

# At War and at Home: The Consequences of Women Combat Casualties\*

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## Abstract

What are the consequences of women dying in combat? We bring together academic research with arguments from public policy debates to derive predictions for how women dying in combat affects public attitudes toward (1) the military, and (2) perceptions of women's equality. Using a series of survey experiments, our results show that women dying in combat has no effect on public support for war, or women's interest in joining the military. However, we find support for the idea that women dying in combat *increases* support for gender equality among women. The positive effect is most strongly supported by measures of women's equality in the public sphere of work and politics. The analysis brings new empirical evidence to bear on the untested assertions underpinning public debates about the political and social consequences of allowing women to serve in combat positions.

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# 1 Introduction

The willingness to fight and die in combat is inextricably linked with what it means to be a full and equal citizen of the state (Janowitz 1976; Krebs 2006). Consequently, restrictions on who can serve in the armed forces and in what capacity have stoked debates across centuries and around the globe. Sources of contention have included service limitations on the basis of race and sexual orientation in the US, ethnicity in Israel, and gender in contemporary Norway.<sup>1</sup> While the precise contours of the debates vary, supporters and detractors alike recognize that allowing new individuals the opportunity to fight and die in combat could have profound ramifications for both the military and society. For example, one columnist predicted the recent opening of all US combat positions to women would erode public support for conflict, stating “I believe our nation could be doubly demoralized by women coming back from war in body bags in equal numbers to men.”<sup>2</sup> In the face of such public disillusionment, leaders, eager to garner and maintain public backing for the use of force (Baum 2004; Canes-Wrone 2006; Foyle 1999; Holsti 2004; Reiter and Stam 2002), might find their ability to fight and win wars severely diminished. Others speculate that women fighting and dying in combat will have broad implications for how Americans view women both within and outside of the military. Cognizant of these potentially sweeping social implications, opponents charge that the impetus for the policy decision “has always been nonmilitary” and reflects a “feminist imperative.”<sup>3</sup>

To better understand the contours of these debates, we examine the political and social consequences of allowing new members of marginalized communities the right to fight. We

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<sup>1</sup>For a historical overview of the role of black soldiers in the United States military, see Foner (1974). For segregation within Israeli forces, see Sharp (2006) and [haaretz.com/.premium-idf-to-disband-druze-battalion-1.5363658](http://www.haaretz.com/.premium-idf-to-disband-druze-battalion-1.5363658) For Norwegian policy change toward full integration of women in the military, see <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/norway/2017-01-19/norways-radical-military-experiment>.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2012/05/19/why-dont-ever-want-to-see-women-in-combat-on-front-lines.html>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.wsj.com/articles/women-dont-belong-in-combat-units-11547411638> For an analysis of how the combat exclusion ban has changed narratives around soldiering in US history, see MacKenzie (2015).

do so by analyzing the ramifications of the recent and high-profile policy change opening all combat positions in the US military to women, announced by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter in 2015.<sup>4</sup> Those in favor and opposed agree on the first-order consequences of the policy change: women will die in combat in higher numbers.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, they disagree both about how the public will respond to these increasing casualties, and the implications of these differential responses for the military and broader society. Since the casualties underpinning these consequentialist arguments about the effects of women dying in combat have yet to be realized, many of the policy arguments about whether women *ought* to be allowed to serve in combat rest upon untested speculative empirical claims about the consequences of allowing them to do so. These debates, paired with insights from the social sciences, highlight two distinct dimensions that may be affected by women serving and dying in combat roles: public attitudes toward (1) the military, and (2) gender equality. We pair theories at the intersection of international relations, public opinion, and gender with experimental methods to bring new empirical evidence to bear on these debates.

Using a series of survey experiments, we first analyze the consequences of women casualties for public perceptions of the military. Women fighting and dying in combat could erode overall support for war while also increasing enlistment among women since they are no longer viewed as second class citizens within the military. We fielded a survey experiment on a nationally representative sample of 1,400 American adults to assess these ideas. Varying the putative gender of a combat casualty, we show that women dying in combat has no discernible effect on public support for war. This finding stands in contrast to past research

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<sup>4</sup>Carter made the final decision to lift the ban entirely, leaving no positions indefinitely closed to women. In 2013, the previous Secretary Leon Panetta rescinded the 1994 ban after four military women who had served in Afghanistan and Iraq—along with the ACLU and the Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN)—brought a lawsuit arguing that the ban limited their opportunities for promotion. Women comprise only 7% of flagged officers, but 14% of the active-duty military.

<sup>5</sup>US women dying in combat is not wholly new. Since 2002, 169 women have died in America’s various overseas conflicts according to the Pentagon’s Defense Casualty Analysis System (data retrieved January 22, 2019). Nonetheless, lifting the combat exclusion is likely to increase the number of women dying in combat, holding fixed the intensity of US armed conflicts. By August 2018, the Army already had 740 women in previously combat-excluded roles while the Marines, the most disproportionately male of the service branches, had 80 (Kayyem 2018).

and popular accounts that women dying in combat will erode support for military action (Gartner 2008b).<sup>6</sup> We further demonstrate through two follow-up experiments on convenience samples collected through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) that this null finding persists across a wide range of additional scenarios which vary the (1) type of adversary, (2) nature of the conflict, and (3) number of women dying. Next, we study how women fatalities affect military recruitment in the form of whether respondents express an interest in serving. In contrast to expectations derived from accounts of role models inspiring demographically similarly individuals to follow in their footsteps (Jones and Kofoed 2017; Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018), we show that women are no more likely to express an interest in military service after observing a woman dying in combat. However, a female combat fatality causes men to express a dramatically heightened interest in military service.

We next assess how women dying in combat affects attitudes toward women more broadly. Following a theoretical distinction in research studying mass attitudes on gender equality, we separate attitudes pertaining to the public sphere (e.g., the workplace) from attitudes in the private sphere (e.g., the home) (England 2010). Across a series of outcome measures, we find that women dying in combat increases support for gender equality in the public realm, but that this effect is only consistently evident among women respondents. A core finding is that positive spillovers of military service accrue largely among members of the previously excluded group. Within the private sphere, we observe mixed findings among both men and women respondents.<sup>7</sup> These inconsistent findings demonstrate both the importance of replication and the need for theoretical and empirical caution when studying the multiple and complex dimensions of gender attitudes.

The study contributes to scholarly and policy debates by illustrating how choices affecting international politics can reverberate to shape domestic politics (Gourevitch 1978). First,

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<sup>6</sup>We argue later that the source of this difference in results may be due to a number of factors, including that the public has become desensitized to women dying in combat, more supportive of women’s equality in the workplace, and less likely to question the martial competence of women.

<sup>7</sup>As explicitly discussed in the results section, some of the results fail to replicate across experiments, leading to our mixed findings.

we provide theory and evidence for how the actions of women in one domain can affect perceptions of women in the other. We do so by building on important but largely distinct bodies of research studying issues of gender and role models (Jones and Kofoed 2017; Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018; Porter and Serra 2018) and the positivist study of gender and international relations (Barnes and O'Brien 2018; Caprioli 2004; Cohen 2016; Croco and Gartner 2014; Eichenberg 2019; Goldstein 2001; Reiter 2015). Our empirical results illustrate how the “second-image reversed” operates at the nexus of gender and international relations. Second, we contribute to policy debates about the consequences of women dying in combat, an issue which was seemingly reopened in September 2018 by Defense Secretary Mattis when he suggested it was unclear whether women serving in combat units was “a strength or a weakness” and that “the jury is out.”<sup>8</sup> Since Mattis resigned, some advocate that the next Defense Secretary reimpose the ban.<sup>9</sup> Scholars have documented implications of women in combat for battlefield performance, unit and tactical cohesion, and sexual assault prevalence (Goldstein 2001; MacKenzie 2015). Understanding the full array of downstream political and social consequences of the policy change is vital to those tasked with judging its merits.

## 2 Theorizing the Effects of Women Dying in Combat

What are the consequences of women combat fatalities for public perceptions of the military and women’s equality? This section integrates common contentions from public debates with scholarly research drawn from literature at the intersection of international relations, public opinion, and gender to formulate predictions for the consequences of women dying in combat.

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<sup>8</sup><https://taskandpurpose.com/mattis-female-infantry-combat/>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.wsj.com/articles/women-dont-belong-in-combat-units-11547411638>

## 2.1 How Women Dying in Combat Affects the Military

Public debates about the consequences of women dying in combat feature at least two main dimensions along which changes in public opinion might affect the ability to fight and win wars. The first dimension highlights how women dying in combat might erode public support for war. Those opposed to women serving in combat positions argue that female fatalities increase the public's casualty sensitivity to the point of diminishing the political viability of using military force. The second dimension underscores how women dying in combat might shape the future manpower composition of the military by changing the willingness of women to fight. Those in favor of allowing women to serve in combat positions argue that allowing women the opportunity to fight and die as equals in defense of the state will act as an important signal to potential women recruits, thus increasing the military's ability to attract and retain women soldiers.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1.1 Eroding Support for War

Two theoretically distinct logics lead to the empirical prediction that women dying in combat will erode support for war. First, the public may view a female casualty as more costly than a male casualty. Exemplifying this view, Fox News host Keith Ablow stated, "I do not believe women should serve as combat soldiers. I know they are fully able to do so... But I can't deny that I value the special place of women in society as a protected gender."<sup>11</sup> Or, as a British Army reservist wrote in an op-ed opposing women serving on the frontlines, "Are we really ready to see our daughters gang raped, tortured and decapitated live on the Internet by ISIL fighters? Because that is exactly what will happen if a female front line soldier is captured in Syria."<sup>12</sup> These statements exemplify attitudes highlighted in a body

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<sup>10</sup>For simplicity, throughout this paper we use the blanket term "soldier" to cover all individuals within the armed services.

<sup>11</sup><http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2012/05/19/why-dont-ever-want-to-see-women-in-combat-on-front-lines.html>.

<sup>12</sup><https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/work/putting-women-soldiers-like-me-on-the-front-line-is-dangerous/>

of research on protective paternalistic attitudes throughout the mass public, which maintain that women are to be cherished, revered, and ultimately protected (eg., [Glick and Fiske 1996](#)). Among many implications of such protective paternalism is the perceived cost of a woman's death in combat exceeds that of a man's death.

If the public views women's combat deaths as more costly, then these deaths will produce greater reductions in support for conflict as compared to the reduction in support following men's deaths. Prior work contends that the public prudently responds to costs and benefits when evaluating whether to extend support for a war effort ([Gelpi 2010](#)). Inputs in this calculation include the prospects for victory ([Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2006](#)), the material stakes of the conflict ([Jentleson 1992](#)), and, most saliently, the human costs of fighting. The link between casualties and war support may depend on the overall number of casualties ([Mueller 1971](#)), trends in casualties ([Gartner 2008a](#)), or the richness of the information environment ([Gartner 2008b](#); [Baum and Groeling 2010](#)). Regardless of the precise mapping between casualties and support, any particular casualties that are perceived to be more costly (e.g., women) will reduce public backing for the conflict.

Second, perceived declines in combat efficacy provide an additional reason why women combat fatalities may reduce public support for conflict. Concerns about unit battlefield performance consistently emerge in debates surrounding the inclusion of previously marginalized or underrepresented groups in military units. Critics voiced these reservations on opening previously restricted assignments to black, gay and lesbian, transgender, and female soldiers. Opponents argue that the presence of members of these groups will erode primary group cohesion, with the inevitable result of reducing combat effectiveness.<sup>13</sup> Some further suggest that the presence of women on the front lines will be a distraction for male soldiers, who will try to save women from injury or death rather than focusing on the mission at hand ([Feinman 2000](#)).

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<sup>13</sup>This contention is based on WWII-era research ([Shils and Janowitz 1948](#)) and has remained a strong conventional wisdom. However, academic researchers have largely overturned these earlier findings. [MacCoun, Kier, and Belkin \(2006\)](#) argue that decades of social science research show task cohesion—commitment to the mission—matters far more than social cohesion, or interpersonal ties.

Female combat fatalities can make concerns about military efficacy especially salient. Some may implicitly or explicitly blame fatalities on a perceived performance degradation of mixed-gender units due to women’s relative lack of physical strength or endurance.<sup>14</sup> Alternatively, the news of a women dying in combat may simply serve as a reminder of their presence in previously restricted combat roles and thereby bring concerns about unit performance to the forefront. This heightened salience of worries regarding martial capability could *increase* estimates of the costs of war and/or *decrease* estimates of the probability of victory. Either possibility reduces the expected value of conflict and thus reduces support for that conflict. Largely consistent with this line of reasoning, Gartner (2008b) finds that respondents are more likely to withdraw support for a conflict when learning of female casualties when overall casualty trends are uncertain. In sum, women dying in combat may be perceived as especially costly and trigger worries about overall military performance, both of which reduce support for conflict.

*H1: Public support for conflict is lower when casualties are women relative to when casualties are men.*

### **2.1.2 Increasing the Willingness of Women to Fight**

How does women dying in combat affect whether women are willing to fight? A core motivation for opening combat positions is to harness the skills of the entire population, regardless of gender. Lifting the ban on combat positions signals to women that they are equals within the military. As Rosemary Mariner, the first woman to command a naval aviation squadron, said, “If you cannot share the equal risks and hazards in arduous duty, then you are not equal.”<sup>15</sup> Allowing women the opportunity to fight and die as equals could also increase women’s interest in volunteering for military service. Defense Secretary Carter, for instance, asserted that “[t]o recruit and retain these women, it is important for them to know they are

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<sup>14</sup>While the issue of performance standards remains controversial, some research supports this perception. A British medical study found that female recruits were more likely to be discharged due to injuries incurred during training (Gemmell 2002).

<sup>15</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/01/obituaries/rosemary-mariner-dead.html>

not second-class citizens in the military, the institution to which they have dedicated their careers” (Carter 2018). These arguments highlight how opening combat positions to women will positively affect the military’s ability to recruit and retain women.

Given the interest in recruiting and retaining women, how might the military go about this in practice? Prior research highlights how an important recruitment strategy long employed by the military is to highlight the heroism and sacrifice of its soldiers as a way of inspiring others to be willing to fight.<sup>16</sup> Observing individuals similar to themselves fight and sacrifice for the United States military might inspire other women to be willing to make similar sacrifices in defense of the state. The possibility relates to a body of research in political science and economics which highlights the importance of women role models for women’s upward mobility. Studies find that observing successful women inspires other women to pursue further success in the role model’s field—whether it is majoring in economics (Porter and Serra 2018), selecting a military occupation (Jones and Kofoed 2017), or running for political office (Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018). If observing the sacrifice of women in combat serves a role model effect, then women dying in combat should increase women’s interest in participating in the military.

*H2: Women will be more likely to express an interest in serving in the military when casualties are women relative to when casualties are men.*

## **2.2 How Women Dying in Combat Affects Perceptions of Gender Equality**

Both proponents and opponents of allowing women to fight in combat roles highlight how doing so could shift gender dynamics more broadly throughout US society. Opposition to the policy change has long stemmed from anxieties over “alter[ing] the traditional role and image of women in American society” and disrupting the traditional division of labor wherein

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<sup>16</sup>For an overview of military recruitment materials and strategies, see Padilla and Laner (2002). On how the historical context drives changes in recruitment strategies over time, see Bailey (2007).

women are mothers and men are protectors.<sup>17</sup> Opponents often emphasize that the decision to lift the combat exclusion ban was born of “political correctness” rather than genuine military need. By contrast, those in favor of allowing women to serve in combat argue that this policy change has the potential to boost women’s equality in the military and society more broadly.<sup>18</sup> As Mariner, one of the first female Navy pilots, put it, “If the institution can discriminate against you, then its not a big leap... [for] bigots to decide that ‘well, I can harass you and I can get away with it’.”<sup>19</sup>

### 2.2.1 Changing Perceptions of Women’s Equality Among the Mass Public

Scholarship—as well as policy arguments—contends that women serving and perishing in previously foreclosed military roles has the potential to challenge stereotypes and reduce inequalities for civilian women. Arguments in this vein trace back to at least the early 1980s. For example, [Ruddick \(1983\)](#)—reflecting on the conscription of women—writes that women in these roles may allow civilian women to gain respect, and challenge stereotypes and inequalities in civilian life. Women’s organizations, such as the National Organization for Women and the Women’s Research and Education Institute, argued that women are denied full civic equality if they are not serving in the military in the same ways as men ([Enloe 1994: 91](#)). [Enloe \(1994: 82\)](#) writes, “Violent sacrifice under state discipline in the name of the nation... is the essential criterion for first-class citizenship.”<sup>20</sup> [Krebs \(2006: 19\)](#) finds that military service in general, and combat experience in particular, provide disadvantaged groups with a powerful rhetorical device to wield in their pursuit of equality. In addition,

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<sup>17</sup><https://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/press-past/2013/05/15/arguing-for-and-against-women-in-combat-in-1978>

<sup>18</sup>Disadvantaged groups have often viewed military service as a path toward broader equality. In many cases—for instance, African-Americans and immigrants in the US or Druze in Israel—equality pertained to securing the full rights of citizenship ([Krebs 2006](#)). The pertinent manifestations of improved equality differ in the case of women and the contemporary US, where women already have the formal markers of citizenship, such as the rights to vote and to run for elective office. The sources of women’s inequality that remain are due to social status and gender norms rather than unequal legal status as citizens.

<sup>19</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/01/obituaries/rosemary-mariner-dead.html>

<sup>20</sup>In policy debates, proponents of lifting the combat exclusion ban argued that the ban relegated women to being “second-class citizens” ([Kayyem 2013](#)).

prior scholarship identifies spillovers from observing women hold traditionally male roles, such as positions of political leadership (Beaman et al. 2009).

A common thread unites these arguments: military sacrifices inspires the public to reevaluate prior conceptions and increasingly view women as equally capable and valuable citizens. Indeed, recent political events highlight the potential for women’s military service to persuade the mass public to reconsider women’s roles more generally. In the 2018 US midterm elections, women who served in the military ran for elective office in larger numbers than ever before. The fact of having status as a veteran increases public perceptions of the legitimacy and authority of female candidates, even wholly apart from their actual military service.<sup>21</sup> A military background could thus help mitigate documented impediments to women running for political office (Fox and Lawless 2004). Women being willing to sacrifice and fight for the state cuts against entrenched stereotypes about gender roles and women’s equality. We derive our third hypothesis from this logic.

*H3: Public support for women’s equality is higher when casualties are women when compared to when casualties are men.*

### **2.2.2 Changing Perceptions of Women’s Equality Among Women**

An alternative account suggests that, rather than changing attitudes among the mass public, changes in perceptions of women’s equality should instead be concentrated among women. President Obama invoked this reasoning in a 2012 commencement address, stating that “Until a girl can imagine herself, can picture herself as a computer programmer, or a combatant commander, she won’t become one.” This pattern of heterogeneous responses, with the expected changes in perceptions of women’s equality being concentrated among women, would be akin to the aforementioned literature on role models. Individual examples of success produce different effects among onlookers: a woman breaking through stereotypical barriers may lead women to upwardly revise their conceptions of what women can accomplish

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<sup>21</sup><http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/ct-military-women-candidates-20180207-story.html>

more broadly while not producing similar attitudinal changes among men. [Beaman et al. \(2012\)](#), for instance, find that when exposed to women political leaders in India, mothers increase their aspirations for daughters across multiple outcomes while the effect among fathers is narrowly circumscribed. Witnessing women dying in combat could generate similar asymmetric responses: igniting more egalitarian views among women while having negligible effects among men. A fourth hypothesis follows from this line of reasoning.

*H4: Among female respondents, public support for women’s equality is higher when casualties are women when compared when casualties are men.*

### 3 Experimental Research Design

Assessing the consequences of women dying in combat poses two main challenges. First, while women in the US armed services have fought and died on the battlefield (even while formally banned from combat roles), overall fatality numbers are relatively limited.<sup>22</sup> This creates empirical challenges for studying the consequences of these deaths as any statistical analyses are likely under-powered.<sup>23</sup> Second, as with any study attempting to understand how conflict dynamics affect public opinion, a variety of contextual factors might change as conflicts unfold. Because these varying contextual factors could shape public opinion independent of the consequences of women dying in combat, they are likely to confound the relationship between our variables of interest.

We use a series of survey experiments to address these empirical concerns. The first survey experiment was fielded on a nationally-representative sample of approximately 1,400 adults through the Harvard-Harris Poll in May of 2018 and was designed to test Hypotheses 1, 3 and 4. The second survey experiment was conducted on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk

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<sup>22</sup>For instance, in 2007, the bloodiest year of post-9/11 combat for US forces, 29 women service members died. Since Secretary Carter announced the Pentagon’s policy shift in 2015, five women have died as part of Operations Inherent Resolve and Freedom’s Sentinel. Data retrieved from the Department of Defense’s Defense Casualty Analysis System.

<sup>23</sup>As female casualties mount, future research might analyze the consequences of these deaths on overall support for the war in the hometowns of those who died ([Althaus, Bramlett, and Gimpel 2012](#)).

(MTurk) and, as detailed in the text that follows, was designed to replicate the core findings of Hypothesis 1 while addressing concerns that our original vignette design entailed an insufficient number of casualties. The third survey experiment, also conducted on a Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, directly tested Hypotheses 2 and 4, which given our interest in heterogeneous effects by respondent gender, necessitated greater statistical power. Taken together, the three experiments allow us to assess the consequences of women dying in combat while holding constant variables that could affect attitudes on the conflict—such as the stakes, costs, and adversary—or views on gender equality.

The motivation, sample, sample size, and substantive variation for each of the three experiments is summarized in Table 1.<sup>24</sup> For simplicity, the sections that follow present the experimental design for the Harvard-Harris Poll. In the results presentation, we then introduce the follow-up MTurk experiments when they help address theoretically-motivated concerns with the Harvard-Harris experimental design.

### 3.1 The Survey Instrument

The Harvard-Harris survey design contains four components. These are: (1) background information about the conflict, (2) the gender of a casualty, which is randomized between a woman and a man, (3) an outcome question measuring support for the conflict, and (4) a second set of outcome questions measuring support for gender equality beyond the battlefield. This section discusses each component in turn.

Respondents first view a vignette that provides background information about a hypothetical conflict scenario involving US service-members. We vary two components of the

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<sup>24</sup>We use the following process to address concerns about the quality of MTurk responses provided through Virtual Private Servers. First, we flag responses with duplicate latitude and longitude coordinates. Second, we collect information on the IP addresses of all flagged responses using <https://www.infobyip.com/ipbulklookup.php>. Third, we exclude respondents if the IP address (1) is located outside of the United States or (2) is associated with a known Virtual Private Server associated with low quality MTurk responses (Dennis, Goodson, and Pearson 2018). In the first MTurk survey, this process flagged 204 responses in a total pool of 2,011. The process flagged 322 responses in a total pool of 2,811 in the second MTurk survey. Table 1 provides the sample size after removing flagged responses.

Experiment	Sample	Sample Size	Substantive Variation	Motivation
Original	National representative (Harvard-Harris)	1,436	See design section	Testing H1, H3, and H4.
Follow-up 1	Convenience (MTurk)	1,807	Greater number of fatalities	Robustness of H1 findings.
Follow-up 2	Convenience (MTurk)	2,489	Combatant dies or survives	Larger and younger sample appropriate for H2. Larger sample and longer survey for robustness of H4 results.

Table 1: Summary of the three experiments, their sample size, and substantive motivation.

vignette. First, we provide background information about the deployment of Special Forces soldiers where we vary the adversary being fought. Since prior research demonstrates that the objective of a conflict mission affects public support (Jentleson 1992; Eichenberg 2005; Larson 1996), we randomize between two scenarios in order to assess whether effects are specific to a given conflict setting or are more generalizable. Specifically, the vignette indicates that US forces are deployed in Africa and working with local forces to either combat a rebel militia group or an Islamic terrorist organization.<sup>25</sup> Our aim is to mirror the types of conflicts that the US is currently fighting and situations to which men and women ground troops could be deployed.

Respondents then receive information about a combat operation during which a US soldier was killed. We vary the name of the individual who was killed between “Todd Ryan” and “Molly Ryan.” The approach of varying a name to cue the gender<sup>26</sup> of an individual

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<sup>25</sup>Given the lengthy US experience combating Islamic terrorist organizations, respondents may hold strong prior beliefs on this vignette. If true, this would attenuate treatment effects as attitudes are no longer malleable.

<sup>26</sup>The policy changes toward opening combat roles to women generally focus on the biological *sex* of the soldiers. However, the experimental manipulation, which varied the name of an individual between Todd and Molly, is manipulating perceptions of the soldier’s *gender*. These are related—but theoretically distinct—concepts.

follows from the voluminous body of audit studies in political science and economics. These studies vary the putative race<sup>27</sup> or gender of individuals through their names<sup>28</sup> and study the effects across political, economic, or social outcomes of interest (Fryer Jr and Levitt 2004; Lavergne and Mullainathan 2004; White, Nathan, and Faller 2015; White et al. 2018). Consistent with much of this work, we limit the name treatment to a single person in order to keep both the presentation and interpretation of our main effect as simple as possible.<sup>29</sup> The hypothetical background conflict scenario and randomized female casualty treatment reads:<sup>30</sup>

Please consider the following hypothetical scenario. Members of a United States Special Forces unit are deployed abroad and working with local government forces to combat [a rebel militia group based in Africa // an Islamic terrorist organization based in Africa.]

During a recent operation, enemy forces ambushed the unit resulting in the death of a U.S. soldier named [Todd Ryan // Molly Ryan].

[Todd/Molly]’s parents describe [him/her] as a fun-loving and free-spirited individual. Reflecting on [Todd/Molly]’s death, they recently stated “there isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t think of [him/her].”

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<sup>27</sup>The two names manipulated in the study are putatively white names. We focus on white names because the US military is majority white; racial and ethnic minorities comprise 40% of active-duty military personnel (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-u-s-military-and-its-changing-demographics/>). This breakdown is even more extreme in the Special Forces, the focus of our treatment, which are overwhelmingly white. Enlisted members of the Army Green Berets and the Navy SEALs, for example, are 4.5 and 2% black, respectively. (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/08/05/diversity-seals-green-berets/31122851/>)

<sup>28</sup>For an evaluation of the benefits of this approach, see Butler and Homola (2017).

<sup>29</sup>A follow-up experiment, described below, includes a larger number of fatalities and simply states the gender composition rather than signaling it via gendered names.

<sup>30</sup>This description is based on a real news article about the death of a female soldier. For the article, see <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-women-veterans-poster-20160603-story.html>.

## 3.2 The Outcome Questions

After reading the vignette, respondents answer two sets of outcome questions. The first concerns public support for the conflict, building on literature linking casualties to diminished public support for war (Mueller 1971; Gartner and Segura 2000; Gartner 2008a; Baum and Groeling 2010). If the presence of female casualties affects overall support, then integrating women into combat units may constrain future decisions about using force as well as the types of operations that are politically viable (for example, drone strikes that reduce human costs borne by the US). The second set of outcome questions concern attitudes on gender equality. To mitigate possible demand effects for the gender equality questions (though see Mummolo and Peterson 2018), all respondents first answer the support for war questions.

### 3.2.1 Support for the Use of Force

To assess Hypotheses 1 for how women dying in combat affects support for the use of force, respondents indicate whether they view US participation in the conflict as a mistake. Surveys on war support often employ a question of this form. Mueller (1973), for instance, assesses the relationship between casualties and war support based on questions soliciting retrospective evaluations of whether it was a mistake to enter the war.<sup>31</sup> Participants use a seven point Likert scale varying from strongly agree to strongly disagree, to indicate their support for the following prompt.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement.  
In light of what happened, the United States made a mistake sending in the  
Special Forces soldiers.

Respondents then answer two additional questions intended to assess the theoretical

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<sup>31</sup>While no single question captures all salient elements of attitudes on the use of force (Berinsky and Druckman 2007), we follow past templates in order to increase comparability to prior studies.

mechanisms underpinning Hypothesis 1. Given space constraints and the fact that we observe a substantively inconsequential effect for whether the operation was a mistake, we present these mechanism questions and results in the Supporting Information (SI).

### **3.2.2 Interest in Military Service**

To assess Hypotheses 2, respondents answer a question about whether they would be willing to serve in the armed forces in the next few years. Unlike outcome questions for Hypotheses 1, 3, and 4, we include this question on a separate sample of MTurk survey respondents rather than on the Harvard-Harris Poll. We did this for two reasons. First, from a theoretical perspective, those most likely to fight and die in defense of the United States will be younger individuals. Since the MTurk survey pool is comprised of younger respondents than other survey platforms (Huff and Tingley 2015), this skew will help increase the number of respondents among our theoretically motivated population of interest. Second, we required a relatively large sample size because our goal is to identify a treatment effect among a subset of respondents (younger individuals and split by gender). It was not possible to collect the desired sample size through the Harvard-Harris survey. Participants were asked the following question with response options of Yes, No, and Don't Know.

Supposing you could do just what you'd like and nothing stood in your way, would you want to serve in the US armed forces in the next few years?

### **3.2.3 Support for Gender Equality**

The final set of outcome questions that Harvard-Harris respondents viewed address how women dying in combat affects support for gender equality. Following research which highlights the multidimensional nature of attitudes toward gender equality, we employ two subsets of outcome questions (England 2010; Pepin and Cotter 2018; Scarborough, Sin, and Risman

2018). These respectively focus on gender equality in public (e.g., workplace success and fitness for leadership)<sup>32</sup> and in private (e.g., division of household duties).<sup>33</sup>

Views on women’s fitness for military and political leadership have implications for the upward mobility of women professionals more broadly and thus serve as a useful measure of attitudes toward gender equality in the public sphere. Due to space limitations on the Harvard-Harris survey, we randomized whether respondents received the military or political prompt. A follow-up study supplements these responses by asking all respondents for their views on leadership aptitude in the military, politics, and business. Harvard-Harris respondents indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement.

On the whole, men make better [military leaders //political leaders] than women do.

Another outcome question gauges whether observing women dying on the battlefield inspires attitudinal changes on women’s equality in the private sphere. Surveys commonly employ questions about the optimal division of household labor to assess attitudes in this domain.<sup>34</sup> Specifically, we analyze whether women serving and dying in combat causes a change in respondent views on the ideal division of chores in the home.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement.  
It is important for men and women to share household work equally.

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<sup>32</sup>We draw these questions from the World Values Survey. For more on the World Values Survey, including the complete text of the instrument, see <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>

<sup>33</sup>Scarborough, Sin, and Risman (2018) find that a growing segment of American society—whom the authors term “ambivalents”—hold attitudes that strongly support *public* equality for women while holding traditional views of women in the *private* sphere. Ambivalents demonstrate that perceptions of public equality are clearly separable from perceptions of private equality. As a result, we include outcomes questions for each type.

<sup>34</sup>See <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/30/sharing-chores-a-key-to-good-marriage-say-majority-of-married-adults/>. Dahl, Kotsadam, and Rooth (2018) similarly use this measure of gender equality in a military context.

In sum, we randomize whether a male or female combatant dies in a hypothetical conflict vignette and then solicit respondent attitudes on the merits of the conflict itself, gender equality in public leadership roles, and gender equality inside the home.

## 4 Results

The results presentation consists of four sections. The first, contrary to H1, consistently shows no relationship between a combatant’s gender and respondents’ views on whether military operations were a mistake. A second section shows that women dying in combat inspires greater interest in military service among men, rather than among women as H2 suggested. The third and fourth sections test Hypotheses 3 and 4, examining whether learning of a female soldier’s death affects perceptions of women’s equality in non-combat domains. We find female casualties cause more pronounced support for gender equality among women respondents (H4) as compared to among all respondents (H3).

### 4.1 Women Dying in Combat Does Not Erode Support for War

Does a female soldier dying during a combat mission increase the likelihood that respondents view that mission as a mistake? We analyze the experimental results with models that include controls for respondent gender, age, race, education, and political ideology, which may affect the outcome variable. All specifications use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS), which assumes linearity across the Likert scale response levels.

Figure 1 shows that the gender of the combat casualty has little effect on respondent views toward the mission, contrary to Hypothesis 1.<sup>35</sup> Across the full sample with all covariates equal to their median values, the predicted response when ‘Todd’ dies is 3.93 on a 1 to 7 scale, with higher values indicating stronger agreement that the mission was a mistake. The marginal effect of shifting to ‘Molly’ dying is only -0.03 ( $\pm 0.16$  at the 95% confidence level).

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<sup>35</sup>SI Table A1 presents full model results.

In Figure 1, the top line plots this result and clearly indicates that we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no effect. While a statistically null result is not necessarily indicative of a substantively negligible effect (Rainey 2014), we suggest the effect here is insubstantial as the confidence interval bounds the effect close to zero. The lower two lines show that there is little effect heterogeneity across respondent gender. We also do not find effect heterogeneity across opponent type. In sum, we find little evidence in a nationally representative sample that the public “won’t tolerate...women coming home in body bags,”<sup>36</sup> or is more sensitive to female combatant deaths.

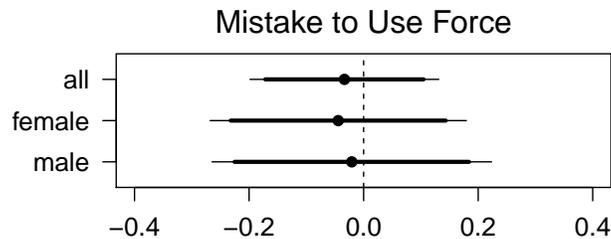


Figure 1: Marginal effect of shifting from male to female fatality on whether mission was a mistake, split by respondent gender. Higher values (1-7 scale) indicate greater agreement it was a mistake. Thick segments indicate 90% confidence interval; thin segments indicate 95% confidence interval.

The first follow-up study addresses potential limitations with the original experimental design. The first design concern is that the original study provided insufficient information, causing respondents to feel unable to make an informed judgment on whether the conflict was a mistake, which would bias results toward zero. The second design concern is that, by experimentally manipulating only a single name, the original study did not provide a sufficient number of women dying in combat. This design choice matters empirically if differential responses to the gender of combat casualties only activates with higher fatality numbers. The follow-up study administered to 1,807 respondents on Mechanical Turk addressed these concerns with an alternative vignette. It provides additional background information on the

<sup>36</sup><https://www.cbsnews.com/news/report-women-should-be-allowed-in-combat/>

conflict setting<sup>37</sup> and specifies that 56 US soldiers died in combat,<sup>38</sup> of which there were either (1) no female casualties, (2) two female casualties, or (3) 12 female casualties.

As in the original Harvard-Harris study, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. The gender of fatalities has no meaningful or statistical effect on whether the public deems the operation a mistake (results reported in SI Table A1). Thus, across experiments on nationally representative and convenience samples, we find that a combatant’s gender does not affect attitudes on using force. The results contradict the theorized possibility that observers assign greater costs to female fatalities. Several factors and trends plausibly contribute to the null finding. First, the public may have been desensitized to women dying in combat given that it has occurred with some regularity during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Second, rising support for women’s equality in the workplace (Scarborough, Sin, and Risman 2018) could mean the public is becoming less likely to question the martial competence of women and consequently withdraw support for combat operations. Third, the Department of Defense’s policy decision to open all combat roles to women could itself dampen casualty sensitivity to female fatalities. The US public expresses high confidence in the military and exhibits high responsiveness to messaging cues from military officials (Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2018). Accordingly, the Pentagon’s support for removing gender exclusions on service in combat roles could signal to the public that concerns over battlefield efficacy are minimal and protective paternalism is misplaced.

## 4.2 No Increase in Women’s Interest in Military Service

We now evaluate whether women fighting and dying in combat makes women more likely to express interest in military service. As noted, space and sample limitations of the Harvard-Harris poll led us to design a second follow-up experiment to test Hypothesis 2. A sample

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<sup>37</sup>For instance, it informs respondents that US forces have fought the adversary over the past year and that the adversary poses a threat to either the local state’s government or regional US interests. For the full text of the follow-up, see the SI.

<sup>38</sup>The number 56 is chosen to mirror the 56 soldiers who died in 2014 as part of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

of 2,489 MTurk respondents completed the experiment. This experiment differed from the original study’s design in two ways. First, we added an outcome question assessing whether respondents would want to serve in the armed forces. We create a binary measure with 1 indicating *Yes*, 0 *No*, and drop *Not Sure* responses. Second, while much of the debate surrounding the consequences of allowing women to serve in combat positions highlights the inevitability that they will die in higher numbers, other concerns relate to the simple fact that women would be allowed to serve at all. To capture the full array of combat service possibilities, we varied (1) the gender of the combatant and (2) whether they survived.

Table 2: Female Combatants and Interest in Military Service

	<u>All Ages</u>		<u>Age &lt; 40</u>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female Combatant	0.01 (0.01)	−0.02 (0.02)	0.09*** (0.03)	−0.02 (0.03)
Male	0.08*** (0.01)	0.04** (0.02)		0.03 (0.03)
Female Combatant*Male		0.08*** (0.03)		0.08** (0.04)
Combatant Survives	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.03 (0.03)	0.005 (0.02)
Female Combatant*Survives			−0.07 (0.05)	
Constant	0.001 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)	0.002 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)
N	2,227	2,227	1,062	1,472
Respondents	All	All	Men Only	All
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

*Notes:* OLS regression with standard errors in parentheses. Binary outcome with 1 indicating interest in military service. Analysis is from the second follow-up study completed on MTurk.

Contrary to Hypothesis 2, we do not find that exposure to a woman combatant increases women’s interest in military service. Model 2 of Table 2 and Figure 2 show this result.<sup>39</sup>

Female respondents actually express slightly less interest in military service following expo-

<sup>39</sup>All results discussed in the text come from OLS specifications. Models employing logistic regression given the binary outcome variable produce similar results, as shown in SI Table A3.

sure to a female, rather than male, combatant (2% point decline;  $\pm 4\%$  points at the 95% confidence interval). Moreover, the modest decline in interest holds regardless of whether the female combatant dies or survives in the vignette. The divergence from H2 may stem from the role model’s occupation. Inspirations for selecting into a potentially fatal occupation are plausibly quite different from the inspiration needed to run for elective office or to pursue an undergraduate major in a field that men traditionally dominate.

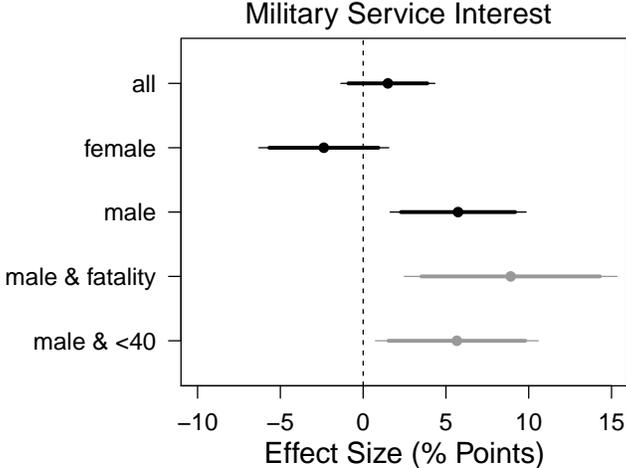


Figure 2: Marginal effect of shifting from male to female combatant on respondent interest in military service, split by respondent gender, age, and vignette scenario. Positive values indicate higher probability of interest in service. Thick segments indicate 90% confidence interval; thin segments indicate 95% confidence interval.

Because it is not a regularly-invoked argument in policy debates, we did not specify ex ante expectations about the consequences of women dying in combat for the male respondents’ interest in military service. That said, ex post analysis shows that men are on average more likely to express an interest in military service when it is a woman combatant compared to when it is a man. As a baseline, 16% of male respondents indicate an interest in military service when receiving the control condition with a male combatant. Shifting to a female combatant produces a 6% point increase ( $\pm 4\%$  points at the 95% confidence interval). Interestingly, the effect among men is far larger in the condition when ‘Molly’ dies rather than survives. In this case, the marginal effect of shifting from a male death in combat to a female

one is 9% points ( $\pm 6\%$  points) from a baseline of 14%. Put differently, there is a greater than 60% relative increase in male respondent interest for joining the military when moving from learning of a male combatant fatality to a female combatant fatality. The sizable treatment effect among men is not simply due to those ineligible to join the military expressing greater interest. Results remain substantively and statistically similar when analyzing only those respondents under 40 years old.<sup>40</sup>

While not theorized before observing results, it is worth briefly discussing the potential mechanisms underpinning this unexpected effect. The finding is consistent with a mechanism highlighted in research on the role of women in terrorist organizations (Von Knop 2007). This body of work argues that terrorist groups seek to recruit women in part to spur male recruitment by shaming the men into participation.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, in some cases, male volunteers increase after observing women enter terrorist groups and perform traditionally male roles, such as suicide bombers.

### 4.3 Mixed Findings for Overall Views on Women’s Equality

We hypothesized (H3) that observing women serving and dying in venerated and typically male roles may change respondent views on gender equality. We find mixed evidence for this hypothesis.

Table 3 and Figure 3 present the findings. The top portion of the figure addresses the assessed aptitude of women leaders, which reflects attitudes on gender equality in the public sphere. The bottom concerns the division of chores in the private sphere. The plot shows the marginal effect of shifting from a male to female combatant on the outcome measures, all of which span from 1 to 7 with higher values representing more support for gender equality. Results from the Harvard-Harris survey are in black and from the second follow-up MTurk survey in grey (see Table A4 in the SI for full results including control variables).

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<sup>40</sup>The maximum age for beginning active duty service in the US is 39, which applies only to the Air Force.

<sup>41</sup>For example, Chechen terrorists’ recruitment propaganda reads, “Women’s courage is a disgrace to that of modern men,” as reported in Bloom (2007).

Table 3: Female Combatants and Gender Equality: All Respondents

	<u>Military</u>		<u>Political</u>		<u>Business</u>	<u>Chores</u>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Female Combatant	0.10 (0.13)	0.14** (0.07)	0.04 (0.12)	0.11* (0.06)	0.12** (0.06)	0.14** (0.07)	0.03 (0.05)
Rebel Group	0.005 (0.13)		0.09 (0.12)			-0.06 (0.07)	
Combatant Survives		0.02 (0.07)		0.08 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)		0.05 (0.05)
Constant	5.24*** (0.38)	6.14*** (0.20)	4.88*** (0.36)	6.32*** (0.17)	6.33*** (0.18)	6.19*** (0.20)	6.51*** (0.15)
N	719	2,488	717	2,488	2,488	1,436	2,488
Sample	HH	MT2	HH	MT2	MT2	HH	MT2
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

Notes: OLS regression with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome ranges from 1 to 7 with higher values indicating more progressive views on gender equality. ‘HH’ sample indicates Harvard-Harris survey; ‘MT2’ sample indicates the second follow-up study completed on MTurk.

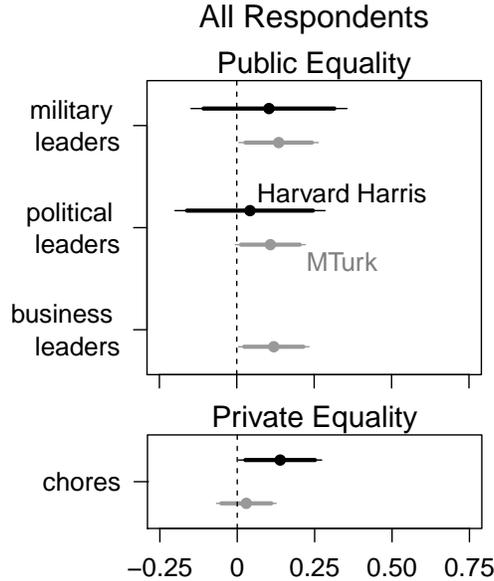


Figure 3: Marginal effect of shifting from male to female combatants on support for gender equality. Higher values (1-7 scale) indicate greater support for equality. Thick segments indicate 90% confidence interval; thin segments indicate 95% confidence interval. Harvard-Harris survey did not ask about business leaders due to space constraints.

As shown, no clear picture emerges for effects in either the public or private sphere. Responses from the Harvard-Harris survey show that the gender of a combat fatality has limited effect on views toward women occupying leadership roles. We cannot preclude the null hypothesis of no difference. However, we observe larger treatment effects among the MTurk respondents. This offers tentative evidence that consistent with a logic of empowerment, observing a woman serve and die in combat causes greater support for gender equality in the public professional domain. Yet the mixed results suggest the matter warrants caution and further study. Similarly inconclusive results emerge on views toward equality in the home. Across the full Harvard-Harris sample, shifting to a female fatality caused an increase in support for an equitable division of household duties. However, this result failed to replicate in the second MTurk follow-up referenced above which also varied whether combatants survived or died.

Overall, the full sample analyses are insufficient to preclude the null hypothesis of no difference in support for gender equality, either public or private, following the death of a female combatant. Rather, the inconsistent results across survey waves merely attest to the value of replicating the original survey.

#### **4.4 Shifting Women’s Views on Women’s Equality in the Public Sphere**

The fourth hypothesis stipulates that attitudinal shifts from women dying in combat are concentrated about women respondents. We start the analysis by discussing the results for public equality before turning to private equality. Figure 4 and Table 4 provide evidence generally consistent with the idea that women dying in combat increases women’s perceptions of women’s public equality.<sup>42</sup> For four of the five public equality outcome variables measured across two distinct samples, we observe a positive effect that is statistically significant at the  $\alpha = 0.1$  level. On the military leadership outcome question in the nationally representative

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<sup>42</sup>Table A5 in the SI reports full results with control variables.

Harvard-Harris sample, respondents who received the male combatant condition averaged a 4.4 on the 1 to 7 scale with higher values indicating more support for gender equality. Shifting to a female combatant caused a 0.37 increase ( $\pm 0.33$  at the 95% confidence level) in responses. For the political leaders outcome question, however, the point estimate is positive and directionally consistent with the hypothesis but statistically insufficient to reject the null hypothesis.

The Harvard-Harris survey imposed limits on the theoretically motivated sub-sample (women only) analyses we wish to conduct for Hypothesis 4. First, the sample size was fixed and could not be increased. Second, due to space constraints each respondent received either the military or political leader question, but not both. For this reason, in the second MTurk experiment we again asked respondents about their perceptions of women’s equality as military and political leaders, while also adding an additional measure for women as equals as business leaders. All respondents answered all three questions. Across all three outcome measures, we observe positive and statistically significant effects of women dying in combat at the  $\alpha = 0.1$  level.

Table 4: Female Combatants and Gender Equality: Female Respondents Only

	<u>Military</u>		<u>Political</u>		<u>Business</u>	<u>Chores</u>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Female Combatant	0.37**	0.17*	0.22	0.14*	0.14*	0.21**	-0.003
	(0.17)	(0.09)	(0.16)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.07)
Rebel Group	0.09		-0.02			-0.03	
	(0.17)		(0.16)			(0.10)	
Combatant Survives		0.10		0.09	0.09		0.10
		(0.09)		(0.08)	(0.08)		(0.07)
Constant	5.61***	5.99***	5.58***	6.26***	6.25***	6.10***	6.45***
	(0.53)	(0.28)	(0.48)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.28)	(0.20)
N	393	1,283	387	1,283	1,283	780	1,283
Sample	HH	MT2	HH	MT2	MT2	HH	MT2
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

*Notes:* OLS regression with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome ranges from 1 to 7 with higher values indicating more progressive views on gender equality. ‘HH’ sample indicates Harvard-Harris survey; ‘MT2’ sample indicates the second follow-up study completed on MTurk.

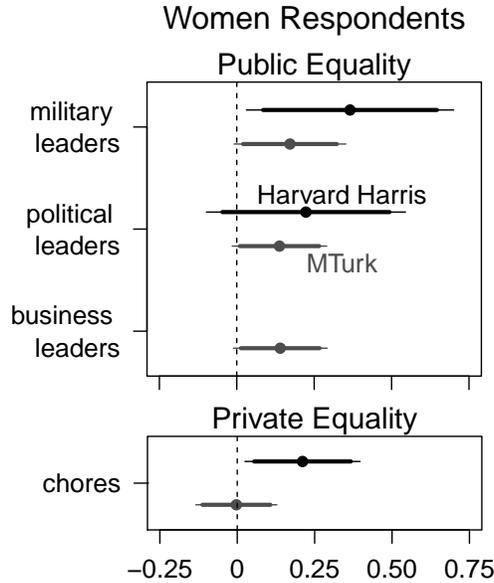


Figure 4: Marginal effect of shifting from male to female combatants on support for gender equality, *among women respondents*. Higher values (1-7 scale) indicate greater support for equality. Thick segments indicate 90% confidence interval; thin segments indicate 95% confidence interval. Harvard-Harris survey did not ask about business leaders due to space constraints.

Taken together, the results suggest that events on the battlefield create attitudinal spillovers to other public domains. However, the spillover effect is concentrated among the historically underprivileged group (women). Observing a group member fulfill a counter-stereotypical role shifts beliefs on other group members' fitness for leadership with such patterns especially evident in the most closely related domain—military leadership. Proponents of opening combat roles to women suggest that it could crack the “brass ceiling” given that combat is often a prerequisite for promotion. A similar line of reasoning appears to influence public opinion. Individuals view other women as increasingly well-suited for military leadership positions in response to female combat fatalities. Contrary to proponents' most optimistic arguments, however, the attitudinal shift is confined to members of the group seeking enhanced status and equal footing.

Results in the private sphere of dividing household chores provide further reason for hesitation about whether combat service paves the way toward first-class citizenship for

women. As seen in the lower portion of Figure 4, we find mixed results. Positive spillovers from the battlefield to the home found among Harvard-Harris female respondents did not replicate among female MTurk respondents. Relatively consistent spillovers in the public sphere as opposed to the mixed findings in the private sphere attest to the importance of differentiating between theoretically distinct conceptions of gender equality.

## 5 Conclusion

With the removal of gender barriers on all combat roles, female fatalities are likely to become a more regular feature of US military conflicts. We address two questions at the intersection of international relations, public opinion, and gender. First, how do female casualties affect perceptions of the military, including overall support for the use of force and women’s interest in fighting? Second, do female casualties change perceptions of women’s equality? Contradicting past research and some received wisdom, we find no evidence that women dying in battle alters popular views on using force. This result holds when varying the conflict scenario, number of casualties, or the respondent’s gender. We likewise find no evidence that women dying in battle increases women’s interest in joining the military. Contrary to our expectations, we do find evidence that women dying in combat makes men on average more likely to express an interest in fighting. Intriguingly, this finding indicates that lifting the combat exclusion on women could actually spur more men, rather than women, to serve in the military.

We go on to find support for the idea that women dying in combat can change women’s perceptions of women’s equality. The positive effect is most strongly supported by measures of women’s equality in the public sphere of work and politics. Importantly, the fact that we observe men and women reacting differently to women dying in combat highlights the complex and conditional nature of spillovers from battlefield sacrifices. Combat service alone appears to be insufficient to yield women’s “first-class citizenship” that the most ardent

supporters hope to achieve. Rather, what gains do materialize largely accrue among members of the previously excluded group.

The debate surrounding the 2015 decision to open all combat positions was, and still is, a hotly contested policy decision. Those on both sides of the debate commonly invoked arguments about the far reaching societal implications of the policy change. And yet, given that the policy had not yet been implemented, much of these claims were made with limited, if any, evidence. In this paper we bring empirical evidence to bear on these debates, and in doing so, demonstrate that several of the claims are overblown. At the same time, we do provide evidence consistent with the idea that the actions of women in the international sphere can spillover to affect attitudes on the domestic front. As women assume increasingly prominent roles in shaping and implementing foreign policy, whether as state leaders or combat soldiers, a central task for political scientists will be to continue to work toward understanding the role of women in shaping when and how states wage war, and how those choices in turn affect the domestic politics of states.

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# Supporting Information for “At War and at Home: The Consequences of Women Combat Casualties”

February 8, 2019

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Survey Instruments for Follow-Up Studies</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Results and Robustness Tests</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Causal Mechanisms on the Use of Force</b>	<b>9</b>

# 1 Survey Instruments for Follow-Up Studies

*Follow-Up Study 1—Multiple Fatalities.* Administered to 1,800 respondents on Mechanical Turk.

Respondents received the following initial prompt and vignette:

Please consider the following hypothetical scenario.

Over the last year, members of United States military have been deployed abroad to train local government forces to combat [a rebel group based in Africa. The rebel group poses a threat to the local African government where the fighting is occurring. // an Islamic terrorist organization based in Africa. The terrorist organization poses an imminent threat to US interests in the region and is known to have a desire to attack the US homeland.]

During the year they've been deployed, 56 US soldiers have been killed in combat, [blank // 2 of whom were women // 12 of whom were women], fighting against the organization.

Respondents then answered a question evaluating whether the mission was a mistake. They did not receive questions on gender equality in this study.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement. In light of what happened, the United States made a mistake sending in the soldiers.

*Follow-Up Study 2—Combatant Fatality and Survival.* Administered to 2,800 respondents on Mechanical Turk.

Respondents received the following initial prompt and vignette:

Please consider the following hypothetical scenario.

Over the last year, members of United States Special Forces have been deployed abroad to work with local government forces to combat an Islamic terrorist organization based in Africa. The terrorist organization poses an imminent threat to US interests in the region and is known to have a desire to attack the US homeland.

During a recent patrol, enemy forces ambushed the Special Forces unit, causing a firefight to erupt. Commanding officers reported that during the fighting, a US soldier named [Todd Ryan // Molly Ryan] performed admirably, [BLANK//sacrificing his/her life] in order to ensure the unit's safe evacuation.

Respondents then answered questions evaluating whether the mission was a mistake, conveying their support for gender equality in the public and private spheres, and indicating their interest in military service.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement[s].

In light of what happened, the United States made a mistake sending in the soldiers.

On the whole, men make better military leaders than women do.

On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do.

On the whole, men make better business leaders than women do.

It is important for men and women to share household work equally.

Supposing you could do just what you'd like and nothing stood in your way, would you want to serve in the US armed forces in the next few years?

## 2 Results and Robustness Tests

*Mistake.* Results from across three surveys on whether the operation was a mistake. Models 1 and 2 used to generate Figure 1 in the manuscript.

Table A1: Female Combatants and Attitudes on Using Force

	Single Death	Multiple Deaths	Death & Survival	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female Combatant	-0.03 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.11)		0.01 (0.06)
2 Female Casualties			-0.09 (0.09)	
12 Female Casualties			0.04 (0.09)	
Male Respondent	0.10 (0.09)	0.08 (0.12)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.06)
Female Combatant*Male		0.02 (0.17)		
Rebel Group	0.16* (0.08)	0.16* (0.08)	0.46*** (0.07)	
Combatant Survives				-0.10* (0.06)
Age	-0.02*** (0.003)	-0.02*** (0.003)	-0.01** (0.003)	-0.02*** (0.002)
White	-0.30*** (0.09)	-0.30*** (0.09)	-0.04 (0.09)	-0.27*** (0.07)
Education	0.003 (0.08)	0.003 (0.08)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)
Ideology	-0.32*** (0.04)	-0.32*** (0.04)	-0.12*** (0.02)	-0.28*** (0.03)
Constant	5.80*** (0.25)	5.80*** (0.25)	4.75*** (0.20)	5.30*** (0.18)
N	1,436	1,436	1,799	2,488
Sample	HH	HH	MT1	MT2

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

*Notes:* OLS regression with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome ranges from 1 to 7 with higher values indicating agreement that operation was a mistake. ‘HH’ sample indicates Harvard Harris survey; ‘MT1’ sample indicates the first follow-up study completed on MTurk; ‘MT2’ sample indicates the second follow-up study completed on MTurk. Baseline for Model 3 is no mentioned female fatalities.

*Military Service.* Results from second follow-up survey on respondent interest in military service. Models 1, 2, 3, and 5 used to generate Figure 2 in the manuscript.

Table A2: Female Combatants and Interest in Military Service: OLS

	All Ages			Age < 40		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female Combatant	0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.09*** (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.08** (0.04)
Male	0.08*** (0.01)	0.04** (0.02)		0.07*** (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	
Female Combatant*Male		0.08*** (0.03)			0.08** (0.04)	
Combatant Survives	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.03 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)	0.005 (0.02)	0.03 (0.04)
Female Combatant*Survives			-0.07 (0.05)			-0.05 (0.05)
White	-0.04** (0.02)	-0.04*** (0.02)	-0.10*** (0.03)	-0.03* (0.02)	-0.03* (0.02)	-0.07** (0.03)
Age	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.0003 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.003)
Education	0.001 (0.01)	0.001 (0.01)	-0.004 (0.01)	0.0004 (0.01)	0.001 (0.01)	0.003 (0.01)
Ideology	0.03*** (0.004)	0.03*** (0.004)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Constant	0.001 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)	0.002 (0.07)	0.005 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.10)
N	2,227	2,227	1,062	1,472	1,472	765
Sample	All	All	Men Only	All	All	Men Only

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

*Notes:* OLS regression with standard errors in parentheses. Binary outcome with 1 indicating interest in military service. Analysis is from the second follow-up study completed on MTurk.

*Military Service.* Results from second follow-up survey on respondent interest in military service. Robustness tests using logistic regression.

Table A3: Female Combatants and Interest in Military Service: Logistic Regression

	All Ages			Age < 40		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female Combatant	0.13 (0.12)	-0.27 (0.20)	0.65*** (0.24)	0.16 (0.15)	-0.23 (0.25)	0.59** (0.28)
Male	0.72*** (0.13)	0.38** (0.18)		0.63*** (0.16)	0.31 (0.22)	
Female Combatant*Male		0.66** (0.26)			0.62** (0.32)	
Combatant Survives	0.08 (0.12)	0.07 (0.13)	0.27 (0.25)	0.04 (0.15)	0.03 (0.15)	0.23 (0.30)
Female Combatant*Survives			-0.49 (0.33)			-0.37 (0.39)
White	-0.39*** (0.14)	-0.40*** (0.14)	-0.65*** (0.19)	-0.30* (0.17)	-0.31* (0.17)	-0.52** (0.21)
Age	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.002 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)
Education	-0.005 (0.05)	-0.002 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.06)	0.01 (0.08)
Ideology	0.29*** (0.04)	0.29*** (0.04)	0.38*** (0.05)	0.30*** (0.05)	0.30*** (0.05)	0.36*** (0.06)
Constant	-3.07*** (0.39)	-2.87*** (0.39)	-2.85*** (0.50)	-2.98*** (0.58)	-2.77*** (0.59)	-2.92*** (0.73)
N	2,227	2,227	1,062	1,472	1,472	765
Sample	All	All	Men Only	All	All	Men Only

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

*Notes:* Logistic regression with standard errors in parentheses. Binary outcome with 1 indicating interest in military service. Analysis is from the second follow-up study completed on MTurk.

*Gender Equality—All Respondents.* Results from Harvard Harris and second follow-up survey on support for gender equality in the public and private spheres. All models used to generate Figure 3.

Table A4: Female Combatants and Gender Equality: All Respondents

	<u>Military</u>		<u>Political</u>		<u>Business</u>	<u>Chores</u>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Female Combatant	0.10 (0.13)	0.14** (0.07)	0.04 (0.12)	0.11* (0.06)	0.12** (0.06)	0.14** (0.07)	0.03 (0.05)
Rebel Group	0.005 (0.13)		0.09 (0.12)			-0.06 (0.07)	
Combatant Survives		0.02 (0.07)		0.08 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)		0.05 (0.05)
Male	-0.52*** (0.13)	-0.79*** (0.07)	-0.90*** (0.13)	-0.60*** (0.06)	-0.75*** (0.06)	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.17*** (0.05)
Age	0.002 (0.004)	-0.01* (0.003)	0.02*** (0.004)	0.01** (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)	0.0002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)
White	-0.06 (0.14)	0.27*** (0.08)	0.24* (0.14)	0.21*** (0.07)	0.22*** (0.07)	0.04 (0.08)	0.04 (0.06)
Education	0.14 (0.11)	0.04 (0.03)	0.15 (0.11)	0.04 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.02)
Ideology	-0.42*** (0.06)	-0.62*** (0.03)	-0.41*** (0.05)	-0.58*** (0.03)	-0.49*** (0.03)	-0.21*** (0.03)	-0.30*** (0.02)
Constant	5.24*** (0.38)	6.14*** (0.20)	4.88*** (0.36)	6.32*** (0.17)	6.33*** (0.18)	6.19*** (0.20)	6.51*** (0.15)
N	719	2,488	717	2,488	2,488	1,436	2,488
Sample	HH	MT2	HH	MT2	MT2	HH	MT2

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

*Notes:* OLS regression with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome ranges from 1 to 7 with higher values indicating more progressive views on gender equality. ‘HH’ sample indicates Harvard Harris survey; ‘MT2’ sample indicates the second follow-up study completed on MTurk.

*Gender Equality—Female Respondents Only.* Results from Harvard Harris and second follow-up survey on support for gender equality in the public and private spheres. All models used to generate Figure 4.

Table A5: Female Combatants and Gender Equality: Female Respondents Only

	<u>Military</u>		<u>Political</u>		<u>Business</u>	<u>Chores</u>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Female Combatant	0.37** (0.17)	0.17* (0.09)	0.22 (0.16)	0.14* (0.08)	0.14* (0.08)	0.21** (0.09)	−0.003 (0.07)
Rebel Group	0.09 (0.17)		−0.02 (0.16)			−0.03 (0.10)	
Combatant Survives		0.10 (0.09)		0.09 (0.08)	0.09 (0.08)		0.10 (0.07)
Male							
Age	−0.002 (0.01)	−0.01** (0.004)	0.01* (0.01)	0.004 (0.003)	−0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	−0.003 (0.003)
White	−0.23 (0.19)	0.20* (0.11)	0.24 (0.19)	0.11 (0.09)	0.17* (0.09)	−0.05 (0.11)	0.08 (0.08)
Education	0.14 (0.16)	0.06* (0.04)	0.31** (0.14)	0.06** (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.15* (0.08)	0.06** (0.03)
Ideology	−0.50*** (0.08)	−0.58*** (0.04)	−0.66*** (0.07)	−0.57*** (0.03)	−0.44*** (0.03)	−0.29*** (0.04)	−0.32*** (0.03)
Constant	5.61*** (0.53)	5.99*** (0.28)	5.58*** (0.48)	6.26*** (0.23)	6.25*** (0.23)	6.10*** (0.28)	6.45*** (0.20)
N	393	1,283	387	1,283	1,283	780	1,283
Sample	HH	MT2	HH	MT2	MT2	HH	MT2

\*p < .1; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01

*Notes:* OLS regression with standard errors in parentheses. Outcome ranges from 1 to 7 with higher values indicating more progressive views on gender equality. ‘HH’ sample indicates Harvard Harris survey; ‘MT2’ sample indicates the second follow-up study completed on MTurk.

### 3 Causal Mechanisms on the Use of Force

After gauging overall support, we next ask about two factors that could mediate the relationship between our treatment and overall support. First, the sex of a casualty may affect perceptions of the combat unit's efficacy. The first mechanism question below aims to tap into these beliefs. Reducing perceived efficacy would alter overall support for a conflict because respondents expect the forces to either suffer more casualties or be less likely to accomplish the mission.

The second mechanism assesses whether respondents, after learning of a female casualty, evince heightened levels of paternalism. Greater paternalism implies, at best, a stronger protective inclination to keep women away from battlefield dangers. Given the reality of gender integration in combat units, the most direct way to achieve this desired protection for women would be to reduce support for conflict generally.

Regardless of whether you think the United States was right to send in the team of Special Forces soldiers, would you agree that in the future a similar group of soldiers would be likely to accomplish a similar mission, but without incurring any casualties?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Regardless of whether you think the United States was right to send in the team of Special Forces soldiers, would you agree that the United States should have done more to protect the soldiers.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The results for the main outcome question (was the mission a mistake) along with the results for the two mechanism questions are presented in Figure A1. We observe a null effect of female casualties across all three.

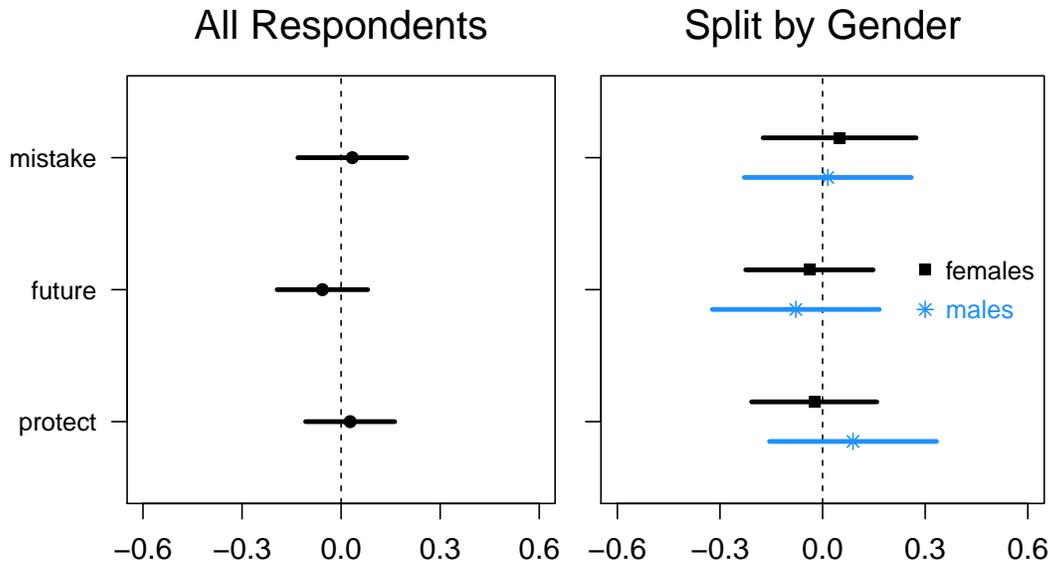


Figure A1: Marginal effect of shifting from male to female fatality on whether mission was a mistake, whether a similar team would succeed in the future, and whether the United States should have done more to protect the soldiers. The left panel presents the main effect, while the right panel presents results split by respondent gender. Higher values (1-7 scale) indicate greater agreement it was a mistake, that a team would succeed in the future, and that the US should have done more to protect the soldiers.