

**The Gender Gap and National Security in the United States:  
Dynamics and Correlates of Public Opinion on Defense Spending and the Use of Military Force**

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# The Gender Gap and National Security in the United States

Richard C. Eichenberg

## Introduction

Once again the United States face the questions of how much and how long the public will support the use of military force. Although there has been much speculation on this score in recent popular accounts, the scholarly literature converges on at least three key research findings. *First*, there appears to be no blanket public opposition to the use of military force since the Vietnam War, as is often suggested. Rather, overall public support varies quite clearly with the purpose for which military force is used, what Jentleson (1992, 1998) calls the “principal policy objective” underlying the use of force.<sup>1</sup> *Second*, the question of whether to use military force nonetheless remains a prominent cause of polarization within the overall public, and this may very well be a result of the Vietnam War (Wittkopf, 1990). *Finally*, among other factors that characterize divisions within the overall public (including ideology and partisanship), it is clear that *gender differences* on the use of military force are among the most significant (Sapiro and Conover, 1993; Brandes, 1994; Fite, Genese, and Wilcox, 1990).

However, to the extent that our interest is polarization within the overall public, the evidence is hardly conclusive. Indeed, there are significant gaps in what we know. For example, although Jentleson’s work on the *principal policy objectives* framework has produced very robust findings on the correlates of aggregate public support for the use of force, to my knowledge there has been no attempt to extend that framework to an analysis of polarization within the overall public. In addition, the research on gender differences and the use of force are concentrated on three major conflicts: the Korean, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf wars (Sapiro and Conover, 1993; Brandes, 1994). These are important cases of course, but they are also rather unique –and therefore potentially unrepresentative. Finally, with the partial exception of Brandes’ analysis of surveys during the Korean and Vietnam wars, there is to my knowledge virtually no research on the *dynamics* of the gender gap, that is, on measures and models that would allow us to systematically describe and explain variation in any gender gap over time.

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed assessment of the research literature follows in subsequent sections.

This paper presents a first report from a research project designed ultimately to fill these gaps in our knowledge. My purpose in this paper is largely empirical. Although I do review the theoretical literature for guidance on which issues should produce a gender gap and why, for the most part the paper is designed to describe data that have not been available previously. Thus, although in one section of the paper I do present a regression analysis of the gender gap in support for the use of military force, a full specification and test of theories of gendered responses to national security issues must await future reports.

I proceed as follows. In the following section, I review the research literature on determinants of the level of aggregate public support for the use of military force and the factors that condition the magnitude of the gender gap on issues of national security. Three observations emerge from this review. First, there is a need to analyze a more diverse set of historical cases in which military force has been used or contemplated. Second, there is a need to differentiate discrete public opinions on specific issues of national security. Finally, there is a need to document the dynamics of the gender gap over time. In subsequent sections, therefore, I present a descriptive overview and some initial analyses of two sets of data: 1.] Longitudinal trends in the gender gap in opinions of defense spending; and 2.] The level and correlates of the gender gap in reaction to all instances in which the United States used or contemplated using military force since 1992, beginning with the ongoing confrontation with Iraq that began in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War and ending with NATO's air war against Serbia in 1999 and the continuing deployment of peacekeepers to Kosovo. Survey questions on these cases cover the period 1992-2000.<sup>2</sup>

I close with several important conclusions. First, my data suggest that the gender gap is indeed *generalized*: women are (on average) less supportive of defense spending *and* less supportive of the use of military force for any purpose. Nonetheless, a second conclusion is that the gender gap does indeed vary across time and across differences in the type of military action and other purposes for which military force is employed. The gender gap on defense spending is small in some years and quite large in others. Similarly, some military actions (intervening in civil wars, for example) move men and women closer together in their views. *Explaining these variations over time and across historical episodes involving the use of military force is an important task for future research.*

### The American Public and the Use of Force

Early research on public support for the use of military force was of course heavily influenced by the collapse of support for the war in Vietnam. Mueller's (1973) famous 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 American public would not support military interventions that could lead to the loss of American lives.<sup>3</sup> 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 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.<sup>4</sup>

Jentleson challenged this research framework in two studies that together covered every actual or threatened military intervention by the United States from the 1980s through 1996 (Jentleson, 1992, 1998). Jentleson's central argument is a convincing one: that public support is likely to vary as a function of the purpose of the military intervention, and 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 used to engineer internal political change within another country whether in support of an existing government considered an ally or seeking to overthrow a government considered an adversary" (1992, 50), or more generally "influencing the domestic political authority structure of another state" (1998, 400). Finally, during the 1990s, a third type of military intervention emerged: *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" (1998, 399-400).

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<sup>2</sup> Future plans include collection of gender breakdowns in public opinion on all episodes involving the use of American military force during and since the Vietnam War.

<sup>3</sup> Although I hasten to add that this is not a hypothesis that would be directly deduced from Mueller without qualification.

<sup>4</sup> Stoll (2002) provides a recent evaluation of the literature on casualties and support for the President. Other recent works that discuss the casualty issue include Larson (1996), Record (2000), and Kull and Ramsay (2001).

Jentleson hypothesized that use of force for purposes of *foreign policy restraint* and *humanitarian intervention* would be higher than support for the use of force designed to influence *internal political change*, and his two studies provided very robust confirmation of these hypotheses. Indeed, in a careful consideration of alternative hypotheses, Jentleson demonstrates that the impact of these “principal policy objectives” (PPO) outweighs such factors as the risk of casualties, the existence of multilateral support for the mission, and the level of perceived vital interests.<sup>5</sup> Jentleson’s evidence therefore seems to suggest a third effect of Vietnam beyond the casualty and vital interest hypotheses that dominate the literature: Vietnam was unpopular because the public adjudged intervention in a civil war to be less legitimate or because civil wars are precisely the sort of situation that are likely to produce protracted, inconclusive conflict.

Indeed, 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 (versus 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 within other states (see Jentleson, 1992, 53-54 for a careful statement of this distinction). Whatever one thinks of this distinction, it is difficult to dispute the findings that Jentleson 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 we will see below, these distinctions also have important implications for explaining the magnitude of the gender gap on the use of military force.

### **Women and the Use of Military Force**

Research on a gender gap in attitudes toward national security reveals a scholarly consensus that is very much like the more general scholarly consensus on the gender gap in partisanship, voting, and policy preferences: we know it is there, but there is far less clarity as to why. In addition, the task of explaining

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<sup>5</sup> Although, as we will see below, the effect of the risk of casualties is tested indirectly rather than directly

variation in any gender gap on national security is limited by the fact that data are far less readily available than are data on partisanship and voting, where so much progress has been made (see Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999, for a review of data and a vast literature). Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, the standard monograph on public opinion and American foreign policy concludes that “The evidence reviewed here neither wholly refutes nor strongly confirms the gender gap thesis” (Holsti, 1996, 172).

To be sure, there is a general 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 security policies more generally (Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986; Smith, 1984). But beyond this general observation (itself based on evidence that is highly aggregated across time and discrete policy issues), we know much less than we would like. In particular, as concerns the use of military force, the most concrete evidence is based on a limited number of military actions, and there is virtually no time series evidence on the gender gap on any national security policy issue.

One of the most comprehensive studies concerns the existence of a gender gap in the US 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). On all of these issues Brandes finds a significant gender gap, even when controlling (where possible) for other socioeconomic correlates of opinions at the individual level. Most interesting from the standpoint of the present study, Brandes found that a gender gap existed in support for the Korean and Vietnam wars, which casts doubt on two popular hypotheses: that the gender gap is a product of a fairly recent political mobilization of women, and that “consensus” on national security issues was destroyed by the Vietnam War. Quite the contrary, a gender gap existed during the Korean War as well as at the *beginning* of the Vietnam War. Given the amount of data reviewed by Brandes, the finding appears quite robust (Brandes, 1994, 99-154).

The Brandes study is useful, in particular in providing evidence that a gender gap on national security issues was not a result of the political mobilization of women during the 1970s and after. To judge from her data, gender differences are more fundamental and longstanding. In light of the Jentleson studies

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through question wording, a fact that will lead me to consider it once again in the analyses that follow.

reviewed earlier, however, Brandes' findings are limited by the focus on Korea and Vietnam, for it is precisely this type of struggle over *internal political change* that evinces the lowest level of overall public support in Jentleson's data and is therefore presumably the most contentious and polarizing. Brandes shows us that men and women did indeed polarize over Korea and Vietnam, but is this also true of other conflicts that enjoy higher popular support –presumably due to the legitimacy discussed by Jentleson? Put differently, do women *always* support the use of force in smaller percentages than men –as the broader literature on gender and violence would suggest-- or was this true only of Korea or Vietnam-type conflicts?

Brandes (1994) and Sapiro and Conover (1993) have partially answered this question by studying a particularly useful series of questions about the Persian Gulf War that were included in the 1990 American National Election Study and the 1991 American National Election Pilot Study. These studies included a number of questions posed both before and after the actual war began and also included a number of items measuring respondents' "feminist consciousness". Here I focus principally on the results dealing with gender differences.

Both Brandes and Sapiro/Conover found clear gender differences on the prospect of using force in the Gulf; in evaluations of the actual fighting (bombing); and in the "emotional distress" that accompanied reactions to the fighting and its consequences. Of particular note is the fact that women were far more sensitive --and negative--about the prospects of civilian and military casualties in the war. Their summary is quite clear: "[W]hen 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." (1993, 1095).

The magnitude of this gender gap is all the more surprising in light of the fact that Iraq had invaded Kuwait in 1990 and the United States was part of a broader UN-sanctioned coalition that was assembled to undo that invasion. It was, in short, a classic and dramatic case of *foreign policy restraint* (in Jentleson's terms), a fact that we might expect to lower the degree of domestic contention and polarization. Yet in these two studies, polarization among men and women was quite high, perhaps even higher than had

prevailed during the Vietnam conflict.<sup>6</sup> The data from the Gulf War, in short, would suggest that a gender gap on the use of force is *generalized* rather than specific to any of the policy variations outlined by Jentleson.

Such a conclusion would have powerful implications, both for the practical politics of national security and for theories of gender politics. For the moment, however, it must remain a tantalizing hypothesis, for the evidence underlying it is actually very thin and perhaps even unrepresentative. It is thin because the data represent reactions to only three events: the Korean, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf wars. It remains to be seen whether an analysis of many threatened or actual uses of military force would reveal the same pattern. And the evidence is unrepresentative—indeed skewed—by the fact that each of these wars were dramatic, intensively publicized events that were accompanied by a great deal of domestic debate and polarization—and in particular publicity and debate about the fact or prospect of casualties. It may be that other, less dramatic uses of force would evince far less polarization—including gender polarization—or that the use of force in less risky situations from the standpoint of human casualties would produce less dramatic gender differences.

We simply do not know on the basis of existing evidence. Moreover, there are some curiosities in the studies that call out for explanation. Most importantly, Sapiro and Conover find that, while gender polarization on the prospect and actual fighting of the Gulf War was quite high, gender differences are actually quite low on a number of more abstract (or hypothetical) security policy opinions that were queried in the same study. For example, there are no significant gender effects in an index of “militarism” that is composed of items measuring opinions on the use of military force, military strength, and support for defense spending, although there are significant gender effects on the question of isolationism and fears of war (1993).<sup>7</sup>

Why this should be the case is not clear. As others have speculated (Holsti, 1996, 173), the greater “isolationism” of women may simply be a specific manifestation of their aversion to the use of force, because the “entanglements and commitments” connoted by internationalism may lead the United States to military intervention. If so, the strong effect of gender on the isolationism item in the Persian Gulf

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<sup>6</sup> It is actually difficult to make a precise comparison, given the differences in question wordings offered during the Vietnam and Gulf Wars, but the aggregate numbers do suggest that gender polarization was higher during the Gulf War (see Brandes, 99-155 for a wealth of data).



War study may simply reflect the intensity of reactions to that conflict – a broader study of gender differences in isolationism across time would be required to evaluate its generality. Similarly, the lack of gender effects on the “militarism” index may be due to rather prosaic factors (the construction of an index blurs sharp differences that might appear in individual items) or once again to the unique circumstances of the Gulf War: although women were indeed more skeptical of using force, the overwhelming communication of crisis and threat may have overwhelmed what are “normally” gendered policy differences. This would seem especially true of support for defense spending, since there is now evidence of the substantial role played by fiscal (budget) policy preferences and economic conditions on the gender gap in partisanship and policy preferences more generally (Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999; Alvarez and McCaffrey, 2000). From this literature, we would expect women to be more skeptical of defense spending than men, in part because of the gendered reaction to security issues, but also in part because women are disproportionately sensitive to social spending, which competes with defense for budget dollars. But this set of priorities could be suppressed by crisis and war. We are thus drawn once again to the need for studies of the *dynamics* of the gender gap over time. A single survey during a single war cannot capture this dynamic.

This seems all the more important in light of the findings in one final study (Fite, Genest, and Wilcox, 1990, 492), who analyzed a large number of foreign policy items from the quadrennial surveys commissioned by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations.<sup>8</sup> 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 circumstances, even when controlling for a number of socioeconomic variables as well as partisanship and ideology. Moreover, the impact of gender grew stronger during the 1980s (as it did in party politics more generally). In short, the findings of Fite, Genest, and Wilcox do indeed suggest that, when a number of timepoints and survey questions are considered, the gender gap appears to be generalized, in two senses of the word. First, it is general across a number of questions dealing with different aspects of national security policy, suggesting that women are in fact relatively more “dovish” than men. Second, the findings are general across time, suggesting perhaps that

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<sup>7</sup> Brandes (1994, 99-106) also finds clear gender differences in perceived fears of war.

any null findings from the Persian Gulf War studies may indeed be unrepresentative in some respects. Of course, even these latter conclusions are based on a very few number of timepoints (four), and like the other studies, they do not evaluate evidence from the substantial number of cases during the 1990s when the United States used or threatened to use military force. There remains a need for data that traces the gender gap over time and for evidence that compares the magnitude of the gender gap across a larger number of cases involving military force.

### **The Gender Gap Over Time: The Example of Public Opinion on Defense Spending**

In this section I describe the extent of variation over time in the opinions of men and women on defense spending.<sup>9</sup> I chose this issue for several reasons. A first reason is obviously data availability –to evaluate the longitudinal variation in the gender gap, I need data for as many points in time as possible, and defense spending has been the subject of polling since the 1960s, thus providing the ability to trace the gender gap across the many swings and turns of US defense policy. The second reason is the centrality of defense spending to national security policy. Defense spending and the defense budgeting process represent the yearly national debate about the country’s national security policy and the resources to be devoted to it. It is important, repetitive, well-publicized, and –more often than not—well-debated. To the extent that men and women have different views of national security, surely it should show up in these yearly soundings on the question of how much of the national treasure should be devoted to defense. Finally, the dynamics of public opinion on defense spending issues are well-understood. We know from previous studies that public opinion reacts to changes in the defense budget in a “thermostatic” fashion, a term coined by Wlezien to capture the fact that the general public reacts to increases (decreases) in defense spending by moving in the opposite direction, a dynamic which has the effect of moderating defense spending increases in either direction (Wlezien, 1995, 1996; Eichenberg and Stoll, 2002). The question here, of course, is whether men and women exhibit the same form and degree of reactivity to defense spending.

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<sup>8</sup> This set of surveys has produced the lion’s share of what we know about the structure and evolution of American public opinion and foreign policy. The signature work using these surveys remains Wittkopf (1990).

<sup>9</sup> I have also gathered data on the gender gap in opinions of International Involvement (isolationism), the Soviet Union, and the People’s Republic of China, but these must await future analysis.

My purpose in analyzing these data involve several questions. First, is there a gender gap at all, and if so, does it vary over time? Of course, an ultimate further purpose is to model the factors that drive any variation in the gender gap, much as has been done in dynamic models of the partisan gender gap (Box-Steffensmeier and De Boef, 2001). In this paper, however, I confine myself to a description of a gender gap series on defense spending and to some speculation as to the reasons for any variation over time.

Several different polling organizations have asked variants of the following question since the mid-1960's: "do you think the amount we are spending on defense is too little, about right, or too much?" I chose the variant of this question posed by the Gallup Organization as the "core" or "base" series to reconstruct gender breakdowns over time.<sup>10</sup> The first administration of this question by Gallup occurred in 1969 and the last in February 2002. Because the Gallup question (or gender breakdowns) are not available for every year, I used the gender breakdowns from the General Social Survey (1973-2000) and the biennial National Election Studies (1980-2000) to estimate the missing gender marginals in the Gallup series. I used a technique that is similar in spirit –but not implementation—to Stimson's method for estimating longitudinal dimensions in citizen issue preferences by employing overlapping time series of survey marginals (Stimson, 1999). Essentially, the missing Gallup gender breakdowns are estimated from a multiple regression of the Gallup responses for men and women on the respective gender breakdowns from the GSS and NES series, taking advantage of the fact that the three are very closely correlated over time.<sup>11</sup>

Once the series of yearly gender breakdowns on the defense-spending question was established, I calculated support for defense spending as follows:

$$\% \text{ Support} = \% \text{ Defense Spending is Too Little} / (\% \text{ Too Little} + \% \text{ Too Much})$$

The gender gap is then calculated by subtracting support among women from the support level among men:

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<sup>10</sup> Responses by gender to the Gallup question were retrieved from the Gallup Political Index (title varies), the yearly publication The Gallup Poll, and from breakdowns available in the Roper Center's IPOLL database. A complete list of all polls on defense spending conducted since the 1930s was provided by the Gallup Organization on a proprietary basis.

<sup>11</sup> The correlation between the Gallup series and the GSS and NES series for men and women is extremely high. As concerns support for increases in defense spending, support among men in the Gallup poll is

**Gender gap** = Male support – Female support

The evolution of this gender gap over time is displayed in Figure 1. Several features stand out. *First*, there is indeed a gender gap on defense spending in many years. The average gap in support for defense between men and women is 9 percentage points (absolute value), a level that comes close but does not exceed the gender gap on the actual use of military force reported in the studies described above. However, in exactly one-third (33%) of the years shown in the Figure, the gap *exceeds* 10 percentage points, in some cases substantially. Indeed, during the Vietnam War, in the early 1970s, and again as the new century began, the gap in opinions of defense spending reached as high as 15 to 20 percentage points.

*Second*, Figure 1 shows clearly that the focus of much research on the period surrounding the Persian Gulf War can be misleading: the gender gap in 1990 and 1991 is actually negative (women were slightly more supportive of defense spending).

*Third*, the data demonstrate that—at least on the issue of defense spending—the gender gap is variable rather than constant. At some times, the views of men and women are identical (the gender gap is zero). At other times, the views of men and women diverge considerably.

Figure 1 therefore invites speculation as to the determinants of this variation in the gap on defense spending. Why does the gender gap reach a peak at both the height of the Vietnam conflict in 1965 and 1966 but also in 2000, well after the end of the Cold War and after a period of substantial *reduction* in defense spending? Other peaks and valleys in the figure will no doubt arouse the curious.

One clue to the causes of this variation is not apparent from the graphic: the opinions of men, while generally more supportive of defense spending than those of women, are also more variable.<sup>12</sup> What is more, much of the movement in the gender gap can be traced to movement in the opinions of men. For example, at the beginning of the escalation phase in Vietnam in 1965, 68 percent of men and 44 percent of women supported increased defense spending—a gap of 24 percentage points. Over the following four years, support among women collapsed by 31 percentage points to only 13 percent supporting an increase

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correlated at .96 with the GSS series and .96 with the NES series. For women, it is .94 (GSS) and .93 (NES). The actual regression estimates were constructed using the IMPUTE command in STATA 7.0.

in defense spending, but the collapse in support among men was even more dramatic: it fell by 54 percentage points through 1969! Thus, the gender gap of only 1 percent in 1969 resulted from a more drastic collapse in male support for defense spending.

A similar phenomenon occurs when the gender gap increases, as in the period of the early 1970s, during which defense spending was in fact declining as American forces withdrew as part of the process of Vietnamization. During this time period, support among women for increasing defense continued to decline (by 4 percentage points), but support among men actually began to increase from the trough reached in 1969 and by a larger margin (13 percent through 1973). The result was the increase in the gender gap visible for 1973 in Figure 1. More generally, a regression of the gender gap in this series against the separate support levels among men and women yields a significant coefficient for the opinion of men and an insignificant coefficient for the views of women.<sup>13</sup>

In summary, although support for defense spending among men and women do move “in parallel”, (Page and Shapiro, 1992, 295-298), they do so at different rates (Bartels, 1994, 488). This fact suggests one of two things: either men and women are responding to the same factors at different rates, or they are in fact responding to different factors altogether. One could speculate, for example, that the responses of men reflect basic attitudes toward international relations, such as patriotism, nationalism, or even ideology more generally, a correlation in fact present in the Shapiro and Conover study discussed above (1993). Women, on the other hand, are known to be relatively more sensitive to social spending and show other differences in fiscal policy preferences that might condition opinions of the defense budget. There is thus no shortage of hypotheses to explain these variations.

### **The Gender Gap and the Use of Military Force**

In this section I describe and analyze a dataset covering public opinion during eight episodes in which the United States threatened or actually used military force during the 1990s. The episodes included in the dataset, and the number of public opinion surveys collected for each, are listed and very briefly described in

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<sup>12</sup> The standard deviation of support for defense spending among men is 21.6 percent; for women it is 16.4 percent.

<sup>13</sup> The adjusted  $R^2$  for this very simple regression is a respectable .24; note also that Kaufmann and Petrocik (1998) present a great deal of evidence that the gender gap in partisanship is largely due to changes in the partisan identification of men.

Table 1; for full capsule summaries, see Jentleson (1992, 1998). Gender breakdowns are available for every survey question listed in Table 1. In this section, the principal question is this: *what explains variation in the gender gap across these eight historical episodes?* Following a description of the data collection and the dataset, I turn to the specification of a regression model designed to answer this question.

### **Data Collection.**

I noted earlier that one reason for the thin base of evidence on the question of a gender gap on national security issues is the paucity of data for many cases in which military force was contemplated or used. Retrieving the percentage breakdowns for potentially thousands of surveys is indeed a daunting task, but it has been made easier—at least for the 1990s—by the availability of online retrieval systems. In particular, the IPOLL database of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research began entering gender marginals (along with other socioeconomic breakdowns) in January, 1992 and continued to do so until June, 1999. Fortuitously, this covers precisely the period during which the United States threatened or actually used force during the post-Gulf War period (the first a missile strike against Iraq in January 1993, and the last the air war against Serbia in 1999).

It was this database that formed the core focus of my data collection efforts. For each of the historical episodes listed in Table 1, I performed a search in the IPOLL database to retrieve all survey results that included a mention of the episode and which indicated that gender marginals were available.<sup>14</sup> This search yielded a total of 1374 survey marginals from the Roper database. In addition to this sample, I retrieved and tabulated gender marginals for the same eight episodes from a number of additional archives, including the ICPSR, the IRSS at the University of North Carolina (Harris Polls), and the data archive of the Pew Center for the People and the Press. The full data collection includes well over 1400 survey questions on the following aspects of the episodes under study: 1.] *interest in and attention* to the issue (episode); 2.] approval of the *President's handling* of the situation; 3.] evaluation of the *strategic and moral* importance of the episode; and 4.] *approval or disapproval of an actual or potential use of military force*. The focus in this paper is on the fourth category only.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Roper Center did not enter socioeconomic breakdowns for every survey question deposited in the database, a task which would require a huge investment of labor.

<sup>15</sup> Future papers will deal with each of the other sets of questions.

Three examples will serve to illustrate the texture of the questions to be analyzed. The following questions were posed before, during, and after NATO's air war against Serbia, which began on March 24, 1999:

- *October 12, 1998*: "Based on what you have read or heard, do you think the United States and its Western European allies should or should not conduct military air strikes against Serbian forces in Kosovo?" (*The Gallup Poll*)
- *April 7, 1999*: "Now thinking about the situation in Kosovo, would you favor or oppose sending US (United States) ground troops along with troops from other NATO countries to serve in a combat situation in the region right now?" (*Gallup/CNN/USA Today*)
- *March 19, 2000*: "There are now US troops in Kosovo as part of a NATO peacekeeping force to help maintain the peace. Do you favor or oppose having US troops in Kosovo for this reason?" (*Pew Center for the People and the Press*)

These examples make clear that there are a number of variations in question wording of potential theoretical or policy interest ("air strikes" versus "ground troops"; mention of NATO or "allies"; mention of "peacekeeping"). *It is precisely these variations in question wording that underlie the measurement of the independent variables to be employed in a statistical model to explain variation in the responses of men and women to questions about the use of force.*

### **Modeling the Gender Gap on the Use of Force**

The Dependent Variable. The specification of my dependent variable is simple: I seek to explain variation in the percentage of men and women (or the gap between them) who favor the use of military force within and across the historical episodes listed above. The implication of this simple fact for data collection and operationalization is that only questions that clearly pose the issue of using military force are included in the analysis. Operationally, this means that the question must ask if respondents "approve" of the use of

force (or “favor” or “agree” that force should be used).<sup>16</sup> Questions can be hypothetical or concrete (“do you approve” or “would you approve”?), but the difference is coded in the data and available for statistical control. Finally, like Jentleson (1992, 1998), I excluded any question that employed vague or biased wording. Using these criteria, the dataset of questions dealing with the use of force numbers 305.<sup>17</sup>

The operationalization of the dependent variable in the analysis to follow is support for the use of military force:

$$\%Support = \%Favor / (\%Favor + \%Oppose)$$

Thus, like support for defense spending described above, I exclude “don’t knows” and nonresponses from my calculation of support (unlike questions on defense spending, there are no questions on the use of force with neutral response categories). Below, I present results for the total population, for men and women separately, and for the “gap” between men and women (**Gender Gap**= Male support – Female Support).

### **Specifying a Model of Support for the Use of Force.**

The null hypothesis in any model of gender differences 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, since 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 the 305 surveys analyzed here, the gender difference in average support for the use of military force (61% of men versus 53.5% of women) is highly significant statistically (using a difference of means test). There is thus no question that there was a gender gap on the question of using military force during the 1990s.

Of course, the interesting question is the degree of variation in this gender gap. As Table 2 shows, there is in fact a great deal of variation across the eight historical episodes under study here, but there is no obvious pattern as concerns the size of the gender gap. The largest gap occurs in reaction to questions on North Korea and Haiti –the former a case of *foreign policy restraint* (using Jentleson’s terms), and the latter

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<sup>16</sup> Thus, the familiar questions that ask if military action is “right or wrong” or “a good idea or a bad idea” are excluded, because it is not clear exactly what these terms mean.

<sup>17</sup> In this paper, “only” 55 questions from the Bosnian episode are included, but an additional 70 are available for inclusion in the dataset. Ultimately, therefore, the dataset will number close to 400 survey marginals.



a clear case of *internal political change*. Even in the most “popular” case of foreign policy restraint (the various threats and actual missile strikes against Iraq and Sudan/Afghanistan), there is a sizable gap (albeit at high levels of support). At least in this broad comparison, then, there is no clear pattern to the gender gap.

One reason is that there is a substantial variety of *specific military actions* that are actually 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 airstrikes, increasing troop levels, or if they approve of the presence of troops already deployed. Table 3 shows average support levels and the gender gap broken down by the type of military action queried in each survey question. Here a very clear pattern emerges: among both men and women, the mention of a generally stated “military action” or “use military force”, as well as the mention of “air/missile strikes”, evinces much stronger support than does any mention of sending or increasing “troops”. Clearly, both men and women are more leery of committing troops to military action than they are of using air power. However, *men are less so*: in several categories involving “troops”, men display majority support, while women are (sometimes marginally) opposed. In any case, the gender gap on the “troop” items is among the highest in the list. To the extent that troop commitments pose greater risks of casualties, this pattern would seem to confirm earlier findings that a significant reason for the gender gap on issues of force is the greater sensitivity of women to the human costs of conflict. I examine this proposition further below.

Finally, there is also substantial variation *within* each episode in the principle policy objective that is specifically queried in survey questions. For example, one question on Rwanda asks if US military forces should participate in “stopping the fighting”, a clear case of participation in an internal political conflict. Yet others ask if US forces should assist in providing “humanitarian relief”. Similar variations exist within the other historical episodes.<sup>18</sup> As we have seen, Jentleson has shown that these within case variations override any distinction that citizens make in their judgements of the use of force in particular

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<sup>18</sup> On Iraq, for example, there are a number of questions concerning the use of military forces to remove Saddam Hussein. Within the Bosnian and Kosovo episodes, there are questions reflecting internal political conflict (defend Bosnian Muslims from Bosnian Serbs) and humanitarian purposes (provide peacekeepers once ceasefire and agreement have been reached).

episodes. For this reason, a multivariate model of the gender gap must somehow take account of variations in the PPO reflected in question wording and other variations of theoretical or policy importance.

### **Measuring Principal Policy Objectives From Question Wording.**

The single most important rule that I adopted in coding the independent variables from each survey question is this: the wording of the question is the decisive consideration in the measurement process. I made no judgements about the nature of US government actions at particular points in time or in particular episodes. In addition, my approach was a combination of conceptual and empirical reasoning. Thus, the policy objectives described by Jentleson provides a clear conceptual guide to the types of wording to look for in any particular question (“remove a government”, “provide humanitarian relief”), but I also conducted a thorough review of every survey question to determine the existing variants on these phrases in the survey database. Each question was then examined for the presence or absence of the following wording (with coding always 1 if present and 0 if absent).

*Internal Political Change* in Jentleson’s terms, involves “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” (1998, 400). In coding questions for the presence or absence of wording suggesting the use of force for purposes of internal political change, I generalized this definition to include any use of force to support, assist, or protect a party to an internal political conflict. The full list of independent variables in the *Internal Political Change* category is as follows:

#### *Internal Political Change Variables*

End conflict	Coded 1 if the question mentions that the purpose of using force is to “help end the conflict” or “stop the fighting”, 0 otherwise.
Assassinate	Coded 1 if the question mentions that the purpose of using force is to assassinate a foreign leader, 0 otherwise.
Change Government	Coded 1 if the question mentions that the purpose of using force is to change or remove a governing regime, 0 otherwise.
Involve	Coded 1 if the question mentions that the purpose of using force is to assist or support one side that is party to an internal conflict, 0 otherwise

*Humanitarian Intervention*, in Jentleson's terms, is the "provision of emergency relief through military and other means to people suffering from famine or other gross and widespread humanitarian disasters". The key consideration here is what actions to include and exclude. Clearly, humanitarian interventions include the provision of relief, as noted above. Such actions are clear in survey questions and thus easy to code. But it is also clear that they do NOT include actual involvement in any conflict that might have led to humanitarian disaster. The distinction in Somalia is clear: before October, 1993, the mandate of US forces in Somalia was to provide assistance to the United Nations in providing humanitarian relief to victims of famine. After that date, the mandate (mission) changed to include active military efforts to suppress factions involved in the Somali civil war. The latter actions would be coded 1 under *Involve* above under internal political change.

Survey questions for the Somali case reflect this difference clearly, but other cases are less clear. The nature and role of "peacekeeping" forces is the primary ambiguity. On the one hand, the provision of peacekeeping forces usually follows the termination of hostilities and serves the purpose of providing a buffer (and other services) *in a neutral fashion*. As such, their purpose is arguably humanitarian, and the necessity of neutrality differentiates peacekeeping from overt involvement in internal conflicts—a fact presumably not lost on survey respondents. On the other hand, in many cases the peace has in fact been coerced (as in Bosnia and Kosovo), and the memory of the conflict that preceded the peace surely affects citizens evaluations of the wisdom of providing peacekeeping forces.

This distinction between the act of coercion and provision of neutral peacekeepers provided the guide to coding questions below. If the question evoked the purpose of *coercing* a peace agreement by attacking one of the parties to an internal political conflict --or even peacekeeping to protect one side party to an internal conflict-- it was coded as *Involve* above. Peace-keeping was coded as a *humanitarian* action, however, if the question merely asked about the provision of peace-keeping forces as a neutral buffer without any mention of assistance or protection to any party to the conflict. In any case, since the variables are separate, it is possible to statistically evaluate the differential impact of each of the variables listed below:

#### *Humanitarian Intervention Variables*

Peacekeeping	Coded 1 if the question mentions that the purpose of using force (deploying troops) is the provision of peacekeeping forces (as qualified in text above), 0 otherwise.
Humanitarian Relief	Coded 1 if the question mentions that the purpose of using force (deploying troops) is the provision of “humanitarian relief” or “food, supplies, medicine specifically listed”, 0 otherwise.
Protect Civilians	Coded 1 if the question mentions that the purpose of the use of force is to protect civilians from harm, 0 otherwise.
Protect peacekeepers	Code 1 if the question mentions that the purpose of the use of force is to protect peacekeepers or to assist in their evacuation, 0 otherwise.

*Foreign Policy Restraint*, in Jentleson’s terms, is force employed “to coerce... an adversary engaged in aggressive actions against the United States or its interests”. Ironically, it is this purpose that is *least clear* from question wording alone. Questions inquiring of support for missile strikes against Iraq or Al-Qaeda bases in the Sudan clearly qualify, even though question wording itself does not reveal the conceptual reasoning underlying the measurement category. But does a question inquiring of support for airstrikes against the Bosnian Serbs not also qualify, since the proposed action implicitly suggests that the Bosnian Serbs are an “adversary”?

One answer, of course, is that the question concerning the Bosnian Serbs should be coded as *Involve* under internal political change above, and this provides the key to ascertaining support levels under *Foreign Policy Restraint*: based on question wording alone, it is a residual category composed of survey questions that have not been coded “yes” to any of the variables under *Internal Political Change* or *Humanitarian Intervention*. In any regression analysis that includes all of these variables, therefore, the mean level of support in this category will be represented in the constant term. In addition, a few questions quite explicitly raise the prospect of using military force to defend a friend or ally against one of the protagonists in the episodes under study here (if Iraq invades Saudi Arabia; North Korea invades South Korea). I therefore coded a variable, *Defend Ally*, to specifically measure this type of foreign policy restraint; it is coded 1 if the question inquires about defending an ally or friend from attack, 0 otherwise.

#### **Additional Predictors in the Model.**

I noted earlier that the literatures on the use of force and on the gender gap and national security converge on some important variables that should have an impact on both *total support* for the use of military force or on the magnitude of the *gender gap* concerning the use of force. Drawing on these literatures, I measured and specified three additional sets of predictors: those related to the *military action* itself; those related to *multilateralism*; and a set of *statistical controls*.

*Additional Predictors Included in the Model*

<b>Military Action</b>	
“Ground” Troops	Coded 1 if the word “ground” appears in the question; 0 otherwise
Send Troops	Action type: “send/use/contribute” troops = 1; 0 otherwise
Increase Troops	Action type: “increase troops/military equipment” = 1; 0 otherwise
Maintain Troops	Action type: “maintain troops/extend stay” = 1; 0 otherwise
Civilian Deaths	Coded 1 if civilians casualties mentioned in question; 0 otherwise
Military Deaths	Coded 1 if military casualties mentioned in question; 0 otherwise
<b>Multilateralism</b>	
Multilateral Action	Coded 1 if U.N., NATO, “allies”, or “friends and allies” mentioned; 0 otherwise
Mandate	Coded 1 if question explicitly states that the action is undertaken/contemplated for the purpose of enforcing a multilateral mandate (ceasefire; weapons inspections; safe havens); 0 otherwise
<b>Control Variables</b>	
Retaliate	Coded 1 if the question states that the action is retaliation/revenge for a specific act against the United States or its military forces; 0 otherwise
Presidential Cue	Coded 1 if President signaled support for action; 0 otherwise (see: Jentleson, 1998)
Rally Effect T + 10 days	Coded 1 for first 10 days after the beginning of a military action; 0 otherwise
Hypothetical questions	Coded 1 if question is hypothetical (“if, would, should”); 0 otherwise

*Military action variables.* All of the variables listed under “military action” are measured from question wording, and all of them are based on the frequent discussion in the literature of the importance of perceived military risks and the sensitivity of citizens to casualties. Although I noted above that there is in fact some disagreement in the literature concerning the causal impact of risk and the fear of casualties, the debate is far from resolved, and it is obviously an issue of tremendous moral and practical political importance (see Stoll, 2002, for the most recent review and some evidence on the matter). The variables concerned with “troops” listed above are a subset of “action types” that were coded for each survey question (air/missile strikes; send troops; send ground troops). Each question was coded for only one action type (including the general categories “attack/use military forces/take military action”). Civilian and military casualties refer to any reference in the question wording of casualties that might *result from the*

*action* (and not from any civilian or military casualties that might have prompted the action). The most frequent manifestation of this wording is “Would you support the use of military force if it would result in the death of American servicemen (or...casualties among our military forces)”.<sup>19</sup>

*Multilateralism.* There is also a scholarly debate concerning the impact of multilateralism on support for the use of force. Scholars who have intensively studied particular cases (Bosnia) have often concluded that multilateral actions enjoy higher support, presumably because of their higher legitimacy and the fact that they pool risk and cost (Sobel 1998). However, comparative studies such as those by Jentleson (1992, 1998) seem to show that other factors –especially the principal policy objectives of the action—outweigh the distinction between unilateral and multilateral actions. Finally, a recent study indicates that women are relatively *more supportive of international institutions* than are men, a pattern that Wohlford and Johnston (2000) attribute to the greater acceptance of a Liberal worldview among women.

Given the large amount of data collected here, I have the opportunity to examine the issue once again, and I have also tried to improve on the measurement of “multilateralism” that has been employed in prior research. The first variable *multilateralism*, captures only the nominal mention of multilateral organizations or allies in the question text, and thus is a rather blunt device for capturing the presumed effects of increase legitimacy and pooled cost and risk that such organizations represent. *Mandate*, on the other hand, is coded whenever the question wording *clearly and specifically states* that the action is being carried out to enforce an agreed mandate of a multilateral organization (virtually always the United Nations). It is important to note that vague invocations of a mandate are *not* coded. Thus, if the question merely mentions “failure to agree to weapons inspections”, *Mandate* is coded 0 (since one cannot expect survey respondents to know the origins of the inspection regime that is being enforced). However, *Mandate* is coded 1 (yes) if the question queries a proposed or ongoing military action “to enforce the United Nations requirement that Iraq (North Korea, Bosnian Serbs)...”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This does NOT include occasional “experimental questions” that seek to discover some threshold of casualties that the public will tolerate (“100 deaths....500 deaths....1000 deaths”). Rather, it includes only favor/oppose questions about military actions when casualties are also mentioned in the wording.

<sup>20</sup> I also coded a “soft” or vague Mandate variable for any mention of inspections or other mandates that were not specific enough to qualify under the definition discussed in the text. Not surprisingly perhaps (vague mandates are unclear to respondents), this second mandate variable proved insignificant in statistical analysis.

*Control Variables.* The regression model reported below also contains a number of variables that have been found to be significant in previous studies or which have implications for variation in any gender gap. *Retaliate* is included because there are a number of questions which inquire of the use of force in response to specific, discrete attacks against Americans (or the hypothetical invocation of such an attack), such as the downing of an American plane or the attack on American forces in Somalia. I include it here for an obvious reason: these questions concern direct attacks against Americans and thus evoke considerations of both self-defense and retribution.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, I followed Jentleson (1998) in coding a variable reflecting the President's position in each historical episode.<sup>22</sup> In these initial analyses, the variable is a dichotomy, but in future analyses I intend a more finely-grained operationalization that captures the *gradations* of President support for particular military engagements. For example, the Clinton administration equivocated for quite some time on the question of exactly which military commitments to make in the Balkans; it was only in 1995 that the administration became actively and energetically engaged, and in fact it was only in 1995 that major military strikes were directed at the Bosnian Serbs. There were similar variations of Presidential commitment within the Somalian case (encompassing both President Bush and President Clinton). Thus, although the dummy variable used here to capture the President's support for using force does prove to be significant, I believe an even better measure can be devised.

The final two variables in the model are the *Rally effect* and a dummy variable, *Hypothetical*, designed to evaluate the effect of hypothetical question wording. There is of course a vast literature on the Rally effect (most recently: Stoll, 2002), and here it is specified both to capture the upward spurt in support for policies in the aftermath of military action, but also because I believe that the "rally round" effect should also prove to dampen (in the short-term) any gender differences that exist within that episode.

### **Model Estimates.**

Regression estimates of support for the use of military force are shown in Table 4. The table shows estimates for men and women, as well as for the gender gap (% male support - % female support).

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<sup>21</sup> Indeed, were it not for the fact that some of these questions occur in the context of obvious internal conflicts (Somalia, Bosnia), one might consider treating them as cases of "Foreign Policy Restraint".

An important aspect of the results is the clear confirmation of the explanatory power of Jentleson's *principal policy objectives* framework. Among both men and women, each of the variables related to "internal political change" has a negative impact on support, and one—actual *Involvement* in an internal conflict—is both negative and highly significant. When survey questions mention actions in support or assistance of a party to an internal conflict, support among both men and women is almost 10% lower compared to other questions. Clearly, neither American men nor women are enthusiastic about such interventions.

Purely *Humanitarian* interventions, in contrast, are clearly quite popular: when question wording mentions humanitarian actions specifically ("humanitarian relief"), support increases by over twenty percentage points among both men and women. Lesser, but significant increases in support also occur when questions inquire of *protecting* civilians or peacekeepers. The commitment of *Peacekeeping* troops itself, however, has no significant effect on support among men or women, suggesting that respondents do not interpret this action as necessarily "humanitarian".

Responses to the *military action* variables vary somewhat according to gender, but I leave these differences aside for the moment to concentrate on the considerable commonalities among men and women. There are two emphatic commonalities: any mention of "*troops*" (send, ground, increase, maintain) has a substantial downward impact on support; and any mention of civilian or military *casualties* has the same effect. Clearly, both sets of variables suggest that both men and women are decidedly cautious about the potential risk and actual consequences of employing "troops". Thus, contrary to the occasional argument in recent studies that the American public is not sensitive to casualties, these results provide very strong evidence indeed that the opposite is the case.<sup>23</sup>

*Multilateralism* exerts a small effect—as measured by the small magnitude of the parameters relative to other variables—and in the event the impact appears only for men. I suspect that the lack of significant impact among women has less to do with any disdain for multilateral institutions. Rather, I

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<sup>22</sup> I also evaluated a variable representing the effect of Presidential Addresses to the Nation in the immediate aftermath of the attack, but it proved insignificant in statistical analyses.

<sup>23</sup> The reason for the difference between this and other studies will be explored in future reports, but they likely will include: i.] the fact that some studies that downplay the importance of casualties are based on a very small (and selective) sample of cases; ii.] test the effect indirectly rather than through measurements in actual survey wording (Jentleson, 1998); or iii.] test the effect of casualties on the President's general approval rating rather than on support for military action specifically (Stoll, 2002).



suspect that the difference between men and women can be traced to a single episode in which the multilateralism variables are important: the (potential) use of force against North Korea to coerce compliance with weapons inspections. As we saw above, this episode evinces the largest gender gap –13 percentage points-- among the eight under study here.

In any case, the results for both men and women (with the qualifications to be noted below) suggest two summary observations. First, any single question or even multiple questions that make general reference to “military force” or “military action” are misleading guides to public opinion on the matter. Concrete mention of sending or increasing “troops” or indeed mention of the civilian and military casualties of military conflict substantially lower support. Second, Jentleson’s principal policy objectives framework is a powerful one. I have analyzed more than twice the number of surveys studied by Jentleson and added two additional historical episodes that occurred after publication of his article (missile attacks against Sudan/Afghanistan; air war against Serbia). In addition, I measure principal policy objectives in a slightly different way (through specific aspects of question wording rather than a summary judgement of each question). Yet despite these differences, the results are essentially the same. The American public – both men and women—are decidedly skeptical of using force to affect the course of an internal conflict, but they do support Humanitarian interventions.

Nonetheless, there are significant gender differences within this summary characterization (see Table 5 in addition to Table 4). One result is akin to the famous dog that did not bark: there is *no gender difference* as concerns the effect of involvement in internal political conflicts. Indeed, the lower level of support for such involvements is almost identically lower among both men and women (as revealed by the very similar parameter estimates for *Involve*). The result is that this variable neither increases nor decreases the gender gap (as shown in the third column of Table 4). This is significant, for it reveals that, just as women are hardly pacifists, neither are men uniformly militant. Involvement in civil wars is something that both men and women want to avoid.

The effect of *humanitarian actions* (as measured by question wording) is quite different: these actions *decrease* the gender gap significantly, and the reason is that mention of humanitarian actions increases support among women by about 4 percentage points more than is the case among men. Put differently, beginning from lower (average) levels of support for using force, women respond by

disproportionately increasing that support when humanitarian goals are mentioned –thus reducing the gender gap. Interestingly, women are essentially unmoved by mention of a peacekeeping mission –the parameter on this variable is statistically very weak. Among men, however, there is a moderately strong tendency to reduce support when questions mention peacekeeping. As result, the mention of the peacekeeping mission reduces the gender gap by moving men closer to the position of women.

In terms of the magnitude of the parameters, by far the strongest impact on the gender gap comes among the variables measuring different aspects of *military actions*. When the survey question mentions defending an ally, increasing a troop presence, maintaining a troop presence, or the possibility of military casualties, the gender gap increases substantially because women are far less supportive of these policies and much more sensitive to the potential for casualties (visible in the regression parameters in column 3 of Table 4). The exception to this is the prospect of “sending troops” or ground troops in the first place. Here both men and women reduce support when the prospect is raised in question wording, but in one case (ground troops), the reduction among men is larger –thus reducing the gender gap. These and other effects on the gender gap are summarized in Table 5.

### **Summary of Regression Results.**

As I have noted, the results provide strong confirmation of the usefulness of Jentleson’s *principal policy objectives* argument, both as concerns determinants of overall public support and as concerns differentiating the gender gap. *Involvement in internal political conflicts* is decidedly unpopular among both men and women, and support for *humanitarian intervention* is decidedly popular among both.

There are gender differences, and they suggest that the patterns found in past research indeed have general application. For example, based both on theory and limited analysis of past conflicts, there has been speculation that women are less supportive of military action because they are *more sensitive to the humanitarian and human costs of war*, but the evidence on this point was limited. Here we see substantial support for this view, as women are significantly more sensitive to *humanitarian* goals and to the potential loss of life in conflict. Equally important, they are substantially less supportive of military action to defend allies, or to support the increase or maintenance of ongoing troop commitments. In all of these cases, the gender gap is large and therefore potentially of political significance.

## Conclusions and Discussion

I noted in the introduction that my principal purpose in this paper is empirical: to describe several new data collections on the gender gap concerning national security. A more limited purpose has been to present some tentative speculation and initial analyses of the determinants of the gender gap. In this concluding section, I summarize some of the empirical generalizations that emerge from the research and provide some additional thoughts on the implications for theory and policy.

The first generalization is that the gender gap is pervasive. As I have noted, past research often left open the possibility that any gender gap was due to the specific nature of the (relatively few) cases studied or to limitations in the timeframe or issues studied. In this paper, we have seen the generality of the gender gap in two instances: historical series in opinions of defense spending, and in reactions to all instances of contemplated or actual use of military force by the United States. Although I have also presented evidence that the gender gap on these issues can vary, this does not belie the fact that—on average—women are generally less supportive of defense spending and generally less supportive of the use of military force for all purposes.

Second, variations in the gender gap largely support the theoretical arguments that have been offered in past research or documented in previous analyses. Past theorizing and research has emphasized the argument that—for many reasons—women may be less supportive of the use of violence to resolve social conflicts and far more sensitive to the humanitarian and human costs of war. 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 (defending allies, increasing or maintaining troops), and they are more sensitive to the prospect of military and civilian casualties of war. 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.

Third, despite these relative differences between men and women, we should nonetheless acknowledge an important point: women are not uniformly pacifist, and men are not uniformly bellicose. Any difference is at the margins. As we saw in Table 2, majorities of women supported the use of force in five of the eight episodes studied here, and Table 3 showed that a majority of women do support certain

types of military actions. In addition, we have also seen that certain factors reduce the support of men as well as women. Thus, whether a significant gender gap will attend any particular threatened or actual use of force very much depends on the specific circumstances and the specific actions contemplated.

### **Postscript: The Gender Gap and the War Against Terrorism**

From the foregoing analysis, it should be clear that caution must be exercised in any attempt to extend the analysis to public opinion in the aftermath of the attacks against the United States in September 2001 and the ensuing war against terror in which the United States is now engaged. To be sure, the fact that the attack was against the United States itself and the losses so grievous leave little doubt that support levels should be high. That this is indeed the case is already known to even the most casual reader of a daily newspaper. But beyond this fact, the voluminous polling that has been done since September 2001 actually does not yet contain a sufficiently large number of questions with the variety of question wordings that would permit us to evaluate some of the variations in support for this war that we have seen in public evaluations of the use of force in the past. For example, while there *are* a large number of questions on support for “the war against terror” or the “military actions in Afghanistan”, there are *not* a large number of questions on such issues as the prospect of casualties, the direct deployment (or increase) in “ground” troops, or (more importantly) expansion of the war to such locations as the Phillipines, Indonesia, Yemen, Somalia, Georgia, or Iraq.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, the fact that the “war against terror” is not one but potentially many wars –or many theaters—is an additional reason for analytical caution. The war against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan is both the central theater of the war and the action most likely to enjoy public support, as it represents the use of force to retaliate for past harm to the United States and to prevent future harm. However, beyond this central “theater”, expectations about public support are less clear. The reasons are four. The first is that “terrorists” in some locations (Colombia) are not clearly linked to groups whose primary mission includes action hostile to the United States –or who can be linked to the actions of last September. Second, some terrorist groups (as in the Middle East) are not considered terrorists at all by other states in the region

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<sup>24</sup> In this brief epilogue, I rely almost entirely on the poll catalog that appears in [www.pollingreport.com](http://www.pollingreport.com), supplemented in a few (noted) cases with data retrieved for re-analysis (Pew Center and PIPA polls).

(including important diplomatic partners of the United States), and in any case those groups have not (recently) engaged in acts against the United States itself. Third, the war against terror—a classic, even extreme case of *foreign policy restraint*—may eventually lead the United States to become involved in *internal political conflicts*, either because unstable states provide safe haven for terrorists (Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Phillipines) or because terrorists or their allies are themselves engaged or may become engaged in internal political struggles (Aghanistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan). Based on past patterns, support for involvement in *internal political struggles* will be lower than support for the central purpose of restraining terrorists from attacking the United States itself.

Finally, the containment—or even re-making—of governments in what the President calls the “axis of evil” may involve the United States in military efforts that blur the distinction between *foreign policy restraint* and efforts to depose governments *internally*. Moreover, such actions have already raised debate—largely outside the United States for the moment—about the paucity of evidence that “axis of evil” states have any links to terrorist acts against the United States. In short, the war against terrorism may become a “complicated cocktail”, to borrow a term used by Thomas Friedman in another context, and beyond the central purpose of *restraining and preventing* acts of terror against the United States, the past record of public opinion would lead us to expect lower levels of public support for military action by the United States.

With these cautions in mind, I present in Table 6 a summary of polls prior and subsequent to September 11. The top half of the table deals with the period prior to September 11 and summarizes relevant surveys dealing with responses to terrorism (Libya 1986 and Sudan/Afghanistan 1998), as well as the numerous polls dealing with *foreign policy restraint* that were analyzed in earlier sections of this paper. The bottom half of the table summarizes surveys concerning support for the war against terrorism since September 11. The percentages tell a clear story. Even prior to 2001, retaliation for terrorist acts against the United States evinced very high levels of support. Remaining cases of *foreign policy restraint*, as we have seen, also evince fairly high support (60 percent).<sup>25</sup> It is only when *casualties are mentioned* that support drops to a politically tenuous level (49 percent)—and which produces a very clear gender gap—but

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<sup>25</sup> In the dataset analyzed earlier in this paper, support for using force produces the following averages when each term is mentioned: “terror(orism)” 71%; “retaliate” 68%; “weapons of mass destruction” 52%.

it is important to emphasize that none of these *FPR* surveys dealt with responses to attacks on the United States itself.

The bottom half of Table 6 summarizes three types of survey conducted since September 2001: those dealing with the war in Afghanistan itself; those dealing with actions against terrorists in other countries; and a single poll on “maintaining civil order” in Afghanistan. Not surprisingly (with the possible exception of the last), support is very high for all of these actions. Indeed, the support level of 89 percent for the military actions in Afghanistan is higher than all but two polls that measured support for military action in World War II ! (Larson 1996, 108)

Notably, there is a sensitivity to casualties (support drops from 89 percent to 68 percent when casualties are mentioned), but this level remains so high as to represent a political consensus even when casualties are mentioned.<sup>26</sup> Support for actions *outside of Afghanistan* and even for maintaining “civil order” there is also high, although notably lower than support for the war in Afghanistan itself. As my earlier analysis would lead us to expect, the mention of casualties does produce a gender gap in support for the war—in this case 16 percentage points.

Two conclusions emerge from the data in Table 6. First, and not surprisingly, political support for the central mission of the war against terrorism in Afghanistan is historically unprecedented and likely to remain so even in the face of military casualties. Second, there is somewhat lesser support once one moves beyond this central mission, but even here the (limited) polling evidence suggests a political consensus as well.

Nonetheless, yet additional cautions should be noted with respect to these conclusions. The first is that the mention of casualties in “war against terror” polls is concentrated in polling conducted during the period between September and December 2001, when a very emotional “rally effect” was taking place. I found only one survey dealing with casualties during 2002: an *ABC/Washington Post* poll asking if “it’s worth risking a large number of casualties to capture or kill Osama bin Laden”. In March 2002 only 44

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<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that the casualty question has *not* been explicitly raised in any survey dealing with actions in countries *other than Afghanistan*. Since support for these actions is lower (68 percent in Table 6), one suspects it might drop to tenuous political levels were casualties to be mentioned. Notably, support for military actions in Somalia are the lowest of any list mentioned in “war against terror” polls, an obvious suggestion that the casualties suffered there by the United States in 1993 remain in the public’s memory. See for example: the CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup Poll, Jan 11-14, 2002, which shows 62% support for taking military action in Somalia (Iraq = 77%).

percent said “yes” (54 percent “no”), a substantial decrease from the 67 percent who answered positively to the very same question in November 2001.<sup>27</sup>

As has been suggested in the literature on casualties and support for the use of force, this decline is likely due to the *lack of success* in finding bin Laden. As several authors have argued, any negative impact of casualties on support for military force is likely to be a function not only of the cost in terms of human lives, but also of the success or failure of the action (see especially Larson 1996). In fact, such an equation was suggested quite early in the war against terrorism in a detailed *Gallup Poll* that inquired in mid-September of support given a range of scenarios involving the duration of the conflict and the likely casualties. A significant drop-off in support for the war (from 90 to 75 percent) came with mention of the possibility that the war could last “a period of several years” (a crude indication of lack of success) or “if 1,000 American troops would be killed”. In addition, the mention of a lengthy war or 1,000 American casualties lowered support among women to 56 percent.<sup>28</sup>

In this context, it is interesting to note that the *ABC/Post* poll on capturing bin Laden occurred just as the American public was beginning to reveal some pessimism about the success of the war against terrorism. As Figure 2 shows, there was a 33 percent (!) decline between January and May 2002 in the *net percentage* of Americans who believe that “the USA and its allies” are winning the war against terrorism. During approximately the same time, there was also a 10-14 percentage point decline in approval of the President’s “handling of the war against terrorism”. Thus, to the extent that support for military actions is conditioned both by the costs of the action and the perceived success, the perceived lack of success may explain the lower level of support in some recent soundings.

This is not to suggest that support for the war is about to crumble. Most measures of support are still quite high in comparison to military interventions of the past, and quite obviously any renewal of threats from terrorists is likely to send them to very high levels once again.

Presumably this standard applies with even greater force to support for military actions that go beyond the central mission against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and of course none of these is more prominent

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<sup>27</sup> The full surveys are available from [www.pollingreport.com](http://www.pollingreport.com).

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr011005.asp> (accessed October 6, 2001)

than the widely presumed intention of the administration to take some military action against the regime in Iraq. Table 7 shows that about 70 percent of the American public have long supported almost any military action against Iraq when the action is queried in the abstract. Before September 11<sup>th</sup>, however, support for those actions dropped considerably when the possibility of American (or indeed Iraqi) casualties were mentioned. Indeed, prior to September 11, the prospect of casualties in any military action against Iraq caused support to drop below the majority level, and the large gap between men and women on this issue demonstrates how divisive it could be politically.

It is difficult to evaluate the effect of September 11<sup>th</sup> on these percentages, because the number of polls that mention casualties in the context of military action against Iraq is very small: two dealing with the removal of Saddam Hussein (56 and 72 percent support), and one dealing with military action against Iraq in general (43 percent support). The average of the three (57 percent) suggests a fairly close division of opinion on action against Iraq if casualties are mentioned. The 43 percent result comes from a fairly recent survey (*USA Today/CNN/Gallup*, March 24, 2002), which showed a clear hierarchy of support: fairly high support for airstrikes (67 percent), but lower levels of support for arming the Iraqi opposition (53 percent) or introduction of US ground troops. These percentages are very close to results that I presented for the entire 1990s in Table 3 above. All of this would lead us to conclude that opinions of using force against Iraq are not substantially different after September 11 than they were before.

The data also suggest that President George W. Bush faces a situation not unlike that faced by his father in the Persian Gulf War: high support for using force but fear of casualties *prior* to the war itself, with strong approval ratings when the war proved successful at surprisingly low cost in terms of human life. One suspects that the current President would find a similar reaction should any military action against Iraq prove successful and result in low casualties. However, should that prove not to be the case, the survey percentages suggest that—even in the context of the war against terror—the potential for political controversy is present.

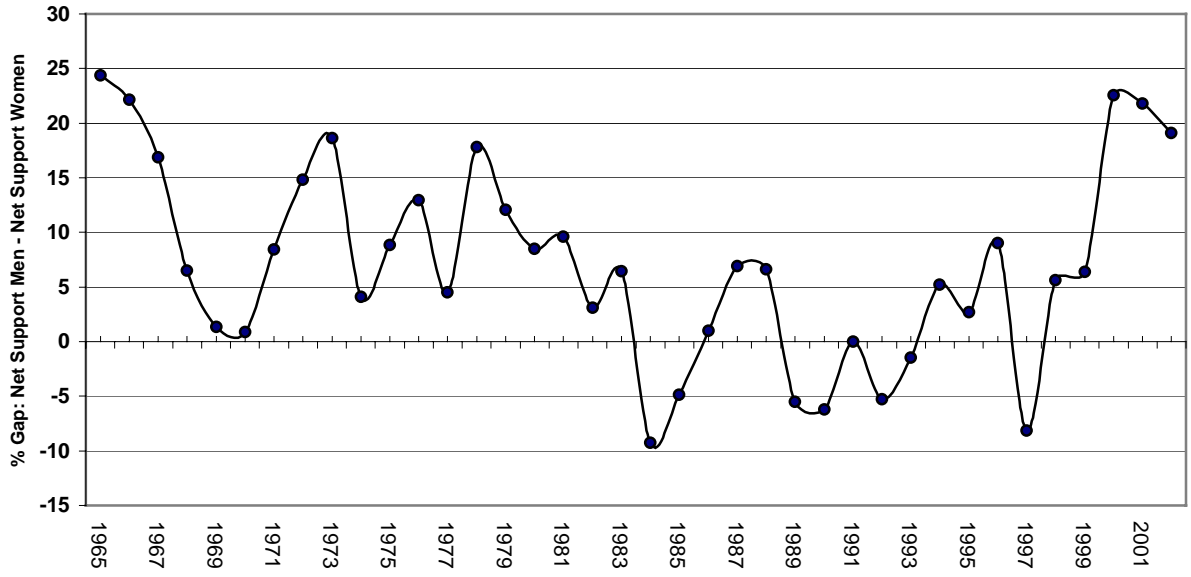


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Figure 1. The Gender Gap in Support for Defense Spending



**Table 1**  
**Surveys Collected on American Threat or Use of Military Force**  
**(Roper Center/IPOLL Only)**

Episode/Case	Dates of survey coverage	Number of Surveys
<b>Bosnia - airstrikes/peacekeeping</b>	1992-present	401
<b>Yugoslav Civil War – General</b>	1992-present	79
<b>North Korea nuclear threat/inspections</b>	1993-present	73
<b>Haiti - restore Aristide government</b>	1994-1996	240
<b>Somalia peacekeeping/attack warlords</b>	1992-1994	112
<b>Rwanda peacekeeping</b>	1994	19
<b>Afghanistan/Sudan missile strikes</b>	1998	15
<b>Iraq: mobilization/weapons inspections missile attacks 1993, 1994,1996, 1998</b>	1992-1999	380
<b>Serbia/Kosovo: NATO air war/peacekeeping</b>	1998-2000	55
<b>Total</b>		<b>1374</b>

**Note:** The totals include surveys on four types of citizen reaction to the use of American military force: approval of the action itself; approval of the President's handling of the action; appraisal of strategic and moral reasons for the action; amount of attention devoted to the issue.

The surveys include prospective actions; reaction to actions underway; and retrospective evaluation of past actions.

**Table 2. Support for the Use of Military Force by Episode**

<b>Episode</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Male Support</b>	<b>Female Support</b>	<b>Gender Gap</b>
Sudan/Afghanistan	78.6	82.0	75.6	6.4
Iraq	70.0	74.3	65.9	8.5
Somalia	60.3	64.2	57.4	6.8
Serbia/Kosovo	58.1	60.2	56.0	4.2
Rwanda	52.7	54.5	50.9	3.5
Bosnia	50.9	53.6	48.3	5.3
North Korea	50.1	56.9	43.7	13.3
Haiti	39.8	45.0	34.8	10.2
Average all episodes	57.2	61.2	53.5	7.7

(N= 305)

Table 3

## Support for Use of Military Force by Type of Military Action

<b>Type of Action Mentioned In Survey Question</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Males Support</b>	<b>Females Support</b>	<b>Gender Gap</b>
military force/action (general)	63.7	67.7	59.9	7.8
air/missile strikes/bombing	68.9	73.3	64.7	8.6
presence of troops	51.2	54.1	48.6	5.6
send troops	50.2	53.8	46.7	7.1
keep/maintain troops	36.0	42.6	29.8	12.9
increase troops	54.9	61.4	48.7	12.8
Provide/send arms	58.6	62.1	55.7	6.4
war/all out conflict	57.0	61.7	52.7	9.0
unclear action type	61.3	62.4	71.4	9.0
<b>Average all action types</b>				
(N = 305)	57.2	61.2	53.5	7.7

**Table 4**  
**Regression Analysis of Support for Using Military Force**

	(1) Support: Males	(2) Support: Females	(3) Gender Gap
<i>Internal Political Change Variables</i>			
End Conflict	-3.070 (1.35)	-2.181 (0.85)	-0.889 (0.71)
Involve	-8.999*** (5.50)	-9.767*** (5.28)	0.768 (0.85)
Assassinate	-10.284 (1.49)	-7.248 (0.93)	-3.036 (0.79)
Change Government	-2.090 (0.97)	-3.300 (1.36)	1.210 (1.01)
<i>Humanitarian Intervention Variables</i>			
Humanitarian Relief	20.787*** (6.75)	24.473*** (7.03)	-3.686** (2.16)
Peacekeeping	-3.930 (1.40)	-0.717 (0.23)	-3.214** (2.07)
Protect Peacekeepers	8.311** (2.16)	9.673** (2.23)	-1.362 (0.64)
Protect Civilians	10.753*** (2.88)	11.885*** (2.81)	-1.132 (0.55)
<i>Foreign Policy Restraint</i>			
Defend Ally	9.109*** (3.02)	0.052 (0.02)	9.057*** (5.43)
<i>Military Action Type</i>			
Ground Troops	-5.411** (2.36)	-3.170 (1.23)	-2.241* (1.77)
Send Troops	-9.009*** (4.85)	-8.909*** (4.25)	-0.100 (0.10)
Increase Troops	-1.688 (0.46)	-7.304* (1.77)	5.616*** (2.78)
Maintain Troops	-18.411*** (3.88)	-23.543*** (4.40)	5.132* (1.95)
Civilian Deaths	-8.881 (1.54)	-12.277* (1.88)	3.396 (1.06)
Military Deaths	-10.196*** (3.77)	-15.221*** (4.98)	5.024*** (3.35)
<i>Multilateralism</i>			
Multilateral Action	3.810** (2.30)	2.403 (1.28)	1.408 (1.53)
Multilateral Mandate	5.252** (2.25)	3.294 (1.25)	1.958 (1.52)
<i>Additional Control Variables</i>			
Retaliate	10.513*** (3.37)	7.752** (2.20)	2.760 (1.60)
Presidential Cue	8.767*** (7.40)	10.549*** (7.88)	-1.783*** (2.72)
Rally effect T+ 5 days	6.899*** (3.68)	8.550*** (4.04)	-1.651 (1.59)
Hypothetical question wording	0.608 (0.41)	-1.126 (0.67)	1.734** (2.12)
Constant	51.999*** (23.77)	44.174*** (17.87)	7.824*** (6.46)
Observations	305	305	305
Adjusted R-squared	0.56	0.54	0.23

Absolute value of t statistics in parentheses

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

Table 5

## The Gender Gap In Support for the Use of Force:

(Regression Using Most Significant Variables from Table 4; gender gap dependent)

<i>Variables That REDUCE the Gender Gap</i>	Coefficient (t-ratio)
Humanitarian Relief	-4.382*** (2.71)
Peacekeeping	-3.252** (2.41)
“Ground” Troops mentioned	-2.945*** (2.82)
Presidential Cue	-1.062* (1.77)
Rally effect T+ 5 days	-1.632* (1.67)
<i>Variables That INCREASE the Gender Gap</i>	
Defend Ally	8.116*** (5.38)
“Increase Troops” mentioned	4.570** (2.36)
“Maintain/Extend” Troops mentioned	4.451* (1.73)
Military Casualties mentioned	4.106*** (2.85)
Hypothetical Question Wording	1.779** (2.30)
Constant	8.280***
Observations	305
Adjusted R-squared	.22

Absolute value of t statistics in parentheses  
 significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%



**Table 6**  
**The Gender Gap and the “War Against Terror”**

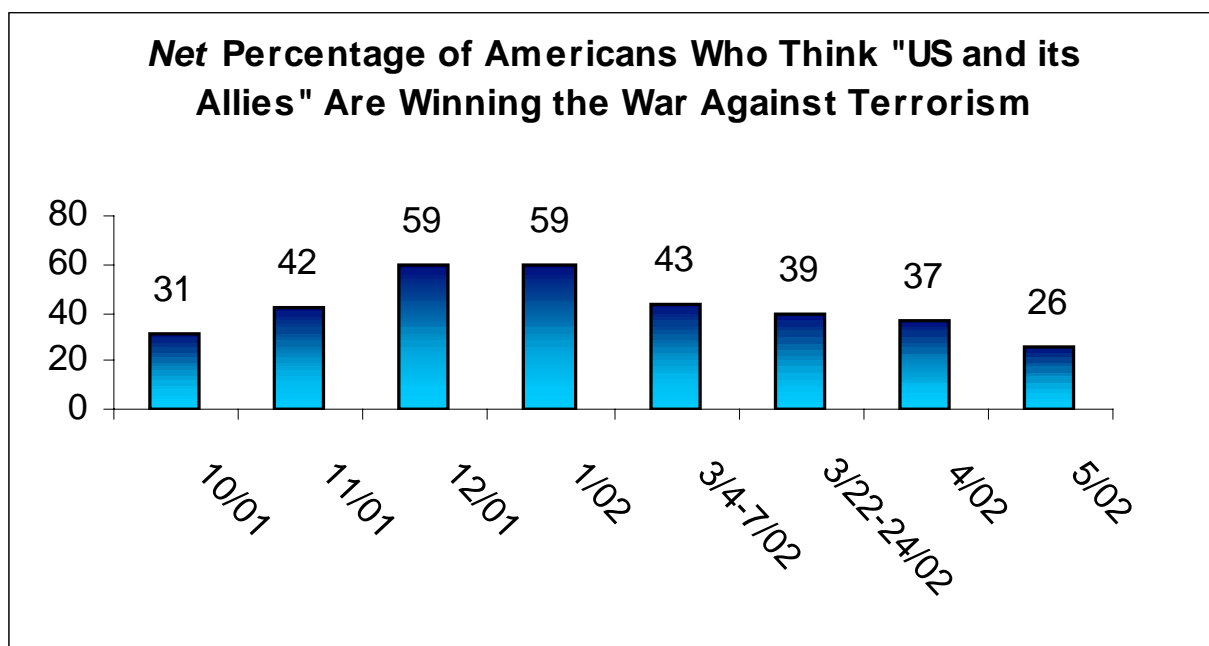
	(Average) % Favor use of Force	Number of Surveys
<b><i>Public Opinion Before 9/11/2001</i></b>		
Airstrikes against Libya: 1986	71	8
Missile strikes against Sudan/Afghanistan 1998	74	4
All Cases of <i>Foreign Policy Restraint</i> , 1992-2000	60	96
<i>Foreign Policy Restraint</i> 1992-2000 when casualties mentioned	49	8
<b>Men</b> 1992-2000: Support <i>FPR</i> with casualties mentioned	56	8
<b>Women</b> 1992-2000L Support <i>FPR</i> with casualties mentioned	42	8
<b><i>Public Opinion and the War Against Terror, 2001-2002</i></b>		
War against Terror: Military action in <i>Afghanistan</i>	89	16
War against Terror – Military action in <i>other countries</i>	73	16
War against Terror - <i>casualties mentioned</i>	68	10
Favor US forces to "maintain civil order" in Afghanistan	68	1
<b>Men:</b> support war (Afgh) with casualties mentioned	78	4
<b>Women:</b> support war (Afgh) with casualties mentioned	62	4

**Sources:** Polls on reaction to Libyan bombing are from Jentleson (1992, 55). All polls prior to 9/11/2001 were collected by the author (see Table 1 and accompanying text). Polls subsequent to 9/11/2001 were taken from [www.pollingreport.com](http://www.pollingreport.com). War against terror/Afghanistan aggregates are average of CBS/NT and FOX News. Military action in other countries reports all polls dealing with military action elsewhere (Somalia, Indonesia, Philippines, etc). War against terror/casualties reports any poll in which military or civilian casualties are mentioned in Pollingreport.com. The “civil order” poll is from the Pew Center for the People and the Press, (January 2002). The post 9/11 “men/women casualties mentioned” were tabulated from polls conducted by the Pew Center (Sept and Nov 2001), The Gallup Poll (Sept 2001), and the ABC/Washington Post survey (November 2001).

Table 7

	<b>% Favor Pre-9/11</b>	<b>% Favor Post 9/11</b>
<b>To Remove Saddam Hussein</b>		
1. Total Population: no casualties mentioned	70 (15)	72 (10)
2. Total Population: casualties mentioned	44 (3)	64 (2)
3. Men: casualties mentioned	50 (3)	
4. Women: casualties mentioned	40 (3)	
<b>Other Military Actions Against Iraq</b>		
1a. Total Population: no casualties mentioned	67 (63)	71 (3)
2a. Total Population: casualties mentioned	47 (9)	43 (1)
3a. Men: casualties mentioned	56 (9)	
4a. Women: casualties mentioned	41 (9)	

Figure 2



**Note:** Full question wording is: "Who do you think is currently winning the war against terrorism: the U.S. and its allies, neither side, or the terrorists?" The figure shows the *net* percentage who think the "USA and its allies" is winning, that is, percent "USA and its allies" minus percent "the terrorists".

**Source:** CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll, as reported in [www.pollingreport.com](http://www.pollingreport.com).

Who do you think is currently winning the war against terrorism: the U.S. and its allies, neither side, or the terrorists?

	10/01	11/01	12/01	1/02	3/4-7/02	3/22-24/02	4/02	5/02
US+Allies	42	53	64	66	53	51	47	41
Neither	44	33	28	25	34	35	39	35
Terrorists	11	11	5	7	10	12	10	15
Dk	3	3	3	2	3	2	4	9
<i>Net US</i>	31	42	59	59	43	39	37	26