

Gender Differences in Public Attitudes toward the Use of Force by the United States, 1990–2003

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In their study of gender differences in public reactions to the 1990–91 Persian Gulf crisis and war, Virginia Sapiro and Pamela Conover analyzed a number of American survey items dealing with hypothetical security policies as well as concrete questions involving the use of military force and its consequences. The results were clear: Although a gender difference on the more abstract, hypothetical questions was weak or nonexistent, when the analysis turned to the specific questions of using force against Iraq and the civilian and military casualties that could result, the differences became large indeed. Sapiro and Conover concluded that “when we moved from the abstract to the concrete—from hypothetical wars to the Gulf War—the distance separating women and men grew, and on every measure, women reacted more negatively. These gender differences are some of the largest and most consistent in the study of political psychology and are clearly of a magnitude that can have real political significance under the right circumstances.”¹

Less than ten years later, as NATO warplanes continued their attacks against Serbia, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that the gender difference in public opinion concerning the war over Kosovo was far smaller than it had been in previous wars: “As debate persists in America over how much to use force,

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1. Virginia Sapiro and Pamela Johnston Conover, “Gender, Feminist Consciousness, and War,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (November 1993), pp. 1079–1099 at p. 1095.

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fewer women are 'doves.'"² After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the Council on Foreign Relations conducted a survey on defense issues and reported that "women's opinion on defense policies has been transformed" because their views of defense spending and missile defense (among other issues) now closely resembled those of men.³

What explains the disappearance of such yawning gender differences over U.S. defense issues? One might speculate that the Gulf War was unique, a dramatic, highly publicized occurrence accompanied by considerable discussion of potential casualties and a polarized political leadership. That public opinion would polarize in such a context is not surprising. The Kosovo war, in contrast, began with President Bill Clinton's stated intention to avoid using ground troops, thus lessening the fear of casualties. One might also speculate (as does the *Christian Science Monitor*) that the war over Kosovo involved humanitarian and other issues that convinced women of the moral necessity of using force to halt the atrocities being carried out by Serbian forces—many against women. And of course, the attacks of September 11 brought near unanimity to the view of citizens and leaders alike that military force was necessary to protect the United States from grievous harm. One does not expect gender polarization under such conditions of near-universal consensus.

However plausible such speculation, there is no basis in the social science literature for favoring one or the other of these arguments, because scholarly knowledge of gender differences on national security issues rests on sparse evidence. For example, Bruce Jentleson's research on a "principal policy objectives" framework has produced robust findings on the determinants of overall public support for the use of military force. To my knowledge, however, there has been no attempt to extend that framework to an analysis of differences within the general public. In addition, scholarly research on gender differences and the use of force are concentrated on three major conflicts: the Korean, Vietnam, and 1991 Persian Gulf Wars.⁴ These are important cases, but they are also unique—they are wars after all—and therefore potentially unrepresentative. Finally, with the partial exception of Lisa Brandes's analysis of surveys during

2. Alexandra Marks, "Gender Gap Narrows over Kosovo," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 30, 1999, p. 1.

3. Council on Foreign Relations, press release, November 1, 2001, http://www.cfr.org/Public/media/pressreleases_110101a.html.

4. Sapiro and Conover, "Gender, Feminist Consciousness, and War"; and Lisa Brandes, "Public Opinion, International Security Policy, and Gender: The United States and Great Britain since 1945," Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1994.

the Korean and Vietnam Wars, there is to my knowledge virtually no research on the historical evolution of gender differences on the use of force. Of course, the lack of data over time makes it difficult to sort out the degree of constancy or variability in gender differences. Perhaps not surprising, therefore, the standard monograph on public opinion and U.S. foreign policy concludes that “the evidence reviewed here neither wholly refutes nor strongly confirms the gender gap thesis.”⁵

Given the importance of gender differences to electoral politics, and the apparent importance of gender on issues of national security, this gap in the scholarly literature is lamentable. The purpose of this article is to close the gap. In the following section, I briefly review research on overall U.S. public support for the use of military force and on gender differences and the use of military force. This review suggests a synthesis in which the likely magnitude of gender differences is cast as a function of two sets of factors: (1) the purpose for which military force is employed; and (2) the likely consequences of employing force, especially the prospect of civilian and military casualties. In subsequent sections, I present an analysis of 486 separate survey questions that query support for using U.S. military force, beginning with the Persian Gulf crisis in the fall of 1990 and continuing through the ongoing war against terrorism in Afghanistan and the 2003 war against Iraq. My analysis of these surveys focuses on several crucial questions. First, how generalized are gender differences? Are they present in some historical conflicts but not in others? Are some types of military action more polarizing than others? Second, what explains variation in observable gender differences? Do differences vary with the purpose for which military force is being used? Does the type of military action, such as air strikes versus the deployment of ground troops, have any impact on gender differences? What other factors affect the magnitude of gender differences?

Several conclusions emerge from the analysis. First, gender differences are indeed generalized: On average, women are less supportive of the use of military force for any purpose. Second, variations in the magnitude of gender differences largely confirm past theory and research: Women are relatively more sensitive to humanitarian concerns and to the loss of human life. Third, it is nonetheless also true that women are hardly pacifists, and men are not uniformly bellicose. Any difference occurs at the margins in response to specific

5. Ole R. Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 172.

circumstances and the particular military actions being contemplated. Fourth, given the magnitude of some gender differences on some issues involving force, such differences have the potential to be a significant factor in political decisions to employ military force and in the political response to the use of force. The concluding section discusses the implications of these findings for two issues on the political agenda: the war against terror and the 2003 war against Iraq.

The American Public and the Use of Force

Early research on U.S. public support for the use of military force was heavily influenced by the collapse of support for the war in Vietnam. John Mueller's finding that support for the war eroded as a function of mounting casualties became the standard hypothesis for the future: One putative lesson of Vietnam was that the U.S. public would not support military interventions that could lead to the loss of American lives.⁶ 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.⁷ Pulling these two strands together, one could say that most research on public support for using military force has pursued either the question of the effect of casualties or the question of the effect of perceived vital interests, although variations on these themes exist. Indeed, press accounts dwell on the risk of casualties as perhaps the single most important factor underlying public opinion on military issues.

Jentleson challenged this research framework in two studies that together covered every actual or threatened U.S. military intervention from the 1980s through 1996.⁸ Jentleson's central hypothesis is a convincing one: Public support is likely to vary as a function of the purpose of the military intervention. He distinguishes three such purposes. Foreign policy restraint 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, in-

6. John Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley, 1973).

7. Bruce Russett and Miroslav Nincic, "American Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force Abroad," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 91, No. 3 (Autumn 1976), pp. 411–423.

8. Bruce W. Jentleson, "The Pretty Prudent Public: Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (March 1992), pp. 49–74; and Bruce W. Jentleson, "Still Pretty Prudent: Post-Cold War American Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (August 1998), pp. 395–417.

volves “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.”⁹ Finally, during the 1990s a third type of military action became prominent: humanitarian intervention, or the “provision of emergency relief through military and other means to people suffering from famine or other gross and widespread humanitarian disasters.”¹⁰

Jentleson hypothesized that public support for the use of force for purposes of foreign policy restraint and humanitarian intervention should be higher than support for the use of force designed to influence internal political change, and his two studies provided strong confirmation of this hypothesis. Indeed, in a careful examination of alternative hypotheses, Jentleson demonstrates that the impact of these “principal policy objectives” outweighs such factors as the risk of casualties, the existence of multilateral participation in the mission, and the level of perceived vital interests. Jentleson argues convincingly that higher levels of support for foreign policy restraint and humanitarian intervention are rooted in two characteristics of these actions: (1) the legitimacy under international law of using military force to defend against encroachments by other sovereign states (vs. the actual illegitimacy of intervening in the internal affairs of other states); and (2) the clearer standard of success that accompanies such actions, compared with the hazy standards that accompany the nation-building aspects of interventions designed to influence internal political conflicts. Jentleson quotes Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf on the specific lesson of Vietnam: “When you commit military forces, you ought to know what you want that force to do. You can’t kind of say ‘Go out and pacify the entire countryside.’ There has got to be a more specific definition of exactly what you want the force to accomplish. . . . But when I harken back to Vietnam, I have never been able to find anywhere where we have been able to clearly define in precise terms what the ultimate objectives of our military were.”¹¹

Whatever one thinks of Jentleson’s reasoning, it is difficult to dispute his findings. There is a clear hierarchy of support that differentiates the unpopularity of intervening in internal conflicts from the much higher levels of sup-

9. Jentleson, “The Pretty Prudent Public,” p. 50; and Jentleson, “Still Pretty Prudent,” p. 400.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 399–400.

11. Quoted in Jentleson, “The Pretty Prudent Public,” pp. 53–54. The original quotation appears in C.D.B. Bryan, “Operation Desert Norm: Getting to Know the General,” *New Republic*, March 11, 1991, p. 25.

port for humanitarian intervention and the restraint of aggressive behavior of other sovereign states. The distinctions also have important implications for explaining the magnitude of gender differences on the question of using military force.

The Casualty Issue and the Use of Force

The impact of casualties on public opinion deserves additional discussion, for a substantial amount of scholarship and popular attention has been devoted to the issue since the publication of Jentleson's first study. As noted above, Jentleson concluded in 1992 that the perceived risk of casualties or the actual deaths in battle per se were not a determining factor of the level of public support. Although there was one instance in which casualties seemed to have driven down public support for the mission (the deaths of U.S. Marines following the bombing of their barracks in Lebanon in 1983), there were far more instances in which casualties and citizen support appeared uncorrelated. For example, casualties were absorbed in the 1983 Grenada and 1989 Panama invasions and the first Gulf War, yet public approval of these actions was very high. U.S. military support for the Contras in Nicaragua and the government in El Salvador resulted in few casualties, but citizen support for these policies nonetheless remained extremely low. The reason, Jentleson argues, is that the former operations were successful, which produced a "halo effect" of high support. The missions in Central America were unpopular because of the public's aversion to U.S. intervention in internal political conflicts. In effect, Jentleson does qualify his principal policy objectives' framework with the additional factor of "success": that is, successful military operations enjoy high support, even when casualties are suffered.¹²

Eric Larson drew similar conclusions in a subsequent study of the impact of casualties on public opinion. Larson's theory has much in common with the Jentleson framework, despite differences in terminology. Like Jentleson, he argues that casualties alone are not the determining factor. Rather, he casts public support as a function of the interests and principles at stake and the real or perceived prospects for success. On closer examination, these two factors are similar to Jentleson's notion of principal policy objectives and the halo effect, for the former refers primarily to humanitarian or peacekeeping interventions in

12. *Ibid.*, especially pp. 58, 71.

internal political conflicts (in which U.S. public opinion has perceived rather low stakes for the national interest), and the latter obviously to successful operations. Larson's examination of public opinion data from World War II through the intervention in Somalia in 1992–93 provides convincing support for these relationships.¹³

What most distinguishes Larson's study, however, is his focus on leadership consensus as a crucial factor that conditions public support for military operations. In an analysis that closely follows the broader scholarly literature on the role of political leaders in shaping (if not totally determining) public opinion, Larson demonstrates that public support for the wars in Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf in 1991, as well as the intervention in Somalia, closely tracked the degree of leadership consensus. When political leaders were united in support of a policy, public support was also high. When leaders polarized, the public also became divided.¹⁴ Jentleson later confirmed this correlation statistically in his study of support for the use of force during the 1990s. During the course of the debates over intervening in Haiti, Bosnia, and Somalia, public support tended to be low when the Congress and the president pursued different positions and high when the two branches were in agreement (as in the coalition air strikes against Iraq over issues of weapons inspections).¹⁵

In summary, three substantial studies that examine the use of force from the 1960s through the 1990s converge on the conclusion that casualties alone are not the determining—or even decisive—factor conditioning citizen support.¹⁶ Rather it is the principal policy objective, the success or failure of the operation, and the degree of leadership consensus that are decisive. Two cautions should be noted, however. First, as Jentleson himself concedes, the ambiguities of intervening in internal political conflicts may well condition expectations of success, fear of casualties, and the degree of leadership consensus. As noted earlier, one legacy of Vietnam (and perhaps Korea) may be the public's view that interventions in civil wars are likely to involve the United States in pro-

13. Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1996).

14. *Ibid.*, chap. 4. Larson draws heavily on the broader theoretical and research contributions reported in John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

15. Jentleson, "Still Pretty Prudent," pp. 408–414.

16. Another study finds that presidential approval actually increased slightly after the U.S. military suffered casualties during the use of force between 1933 and 1992. See Richard J. Stoll, "Rules of Engagement? Disputes, Casualties, and Support for the President, 1933–1992," Rice University, 2002.

tracted, inconclusive, and costly conflicts. Thus the low level of support for such interventions may result from the fact that the category “internal political conflicts” evokes all of these fears. Moreover, that Vietnam polarized the U.S. political leadership on questions of the use of force is well documented. Studies show that the question of the use of force most divided the American leadership in the post-Vietnam period.¹⁷

Although Jentleson and Larson offer plausible arguments that the risk or fact of casualties is not a decisive influence, fear of casualties and failure may well underlie the low level of public support in the United States for intervening in internal political conflicts. Moreover, a curious gap exists in even the best studies: There is no comprehensive comparison of public opinion questions that mention the prospect of casualties with questions that do not.¹⁸ Thus there is currently no answer to the most basic question surrounding the casualty issue: What do Americans say about casualties resulting from the use of force when they are directly asked? After reviewing the literature on gender differences and the use of force, I provide an answer to this question.¹⁹

Women and the Use of Military Force

Research on gender differences in attitudes toward national security reveals a scholarly consensus that is very much like the more general consensus on the

17. Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*; and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *The Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990).

18. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus*, does study some surveys on casualties, but there is no systematic comparison across all historical cases of the sort that I mention in the text.

19. There are a number of additional studies subsequent to those of Jentleson and Larson that confirm their results. For additional analysis of the Lebanon, Persian Gulf, and Somali cases, see Steven Kull and Clay Ramsay, “The Myth of the Reactive Public: American Public Attitudes on Military Fatalities in the Post-Cold War Period,” in Philip Everts and Pierangelo Isernia, eds., *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 205–228; and James Burk, “Public Support for Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia: Assessing the Casualties Hypothesis,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 114, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 53–78. For two studies that begin by arguing that the casualties hypothesis is “to some extent a self-fulfilling prophecy; politicians use it as an alibi to avoid taking their responsibilities seriously,” but that appear to conclude that public opinion is in fact quite sensitive to casualties, see Philip Everts, “Public Opinion after the Cold War: A Paradigm Shift,” in Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Pierangelo Isernia, eds., *Decision-making in a Glass House: Mass Media, Public Opinion, and American and European Foreign Policy in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), pp. 177–194; and Philip Everts, “War without Bloodshed? Public Opinion and the Conflict over Kosovo,” in Everts and Isernia, *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, pp. 229–259. Finally, Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi argue forcefully on the basis of their own public opinion survey that “success” is the truly decisive factor that underlies public support. See Feaver and Gelpi, “How Many Deaths Are Acceptable? A Surprising Answer,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 1999, p. B03.

impact of gender on partisanship, voting, and policy preferences: Scholars know that it exists, but there is less clarity as to why. In addition, the task of explaining variation in gender differences on national security is limited by the fact that data have been far less readily available than data on partisanship and voting, where so much progress has been made.²⁰

To be sure, there is scholarly consensus that women appear less likely to support policies that involve the use of force. Indeed women are less likely to endorse any violent action, and there is some evidence that they are less supportive of security policies more generally.²¹ But beyond this general observation (itself based on evidence that is now somewhat dated and highly aggregated across time and policy issues), scholars know much less than they would like. In particular, as concerns the use of military force, the most concrete evidence is based on public reactions to a limited number of military actions, and there is sparse data that track gender differences over time.

One of the most comprehensive studies concerns the existence of gender differences in the United States and Great Britain on a number of national security issues: the fear (and risks) of war; the use of conventional military force in Korea and Vietnam; and the testing, deployment, and potential use of nuclear weapons.²² On all of these issues Brandes finds significant gender differences, even when controlling for other socioeconomic correlates of opinions at the individual level. Most interesting from the standpoint of the present study, Brandes found that a gender difference existed in support for the Korean and Vietnam Wars, which casts doubt on two hypotheses: first, that gender differences are the product of a fairly recent political mobilization of women, and second that the Vietnam War destroyed consensus on national security issues. Quite the contrary, gender differences existed as early as the Korean War and at the beginning of the Vietnam War. Given the amount of data that Brandes examined, the finding appears solid.²³

The Brandes study is particularly useful in providing evidence that gender differences on national security issues were not a result of the political mobili-

20. For reviews of data and a vast literature, see Karen M. Kaufman and John R. Petrocik, "The Changing Politics of American Men: Understanding the Sources of the Gender Gap," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (July 1999), pp. 864–887; and Virginia Sapiro, "Theorizing Gender in Political Psychology Research," in David O. Sears, Leonie Huddy, and Robert L. Jervis, eds., *Handbook of Political Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

21. Robert Y. Shapiro and Harpreet Mahajan, "Gender Differences in Policy Preferences: A Summary of Trends from the 1960s to the 1980s," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 42–61; and Thomas Smith, "The Polls: Gender and Attitudes toward Violence," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Spring 1984), pp. 384–396.

22. Brandes, "Public Opinion, International Security Policy, and Gender."

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–154.

zation of women during the 1970s and after. To judge from her data, gender differences are more fundamental and long-standing. In light of the Jentleson studies that I reviewed earlier, however, Brandes's findings are limited by the focus on Korea and Vietnam, for it is precisely this type of struggle over internal political change that evinced the lowest level of overall public support in Jentleson's study and is therefore presumably the most contentious and polarizing. Brandes shows that men and women did indeed polarize over Korea and Vietnam, but is this also true of 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 is this true only of Korea- or Vietnam-type conflicts?

Brandes and Sapiro and Conover have partially answered this question by studying a particularly useful series of questions about the Persian Gulf War included in the American National Election Study in 1990 and 1991. These studies examined a number of questions posed before and after the war began. In evaluations of the actual fighting (bombing) and in the "emotional distress" that accompanied reactions to the fighting and its consequences, both Brandes and Sapiro and Conover found clear gender differences on the prospect of using force in the gulf. Of particular note is the fact that women were far more sensitive—and negative—about the prospects of civilian and military casualties in the war.²⁴ The same finding emerged in a unique tracking study conducted by the Wirthlin Group during the Persian Gulf crisis from August through December 1990. Using nightly samples, Wirthlin eventually queried almost 17,000 respondents on their opinions of President George H.W. Bush's handling of the crisis, support for an eventual attack against Iraq, and willingness to absorb the costs of the war. The results were striking: Gender differences on all of these questions were high, but they were highest on the question of the human costs of the war. In fact, gender differences on the prospect of casualties pervaded all economic and social classes and were the strongest correlate of individual opinions during the crisis.²⁵

The magnitude of this gender difference is all the more surprising given that Iraq had invaded Kuwait in 1990 and that the United States was part of a broader United Nations-sanctioned coalition that was assembled to undo that

24. *Ibid.*; and Sapiro and Conover, "Gender, Feminist Consciousness, and War."

25. Clyde Wilcox, Joseph Ferrara, and Dee Alsop, "Group Differences in Early Support for Military Action in the Gulf: The Effects of Gender, Generation, and Ethnicity," *American Politics Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (July 1993), pp. 343–359. The "costs" of a possible war were measured by asking if "the death of American soldiers in a fight with Iraq is too high a price to pay."

invasion. It was, in short, a classic and dramatic case of foreign policy restraint (in Jentleson's terms), a fact that scholars would expect to lower the degree of domestic contention and polarization. Yet in these two studies, polarization among men and women was high, perhaps even higher than had prevailed during the Vietnam conflict.²⁶ The data from the 1991 Gulf War, in short, would suggest that gender differences on the use of force are 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. It makes a difference—theoretically and politically—if men and women differ on all or just some types of military intervention. For the moment, however, it must remain a tantalizing hypothesis, for the evidence underlying it is very thin and perhaps even unrepresentative. It is thin because the data represent reactions to only three events: the Korean, Vietnam, and 1991 Persian Gulf Wars. It remains to be seen whether an analysis of many threatened or actual uses of military force would reveal a similar pattern. And the evidence is unrepresentative—indeed skewed—because all of these were wars, intensively publicized events accompanied by a great deal of domestic debate and polarization. In addition, they were accompanied by much publicity and debate about the fact or prospect of casualties. It may be that less dramatic uses of force would evince less gender polarization or that the use of force in less risky situations from the standpoint of human casualties would produce less dramatic gender differences. Scholars are drawn once again to the need for studies of gender differences in a variety of situations involving the actual or threatened use of military force.

This seems all the more important in light of the findings of David Fite and his colleagues, who analyzed an array of foreign policy items from the quadrennial surveys commissioned by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. Studying data from four surveys (1975, 1979, 1982, and 1986), they found significant gender differences on both the ends and means of foreign policy, including the use of troops in a variety of hypothetical circumstances. Moreover, the impact of gender grew stronger during the 1980s (as it did in party politics more generally).²⁷ These findings suggest that, across time and a number of

26. It is difficult to make an exact comparison, given the differences in question wording employed during the Vietnam and Gulf Wars, but the aggregate numbers do suggest that gender polarization was higher during the Gulf War. For a wealth of data, see Brandes, "Public Opinion, International Security Policy, and Gender," pp. 99–155.

27. David Fite, Marc Genese, and Clyde Wilcox, "Gender Differences in Foreign Policy Attitudes: A Longitudinal Analysis," *American Politics Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (October 1990), pp. 492–513.

survey items dealing with military issues, gender differences appear to be generalized, in two senses of the word. First, they are general across a number of questions dealing with different aspects of national security policy, suggesting that women are in fact relatively more “dovish” than men. Second, the findings are general across time. Of course, even these latter conclusions are based on data from only four years, and like the other studies, they do not evaluate evidence from the substantial number of cases during the 1990s when the United States actually used or threatened to use military force. There remains a need to trace gender differences across a larger number of historical cases involving the use of military force.

Gender Differences in Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force

In this section I analyze gender differences in public opinion during ten episodes in which the United States contemplated, threatened, or used military force from 1990 and 2003. The ten episodes and the number of public opinion surveys examined for each are listed in Table 1.²⁸ The principal research questions are these: How generalized are gender differences? Do they exist during all historical episodes or for all types of military actions? What explains variation in the gender differences across these ten historical episodes? Following a description of the methods used to collect the survey data listed in Table 1, I turn to analysis of these questions.

Recent scholarship on public opinion emphasizes two important lessons. First, a single question on any issue will be a misleading gauge of the public mood because an infinite variety of question wordings on any issue is conceivable, and each is likely to yield a different set of responses. The response to a single question today on using “ground troops” in Kosovo is likely to be modified (or even contradicted) by a second question with even slightly different wording, and a question about “air strikes” will yield altogether different percentages. Second, the study of many questions does, however, yield an estimate of the public’s preferences that is both plausible and systematically related to government actions.²⁹ Survey respondents do react differently to

28. The last survey on the prospect of initiating a war against Iraq occurred on March 17, 2003—three days before hostilities began. In the concluding section, I review surveys on the war that were conducted through May 30, 2003. For full case summaries of the episodes studied here, see Jentleson, “The Pretty Prudent Public”; Jentleson, “Still Pretty Prudent”; and the analytical histories provided in Barry M. Blechman and Tamara Cofman Wittes, “Defining Moment: The Threat and Use of Force in American Foreign Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 114, No. 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 1–30.

29. The signal works are James A. Stimson, *Public Opinion in America: Mood, Cycles, and Swings*

Table 1. Public Opinion Surveys on the Threat or Use of Military Force.

Episode/Case	Dates of Survey Coverage ^a	Number of Surveys ^b
Persian Gulf crisis and war	1990–2001	17
Iraq (inspections; missile strikes; mobilization; war)	1992–2003	120
Bosnia	1992–98	134
North Korea (nuclear threat/ inspections)	1993–2003	29
Haiti (restoration of Bertrand Aristide's government)	1994–95	49
Somalia (provision of humanitarian assistance/ attack warlords)	1992–94	39
Rwanda (provision of humanitarian assistance)	1994	3
Sudan/Afghanistan (missile strikes)	1998	5
Serbia/Kosovo	1998–2000	71
War against terror	2001–02	19
Total		486

^aThe surveys include prospective actions; actions under way; and retrospective evaluation of past actions. Surveys on the Gulf War after 1991 are retrospective evaluations. War against terror refers primarily to military attacks in Afghanistan, although there are several polls dealing with potential attacks elsewhere (Somalia and Sudan). The last prewar survey concerning the impending war against Iraq was March 16, 2003. Surveys taken during the war are discussed in the concluding section.

^bFigures refer to surveys for which gender breakdowns were retrieved.

variations in the question posed. Thus the study of every question on the use of ground troops and air strikes over a substantial period is likely to yield a reliable estimate of the public's preferences. The implication of these lessons is that a reliable analysis of gender differences requires the study of many survey questions that employ a variety of question wordings.

I therefore retrieved every survey question on the potential or actual use of military force for which the gender breakdown was already available (see Table 1). I also retrieved surveys from archives and tabulated the gender break-

(Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1999); and Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. The same philosophy is also evident in the following works: Robert Y. Shapiro and Benjamin I. Page, "Foreign Policy and the Rational Public," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (June 1998), pp. 211–247; and Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

downs.³⁰ I include only those questions that actively (if sometimes hypothetically) query approval or disapproval of an action involving military force as a means of policy. I required that questions actively query if respondents “favor” (or “approve” or “agree to”) a specific military action.³¹ Vague or biased questions were excluded, as were general questions concerning approval of the president’s “handling” of the situation or questions that asked if an action was a “good idea” or somehow “right” or “wrong.”

Three examples illustrate the texture of the survey 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?” (Gallup Poll)
- April 7, 1999: “Now thinking about the situation in Kosovo, would you favor or oppose sending U.S. (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 U.S. troops in Kosovo as part of a NATO peacekeeping force to help maintain the peace. Do you favor or oppose having U.S. 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” vs. “ground troops”; mention of NATO or “allies”; mention of “peacekeeping”). Other variations—such as mention of potential casualties or the use of force to remove a

30. I include only nationally representative probability samples of the entire population (thus excluding surveys of likely or registered voters or segmented polls of particular population subgroups). The average sample size is 989. The largest number of gender breakdowns came from the IPOLL database available to members of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut (and also available via Lexis-Nexis). In addition, I retrieved original survey responses and tabulated gender breakdowns from archives at the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences at the University of North Carolina; the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research; the Pew Center for the People and the Press; and the Program on International Policy Attitudes. Gallup surveys on the Persian Gulf War are taken from John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). These are supplemented by gender breakdowns available in monthly and yearly Gallup publications.

31. As further described below, these military actions include air/missile strikes/bombing; war/all-out conflict; military force/action (general); providing/sending of arms; sending of troops abroad; and keeping/maintaining troops abroad.

government leader—also exist and have been preserved in the database. I employ these differences in wording to examine the sources of variation in any gender difference on the issue of using military force.

With one exception, these procedures for including surveys are close to identical to those employed by Jentleson.³² The exception flows from my desire to further pursue the impact of the risk of casualties on support for the use of force. For most of the episodes listed in Table 1, survey organizations have posed a variant of the following question (here concerning Iraq): “Do you think getting Saddam Hussein to comply with United Nations weapons inspectors is worth the potential loss of American life and other costs of attacking Iraq, or not?”³³ There are several important reasons to include this “worth it” question. First—and surprisingly—other survey questions dealing with particular military actions seldom mention casualties within the “action” question itself (although a number of idiosyncratic “casualty experiment” questions do exist). Thus, in studying this important issue, scholars need to find better information, and this variant of the casualty question represents the best available. Second, these “worth it” questions invariably occur within opinion surveys (questionnaires) that also inquire about support for specific military actions—indeed that is often the sole purpose for conducting the survey. Thus, due to “questionnaire effects,” it seems plausible that respondents connect the “worth it” question to the specific military actions queried in other items on the same survey questionnaire.³⁴ Third, the question serves as a supplement and comparison to the far greater number of questions in polls that do query specific military actions; scholars can thus compare respondents’ reactions to surveys that do not mention casualties to this question that does.³⁵ Fourth, this survey question raises an important calculus of security policy in a democratic

32. Jentleson, “The Pretty Prudent Public,” pp. 54–55; and Jentleson, “Still Pretty Prudent,” p. 400.

33. Survey by CBS/*New York Times*, December 13–17, 1998.

34. There is a fairly standard sequence in survey questionnaires on the potential or actual uses of military force. Generally, survey organizations ask about (1) attention to the matter; (2) approval of the president’s “handling” of the situation; (3) approval of the action itself (e.g., “air strikes” or “sending troops”); and (4) occasionally about approval if casualties would be suffered (including the “worth it” question discussed here). For an analysis that supports my argument that the “worth it” question is tied to military actions through questionnaire effects, see John Zaller and Stanley Feldman, “A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (August 1992), pp. 579–616.

35. For example, there were fifty-eight survey questions during the war over Kosovo concerning approval of air strikes, deployment of ground troops, and deployment of peacekeepers. None of these questions inquired of the risk of casualties within the active question itself, although some news organizations did ask the “worth it” question separately.

society, what Michael Howard has called the requirement of public reassurance “to persuade one’s own people, and those of one’s allies, that the benefits of military action, or preparation for it, will outweigh the costs.”³⁶ As noted earlier, the presumed difference in the calculus of men and women on the issue of the costs and benefits of risking human life makes it a focus of study for reasons of theory and policy relevance.

Gender Differences in Public Opinion on the Use of Force

The general expectation in any analysis 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, because much of the theoretical literature and a great deal of empirical research emphasizes that it is the differential acceptance (or toleration) of violence in social conflicts that most divides men and women. And in fact, across the 486 surveys for all of the ten historical episodes summarized in Table 2, the gender difference in support for the use of military force (58 percent of men vs. 48 percent of women) is highly significant statistically.

The interesting question is the degree of variation in this gender difference. As Table 2 shows, there is a great deal of variation across the ten historical episodes, but there is no obvious pattern as concerns the size of the gender difference. The largest gap occurs in reaction to questions on the Gulf War, North Korea, and Haiti—the first two involving cases of foreign policy restraint (using Jentleson’s term), and the latter a clear case of internal political change. Even in the most popular cases of foreign policy restraint (the war against terror as well as the various threats and actual missile strikes against Iraq and Sudan/Afghanistan), there is a sizable gender difference (albeit at high levels of support).³⁷ At least in this broad comparison, then, there is no clear pattern to gender differences.

One reason for the absence of a such a pattern is that there is substantial variety in the types of military action undertaken by the United States or posed

36. Michael Howard, “Reassurance and Deterrence,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Winter 1982–83), p. 309.

37. Concerning the long confrontation with Iraq from 1992 through the prewar period in 2003, the support levels and gender differences reported in Table 2 are very stable. In the concluding section, I return to the question of any recent change in opinion on using force against Iraq, especially after September 11, 2001; during and after the debate in the U.S. Congress and the United Nations in late 2002 and early 2003; and after the beginning of the war against Iraq on March 20, 2003.

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

Episode	Male Favor (%)	Female Favor (%)	Gender Difference (%)	Number of Surveys
War against terror, 2001–02	80.0	70.5	9.6	19
Sudan/Afghanistan, 1998	77.8	67.8	10.0	5
Iraq, 1992–2003	69.6	58.5	11.1	120
Persian Gulf crisis and war, 1990–2001	66.8	49.8	17.0	17
Somalia, 1992–94	61.4	52.6	8.8	39
Serbia/Kosovo, 1998–2000	54.4	47.0	7.4	71
North Korea, 1993–2003	53.4	38.8	14.6	29
Rwanda, 1994	49.7	45.0	4.7	3
Bosnia, 1992–98	49.2	41.6	7.6	134
Haiti, 1994–95	42.2	30.9	11.2	49
Total	57.6	47.9	9.7	486

hypothetically to survey respondents within each episode. That is, even within a specific historical episode, survey organizations may ask if respondents favor sending troops, conducting air strikes, or increasing troop levels, or if they approve of the presence of troops already deployed. Table 3 shows average support levels and gender differences broken down by the type of military action mentioned in each survey question. Here a pattern emerges: Among both men and women, the mention of a generally stated “military action” or use of “military force,” as well as the mention of “air/missile strikes/bombing,” evinces much stronger support than does any mention of sending or maintaining the presence of troops abroad. Clearly, both men and women are more leery of committing U.S. troops to military action than they are of using air power or endorsing the use of “military force” when the type of force is not specified.

Men, however, are less wary in this regard: In several categories involving “troops,” men display majority support, whereas women are (sometimes marginally) opposed. Indeed a majority of men support the use of force in eight of the nine types of action, while a majority of women favor only three of the nine types of action. In any case, the gender differences on the “troop” items are among the highest on the list, and perhaps most significantly, they occur at politically tenuous levels of support (men and women are divided at levels close to a tenuous majority). To the extent that troop commitments pose greater risks of casualties, this pattern would seem to confirm earlier research findings that a significant reason for gender differences on issues of military force is the greater sensitivity of women to the human costs of conflict. I examine this proposition further below.

Table 3. Support for Use of Military Force by Type of Military Action.

Type of Action Mentioned in Survey Question	Men Favor (%)	Women Favor (%)	Gender Difference (%)	Number of Surveys
Air/missile strikes/bombing	66.6	54.1	12.6	86
War/all-out conflict	64.1	50.4	13.7	22
Military force/action (general)	65.0	52.2	9.9	102
Providing/sending arms abroad	60.0	48.1	11.9	8
Increasing troops abroad	59.6	45.5	14.1	11
Unclear action type	54.6	45.4	9.1	16
Presence of troops abroad	50.3	43.1	7.2	24
Sending troops abroad	51.1	43.1	8.0	208
Keeping/maintaining troops abroad	41.0	29.1	11.9	7
Total	57.6	47.9	9.7	486

Gender Difference and Principal Policy Objectives

The percentages for each of the ten historical episodes and military action types reviewed above do not address the question of the purpose for which military force is used or threatened. One can ask if respondents favor “sending troops,” but to what purpose? In fact, there is substantial variation within each episode and military action in the principal policy objective queried in survey questions. For example, one question on Rwanda asks if U.S. military forces should participate in “stopping the fighting,” which clearly suggests active participation in an internal political conflict. Yet other survey questions on Rwanda asked if U.S. forces should assist in providing “humanitarian relief.”

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

In this section I provide an analysis of gender differences according to the principal policy objective mentioned in the survey question. My definitions follow Jentleson, as reviewed above. Foreign policy restraint involves the con-

templated, threatened, or actual use of force to coerce another state or nonstate actor that is threatening U.S. interests or allies. Internal political change involves the use of force (most generally) to “[influence] the domestic political authority structure of another state.” Humanitarian intervention refers to the “provision of emergency relief through military and other means.”

In the course of reviewing the survey materials, it became clear that a fourth category—peacekeeping operations—was both conceptually necessary and empirically obvious. Conceptually, it is difficult to argue that peacekeeping operations are per se a form of participation in internal political change, for the entire spirit and purpose of peacekeeping is to provide a *neutral* buffer to warring parties. Indeed, in this sense, peacekeeping is also very much in the humanitarian tradition, because it is often offered precisely because civilians have suffered mightily. Empirically, support for almost any question that mentions peacekeeping troops is generally low and very stable, which suggests that it is seen much differently than the use of force for other purposes.

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

Survey organizations have recognized the difference and have adjusted the wording of their questions accordingly, making it possible to distinguish the purpose that underlies the military action (“peacekeeping”) that is proposed in survey questions. One version frequently inquires of “sending troops to enforce a peace agreement once peace has been established.” This formulation strikes me as closest to the true purpose of peacekeeping (the conflict has ended, and “peace” is what is being enforced). Other formulations are really questions about participating in internal political conflicts. One variation asks of sending peacekeepers “to help end the conflict [or: stop the violence].” Surely survey respondents understand that this wording implies potential participation in the conflict. Yet other questions ask if peacekeeping troops should be sent to “protect ethnic Albanians in Kosovo,” which surely has a similar effect on survey respondents. Therefore the key rule as I tabulated the surveys was to establish the distinction between a question that actually is inquiring of

“neutral” peacekeeping and one that is actually inquiring of “peacekeeping” that might involve participation in the internal political struggle under way.³⁸

For the analysis of gender differences according to principal policy objectives, I therefore present four categories rather than the three employed by Jentleson: foreign policy restraint, humanitarian intervention, internal political change, and peacekeeping operations.³⁹ The breakdown of support among men and women for each of these purposes is presented in Table 4. The striking feature of the figures in this table is the strong confirmation of the utility of Jentleson’s distinction: foreign policy restraint and humanitarian intervention enjoy the strongest support by far among both men and women. This is true not only of the overall totals at the top of the table, but also within each of the historical episodes for which different objectives have been queried in surveys. The only exception is Iraq, where support for internal change (which for the most part involves questions on removing Saddam Hussein) is essentially the same as support for foreign policy restraint.

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

The mention of peacekeeping operations also produces an average gender difference smaller than the overall average of 10 percentage points. However, the reason in this case is that, while both men and women reduce their average level of support when peacekeeping is mentioned, the decrease among men is slightly larger (7 percentage points below the overall average vs. 4 percentage

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

39. My criteria for classifying surveys into these four categories are described in Richard C. Eichenberg, “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,” paper presented to the annual convention of the International Studies Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, March 24–27, 2002.

Table 4. Support for Using Force by Principal Policy Objective.

	Men Favor (%)	Women Favor (%)	Gender Difference (%)	Number of Surveys
Total all episodes/surveys				
Foreign policy restraint	68.1	54.9	13.2	142
Humanitarian intervention	68.1	63.4	4.8	24
Internal political change	53.2	43.8	9.5	237
Peacekeeping operations	49.6	43.4	6.1	81
Total	57.6	47.9	9.7	484
Persian Gulf crisis and war				
Foreign policy restraint	66.8	49.8	17	17
Bosnia				
Humanitarian intervention	58.6	57.7	0.9	7
Internal political change	50.1	40.2	10.0	62
Peacekeeping operations	47.6	41.5	6.1	63
Iraq				
Foreign policy restraint	70.2	57.5	12.7	75
Internal political change	68.6	60.2	8.4	45
North Korea				
Foreign policy restraint	53.4	38.8	14.6	29
Haiti				
Internal political change	42.2	30.9	11.2	49
Somalia				
Internal political change	51.7	41.6	10.1	21
Humanitarian intervention	72.1	65.6	6.5	16
Peacekeeping operations	78.5	64.0	14.5	2
Rwanda				
Internal political change	39.0	34.0	5.0	2
Humanitarian intervention	71.0	67.0	4.0	1
Sudan/Afghanistan				
Foreign policy restraint	77.8	67.8	10.1	5
Serbia/Kosovo				
Internal political change	54.7	46.5	8.2	55
Peacekeeping operations	53.5	48.5	5.0	16
War against terror				
Foreign policy restraint	83.7	73.7	10.0	16
Internal political change	61.0	53.3	7.7	3

points among women). Thus peacekeeping operations are unpopular among both men and women, but they are slightly less popular among men in terms of the change in opinion that mention of peacekeeping operations evokes.

There is an interesting additional pattern to the data in Table 4: Gender differences on average are lower in historical episodes in which violence against women was an explicit tactic of warring parties and was heavily featured in media reporting.⁴⁰ This is true, for example, for the humanitarian and peace-

40. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this line of analysis.

keeping categories for the conflicts in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Kosovo, where atrocities against women were widely reported and for which gender differences are much lower than the overall average of 10 percentage points. Women, it appears, are more sympathetic to military action when they can identify with the suffering that has been experienced by women in those conflicts. One would expect this to be a feature of the war against terror surveys as well because the plight of women in Afghanistan under the ruling Taliban was widely reported. Any relationship in the survey data is confounded, however, because the attacks against Afghanistan were in retaliation for an attack against the United States itself, which should reduce gender differences. In the event, gender differences during the war against terror are actually about average in Table 4 (10 percentage points for foreign policy restraint), perhaps because the level of violence employed was high. Nonetheless, the sensitivity of women to the plight of other women plagued by violence is an important avenue for further research.⁴¹

Somewhat paradoxically, the largest gender difference—14 percentage points—occurs within the episodes involving foreign policy restraint, although the political significance of these differences is somewhat lessened by the high levels of support at which they generally occur (North Korea is the exception). The paradox is that the most uniformly popular reason for using force (restraining a threatening adversary) should also be the most divisive on gender grounds. One clue to the anomaly may be that in three out of the four cases of foreign policy restraint (the missile strikes against Sudan/Afghanistan being the exception), the situation was in fact a war (first in the gulf and then against terror) or involved countries with whom the United States had actually fought wars (North Korea and Iraq). Recalling from Table 3 that the mention of the words “war” or “all-out conflict” in survey questions also evinces a very high gender difference leads to speculation that the higher level of sustained violence associated with “war” sets limits to women’s support relative to men, even when the objective is popular.⁴² Further, although it is possible that women are simply more disapproving of the sustained social violence that war represents, based on the research reviewed above, it seems equally

41. An interesting starting point might be the survey sponsored by the Center for Gender Equality, *The Impact of Terrorist Attacks on Women*, conducted during November 2001. The survey showed widespread knowledge among American women of the situation of women in Afghanistan. The results of the survey can be found at http://www.Greenbergresearch.com/publications/press_releases/pr_centerforgenderequality.pdf.

42. Not surprisingly, mention of the word “war” occurs, with a single exception, only in surveys on the Gulf War; Iraq, 1992–2003; and North Korea. The exception is a single poll on “winning the war” against Serbia in 1999.

plausible that it is the risk of major casualties in war that affects women's views.⁴³

The Casualty Issue and Gender Difference

The figures in Table 5 demonstrate that the prospect of casualties does condition the magnitude of gender differences. Overall both men and women demonstrate lower support for using force when casualties are mentioned in the question, but women reduce that support more than men. As shown in the total for all episodes at the bottom of the table, the decline when casualties are mentioned is almost 8 percentage points among women and 4 percentage points among men. As a result, the mention of casualties increases the gender difference. This gender difference is dramatically revealed in another way: When casualties are mentioned in surveys, men still respond with majority support for the use of force in four of the seven episodes listed in the table. Among women, there is majority support for using force in only two episodes when casualties are mentioned, and significantly one involves humanitarian purposes (Somalia) and the other the defense of the United States itself (war against terror). In the other five cases, were referendums on the use of force to be held, a majority of men would approve, but a majority of women would disapprove.

I speculated earlier that the low level of support for U.S. intervention in internal conflicts might result from the inherent risk of casualties in those situations, because such conflicts are intractable and because intervention raises the prospect of deploying ground troops as peacekeepers in strife-ridden situations. At first glance, Table 5 does not bear out this reasoning; the decline in support when casualties are mentioned is actually somewhat less than average for situations of internal conflict (Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia). Indirectly, however, there is some evidence for the proposition. In two situations—using force against Iraq after 1991 and against Serbia in 1999—there is a steep drop in support among both men and women when casualties are mentioned. What these two situations have in common is the reliance on air power as the principal means of coercion. Throughout the 1990s the United States conducted air strikes and missile strikes against Iraq, but the prospect of renewed ground war was never seriously raised until the end of 2002. In the war against Serbia,

43. It also seems plausible that the consistently low levels of support for using force against North Korea are related to the large number of casualties suffered during the Korean War.

Table 5. Support for Using Force by Episode and Mention of Casualties.

	Men Favor (%)	Women Favor (%)	Gender Difference (%)	Number of Surveys
Persian Gulf crisis and war				
No casualties mentioned	73.2	53.8	19.3	6
Casualties mentioned	63.4	47.6	15.7	11
Bosnia				
No casualties mentioned	49.5	42.0	7.5	128
Casualties mentioned	42.8	32.0	10.8	6
Iraq				
No casualties mentioned	72.4	62.0	10.4	101
Casualties mentioned	54.6	39.8	14.8	19
Haiti				
No casualties mentioned	42.5	31.3	11.2	46
Casualties mentioned	37.7	26.0	11.7	3
Somalia				
No casualties mentioned	62.0	52.9	9.1	33
Casualties mentioned	58.5	51.0	7.5	6
Serbia/Kosovo				
No casualties mentioned	56.4	49.7	6.7	58
Casualties mentioned	45.8	34.9	10.9	13
War against terror				
No casualties mentioned	82.4	73.8	8.6	15
Casualties mentioned	71.5	58.0	13.5	4
Total all episodes				
No casualties mentioned	58.2	48.9	9.3	424
Casualties mentioned	53.8	41.0	12.8	62
Overall Total	57.6	47.9	9.7	486

the use of ground troops was ruled out. Given the drop in support in these situations when casualties are mentioned, it appears that citizens are revealing a clear preference for military means that pose less of a risk to American lives. When the possibility of American deaths is raised, support drops precipitously, and the gender difference—already large on average—increases.

Given the known importance of gender differences to the outcome of elections, does this also mean that the risk of casualties—and the political divisions that it produces—constrain politicians from the use of force in any but the most threatening situations to the United States itself? The data certainly point in that direction—even on Iraq, the public is deeply divided in gender terms—but as noted above, there is an additional factor to consider: the actual success of the military undertaking. Both Jentleson and Larson argued persuasively that the reaction of public opinion to the suffering of casualties is conditioned by the perceived “success” of the operation. In Vietnam and Somalia (to choose

two famous examples), U.S. interventions were widely seen as failures, and support for the operations eroded as casualties were absorbed. In the 1991 Gulf War, in contrast, the widely (and anxiously) anticipated high rate of casualties did not occur, and support for the war did not erode as the fighting continued.⁴⁴

Indeed, as shown in Table 6, support for the Gulf War actually increased after fighting began and casualties began to occur. Further, gender differences declined because women increased their support for the war almost twice as much as men. As a result, in all polls since the day the first Gulf War began, the gender difference is less than half of prewar levels, despite the 382 casualties taken on the U.S. side and many more on the Iraqi side.

During the Somalia episode, the opposite occurred. Due to the humanitarian purpose of the initial intervention, support for sending U.S. forces was high before the deaths of U.S. soldiers in Mogadishu on October 5, 1993, and the gender difference was lower than average. As Table 6 shows, however, this changed dramatically after October 1993.⁴⁵ Support dropped among men to a level below a majority and fell even further among women. Note once again, however, that women are more sensitive to casualties than men: The loss of life in Somalia increased gender differences. In any case, the contrast with the Gulf War is clear. Even though the (cumulative) twenty-eight deaths in Somalia were far fewer than had been suffered in the Gulf War, overall support declined and gender polarization increased. It thus appears that the success of the Gulf War operation versus the perceived failure of the Somalia operation is responsible for the difference. And to judge by the views of women in the aftermath of the deaths in the two episodes, women are relatively more rewarding of mission success and intolerant of mission failure than are men.

What Moves Gender Differences on Issues of Military Force?

To this point I have analyzed several factors that affect variation in gender differences on the question of using military force. In particular, I have shown that the type of military action, the principal policy objective, and the mention of casualties in the survey question each influences the gender difference when

44. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus*, pp. 112–120.

45. There is evidence that support for the Somali operation began to decline early in the summer of 1993 in response to the death of UN peacekeepers, but this merely adjusts the timing of the pattern reported here; it does not change it. For detailed analysis of the Somalia case, see *ibid.*; and Burk, “Public Support for Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia.”

Table 6. Support for Using Force among Men and Women Prior and Subsequent to Occurrence of Casualties.

	Men Favor (%)	Women Favor (%)	Gender Difference (%)	Number of Surveys
Persian Gulf crisis and war				
Support prior to beginning of war on January 16, 1991	64.1	44.1	20.0	11
Support subsequent to January 16, 1991	71.8	60.3	11.5	6
Total	66.8	49.8	17.0	17
Somalia				
Support prior to casualties on October 5, 1993	68.2	60.6	7.6	27
Support subsequent to casualties suffered on October 5, 1993	46.2	34.7	11.5	12
Total	61.4	52.6	8.8	39

taken individually. But the question arises: Which of these (and other factors) are the most important influences, and to what degree?

In Table 7, I have summarized the relative impact of a number of important factors that influence the support of men and women for employing force—and thus any gender difference that exists—controlling for all of the factors listed in the table.⁴⁶ Because the table contains a great deal of information, it is worth close study and detailed commentary. The beginning point is a baseline average level of support for questions classified as foreign policy restraint and the resulting gender difference of 12.19 percentage points. The impact of a different question wording (say, a question that either is classified as humanitarian or mentions military casualties) can be read as the deviation or change from this baseline average. For example, average support among men for humanitarian intervention is 9 percentage points higher (+9.05) than foreign policy restraint and 17 percentage points higher among women (+16.99).

As the immediately preceding example makes clear, principal policy objectives are a powerful influence on support for the use of force among both men

46. Readers with a statistical bent will recognize these figures as the parameters from a multiple regression analysis containing all of the factors (variables) listed in the table. Because the variables take the values of 1 and 0 (indicating the presence or absence of a particular question wording), they are readily interpretable as the percentage change in opinion due to the presence of a particular wording. Based on previous analysis, only those factors that are statistically significant are reported in the table. The baseline average is the constant in the regression.

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

	Change in Support (%)	Change in Support (%)	Effect on Gender Difference (%)
	Men	Women	
Baseline average foreign policy restraint	59.00	46.81	12.19
Effect of question that mentions:			
Humanitarian intervention	+9.05	+16.99	-7.94
Internal political change	-12.23	-8.98	-3.26
Peacekeeping operations	-12.08	-6.39	-5.69
Ground troops	-3.47	-1.13	-2.35
Terror or terrorism	+11.06	+15.18	-4.12
Saddam Hussein	+16.69	+17.98	-1.28
Multilateral action	+6.04	+5.80	+0.24
Air or missile strikes	+7.67	+5.46	+2.02
Maintaining troops	-9.46	-12.59	+3.13
Military casualties	-3.20	-6.50	+3.30
Retaliate for attack on the United States	+13.48	+10.54	+2.93
Increase troops	+8.30	+3.26	+5.04

NOTE: The methodology underlying this table is discussed on page 135 and in note 46.

and women, but as noted earlier, the relative impact of some factors on men and women differ—and therefore condition the magnitude of gender differences. For example, the reduction in the gender difference that accompanies the mention of humanitarian goals is due to the fact that women’s support for using force for this purpose rises much more than that of men. Of particular interest are the effects listed at the bottom of the table—mention of specific military actions or their consequences—for all of these increase gender differences. Although opinion is affected in the same direction among men and women for each of these characteristics of military action, in general women’s reactions are less bellicose. Their support drops more when military casualties or “maintaining troops” is mentioned, for example, and rises less when retaliation or a proposal to “increase” troops is mentioned. Taken together, these variations represent ample support for hypotheses frequently offered in past research: Women are relatively less likely to endorse violent (or escalatory) actions; they are relatively more sensitive to the loss of human life; but they are relatively more sensitive to humanitarian objectives. Although fragments of evidence for each of these correlations existed in past research, there is now evidence

that they exist on the basis of a substantial sample of public opinion surveys, with considerable historical reach, and with considerable variety in question wording.

Conclusions and Implications

Five conclusions emerge from this research and provide additional thoughts on the implications for theory and policy. The first conclusion concerns the strength of the explanatory argument developed by Jentleson. Using slightly different methods and a far greater number of survey items, I have nonetheless confirmed the importance of principal policy objectives in explaining the overall level of citizen support for the use of force. As Jentleson argued, among Americans foreign policy restraint and humanitarian interventions are popular, whereas intervention in internal conflicts is not. By studying peacekeeping operations separately, I have shown that Americans are unenthusiastic about this role as well. Notice also that this pattern holds even when one analyzes other considerations in survey questions, such as the nature of the military action or the risk of casualties (as in Table 7). These factors shift opinion at the margin—which is obviously important—but they do not rearrange the overall pattern.

The second conclusion is that gender differences are truly generalized. As I have noted, past research left open the possibility that gender differences were due to the specific nature of the relatively few historical episodes or survey questions that have been studied. In this article I have demonstrated the generality of gender differences both by examining ten historical episodes between August 1990 and March 2003 in which the United States contemplated, threatened, or used military force and by laboring to examine all questions available for each episode. Although I have presented evidence that gender differences do vary in magnitude, this does not belie the fact that—on average—women are generally less supportive of the use of military force for any purpose, involving any type of military action, in every historical episode.

Third, variations in the magnitude of gender differences largely support the theoretical arguments offered in past research or documented in previous analyses. Past theorizing and research have emphasized the argument that—for many reasons—women may be less supportive of the use of violence to resolve social conflicts and 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

relatively less supportive of overt military actions (increasing or maintaining troops), and they are more sensitive to the prospect of casualties in war. Moreover, although both men and women respond positively to the prospect of deploying military forces for humanitarian purposes, women do so at relatively higher levels.

Fourth, despite these relative differences between men and women, women are not uniformly pacifist, nor are men uniformly bellicose. Any difference is at the margins. As shown in Table 2, majorities of women supported the use of force in some historical episodes, and Table 3 showed that a majority of women do support certain types of military actions. In addition, certain factors reduce the support of men as well as women. Thus, whether a significant gender difference will attend any threatened or actual use of force depends on the circumstances and the actions being contemplated.

Fifth, it nonetheless remains the case that in many historical episodes, circumstances and policy options—as gauged in opinion surveys—have produced a gender difference that is potentially of political significance. Table 2, for example, shows that majorities of men supported the use of force in seven of ten historical episodes, and 49 percent supported force in two others. Among women, majority support occurred in only five. In several cases, opinion is divided between majority male support and a dissenting female majority (the same is true of the specific actions listed in Table 3).

Thus, one of the most significant political implications of my research is that gender differences on the use of military force must be an important consideration for politicians who would attempt to gauge the public mood on the use of force. The reason is the well-documented impact of gender on partisanship and voting; no politician can ignore the potential impact of her or his actions on the potential for gendered responses in the voting booth. Although this is not the place to review the entire literature on gender and voting, it is clear that several factors will condition the impact of the gender issues reviewed here.⁴⁷ The first is obvious: the timing of the use of force in the electoral calendar. Had President George H.W. Bush faced re-election in the fall of 1990 or President Clinton in the fall of 1993 (or even the fall of 1995), the impact of gender differences could certainly have been substantial. In the former case, the skepticism of women toward the use of force in the pre-Gulf War period would likely have complicated the problems that the president already had with female vot-

47. Kaufman and Petrocik, “The Changing Politics of American Men”; and Sapiro, “Theorizing Gender in Political Psychology Research.”

ers, and in the latter case it may have diluted the advantage with female voters that Clinton had enjoyed in 1992.

These examples simply restate in commonsense terms what the scholarly literature on foreign policy and voting behavior has taught. This is not the place for a detailed review, but scholarly studies would lead to the conclusion that foreign policy opinions—and gender differences on foreign policy issues—are most likely to affect voting behavior under the following conditions: (1) the issue is salient at the time of the election; (2) candidates differ in their policy positions; and (3) the issue is not overly technical. Although the second of these conditions cannot be foreseen, the first and third are clearly met in a dramatic international crisis or a well-publicized debate about using military force.⁴⁸

On the current political agenda, the two issues with the potential to affect voters' calculations—and thus the behavior of politicians—are the war against terror and the 2003 war against Iraq. Based on the analysis presented above, it seems unlikely that the war against terror will have a significant impact on gendered voting. The reason is not that the war lacks salience or that it represents technical policy choices, but rather that the levels of support for the war among all sectors of the population approach unanimity, making any gender polarization inconsequential. Casualties in the war have thus far been quite low, and the capture of a number of important terrorist operatives should contribute to perceptions of success in the war. One would expect therefore that the candidate who opposes President Bush in 2004 will be unlikely to offer intense criticism or indeed alternative policies.⁴⁹

The same cannot be said about the war against Iraq, which does have the potential to produce electoral consequences. As shown in Table 2, 70 percent of American men and almost 60 percent of women have long supported any military action against Iraq when the action is queried in the abstract. In the past, however, support dropped considerably when the possibility of American casualties was mentioned (recall Table 5). Indeed, before the war against Iraq be-

48. The generalizations presented in this paragraph represent a synthesis of Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, "The Two Faces of Issue Voting," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (March 1980), pp. 78–91; Benjamin I. Page and Richard Brody, "Policy Voting and the Electoral Process: The Vietnam War Issue," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (September 1972), pp. 979–995; John H. Aldrich, Eugene Borgida, and John L. Sullivan, "Foreign Affairs and Issue Voting," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (March 1989), pp. 123–141; and Kaufman and Petrocik, "The Changing Politics of American Men."

49. Although the analysis above suggests that, should the perception of success in the war against terror gradually erode, it could reduce public support and/or increase gender polarization, which could be electorally significant. Further, should the war against terror lead to sustained involvement in internal conflicts, support among men and women would likely decline.

gan in March 2003, the mention of casualties in any military action against Iraq caused support to drop below the majority level within the overall population, and the large gap between men and women demonstrated how divisive it could be politically. These figures were little affected by the events of September 11, 2001, or by the vigorous debate about the possibility of war against Iraq that occurred during the fall of 2002 and early 2003. In fact, the intense focus on the possibility of war decreased support slightly during the course of last year and during early 2003.⁵⁰

Support for the war did increase among both men and women after hostilities began on March 20, 2003. Absent any mention of casualties, support for the war through the end of April averaged 80 percent among men and 70 percent among women. As was true after the beginning of hostilities in the Persian Gulf War of 1991 (Table 6), however, gender differences narrowed considerably during the course of the war. Indeed, on the day Baghdad fell (April 7, 2003), gender differences were essentially zero, despite the casualties suffered during the previous three weeks. Significantly, the percentage of the general public who thought that the war was “worth the cost in human lives” never dropped below 62 percent.⁵¹

The survey data on the war against Iraq in 2003 therefore suggest that President Bush had secured strong public support for the war in much the same way as the first President Bush did in 1991: He accomplished at least one of his objectives (removing the Iraqi regime) with relatively low casualties. Given the high priority that the American public had placed on the objective of removing the Hussein regime, public support is likely to remain high, but based on the data analyzed above, it could be eroded by two potential developments. The first is the potential collapse of leadership consensus that has supported the president’s policy on Iraq. In early summer 2003, there were signs that leadership consensus had begun to erode, as leading Democrats questioned the ad-

50. Support for using force against Iraq averaged 66 percent among men and 57 percent among women between September 11, 2001 and March 17, 2003. Between August 1, 2002, and March 17, 2003, support averaged 62 percent among men and 52 percent among women. These figures are 6 to 10 percentage points lower than the support levels for the entire period of confrontation with Iraq that are reported in Table 5.

51. The observations in this paragraph are based on polling through May 30, 2003. Overall support is the average in four major surveys: Gallup, ABC/*Washington Post*, CBS/*New York Times*, and Pew Center for the People and the Press, all reported at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq>. The question that asks whether the war is “worth the cost” in human lives is reported at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/03/28/opinion/polls/main546585.shtml>. A *Time*/CNN poll of March 27, 2003, suggested that support for the war could drop below a majority if 1,000 casualties were suffered: “American Opinion on the War,” *Time*, April 7, 2003, p. 40.

ministration's handling of prewar intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Should Democrats continue to question the competence—or even the sincerity—of the administration's handling of this issue, one would expect public opinion to polarize as a result.

The second threat to the resounding levels of public support for U.S. policy in Iraq could come if the occupation proves unsuccessful and if there are continuing casualties resulting from the occupation mission. Of course, just what a “successful” occupation would mean remains somewhat murky. Although the administration spoke of bringing democracy to Iraq, few expect that transition anytime soon. To the extent that “success” is defined in more limited terms as the establishment of security and stability within Iraq, the outcome is still very much up in the air. Should establishment of stability prove a lengthy and inconclusive process, and especially if U.S. forces continue to suffer casualties, one would expect public support for the mission in Iraq to decline, and based on the evidence reviewed above, gender differences would be no small part of the consensus.