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Danger Close: Military Politicization and Elite Credibility

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Michael A. Robinson

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the relationship between the American public and the military institution as a source of political information. As much of the study of international relations and domestic institutions suggests, leaders considering policy options are sensitive to public opinion regarding those policies; as such, it is of considerable import to understand how the public forms those attitudes. Though traditional study has focused on the influence of partisan leaders and media elites in shaping the public's base of information, comparatively little has been devoted to understanding the role of military elites in this process. As the value and veracity of political information is subject to increased public skepticism based on its source, the military is by contrast a highly trusted institution whose representative figures – both active and retired – continue to play a public role in politics.

In this project, I examine not only the potential influence that such figures can have on public political attitudes, but how the credibility of the military and its elites as a source of information operates in an environment of partisan polarization, selective media exposure, rising acceptance of illiberal norms, and falling confidence in government and traditional expert communities. The dissertation that follows comprises three papers that incorporate original survey experimentation, observational time-series and social media data, text-as-data, and qualitative case studies in order to contribute to our general understanding of how politicization of the military affects – and is affected by – the credibility of military elites in the political information space.

The first paper measures the potential political influence of military elites on public attitudes towards proposed military interventions. Using original survey experimentation,

I build on previous knowledge of elite cuing and public attitudes for war by placing the political preferences of the military and the president in opposition, providing the military source a variety of mechanisms by which to challenge the stated preferences of the executive. Not only do I find that the military voice is a potentially influential one, but that this effect is tied considerably to impressions of the military elite as a credible source of information. Military elites – both active and retired – possess not just an independently powerful voice, but one that remains significant even when conditioning on the partisan identities of the president and the individual.

The second paper envisions this concept of elite credibility not as a moderator, but as a dependent variable in its own right, seizing on the empirical puzzle presented by the partisan “gap” in expressed confidence for the military. Using time-series data and text-as-data on media reporting I find that partisans are likely to be exposed to widely different media environments when acquiring information on military institutional quality. Furthermore, using original survey experimentation, I find that even conditional on being presented with negative information on the military, partisans exhibit different pathologies in using it to update their impressions in a rational (Democrats, Independents) or biased (Republicans) fashion.

The third paper takes this concept one step further, measuring not only the nature of elite credibility, but its limits. This chapter captures how partisan activism by military elites affects the perceived credibility of these figures and their parent institution. Using the results of original survey experimentation, I find that the public, contrary to much of the established literature on civil-military norms, is not normatively opposed to political activism by retired military elites. Instead, partisans asymmetrically – and significantly – reduce their estimations of credibility for military elites only on the other side of the political aisle. Using analysis of social media data for several prominent military elites, I further reveal an environment of weakened civil-military norms that is ripe for continued politicization into the future.

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in helping me complete this project.

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*War is too serious a matter
to leave to soldiers.*

– George Clemenceau

*I have come to the conclusion that politics is too serious a matter
to be left to the politicians.*

– General Charles de Gaulle

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Chapter 1

Introduction

When we assumed the Soldier we did not lay aside the Citizen.

– George Washington, June 26, 1775

Project Overview

In making policy decisions, leaders in democratic societies such as the United States are politically accountable to a broad audience. In matters of security or foreign policy, however, the preferences and “reasoned choices” of that audience are less likely to be informed by first-hand expertise of such a wide and complex subject matter. Yet, as Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins (1998) offer, “reasoned choice does not require full information”, merely the ability to heed and be persuaded by elite voices in society. The voices to which individuals attend, the level of influence such elites have on public attitudes, and the limits of that influence are of considerable import to the functioning of a democratic society and the aggregation of informed public preferences into policy choices. In a time of marked partisan polarization, an increasingly crowded information space, and the discreditation of traditional ‘experts’, investigating why the public chooses certain voices to inform their thinking over others is significant to academics and policy-makers alike. Furthermore, mapping the limits of that influence can increase our understanding of not only those elite groups in

question, but of the public itself.

This dissertation explores the nature of one of these voices, an institution that enjoys high public trust, but whose influence on public attitudes has escaped a degree of academic scrutiny: the military. As an elite community with unique institutional features, the military warrants a deeper examination in order to understand the potential influence that such voices can have in shaping public opinion, particularly on matters of war that may hinge on broad public support. Understanding the influence of this military elite bloc – which I define broadly to include senior leaders both active and retired – is particularly important given the high level of confidence that the public consistently expresses in them compared to nearly every other political and social institution in the United States. However, this dissertation also explores the limits of that very credibility among the public, which exists alongside sharp political polarization, selective information environments, and a move away from traditional political norms. It is of considerable importance to the fields of both public opinion and civil-military relations to understand not only the magnitude of the military elite voice, but why certain individuals attend to it. The implications of this process are significant given long-standing norms against military politicization; an erosion of these important civil-military traditions would compound a broader shift in preferences for illiberal governance and dissatisfaction with democratic norms.

The collective research presented here comprises three efforts that (1) demonstrate that the military’s credibility gives it considerable latent influence on public policy attitudes, (2) reveal how individual-level partisanship influences – objectively or not – perceptions of that credibility, and (3) tests the limits of military credibility through that same lens of partisan polarization. Though much empirical study has been devoted to understanding the influence and credibility of elite communities on public opinion, particularly political and social institutions, comparatively little has focused on the role of military elites in the same process. This gap in understanding with regards to the military is particularly noteworthy given its increasingly public role in policy formulation, advocacy, and execution. As such, this research effort contributes not only to our understanding of elite-driven politics, public

confidence in institutions, and civil-military norms, but to how these processes operate in the context of partisan politics.

In this dissertation, I argue that military elite voices are indeed potentially influential ones, particularly on matters of armed intervention and foreign policy. The influence of these elite signals is tied considerably to individual-level impressions of credibility for the military institution. However, these attitudes about credibility are themselves susceptible to partisan predispositions. In exploring levels of public trust for the military in a partisan context, I further argue that a consideration of both media exposure patterns and cognitive biases is necessary in order to understand a partisan divide in attitudes about the military as an institution. While institutionalists argue that a rational evaluation takes place when deciding to trust specific organizations or communities, there is little support for the argument that partisans view the military either similarly or objectively. Variation among partisans in tolerance for normatively-negative behavior or activity is evidence for not only different sensibilities about institutional performance, but different access to information and reflexive biases about the military based on in-group partisan attitudes. Adopting trust for the military into a partisan identity can prevent individuals from accurately learning the lessons of past policies (K. A. Schultz 2018) or to objectively characterize institutional success and failure (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012).

Finally, I argue that this partisan bias has contributed to an environment where a long-standing norm against political activism by military elites may be much weaker than previously theorized. The credibility of military elites is conditional not on avoiding a partisan identity, but on assuming the “correct” partisan identity. These findings suggest that the same force which contributes to individual attitudes about military credibility – partisanship – may also be the mechanism by which that credibility is eroded. Such a weakened state of civil-military norms poses significant challenges to the preservation of an apolitical military with a credible voice in civic society. This trend is more problematic to democratic regime quality given the concurrent rise in public tolerance for authoritarian political solutions, illiberal rule, and calls for the military to perform functions for which it was not

normatively or structurally intended.

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation analyzes the magnitude of military political influence through the public, the role of source credibility in that process, and the limits of that credibility in a partisan context. As mentioned above, this research effort comprises three papers that incorporate various theoretical frameworks and empirical techniques in order to substantively contribute to our understanding of these concepts. The first chapter explores the latent influence of military elites on shaping public attitudes towards military intervention; using a competitive-signal experimental survey design, it builds on previous empirical studies on elite-driven politics and discusses the role that source credibility plays in public consumption of elite signals. The second paper addresses political heterogeneity in perceptions of the military institution, seeking to explain how partisans arrive at such different conclusions regarding military credibility. Analyzing the results of observational reporting data, original text data, and original survey experimentation, this chapter develops a fuller theory of how information and partisan bias shapes attitudes about institutions like the military. The third chapter takes this concept one step further, experimentally testing how partisan activity by military elites affects the public's evaluation of elite- and institutional-level credibility for the military as a source of information.

This introductory chapter provides a broad theoretical context for the study of elite credibility and maps the structure of the project. In the following sections, I review the relevant state of the art, theoretical and empirical gaps, central research questions, principal findings, and contributions for each of the project's component chapters. In the last section, I offer how these findings pose unique challenges to political decision-makers, future military leaders, and scholars of public opinion and civil-military relations, providing several avenues for further research.

That Fair and Warlike Form: Military Voices in Elite-Driven Politics

In exploring these various dimensions of the public-military relationship, this dissertation contributes to several robust fields of political science. The first is the study of elite-driven politics and public opinion. This literature speaks to the role played by political and social elites in shaping the public's preferences on policy, with the foundational assumption that individuals frequently seek the heuristic provided by such "elite cues" as a cognitively-efficient means for achieving an informed opinion (Downs 1957; McGuire 1969; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993; Zaller 1992). The influence of various elite communities – such as partisan leaders (Adam J. Berinsky 2009; Zaller 1992; Guardino and Hayes 2017), media outlets (Feldman, Huddy, and Marcus 2015; Baum and Groeling 2010), policy experts (Guisinger and E. N. Saunders 2017), and international institutions (Chapman 2011; Grieco et al. 2011; Fang 2008) – have been revealed to be powerful shaping forces on public attitudes towards political choices. Though limited, a burgeoning field of study has similarly explored the influence of military elites on preferences for political candidates (Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012) and military interventions abroad (Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017). However, this project addresses a considerable gap in understanding the reach of these elites when their voices are placed in a competitive environment, transmitted across different mechanisms, and moderated through the lenses of individual partisanship and institutional confidence.

The influence of political or social elites on public attitudes has been well documented. Both the political science and social psychological literatures argue that the heuristic offered by such elite voices can offer the shortcut necessary for individuals to achieve reasoned opinions without expending the cognitive resources necessary for expert-level knowledge (Downs 1957; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993). The effectiveness of these elite "cues" has been attributed to various factors, such as the audience, the message itself, and characteristics of the source (Hovland and Weiss 1951). First, individual-level features of those attending to elite cues can determine the effect of such a message. Both Converse (1962) and McGuire (1969) argue that the influence of an elite message is a product of its probability of (1) being received by the individual and (2) the individual's acceptance of its content. Zaller (1992)

draws attention to the role of political awareness at the individual level in affecting both of these dimensions, with politically-engaged citizens more likely to receive elite messages on important issues. However, the explanatory power of individual-level political sophistication has varied across studies, with evidence to suggest that both high- and low-awareness individuals can utilize elite cues effectively (Gilens and Murakawa 2002).

Second, attributes about the message content or information environment can influence the effectiveness of elite signals. Specific issue domains can increase individual reliance on elite cues, such as when the subject is complex or “low-involvement” from the perspective of the individual (Lupia 1994; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Message characteristics are also particularly salient when the information environment is less confusing (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) or the surprising nature of their direction or substance lends them value (Baum and Groeling 2010; Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998). However, while both audience and message factors are important, I follow many previous studies in arguing that more essential to this process are the attributes of the source itself when assessing the influence of elite messaging.

In line with much of this existing research in elite-driven politics, this dissertation focuses on the importance of elite credibility. Individuals posed with a variety of political information sources invest finite cognitive resources in choosing the ones they deem credible; heuristic cues offer the most effective guideposts to reasoned choice if they come from trusted elites. In their Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Petty and Cacioppo (1986) argue that when issues are simple or personally-important, the individual *centrally* processes the substance of the message; however, as issues become more complex or distant, individuals *peripherally* attend more to attributes of the source itself when rendering a judgment about the signal’s quality. In this sense, elite credibility has played a significant role in many theoretical models governing the effectiveness of elite signals. It is this peripheral consideration of elite credibility with regards to the military institution that I consider through this dissertation.

What attributes about an elite source dictate its credibility? One consistent dimension of credibility is *knowledgeability* or *expertise* on the issue under debate (Downs 1957; Lupia 1994; McGuire 1969). Sources that have highly-localized subject matter expertise should speak more authoritatively on issues regarding that knowledge base. Another dimension of credibility established by the existing literature is *trustworthiness*. Elites who share ideological or partisan inclinations with a “like-minded” audience are more likely to be seen as credible by that same audience. However, individual-level partisanship can complicate both of these characteristics. Though political alignment may create a perception of trustworthiness, it can similarly result in a biased rejection of contrary information, even if that information is credible (Zaller 1992; Taber and Lodge 2006). Though expertise in a specialized area of policy may imbue non-partisan elites with a degree of influence, this effect is conditional on the underlying level of partisan polarization about the issue itself (Guisinger and E. N. Saunders 2017).

However, sources that are not politically “like-minded” or explicitly trustworthy can still appear credible to a broad audience if they can “be trusted to reveal what they know” or have very clear incentives to provide accurate information (Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998). Elites can incur costs in sending political signals, such as criticizing a co-partisan or praising a political opponent, providing the public with valuable and informative signals on elite consensus or discord on complex issues (Baum and Groeling 2009). While expertise and trustworthiness are two principal components of establishing elite credibility, these attributes are highly susceptible to features of the political information environment, including partisan polarization, selective information exposure, and cognitive biases.

When testing the effects of elite cues empirically, the importance of credibility is often implicit. Numerous experimental studies have explored the influence of partisan leaders in driving public preferences. These have included persuasion effects on a range of issues from support for war (Adam J. Berinsky 2009; Zaller 1992; Guardino and Hayes 2017) to domestic policy choices (Druckman 2001; Bullock 2011). Perceptions of elite credibility need not be measured in any fashion beyond partisan identity, as these studies can make the

reasonable assumption that individuals are likely to see co-partisans as more credible than members of the opposite party. However, this assumption becomes more difficult when considering institutions or elites for whom perceived credibility is not so easily proxied. The role of the media (Baum and Groeling 2010), international institutions (Chapman 2011; Fang 2008), and policy experts (Guisinger and E. N. Saunders 2017) have also been explored, with these actors often providing a “second opinion” to elite voices from across the partisan aisle (Grieco et al. 2011). However, few empirical efforts incorporate measurement of the reliability of these sources into their analysis, even those dealing explicitly with the influence of military elite (Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017).

These considerations in hand, it is clear that though elite cues have been the subject of wide academic study, focus on the military has been comparably low; though elite credibility is theoretically important in this process, it has not been explicitly incorporated into empirical design strategies. The first chapter in this dissertation seeks to address these gaps through analyzing the influence of military elite actors on public attitudes towards military intervention. Similar to earlier empirical efforts regarding the ability of military actors to shape these preferences through “cues”, I argue that military elites have considerable latent influence among the public, particularly on security-related issues. However, I build on this existing body of knowledge by analyzing this process across different sources and different partisan alignments, while considering individual levels of institutional confidence for the military.

Using a competitive-signal experimental survey design, respondents were exposed to a variety of informational cues from both the president and various military elites regarding proposed conventional and unconventional military interventions abroad. I find that not only do military elites wield considerable influence in the policy debate, but that this effect is rooted in individual-level perceptions of the military’s credibility. The effects of the military elite cue-giver are robust across different sources – including retired officers – and different transmission mechanisms, including both public statements and media leaks. The influence of these figures remains significant even when conditioning on the views of

the president and individual-level partisan identity. Unlike many previously-studied elite communities, advocacy from military officials has the potential to cultivate support for the president's policies even from members of the out-party, while opposition can have a suppressive effect on support even among the president's co-partisans.

This chapter substantively contributes to existing work on elite-driven politics, public opinion, and civil-military relations. First, military elites have latent political influence with a public that considers the military institution one of the most trusted in society. Particularly on matters of conflict, the potential for military elites to shape the public's attitudes about a proposed intervention suggests that civilian leaders benefit from limiting military opposition and cultivating support. While this can be achieved with active-duty officers through bargaining or co-optation, retired officers may be more difficult to constrain, though there are just as influential as their serving counterparts.

Second, these results contribute to a larger debate in the civil-military relations literature regarding the use of such influence in a democratic society where civilian control of the military is a governing principle. As I discuss in the chapter's case studies, both the 2006 "revolt of the generals" and the 2010 Afghanistan troop estimate leak reveal that while these tactics can be effective, they can have damaging second-order effects on the quality of civil-military relations, strategic harmony, and elite consensus, particularly during wartime. While these findings predict that military elites can have an influential role in shaping public opinion, long-standing normative standards in the civil-military literature proscribe such behavior outright. This is a conflict I discuss further in the third chapter of this analysis.

Finally, the role of source credibility is central to the influence of the military elite. Despite varying source types and transmission mechanisms, the source's military identity lent these signals influence on public opinion despite contrary rhetoric from the president. Individual-level measurement of institutional confidence in the military is revealed to be a key moderator in the effectiveness of military source cues. These findings reveal the potential magnitude of the military voice in elite-driven politics; but, given the role that source

credibility plays in this process, what is the nature of public confidence in the military, and what are its limits? I explore this question further in the next chapter, assessing partisan polarization in attitudes towards the military institution.

Who Follows the Generals?: Polarization in Institutional Confidence in the Military

If the first chapter demonstrates the moderating role of elite credibility on the effect of military signals, the latter two chapters of this project analyze this concept as a dependent variable in itself. If the perceived credibility of the military institution is what lends elite signals their influence, it is of considerable importance to understand the dimensions and limits of that credibility. I first examine the nature of perceived military credibility among political partisans, seeking to provide a more robust explanation for the widening confidence “gap” between the parties regarding the institutional quality of the military. More pointedly, I explore why partisans seem to reach different conclusions about the military’s credibility, despite the foreign-facing and non-partisan mandate of the institution. Analyzing public trust in the military is particularly important amidst declining confidence across nearly all political and social institutions in US society and a broader rejection of traditional “experts” as credible sources of information. The military institution has remained largely unaffected by these trends, maintaining high public confidence despite unsuccessful wars abroad.

However, this notable status that the military enjoys in society is in actuality far more nuanced. While aggregate confidence in the military remains high, this masks a wide gap between partisan subgroups. As of this writing, this gap between the percentage of Republicans and Democrats who expressed high confidence in the military institution was more than 20 percentage-points across multiple survey instruments, with Republican support consistently higher.¹ This puts the military in the same class of polarization as highly-partisan

¹According to the Gallup June Wave annual surveys for confidence in US institutions, the only other institutions with comparable partisan gaps as of 2017 were the police (28% pts), the presidency (50% pts), and the print media (29% pts). Frank Newport, “Americans’ Confidence in Institutions Edges Up”, Gallup,

institutions such as the presidency, the news media, and the major party establishments. Further analysis of expressed confidence in other institutions and “feeling thermometer” ratings between partisans reveals that not only do partisans differ in their estimations of military credibility, but display different sensibilities with regards to how they evaluate the institution. It is from this basic observation that the second chapter in this dissertation begins, attempting to explain why partisans seem to arrive at different estimations of an institution with no partisan functions or domestic roles in governance.

In order to understand the micro-foundations of these observations, it is first necessary to detail the extant literature regarding public confidence in institutions, to which this dissertation substantively contributes. When evaluating institutions on their performance and credibility, the theoretical literature has adopted two contrary narratives: a socio-cultural explanation, where institutional confidence is the natural aggregation of inter-personal cohesion and collective societies (Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 1993; Fukuyama 1995) and the institutionalist explanation, in which individuals rationally evaluate an organization’s quality based on observed performance (Rothstein and Stolle 2007; Hetherington 1998; Mishler and Rose 2001). This analysis follows in the tradition of the latter; individuals in this framework render opinions about the quality and credibility of institutions in society through an evaluation of their performance. However, as Mishler and Rose (2001) argue, “although institutional theories agree that political trust is endogenous, they disagree about which aspects of performance are important or how performance is assessed.” As such, there is not only little empirical basis for understanding how individuals evaluate and imbue confidence in civic institutions writ large, but even less on how this process functions with regards to specific institutions like the military.

This is not to suggest that the causes of military confidence have not been previously theorized; on the contrary, numerous civil-military scholars have attributed public perception of military credibility to battlefield successes (Gronke and Feaver 2001; King and Karabell

June 26, 2017.

2002a), organizational professionalism (Burbach 2017), or its image as non-partisan and objective (Owens 2015; Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017; Hill, Wong, and Gerras 2013). While not mutually exclusive, these broad classes of military behavior capture the majority of the proposed explanations for how the military has improved and preserved its high standing with the public since the nadir of public trust following the Vietnam War. However, these theoretical images of how the public evaluates the military institution also lack an empirical base of support, as well as little understanding or theorization as to how these evaluations might differ across partisan subsets.

Allowing for different preferences among partisans with respect to evaluation of the same institution is significant when considering the nature of the partisan confidence gap. Bartels (2002) argues that partisans failing to converge on a common understanding of a policy or institution confirms that some bias is at work; however, Gerber and D. Green (1999) argue that partisans can simply have different preferences for performance and evaluate accordingly. The latter requires consideration of the argument that partisans are not split over military credibility due to some partisan bias, but rather due to fundamentally different preferences in terms of expected behavior. In this chapter, I allow for this alternate explanation through empirical testing of these different classes of military activity, namely, battlefield performance, professionalism, and non-partisanship.

However, just as important to this analysis are the predictions of the former argument, that the partisan gap can be explained more thoroughly through understanding of the cognitive biases that can result from individual-level partisanship. Partisan polarization and its resulting effects on individual-level perceptions of the military institution is therefore another literature that this dissertation addresses. Though positive support for the military along partisan lines has been traditionally ascribed to elite-level similarities on the use of force (Golby 2011; Feaver and Kohn 2001) or the demography of the military itself (J. K. Dempsey 2009; Urban 2010; O. R. Holsti 1998), there is little accounting for the dynamic effects of partisanship in solidifying these attitudes. If institutionalist theories of public confidence rely on objective valuations of an institution's performance, partisans may

not only vary on which type of performance they value, but their exposure to information that challenges their impressions of the institution (Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Stroud 2008; Jamieson and Cappella 2008) and their objectivity given social proximity to the institution itself (Mason 2015; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Iyengar and Westwood 2015).

With this state of the art in hand, I address the question of the partisan confidence gap, proposing a dynamic process where partisan polarization drives both (1) the volume and slant of political information received about the military and (2) the cognitive biases that shape how that information is used in evaluating the military institution. This chapter utilizes a variety of observational and experimental data analysis methods in order to demonstrate the salience of partisan identity on attitude-formation regarding the armed forces. First, using observational data on media reporting habits, I find that during a key phase of the Iraq War, partisans were subject to widely different levels of information on military performance. Analyzing trends over cable news, network news, print media, and radio, I find that conservative media outlets consistently reported on combat casualties, material losses, strategic frustration, and military difficulties of the Iraq War at lower rates than left-leaning or centrist outlets. Information on military scandals or organizational failures more broadly were also under-reported by conservative outlets, such as the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, the Haditha massacre, and the Walter Reed Medical Facility scandal.

Using original text-as-data on cable news broadcast transcripts during the 2007 reporting window, I further find that not only were partisans exposed to widely different rates of reporting on military activity in Iraq, but that these stories were likely to be framed in vastly different ways depending on one's source of information. Using nearly 2,000 transcripts of news segments from MSNBC, CNN, and FOX News, I utilized the structural topic model and unsupervised machine learning techniques to gain visibility on the topics with which these news sources spent Iraq War reporting air time. Left-leaning media outlets (MSNBC, CNN) were more likely to discuss the war's material cost, plans for withdrawal, casualties, and strategic re-direction when spending on-air time discussing the military's performance. Conservative outlets (FOX News), conversely, spent more time discussing domestic fights

with Democrats over the budget, allowing the military itself to justify its strategy, and criticizing other media sources for their reporting on the war. Collectively, the data support the argument that during a key phase of the Iraq War, strong partisans were subject to receiving vastly different levels of information regarding military performance and institutional quality. While conservatives were likely to experience a positive image, or at least an insulated one, liberals and centrists were more likely to observe military complications and the costs of the conflict.

In order to explore the second part of this process, I utilized survey experimentation designed to explore how different types of military activity affect public confidence in the institution. In order to allow for the alternate explanation offered by Gerber and D. Green (1999), I allowed respondents to be primed with news stories regarding military failures in each of the theorized classes of military performance: battlefield performance, professionalism, and objective non-partisanship. I first find that Democrats and Independents express clearer preferences for military behavior, losing substantively and statistically significant levels of confidence in the military over professional or battlefield performance failures. However, not only do Republicans never degrade their evaluation of the military in response to negative information, they even *increase* their expressed confidence in each treatment condition. This “backfire” of positive support for the military even becomes statistically significant among strong or “sorted” partisans. In line with the analysis of media reporting habits, Republicans and strong conservatives preserved their confidence in the military even in the face of contrary information.

More pointedly, these results conform to expectations from the literature on affective political polarization. While Democrats apparently view the military in a manner similar to the way non-partisans view the institution, Republicans display an in-group defensiveness that resembles attitudes about a co-partisan. Analysis of the 2012 ANES feeling thermometer data provided some initial evidence of this trend, where the military was more strongly correlated in the Republican mind with political allies like the Tea Party or “conservatives”, rather than instruments of government such as their Democratic counterparts. But

the results of both the media reporting data, broadcast text data, and the survey experiment depict a broader picture of the different images partisans have of the same institution. Partisans are likely to be exposed to different information environments that subsequently inform different evaluations of institutional quality; however, even conditional on being provided negative information, conservatives are more likely to dismiss the information rather than incorporate it into their cognitive processing. The result is a political subset of society that has merged trust in the military into a component of their partisan identity.

Given the apolitical mandate of the military, I argue that such biased processing and partisan imaging of the military is potentially damaging to effective governance for a variety of factors. First, the results indicate a highly partisan environment in which the military is unlikely to be objectively evaluated on its performance by a subset of the population. The solidifying effect of selective media “echo-chambers” in shaping the partisan bias we observe in this study makes it unlikely that such polarization over military credibility will wane in the near future. Second, political leaders may be increasingly tempted to draw military elites into the political fray as advocates or allies, if they believe that such endorsements are likely to be successful among individuals who have immovably high levels of confidence in the military. This is already apparent in the increasingly public role played by these figures – particularly retired elites – in media commentary, policy advocacy, and the top ranks of civilian government. Finally, partisan bias with regards to institutional performance can prevent partisans from acknowledging when allies do poorly or opponents do well (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Applied to the military, this could contribute to an already growing concern that polarization can prevent individuals from learning the proper lessons of foreign policy efforts (K. A. Schultz 2018). In-group defensiveness or political tribalism designed to insulate the military from criticism complicates this type of objective reasoning.

What Discord Follows: Partisan Polarization and Civil-Military Norms

The previous chapters in this dissertation empirically demonstrate how credibility drives the influence of the military voice and the importance of individual-level partisanship on

perceptions of that elite credibility. The last chapter addresses the logical extension of these findings: what are the limits of this credibility? In order to address this question, I examine the role of partisanship by military elites on their own credibility and that of the broader military institution. A cornerstone of traditional civil-military relations theory, the “apolitical norm” against partisan activity requires a military outside the realm of politics, structurally subordinate to civilian control, and objectively non-partisan in the public space (Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960; Kohn 1994). Despite this, military elites – particularly retired officers with the imprimatur of the institution – are ubiquitous figures in politics as appointed officials, media commentators, and political activists, despite norms against such behavior. Civil-military scholars have warned that the credibility of the institution is conditional on its appearance as non-partisan; to compromise this image would erode the veracity of military counsel and the reliability of information it provides (J. K. Dempsey 2009; Owens 2015; Urben 2017; Hill, Wong, and Gerras 2013). However, this theory relies on an objective image of the public as a principled whole that broadly embraces a norm against political activity, with little empirical validation to defend such an assumption.

As in the previous chapter, this requires conceptualizing credibility as a dependent variable. As such, the first challenge this chapter addresses is a methodological one. Operationalizing elite or institutional credibility has taken a variety of forms in past empirical efforts. These have included a four-point measure of institutional trust used in cross-national studies based on the World Values Survey (WVS) (Newton and Norris 2000; Rothstein and Stolle 2007), a 100-point ‘feeling thermometer’ (Ladd 2010), the five-point measure of institutional confidence used by Gallup (Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012), or analogous three-item scales from the General Social Survey (GSS) and Harris polls (Burbach 2017). In this chapter, I adopt more granular instruments for measuring this concept. These include modified additive scales adapted from the business research literature, exploring not only the credibility of individual elites, but the “corporate” credibility of the institution they represent (Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell 2000). Furthermore, these metrics allow for more precise measurement of elite credibility’s principal components: expertise and trustworthiness (Lafferty and Goldsmith 1999; Newell and Goldsmith 2001). While there is

wide variation in how political scientists have captured public perceptions of institutional credibility quantitatively, these measures collectively provide a host of methods by which to assess credibility as a dependent variable.

However, the second and more pressing challenge this work poses is to an established theoretical image of civil-military norms. While the supposed causes of high military credibility have been discussed at length in the civil-military relations literature, there has been little empirical validation of them. In operationalizing elite credibility, we gain an opportunity to test the strength and salience of civil-military norms that have long been credited as the foundation of high public trust in the military. The professionalization of the modern officer corps has relied on formalizing the functional and societal “imperatives” of an apolitical and subordinate military, constraining the institution’s inherently martial ethos amidst a society of liberal norms (Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960; Finer 1962). Recent scholarly work on military influence has more pointedly warned against political activity by military elites – including those no longer in service – asserting that it is the appearance of non-partisanship that preserves military credibility (Golby 2011; Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017; J. K. Dempsey 2009; Owens 2015; Urban 2010; Hill, Wong, and Gerras 2013; Feaver and Kohn 2001; Kohn 2002). While this is a near-consensus opinion in much of the civil-military relations literature, it has endured neither broad empirical validation nor consideration in a climate of increasing partisan polarization. The final chapter in this dissertation substantively contributes to study of this question, testing the durability of military credibility against knowledge of partisan activity by military elites.

As I discuss in this chapter, there are several reasons to believe that traditional norms regarding military activity in politics may be weaker than previously theorized. The first of these is a broader shift in the public’s acceptance for standards of governance, institutions, and civil-military norms that are decidedly undemocratic or illiberal. These include notable increases in public support for military rule (Foa and Mounk 2016), resistance to “unwise” orders (Schake and Mattis 2016), and active-duty military figures playing a role

in politics.² A second reason to suspect a weakening of the apolitical norm is the acute effect of partisan polarization on evaluations of credibility. Existing study in this vein has already revealed that strong affective polarization can distort these cognitive processes by affecting perceptual bias (Mason 2015), in-group pride (Mason 2016), out-group animus (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012), and impressions regarding the expertise of co-partisans over contra-partisans (Iyengar and Westwood 2015).

In order to test the salience of these norms in such an environment, I propose three potential images of the public, in which the apolitical norm is objectively strong (the *principled public*), objectively weak (the *indifferent public*), or selectively weak (the *partisan public*). The first captures the near-consensus assertions of civil-military relations scholarship: military credibility is conditional on the appearance of non-partisanship. The second reflects the findings of the limited empirical work conducted by Golby, Dropp, and Feaver (2012), that the public is indifferent to such behavior. To these I add my own theory, a third image of the public in which partisan activity can substantively affect elite credibility, but wherein civil-military norms are much weaker than previously theorized. In addition to examining the effects that such partisan activity can have on individual elites, I also look at the second-order effects of this behavior on the perceived credibility of the military institution.

Using an original experimental survey instrument, this analysis captured individual impressions of elite credibility in response to different profiles of a retired senior military official that differed only in the nature of their post-retirement levels of political activism. While the “non-partisan” engaged in politically-neutral research or board membership, “activists” participated in political campaigns, appeared regularly on cable news networks with strong partisan audiences, and engaged in policy advocacy. Partisan activity by these figures elicited sizable changes to their perceived credibility by all partisan subgroups, offering little support for the indifferent public hypothesis. However, instead of a principled rejection of partisan activity by the public, partisans only expressed lower levels of credibility for

²Peter Moore, “Could a coup really happen in the United States?”, YouGov, September 9, 2015.

military elites on the opposite side of the political aisle. The effect was replicated when measuring attitudes about the larger military establishment, with partisan alignment driving the direction of these effects.

The findings instead present strong evidence for the partisan public hypothesis. Individuals compartmentalized their disdain over partisan activity by military elites only when such activity did not align with their own views. While the principled public hypothesis argues that military credibility is conditional on remaining non-partisan, these results demonstrate that it is fact conditional on being the “correct” partisan. In some cases, individuals actually expressed *higher* levels of confidence in the elite source for having engaged in such behavior on their side. Additionally, this one-sided trend effectively aggregated to the individual’s impression of the military as an institution. While the process predicted by the principled public is not evident, the pooled effects to military credibility are likely similar to the predictions feared by many civil-military scholars: *ad infinitum*, it is not unreasonable to propose that continued partisan activity would damage the credibility of the military institution.

However, the key difference is that the micro-foundational incentives of the partisan public are much different than the principled public. In the latter, military elites can expect broad opposition to their partisan activity, making such behavior decreasingly valuable. Elites seeking to shape policy by cultivating a broad public audience face decreasing returns for repeated forays into political debates. However, the partisan public compartmentalizes this disapproval to individuals with whom the military elite actor already disagrees. This environment creates incentives for those elites who do not value a broad audience. Additionally, it can create an opportunity to build credibility with co-partisans, curry favor with a partisan establishment, or set the conditions for a political “afterlife” to their careers. In order to demonstrate this, I utilize the experimental findings and information on media outlet demography to show that, even if broad approval is unlikely, the tailored audiences offered by cable news or talk radio outlets can be a tempting alternative.

Similarly, this chapter explores the different political listeners that military elites cultivate at varying levels of partisan activism, building on previous studies mapping the ideological distribution of social media networks (Barbera 2015). Using information from the Twitter follower networks of several prominent military figures, I find that social media can provide the type of audiences amenable to partisan activity. Military elites with records of partisan activism speak with far less authority and credibility to the broader public. Instead, as the experimental results suggests, partisan military actors succeed in cultivating a much narrower – if ideologically coherent – audience. The incentives for military elites seeking to shape public attitudes through activism are therefore less threatening: these figures can attract a dedicated partisan audience in which such activism is not only acceptable, but potentially beneficial.

Moving Forward

Individuals in society are faced with a multitude of choices in their information environment; yet, while “the volume of data is exploding [...] credible information is harder to find”.³ The voices that citizens choose to attend to – and the limits of that influence – are of considerable importance to our understanding of political preference formation. This dissertation places the military – among the most trusted institutions in US society – in a central role, exposing its political influence to a new depth of academic scrutiny. Military elites continue to function as prominent actors in not only the execution of policy, but the marketing of strategy and policy choices. This research effort explores not only the credibility of the military voice in that information environment, but what the susceptibility of that credibility to partisan forces says about the public itself.

Among several others, the principal findings of this dissertation are that military elites, due to high levels of public credibility, have considerable latent influence in shaping public attitudes. Despite the military’s non-partisan institutional functions, this credibility is

³Amy Zegart, “The Three Paradoxes Disrupting American Politics”, *The Atlantic*, August 5, 2017.

highly sensitive to individual-level partisan biases, selective exposure to information, and social polarization. Political conservatives, in particular, view the military as the extension of a co-partisan in-group, downweighting the influence of negative information even when it is presented to them. However, this same force of polarization poses significant threats to continued military credibility into the future; to a certain extent, the credibility of military elites does not rest reliably on its appearance as non-partisan, but tenuously on its adoption of “correct” partisan attitudes. This process presents considerable challenges to effective elite signaling by potentially eroding military influence and cultivating increasingly narrow audiences among the public. I conclude by proposing some of the ramifications of this effect on the quality of civil-military relations, democratic governance, and security policy.

The first byproduct of military politicization is the potential loss of a credible voice in the political information space. While the findings of this analysis are that the logic of military partisanship may not be ostensibly self-defeating, it is nonetheless harmful to military credibility as the frequency of partisan activity by military elites increases. The military’s singular position as trustworthy among nearly all political and social institutions in US society would not only be jeopardized, but could contribute to a wholesale loss of confidence in government. The perception that military leaders were espousing inaccurate, misleading, or partisan-driven operational information or priorities was part of a general loss in governmental confidence following the war in Vietnam.⁴ It is not unreasonable to believe that the placement of military elites in increasingly political or partisan positions of responsibility could lead to a general shift in perceptions of the institution’s reliability. Casting the veracity of military information into doubt jeopardizes not only its esteem with the public, but the level of trust it enjoys from civilian leaders during wartime, where such military counsel is essential to informed decision-making.

Second, the encapsulation of military support as part of a political identity is problematic for an effective process of public learning with regards to foreign policy outcomes.

⁴Julian E. Zelizer, “How the Tet Offensive Undermined American Faith in Government”, *The Atlantic*, January 15, 2018.

Another finding of this dissertation is that Republican confidence in the military is tied to a social and partisan identification with that party, defending the military institution in a fashion similar to a political co-partisan. This has manifested in steady and high Republican confidence for the military despite changes in presidential partisan identity, moral and ethical scandals, and consistent frustrations in foreign conflicts. However, it also is evident in the clear insulation the military enjoys from foreign policy failures. Recent polling on this subject suggests that civilian leaders carry more responsibility than the military for a lack of decisive victory in foreign wars.⁵ Allowing support for the military to override an objective evaluation of the merits of foreign policy could contribute to broader polarization effects that “impede the country’s collective ability to learn and adapt from foreign policy” (K. A. Schultz 2018). Objective scrutiny by military elites on such policies risks being attributed to partisan agenda-setting rather than concern for the maintenance of national security. If public support for war is shaped by military input and significant to political decision-making, military politicization could exacerbate existing polarization on foreign policy attitudes and limit the public’s exposure to non-partisan critiques and lessons learned.

Third, military politicization exploits a level of esteem for the military institution that is itself problematic. While public trust in institutions is indeed a positive outcome in democratic society, the military’s singular status as both most-trusted and least-democratic institution is potentially troublesome. Former Army officer and Obama administration official Andrew Exum contends this issue has become so acute that veterans themselves should campaign for public office and make a concerted effort to ensure that the military is “brought down a peg or two” in the public’s esteem by challenging active-duty officers from the chairs of committee hearings.⁶ Yet, as this study suggests, partisan military actors can instead

⁵Respondents were asked which statements were closer to their own beliefs: “Modern wars are unwinnable”, “Modern wars are winnable, but our military hasn’t figured out how to win them”, “Modern wars are winnable, but civilian policy decisions prevent the military from winning”, and “Modern wars are winnable, and our military is winning them”. After those responding “Don’t Know” (28%), the next largest bloc of respondents believed that modern wars were “unwinnable” (19%) (Schake and Mattis 2016).

⁶Andrew Exum, “The Dangerous Politicization of the Military”, *The Atlantic*, July 24, 2017.

expect to lose the broader appeal and credibility of their apolitical counterparts, marginalizing their ability to effect such a change. Furthermore, this does little to correct the broader problem of low public confidence in the representative institutions that characterize US democracy, such as the legislature.⁷ Military officials would seemingly benefit most from a concerted campaign to distance the institution from partisan co-optation or rhetoric and to strongly encourage its retired representatives to more closely embrace the apolitical norm after their service.

Fourth, politicization of the military risks compromising its capacity to effectively perform its assigned functions in national security. The military institution and its representative elites are increasingly being called upon to perform political functions not previously conceived by civil-military scholars. Republican partisans have more recently sought out military elite involvement in government as a way to ‘borrow’ national security credentials from a credible source or to publicly advocate for budgetary or strategic interests.⁸ Civil-military scholars have pointed to highly-partisan speeches and appeals to the military as a conservative constituency as evidence that military politicization can occur *to* the institution just as well as *by* the institution. Conversely, Democratic activists have begun to view the military and its retired elites as a power-checking institution with an opportunity to constrain executive power or as a repository for the ideals of liberal democracy that could resist an “authoritarian model” of governance.⁹ The politicization of this institution may very well result in the same loss of public esteem that politicization of the intelligence services has created among some of those organizations.¹⁰ Discrediting the military as an

⁷Matthew Fay, “Persistently Politicizing the Military”, Niskanen Center, Jul 28, 2017.

⁸Joe Gould, “Handful of hawkish US lawmakers urge military leaders to fight new CR”, *Military Times*, December 1, 2017; Philip Bump, “The White House is increasingly – and worryingly – using the military as a shield against criticism”, *The Washington Post*, October 20, 2017; H.R. McMaster and Gary D. Cohn, “America First Doesn’t Mean America Alone”, *The Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2017.

⁹Jonathan Stevenson, “The Generals Can’t Save Us From Trump”, *The New York Times*, July 28, 2017; David A. Graham, “Are Trump’s Generals Mounting a Defense of Democratic Institutions?”, *The Atlantic*, January 31, 2017.

¹⁰Of 13 government agencies polled by Gallup, Republicans espoused between a 3% and 33% increase in those rating their performance as “excellent” or “good” between 2014 and 2017 (switching presidential party identity) in 12 of those agencies. The only organization Republican partisans felt worse about was the FBI, which lost 13% of its approval with the same subgroup. The partisan gap in approval for the FBI was 20 percentage-points, the second-highest in the survey. Megan Brenan and Steve Ander, “Republicans Push Government Agency Ratings Up, but Not FBI”, Gallup, January 2, 2018.

objective voice through these competing partisan demands risks compromising the quality of military advice given by serving elites to civilian leaders.

Chapter 2

That Fair and Warlike Form:

Military Voices in Elite-Driven Politics

Introduction

The role of public support for foreign military intervention is a prominent feature of international relations and security theory. Political elites and key decision-makers, particularly in costly arenas such as military intervention or foreign affairs, must consider not only the material costs of military action, but the public and political costs as well. Public approval for these types of policies can often shape the realm of feasible options for political leaders and underpins much of our understanding about how democratic systems of government decide to launch, sustain, and conclude conflicts abroad (K. A. Schultz 2001; Reiter and Stam 2002; Howell and Pevehouse 2007). As the modern information environment allows broad access to elite opinions and preferences, the shaping influences of public opinion on complex issues such as foreign policy are of considerable interest to both policy-makers and academics.

A sizable literature in political science has been devoted to understanding how elites in society can shape public support for foreign policy or war initiation. These efforts have studied the ability of the media (Baum and Groeling 2010), partisan political leaders (Adam

J. Berinsky 2007; Feldman, Huddy, and Marcus 2015), policy experts (Guisinger and E. N. Saunders 2017), and international institutions (Chapman 2004; Grieco et al. 2011; Guardino and Hayes 2017; Fang 2008) to influence public opinion on these complex issue domains. The potency of these ‘cues’ are understood to vary considerably depending on the credibility of the source (Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998), the political awareness of the recipient (Zaller 1992), or the substance of the message (Baum and Groeling 2009; Bullock 2011). However, the relative influence of traditional social and political elite groups such as partisan leaders and the media has become increasingly uncertain, particularly as public distrust in these organizations increases in democracies like the United States.¹ Over the past two decades, this trend has been coupled with a increasingly public focus on the opinions and policy-making relevance of one of the few institutions with high levels of public trust: the military. Given the central role that elite members of the military play in both the development and execution of these policies, it is notable that little empirical study has focused on this community in assessing the influence of elite-driven politics. How effective are military elite cues in influencing public opinion on complex issues?

This analysis focuses on the influence of the military institution in shaping public attitudes on intervention abroad, contributing to both the elite cue theory literature and the broader study of public support for war in several ways. First, I propose a general theory of military elite cue effects on public opinion formation. Given the high degree of source credibility that military elites have enjoyed over the past several decades, otherwise professionally taboo public appeals issued by these figures will have a substantive effect on public approval, even when issued in contradiction to the public preferences of the president. The central role of source credibility will make these effects robust to different military actors, including retired elites. I further argue that such cues are useful as valuable or surprising

¹Gallup polls in 2017 find that only 27% of the American public expresses high confidence in newspapers, 24% in television news, and just 12% in Congress. Public esteem in the mass media is particularly low among political conservatives, who display broad skepticism or active distrust across the majority of major media outlets in print, television, or radio stations. Frank Newport, “Americans’ Confidence in Institutions Edges Up”, *Gallup*, June 26, 2017. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/212840/americans-confidence-institutions-edges.aspx>; “Political Polarization and Media Habits: From Fox News to Facebook, How Liberals and Conservatives Keep Up with Politics”, Pew Research Center, October 21, 2014.

information for individuals to form preferences on policy, in some cases even confounding partisan expectations by challenging the input of a trusted co-partisan president or making a contra-partisan president's policy seem more acceptable.

Second, I utilize survey experimentation to measure the effect of military elite cues on public support for military intervention. Existing study on military cues have revealed a baseline level of influence with the public on different types of security issues (Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017). I expand the empirical study of elite cuing and military influence by placing these statements in a competitive framework. Competitive designs are particularly useful in probing the susceptibility of individuals in society to elite influences in a high-information environment that is more ecologically representative of the media exposure cue recipients would experience (Paul R. Brewer and Kimberly Gross 2005). However, this design strategy has yet to be widely incorporated into the study of cuing effects. The competitive design allows for studying the impact of military cues within the larger information environment wherein the military voice is not the only one the individual hears. The credibility of the military elite makes such cues likely to remain significant, even when contrary to the stated preferences of their civilian leadership.

Third, I incorporate the level of public trust in a variety of governmental and social institutions in order to better understand the moderating influence of this individual-level characteristic on the potency of elite cues. Source credibility to the individual is a principal theme in the study of elite cue persuasiveness, whether in the form of ideological "like-mindedness" (Downs 1957), elite position (Zaller 1992), or having sufficient incentives to be truthful (Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998). The high and durable levels of public confidence enjoyed by the military should make source-specific credibility a key consideration in understanding their potential effect. As such, I measure public confidence in media, political institutions, and the military in order to further explore whether trust in the institution indeed moderates the effect of military cuing.

This analysis will proceed in the following manner: first, I will discuss the state of relevant empirical efforts in the elite cue literature in order to identify relevant gaps in understanding, deriving testable hypotheses for empirical validation where appropriate. Second, I will introduce the design features and discuss the results of survey experimentation analyzing the influence of military elites on public opinion over proposed military interventions by presidents of both parties. Finally, I will conclude with two structured case study examples of military cuing in practice and propose the next steps in studying military elite influence.

Elite Cues and the Military

Before discussing the potential effects of military elite cues, it is worth noting why these signals might happen at all. The foundational theories in civil-military relations prescribe different philosophies for the role of military elites in democratic systems of government, ranging from a clear division of labor between political and military elites (Huntington 1957) to more synergistic models based on shared values and oversight (Janowitz 1960; Feaver 1998). However, these works find common ground in the assertion that the military owes not just subject matter expertise to political leaders, but institutionalized subordination. Senior military officers are both formally and normatively discouraged from actions or statements that could be construed as subversive of sitting civilian leaders, especially the president as commander-in-chief. Despite being professionally discouraged, military cues on policy may still be issued for a variety of reasons. One explanation comes from understanding the formulation of policy as a bargaining process between civilian decision-makers and the elite advisors they enlist for counsel on complicated issues. E. N. Saunders and Wolford (2016) argue that intra-elite bargaining is essential in foreign-policy formulation, both as a means for developing robust and successful strategies and for co-opting key elites in order to prevent them from publicly signaling against the policy later.

Sufficiently co-opting these elites gives them a vested interest in the policy's success and less ability to publicly appeal on flaws in the policy. Applied to the military context, these

concessions may involve civilian commitments to specific strategies desired by the military elite (Feaver 2011), bureaucratic advancement or promotion (Woodward 2009), or providing increasing resources to the military commensurate with the task. However, a failure to bring these key leaders into the decision-making process in a way that sufficiently mollifies their misgivings or incorporates their preferences can create incentives to seek end-around strategies in order to shape the decision space of the civilian leadership through the public.

Another potential reason for military cuing comes from fundamentally divergent preferences between military and civilian leaders that is exacerbated by bureaucratic factors. Golby (2011) argues that military elites appointed under a different administration or not appointed by the president are likely to have far different foreign policy attitudes than the executive across a range of possible issue domains. Similarly, executives who have inherited the military appointees of a previous administration may be less likely to lend weight to their advice. As a result, civilian leaders may more forcefully push foreign policy or security agendas in spite of contrary military advice in the private sphere, incentivizing military defection in the public sphere in an effort to shape the process.

This focus on divergent preferences, unrestrained by a sense of accountability to a political patron, is particularly important given another source of military elite cues: an increasingly vocal retired military community. These elite figures have generated intense debate on the normative implications of military dissent and the political consequences of former military leaders offering conflicting opinions to sitting political elites (J. K. Dempsey 2009; Owens 2015; Liebert and Golby 2017a). Regardless of the normative propriety of their presence in the political sphere by traditional civil-military relations standards, they present an unstudied and potentially significant empirical puzzle. As I will discuss, this community is worthy of consideration as part of the larger military elite community, as they draw on the same shared pool of institutional credibility as their active duty counterparts.

Bureaucratic patronage or intra-elite bargaining failure present some explanatory insight into why the military elite may issue these public signals at all, despite the proscriptions

against them. Though many civil-military scholars have argued that such political interventions by military elites could degrade the credibility of the larger institution (J. K. Dempsey 2009; Owens 2015; Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017), this does not remove incentives for individual cue-givers to exploit a common pool of clout with the public for short-term gain. Despite strong reason to believe that these types of signals will be influential, the elite cue literature exhibits only a limited empirical accounting of their impact. This is particularly curious given the increasingly public and political role being played by active and retired military elites in government and warrants a more tailored analysis.

Public Opinion and Elite Cues

A considerable effort in political science has sought to understand the dynamic by which the public develops opinions about complex issues. The formative models of public opinion-shaping subscribe to the notion that individuals are unable to efficiently form expert opinions on every issue in the political sphere, resorting instead to the heuristic offered by cues from trusted elites (Zaller 1992; O. Holsti 2004; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993; Druckman 2001). Empirical efforts testing the potency of these cues have explored the influence of partisan leaders (Adam J. Berinsky 2007; Adam J. Berinsky 2009; Baum and Groeling 2009), policy experts (Guisinger and E. N. Saunders 2017), and international institutions (Grieco et al. 2011; Fang 2008; Chapman 2011). This body of work has generally ascribed considerable influence to elite figures in their ability to shape public attitudes on policies or candidate choice through cuing.

In measuring these effects, a principal consideration has been the relative importance of the cue's substance ("the message") against characteristics of the source ("the messenger"). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) identify these two channels as central (where the message's substance is analyzed) and peripheral (where the cue source's credibility is assessed) modes of thinking. This Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) argues that peripheral processing is more likely when the information environment is distracting, the issue under debate complex, and the stakes of the decision impersonal. Given the distant and complex nature of

foreign policy to the individual, we should expect increased reliance on source characteristics when measuring signal persuasiveness. The military's unique position as executor of foreign policy and as an ostensibly trustworthy institution in the public's esteem should posture military elites for considerable influence on such issues.

One of the primary empirical efforts in this vein was conducted by Golby, Feaver, and Dropp (2017) in their analysis of scenario-specific military cuing effects. Across different types of proposed intervention scenarios, they find that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff declaring a public preference can influence opinion by shaping impressions about the operation's legitimacy or probability of success. While they find initial evidence for the potential influence of military elites, this design and its resulting conclusions are limited by several factors. First, the importance of other voices in the policy debate is not sufficiently addressed. Though members of Congress and national security experts are used in parallel experimental conditions, these signals are not put into competition with the military signal; furthermore, the relative influence of the military source is only revealed as significant in one of the proposed scenarios. Second, the design lacks perhaps the most important voice in the discourse regarding military intervention: the president. This is complicated further by the fact that all surveys take place under the Obama administration, which prevents broader conclusions about the influence of military signals in a partisan context. Third, military sources are limited to serving senior military officers making public statements; this precludes the effect of a host of other signaling mechanisms available to military elites – both active and retired – for influencing policy (Risa Brooks 2009). Finally, elite credibility among military sources is not explicitly measured, instead relying on Republican partisan identity as a proxy for ideological like-mindedness with the military.

As I will discuss, I build on this work by including a number of design features that more precisely measure influence patterns among partisans, incorporate a competitive-cue environment more representative of the respondent's information space, factor in the partisan identity of the president, use a broader array of military cue-givers (including retired elites), allow for different transmission mechanisms, and measure individual-level confidence

in the military institution as a potential moderator. However, their research design and initial findings are a critical first step and provide a useful baseline for this analysis, both in attempting to recover the original effects and in allowing for expansion to a more robust experimental design. The state of the art in elite cue theory therefore helps me to structure some guiding hypotheses.

I categorize these hypotheses into three broad groups. The first addresses the influence of military elite cues as they relate to characteristics of the source itself, namely, its credibility. These peripheral mechanisms include the existence of influence effects in the aggregate, the role played by perceived trustworthiness and reliability, and the robustness of cue effects across different types of military sources. These are intended to gauge both the latent political influence of military elites and the importance of source credibility in that process. Second, I propose a set of hypotheses relating the substance of the message to the effectiveness of the elite cue. This test serves to measure the significance of signal direction relative to other voices in the respondent's information space, in this case the president. Finally, I propose a third set of hypotheses designed to analyze the effect of multiple signals on the strength of the military cue. These leverage the competitive cue framework of the design to assess the influence of military elites in a partisan context and demonstrate how military signals may be able to assuage polarization in support for policy across partisan lines.

Source Credibility

The first hypothesis I propose regards the ability of the military source to move public opinion in absolute terms. As previously discussed, cues that originate from credible elites may influence public opinion formation across a range of issues. Given highly-specific subject matter expertise, perceived objectivity, and broad confidence from the public, military elites should be a potentially influential voice in the information space. One should therefore expect military cuing to be persuasive on matters specific to that base of knowledge, such as military intervention. Additionally, military cues may be normatively costly to

transmit given professional imperatives against political activity by representatives of the military institution. For these reasons, policy cues from military elites should be influential to individual-level attitude formation.

- **H1A (Military Influence):** All else equal, public approval for a proposed military intervention will be higher [lower] with supportive [opposing] military cues than without them.

Second, I propose a hypothesis for understanding the role of source credibility by directly considering the perceived reliability of the military elite. Credible sources may serve as a useful gauge for finding one's ideal point policy on issues with which the respondent is unfamiliar, particularly as the issue becomes more complex or distant (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). This credibility is largely understood to be the product of the source's perceived trustworthiness (Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998), expertise (McGuire 1969; Downs 1957; Hovland and Weiss 1951), and ideological or political like-mindedness (Downs 1957; Zaller 1992). Ideological alignment with partisan elites is more easily measured through individual-level partisan identity or political ideology. Though it is harder to measure like-mindedness between the individual and the military than it is with political leaders, I proxy for this connection by measuring the level of institutional trust the respondent expresses in the military establishment.

- **H1B (Confidence in the Military):** The effect of military elite cuing will increase positively with the level of institutional trust the respondent expresses for the military establishment.

Third, in order to further establish the role of source credibility in this process, I test the robustness of source cues across different types of military elites. Military elites operating in this framework have a variety of options to influence the possible decision space of civilian leaders and the mass public (Risa Brooks 2009). In recent decades, one of the most prevalent strategies employed by these figures has been to utilize a high level of public trust in an attempt to "end-around" political decision-makers. Appeals of this sort provide a

potentially potent tactic for military elites to influence policy through the public. However, due to the normative proscriptions against military leaders engaging in such behavior, the larger literature on elite cuing and the mass public has suffered from an incomplete body of research on the effectiveness of these tactics. Testing the relative effect of these different sources serves both to broaden the existing body of knowledge on military cues and to test the robustness of military source cues across different strategies. I briefly discuss the nature of these strategies and propose a third hypothesis regarding the importance of source credibility by different military sources.

Deliberate Statements

Most directly, serving military elites can influence the public discourse by making speaking or writing through conventional media outlets. Risa Brooks (2009) captures this option in her typology of domestic political strategies for the military elite, distinguishing public appeals from the normal disclosure of military counsel by (1) its public nature and (2) its outright endorsement or admonishment of a proposed policy alternative. This tactic has seen wider use in the form of speeches, op-eds, and interviews to the media that place the imprimatur of military elite support or opposition on particular policies. General Colin Powell's letter to the editor of the *New York Times* and article in *Foreign Policy* in 1992 opposing the contemplated intervention in Bosnia placed the enterprise in serious doubt in the final month of a contentious presidential campaign.² Though Brooks does not consider Congressional testimony a true example of a public appeal, General Eric Shinseki's testimony in the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq War that subverted the White House's war plans for the invasion was both a public signal and one of decided policy opposition.

Public appeals are easiest to employ, as senior military officers interact with conventional media outlets on a regular basis. However, the visibility of these cues can present trade-offs to their effectiveness. The first is that concurrence may be indistinguishable from

²Colin H. Powell, "Why generals get nervous", *The New York Times*, October 8, 1992; Colin Powell, "U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead", *Foreign Affairs* 71, No. 5, (Winter 1992-93), pgs. 32-45.

independent judgment when public cues are in accord with civilian-led policy, such as General David Petraeus' 2004 *Washington Post* editorial supporting the ongoing strategy in Iraq or Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster's 2017 *Wall Street Journal* editorial advocating the Trump administration's "America First" foreign policy.³ When civilian and military cues are in alignment, individuals may simply surmise that this is the public reflection of some private sphere bargaining process or coordination. Political leaders are likely to have co-opted the military into the decision-making process outside the public eye and little "surprising information" is disclosed by both elite groups espousing the same position. More simply, because of the professional expectation of military support to the civilian leadership, concurrent military cues may simply reflect a fulfillment of this supportive role. However, they can also present an implicit statement about cost, likelihood of success, and feasibility; supportive comments by senior military officials can provide comfort to those with interventionist preferences but uncertain opinions about a specific case.

Prepared statements, interviews, or articles have a high probability of being received by the public and enjoying wide media circulation. As a result, there is a higher probability that the signal will be received by a broader audience among the public. However, the second potential effect of this openness is that the signal's influence may be limited, particularly among active duty officers, if the public perceives that any statements made by such figures are screened beforehand. Powell's public remarks on the 1992 Bosnia debate were highly publicized and ignited considerable debate about the limits of appropriate military influence, although he has since remarked that these comments were permitted by the Department of Defense before their release (C. Powell 2003). This is not always the case, however, and public statements can also trigger a wider dialogue over the merits of civilian-led policy. During the air campaign in Kosovo in 1999, outspoken ground invasion proponent General Wesley Clark was asked by the press to gauge the success of the air war on Serbian forces. Clark, who had been marginalized by other senior defense officials for his views on the necessity of a ground operation, offered that "without being there on

³David H. Petraeus, "Battling for Iraq", *The Washington Post*, September 26, 2004; H.R. McMaster and Gary D. Cohn, "America First Doesn't Mean America Alone", *The Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2017.

the ground, it's very difficult to give reliable information", a subtle attempt to 'box in' the Clinton administration's policy space.⁴

Media Leaks

Communicating cues to the public need not utilize traditional transmission channels. As noted previously, prepared statements and conventional media use may theoretically limit the effectiveness of the cue in certain circumstances. A potentially potent tactic also available to military elites, specifically active-duty officers, is to allow private information to be acquired by or leaked to the press in an effort to circumvent normal decision-making channels. There are several reasons to believe media leaking or private information 'spillage' can be effective. First, public opposition to such tactics on normative grounds has weakened over time. While Golby, L. Cohn, and Feaver (2016) find that leaking information in response to "unwise orders" is considered the least legitimate response by the public, approval of this tactic has increased four-fold since 1998 across both veteran and civilian elements of the mass public.

Second, the release of classified or private information should be an inherently useful elite signal to the public in their attitude formation regarding policy. Given the newsworthiness of unauthorized information seizures, third-party "doxing" activities, and staff-level leaking of private information, it is reasonable to argue that this type of signal can be highly influential because it lacks the impression of pre-approval that deliberate statements might carry. The private nature of the message instead heightens the "surprising" nature of the information and increase its perceived credibility. Through this mechanism, the public can be exposed to information about misgivings held by military elites over the feasibility, cost, and likely duration of a conflict.

Targeted leaks of private information can be a potent tool for military leaders seeking

⁴Clark's comments were reported in the press as an indication that the air campaign was not succeeding. He was privately reprimanded by Secretary of Defense William Cohen and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Hugh Shelton for knowingly using the public as a way to advance the ground invasion agenda. The service chiefs and key Clinton administration officials were "starkly unsupportive" of Clark's subsequent attempts to push the issue. Peter Boyer, "General Clark's Battles", *The New Yorker*, November 17, 2003.

to shape policy. An example of this tactic in practice was the release of internal documentation detailing General Stanley McChrystal's troop level recommendations to the Obama administration in 2009. The headquarters staff in Afghanistan, concerned with a potentially unfunded mandate to achieve rapid success there, sought to shape the decision space of the newly-elected Obama administration by pushing for a "surge" influx of additional forces. Finding themselves "boxed in" by the leak, the White House approved the Afghan "surge" in accordance with a proposed military course of action (Rosa Brooks 2016). Signals of this type similarly carry the imprimatur of military source credibility while providing "surprising" or private information that the public would not see otherwise.⁵

Retired Community Influence

One aspect of analyzing the influence of the larger military establishment that has been largely unstudied is that of the retired community. Though some theoretical frameworks for military signals include consideration of retired senior military officers in the endorsement of major political candidates (Risa Brooks 2009), there has been little empirical analysis of their potential influence in shaping policy through signaling and public appeals. In order to account for this gap in the elite cue literature and to provide a more complete theory of this specific elite community, I incorporate the influence of retired military elites into the empirical strategy of this analysis. There are several reasons to believe that this community warrants inclusion in the study of elite cuing.

First, retired officers are increasingly present in the public sphere as cue givers, whether as security analysts for major media outlets or as independent subject matter experts. Over several administrations, retired military officers have engaged in public criticism, advocacy,

⁵Controlled leaks have a long history that pre-dates modern technology for distribution. In January 1950, General Douglas MacArthur allowed the release of classified State Department briefing materials predicting an urgent threat to the island of Taiwan in response to the "appeasement" policy adopted by President Truman and Dean Acheson. While this was seen by many as an attempt by MacArthur to support Republican allies in Congress and facilitate a future presidential run, the incident contributed to the increasingly confrontational relationship between Truman and MacArthur that would result in one of the most notable civil-military clashes in US history during the Korean War and MacArthur's relief from duty. Callum A. MacDonald, *Korea: The War before Vietnam*, MacMillan Press Ltd.; London, UK, (1986), 21.

or activism on issues such as security strategy in Iraq, Syria, and North Korea,⁶ the allocation of the federal budget,⁷ and policies governing the open service of homosexual or transgender individuals, torture, and relations with the media.⁸ The increased popularity of such figures as media commentators or analysts has made retired military influence an increasingly ubiquitous feature of the information landscape, especially given the additional platforms afforded to military elites by social media (Urban 2017).

Second, retired officers draw on the same shared pool of institutional credibility as the active officer corps. In this way, retired military officers issue cues from the same position as the active military, but with a less pressing normative proscription against speaking publicly. Recent study into the impact of retired officials drawing on this credibility pool has concerned scholars and policy-makers alike, for fear that such repeated interference may actually degrade the integrity of the wider military institution (Kohn 2002; J. K. Dempsey 2009; Owens 2015).⁹ Appearances by retired officers in major party conventions during the 2016 presidential campaign earned admonishments from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey that “generals and admirals are generals and admirals for life”.¹⁰ The importance of high source credibility among retired officers even after they have left the military has become more salient in light of increasingly numerous and high-profile appointments of retired military officers to key bureaucratic positions in government (P. Carter et al. 2016).

⁶On Syria: Robert H. Scales, “U.S. military planners don’t support war with Syria”, *The Washington Post*, September 5, 2013. On Iraq: David Cloud and Eric Schmitt, “More Retired Generals Call for Rumsfeld’s Resignation”, *The New York Times*, April 14, 2004. On North Korea: Anna Fifield, “Retired military leaders urge Trump to choose words, not action, to deal with North Korea”, *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2017.

⁷On the federal budget: Dan Lamothe, “Retired generals cite past comments from Mattis while opposing Trump’s proposed foreign aid cuts”, *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2017.

⁸On media relations: Kristine Phillips, “‘Greatest threat to democracy’: Commander of bin Laden raid slams Trump’s anti-media sentiment”, *The Washington Post*, February 24, 2017. On torture: Michael D. Shear, Nicholas Fandos, and Jennifer Steinhauer, “Trump Asks Critic of Vaccines to Lead Vaccine Safety Panel”, *The New York Times*, January 10, 2017. On LGBT service policy: Chris Kenning, “Retired military officers slam Trump’s proposed transgender ban”, *Reuters*, August 1, 2017 and John M. Shalikashvili, “Second Thoughts on Gays in the Military”, *The New York Times*, January 2, 2007.

⁹Admiral Michael Mullen, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, directly authored a warning to military servicemembers in the publication *Joint Force Quarterly* not to “wear our politics on our sleeves”. Michael G. Mullen, “From the Chairman: Military Must Stay Apolitical”, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Iss. 50, 3rd Quarter, 2008.

¹⁰*National Public Radio*, “Gen. Dempsey To Fellow Officers: Stay Off the Political Battlefield”, August 3, 2016.

These different signal mechanisms – deliberate statements, undisclosed leaks, and retired elites – reflect the wide variation in military elite sources to which the individual may be exposed when acquiring information and forming policy attitudes. Whereas the previous hypotheses explore the magnitude of military elite influence and the role of institutional confidence on that same influence, I also argue that this effect is largely consistent across different types of military sources. Given that a military identity is the constant feature across these different sources, this third hypothesis provides an opportunity for further evidence of source credibility’s central role in military elite influence.

- **H1C (Consistency of Military Influence):** The effect of the military cue will be robust across different types of military sources, including active duty, undisclosed, or retired elites.

Collectively, this first set of hypotheses speaks directly to the importance of source credibility on individual-level receptiveness to military elite cues. It first tests whether such elites can have an effect on support levels for a given policy (H1A); this effort reflects past empirical designs measuring military elite influence in the context of the elite-cue literature. However, I also explore the role of peripheral processing and the importance of source-specific characteristics in this process by measuring the moderating effect of institutional confidence (H1B) and the robustness of the military cue across different strategies (H1C).

Signal Direction

The second set of hypotheses regards how the cue’s substantive direction might influence the public on its own. Much of elite cue theory includes the assertion that individuals in society may lend special weight to cues that are deemed surprising information or counter to the perceived preferences of the cue source. Elite communities with stated preferences on particular issues provide little new information by supporting those positions. However, when partisan leaders or other elites issue cues that are counter-to-type or costly, these cues

can be particularly informative to individuals, even if the individual does not share ideological alignment with the source (Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998). This dynamic is identified by Baum and Groeling (2009), who find that costly and “credible communication” – such as criticism of the president from a co-partisan – is far more influential to the public than unsurprising, expected, or “cheap talk”.¹¹

Applied to the case of military elites, such surprising information may be the military advocating for a policy believed to be counter to its core preferences or interests. Considerable study in understanding military elite policy preferences argues that senior military officials are often politically realist and conservative in the use of force, preferring those efforts which allow for the overwhelming use of force within clearly defined objectives (Huntington 1957; Petraeus 1989; Vertzberger 1998). This comes in contrast to humanitarian interventions, asymmetric conflict, or “military operations other than war” (MOOTW), to which the military has been ascribed a pathological avoidance in light of past experiences with such operations (Wittkopf 1990; Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017). This perceived preference for conventional conflicts is likely not lost on the mass public. Indeed, survey polling on attitudes towards limited or asymmetric operations has found that only a small minority of Americans believe that these interventions align with the military’s structure and capacity.¹² As such, military cues in support of such policies may be substantively more influential compared to those advocating for traditional armed interventions:

¹¹Kriner and Howell (2008) similarly demonstrate that the trustworthiness of the cue is a product of the source’s ideological alignment with the receiver, while its costliness comes from the source issuing a cue that is seemingly against its predicted direction. Kriner and Howell (2008) study this dynamic within the context of support for the Iraq War. “Trusted” cues, for example, were those issued by Republican politicians to Republican receivers. “Costly” cues were those that ran counter to expectation, such as a Republican politician issuing a cue against the war. Cues that are both “trusted” and “costly” would exhibit both qualities, such as a Democrat offering support for the war to a Democratic individual.

¹²Schake and Mattis (2016) found in their 2013 YouGov poll measuring civil-military attitudes that only 8% of respondents believed that “modern wars are winnable and our military is winning them”. This is in contrast to the 34% who believed that “modern wars are winnable, but civilian policy decisions prevent the military from winning”, the 19% who agreed that such wars are generally “unwinnable”, and the 11% who believed that the wars are “winnable, but our military hasn’t figured out how to win them”

- **H2A (Counter-to-Type Preferences):** Military cues that are counter-to-type – advocating a surprising policy preference – will be more effective than those advocating for traditional military preferences.

Insofar as the message’s substance is concerned, H2A asserts that it is this direction of the policy prescription relative to the organization’s preferences that largely determines the cue’s influence. However, the military’s “type” need not be defined solely as a product of policy preferences, but also from the organizational standards that govern its professional conduct. More specifically, I argue that an aspect of the military type is also restraint against oppositional cues that contradict the commander-in-chief’s preferences. As a result, statements or actions that violate this long-held norm should be considered costly and informative. Whereas the *counter-to-type preferences* hypothesis looks to the policy itself for surprising information, this argument focuses on the cue’s direction relative to the stated preferences of the executive. I propose H2B to address this potential explanation:

- **H2B (Costly Signaling):** Military cues that are professionally costly – issued in contradiction to public executive preferences – will be more effective than those issued in concurrence with the executive.

This set of hypotheses speaks to the substance of the message itself and generates several testable implications. If military elite influence is high conditional on the intervention type under debate, there is stronger evidence for counter-to-type calculations (H2A) among the public. Military advocacy for a seemingly difficult or undesired policy (or opposition to a more traditional intervention) would therefore present a substantively more informative signal. However, if cue direction relative to the president’s preferences (H2B) is more significant, its strength depends instead on whether they are supportive or oppositional in nature.

Effect of Multiple Signals

The third set of hypotheses I propose addresses the effect of multiple signals on the influence of the military elite cue. As I will discuss, another advantage of my empirical design is the

competitive structure, allowing for the incorporation of individual-level characteristics like partisanship in understanding the influence of military elites. While both partisan and military cues have been shown to have an independent effect on attitude formation, the strength of that influence in a partisan environment with competing voices has yet to be explored. This dynamic is of considerable interest in situations where the information is expected to have the least effect: does military opposition degrade support among co-partisans? Does military concurrence increase support among contra-partisans?

Analysis of these competitive cues again speaks to the importance of source-specific characteristics of the military elite. With exposure to multiple cues, the individual is forced to weigh the relative credibility of the sources when rendering an expressed opinion. Recent polling on the prospect of military intervention reveals the potentially wide disparity in public confidence between different voices in the debate, most notably the president and the military.¹³ Whether partisan political cues or military elite cues maintain a residual effect after considering the other is unclear, though there are theoretical reasons to support either case. Across the elite-driven politics literature, the effect of partisan resistance or “motivated reasoning” plays a significant role; partisans may attend to co-partisan preferences while downplaying contradictory information (Zaller 1992; Taber and Lodge 2006). However, military elites may present an objectively credible source of information, potentially tempering partisan biases or providing substantive policy cues. Accordingly, I propose the following hypotheses testing the effect of military cues in this partisan context:

- **H3A (Oppositional Effect Among Co-Partisans):** Military elite cues that are oppositional will decrease support for a policy advocated by a co-partisan president.

¹³A September 18-21, 2017 Washington Post/ABC News Poll probed public attitudes on a potential preemptive strike on North Korea by US military forces in response to escalating rhetoric over the North Korean nuclear program. When asked who they “trust to handle North Korea responsibly”, 72% of respondents answered “US military leaders”, compared to only 37% who answered President Donald Trump. Confidence in the president was highly divided along partisan lines; in addition, expressed confidence between the two entities was highly polarized, with 42% of respondents expressing no trust at all in the president and 43% trusting the military “a great deal”. Scott Clement and Philip Rucker, “Poll: Far more trust generals than Trump on N. Korea, while two-thirds oppose preemptive strike”, *The Washington Post*, September 24, 2017.

- **H3B (Supportive Effect Among Contra-Partisans):** Military elite cues that are supportive will increase support for a policy advocated by a contra-partisan president.

There are several testable implications of these hypotheses. If military cues in support of a policy advocated by a president who does not share a partisan identity with the respondent, this would indeed present evidence for the strength of the military signal. Rather than ignore the information, this would indicate that individuals instead expended more cognitive resources in addressing the dissonance it presents and updated their impressions of the policy. Similarly, the preservation of oppositional cue effects in co-partisan respondent-president dyads suggests that not only do military elites have an independent political influence, but one that remains relevant even after considering strong co-partisan voices. Individuals presented with oppositional military signals can also choose to either ignore the information or allow it to update their support for the policy. While the former suggests that partisan bias or resistance takes precedence, the latter is evidence for the robustness of military influence amidst competing voices from a trusted political source.

Collectively, these three groups of hypotheses approach the latent political influence of military elites from several different perspectives. The first analyzes the role of source credibility on the effectiveness of military cues: whether this influence exists at all, its conditionality on perceived reliability, and its robustness to different types of military sources. The second assesses which aspects of the message's substance are most significant, its direction relative to the preferences of civilian leaders or its content relative to the military's own preferences. The last set of hypotheses tests the durability of these cues in a partisan context, specifically evaluating whether such signals can influence individual attitudes against the expected direction.

Research Design

In order to test these various sets of hypotheses regarding persuasiveness and military cueing, I employ a survey experiment with unique design features. The survey was fielded to

a nationally-representative opt-in panel and was designed to measure the effect of military elite cuing on proposed armed intervention policies.¹⁴ The design incorporates competitive cue environments and explicit assignment of presidential partisan identity, including variation in the transmission mechanism of military elite cues, building on initial empirical findings from Golby, Feaver, and Dropp (2017). After the standard demographic battery and randomized assignment, respondents were asked to read and offer an opinion on a short news story detailing a proposed military intervention being considered by the United States, the substance of which varied along two dimensions.

The first dimension varied the president’s partisan identity as either a Democrat or Republican.¹⁵ In all conditions, the president advocates support for the proposed policy. The second dimension varied the nature of military influence as either silence (*control*), a supportive signal (*support*), or an oppositional signal. Supportive signals came in the form of a statement to the press by an active-duty senior military commander in the region. Oppositional signals came in one of three possible forms: a statement by an active-duty officer similar to the *support* condition (*oppositional statement*), a leaked internal memorandum from the regional military headquarters (*oppositional leak*), or cable news commentary from a retired senior military commander (*oppositional retired*). Military signals differed only in transmission mechanisms and direction, offering no governing logic for support or opposition.

The resulting structure yields a 2x5 factorial design with 10 possible experimental conditions. Respondents were assigned to one of these conditions, asked to read the corresponding vignette, and subsequently provided their level of agreement with pursuing the proposed policy, which was randomly presented as either a humanitarian or conventional military intervention.¹⁶ After measurement of their support for this policy, respondents receiving

¹⁴The survey was conducted with the firm YouGov in December 2016 using online survey questionnaires to a opt-in survey panel of 1,000 respondents. Specific wording of the questionnaire and format of news articles can be found in the Appendix.

¹⁵The timing of the survey occurred during the post-election period in 2016, providing a rare window where both partisan identities could be realistically projected onto the presidency, given the party switch that would occur the following month.

¹⁶Respondents offered support on a five-point scale (“strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “neither agree nor

either vignette were re-randomized into a new treatment condition and asked to read and provide their level of support for the other scenario. Each respondent therefore went through random assignment, news story exposure, and approval measurement twice, with the order of the scenario's presentation randomized.

The design is structured to provide information in a competitive environment. In all conditions, the president was on record as being in support of a potential intervention, with the partisan identity of the president randomized between the two major parties. A completely symmetrical design would include a dimension in which the president publicly opposed the intervention; however, in order to preserve both statistical power and ecological realism, this dimension is not included, as it is less likely that the president would actively campaign *against* an intervention. The format of the vignette and the randomization of partisan identity were chosen for several reasons. First, the information was formatted in order to best replicate the manner in which many Americans actually consume news media, in short news summaries rather than in long substantive articles. Second, the president was assigned a randomized party identity in order to allow for analysis of partisan alignment between individuals and the president on cue effectiveness. The resulting design provides numerous avenues to test the hypotheses of this analysis and investigate the influence of military elites in a political context.

disagree", "agree", "strongly agree"). In the conventional scenario, the news story depicts a small former Soviet state as the victim of increased aggression from Russia as border skirmishes and mobilization threaten the country. The country has positive relations with the United States, but no formal alliance; such comparable cases include Russian interventions in Georgia (2008) and the Ukraine (2014), where US military intervention was at least contemplated if not pursued. In the humanitarian condition, the news story reflects an authoritarian regime clashing with protesters as domestic resistance to the regime breaks into violence. Analogous cases where such events occurred and US military intervention was contemplated or executed include Syria (2013), Libya (2011), Bosnia (1996), and Kosovo (1999). Additionally, respondents were asked as part of the demographic battery to rate their level of confidence in a random-ordered display of social and political institutions, including Congress, television news, the Presidency, newspapers, and the military. This question utilized Gallup's formulation of their "Confidence in Institutions" poll conducted annually. The question asked is "I am going to read you a list of institutions in American society. Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in each one – a great deal, quite a lot, some, very little, or none at all?" The most recent national response for confidence in the military institution in June 2016 was 73% in the top two blocks. The sample for this experiment was substantially lower at 55%, making this sample a 'hard case' for recovering effects given the lower overall confidence in the military establishment *Gallup*, "Confidence in Institutions", <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>

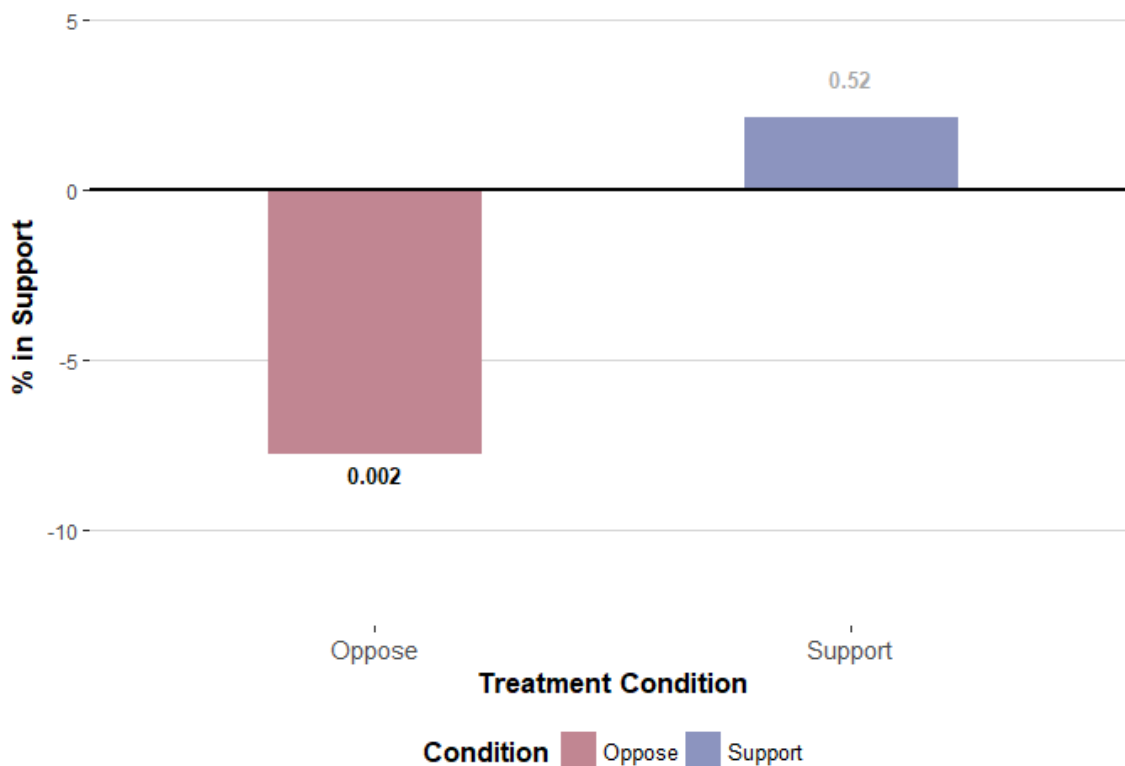
Data Analysis and Findings

Aggregate Cue Effects

The initial results of the experiment confirm that military signals do influence public opinion in the aggregate. Figure 2.1 displays the change in aggregate levels of public approval compared to the control condition, given respondent treatment conditions and pooling over both scenarios. Most notable is the suppressive effects of military opposition to public support. The mean support level among the public drops considerably between the support (+2%) and opposition (-8%) conditions. Conditional on the military weighing in on the debate, the direction of military influence creates a 10 percentage-point swing in support among the public. These initial findings resemble the response patterns observed by Golby, Feaver, and Dropp (2017) and bear out the central claim of H1A, with effects being recovered while pooling across both partisan assignments of the president, the different treatment conditions of military cues, and any respondent characteristics ¹⁷

The effect of military cues observed in Figure 2.1 is in line with one of the central arguments of this analysis; namely, that information provided by military elites is useful to individual attitude formation in a political context. While this does not yet allow for inference about the role of source credibility, it is noteworthy that such effects were achieved through mere endorsement/opposition to the policy. The structure of the experiment and the design of the news vignettes and military cues isolates the effect to characteristics of the source; because the wording of the cue is held constant, we have reason to believe that any resulting variation in effect size is the result of the source's perceived reliability or expertise. While this suggests that source credibility is a potentially important function in determining the effect of military cues, analysis of the following two hypotheses will more directly measure this argument.

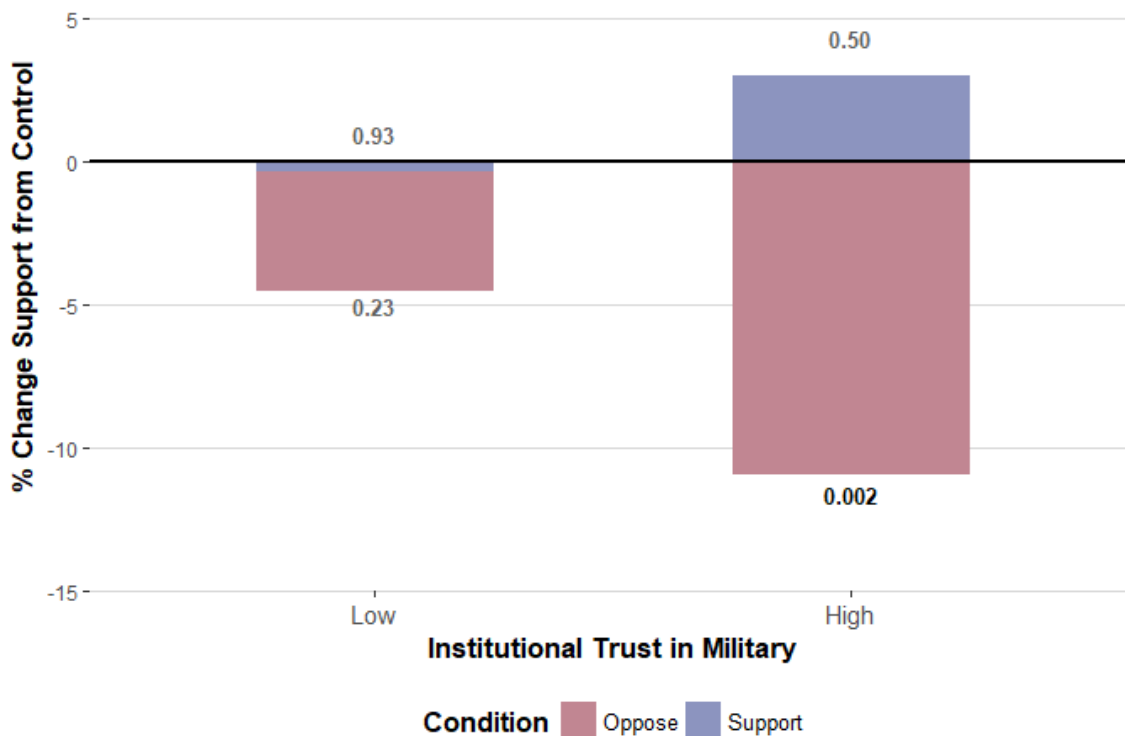
¹⁷The significance of the treatment condition is reflected in Table 2.5 and 2.6 in the Appendix, which captures the results of a logistic regression model using a binary indicator variable for approval of the policy. The treatment condition for oppositional cuing remains substantively and statistically significant across base and fully-specified models, which include controlling for respondent gender, education, partisan identification, political ideology, and the partisan identity of the president. The results are robust to an alternative model using ordered logistics regression and similar covariates.

Figure 2.1: Public Support for Interventions by Treatment Condition

Note: This figure reports the change in support for proposed military intervention, pooling across both intervention scenarios. Individual responses were recoded as a binary variable for support for the intervention if they answered “strongly agree” or “agree” to the policy, and 0 if otherwise. The “Support” treatment condition reflects those respondents assigned to military cues in support of the policy, where “Oppose” reflects those respondents assigned to any of the conditions where military cues were issued in opposition. Reported figures display p-values for two-tailed t-test for difference in means between treatment and control conditions. $N_{SUPPORT} + N_{OPPOSE} = 1579$.

Confidence in Military Institution

How is this effect moderated by expressed trust in the source? In order to allow for further investigation of the effect of source credibility on how these military cues are being internalized, respondents were asked a part of the demographic battery to provide their level of confidence in several political and social institutions, using the same question format as the annual Gallup survey for trust in government. Respondents were asked for this measure of

Figure 2.2: Effect of Oppositional Cues by Institutional Confidence

Note: This figure reports the effects of military cues based on respondent-level confidence in the military institution across both scenarios. Respondents were characterized as “high” trust if they responded “quite a lot” or “a great deal” to the confidence measurement question and “low” trust if otherwise. Reported *p*-values denote significance in two-sided *t*-test for difference in means between treatment condition and control condition. $N=1564$. Among high confidence individuals, $N_{Dem}=414$, $N_{Rep}=498$; among low confidence individuals, $N_{Dem}=468$, $N_{Rep}=184$.

confidence for print newspapers, television news sources, the presidency, Congress, and the military. I use this measure to assess the validity of H1B, that public trust and confidence in the institution relates positively to cue persuasiveness.

I collapse the five-point confidence scale into a binary categorization for *high* and *low* confidence in the military as an institution, with the former including those who responded with “a great deal” or “quite a lot” to the confidence question. Using this respondent attribute, I re-assess the magnitude of military elite cues based on this characteristic among

individuals. Figure 2.2 displays the relative influence of both signal types in both low-confidence and high-confidence subsets. Individuals exhibiting greater skepticism or distance from the military institution were, across both scenario types, far less influenced by the military signal when forming intervention attitudes. However, high-confidence individuals in the sample were more susceptible to military cuing on average; this is particularly true for oppositional cues for which the magnitude of the effect is nearly three times that in the low-confidence group.

This finding seems to lend increased support for the argument that source credibility matters when considering military elite cues (H1B). Trust in the institution visibly moderates the effect size of the signal, though the substantive information provided by the oppositional cue remains more powerful. A principal finding of Golby, Feaver, and Dropp (2017) is that military elite cues are generally more influential among Republicans. These results suggest a more precise characterization is that cues are most persuasive among those with pronounced confidence in the institution. However, the basic assertion that Republicans are more likely to be in the high-trust condition was also validated. Republicans in the survey largely expressed high confidence in the institution (73%), compared to a comparably lower rate among Democrats (46%). Across the entire sample, 55% of respondents expressed high confidence in the military; within this group, 46% identified as Republicans and 37% as Democrats.¹⁸ While confidence in this regard is more tightly correlated with Republican identification, the broader inclusion of the trust metric reveals that even Democrats can be moved by such cues if they trust the source.

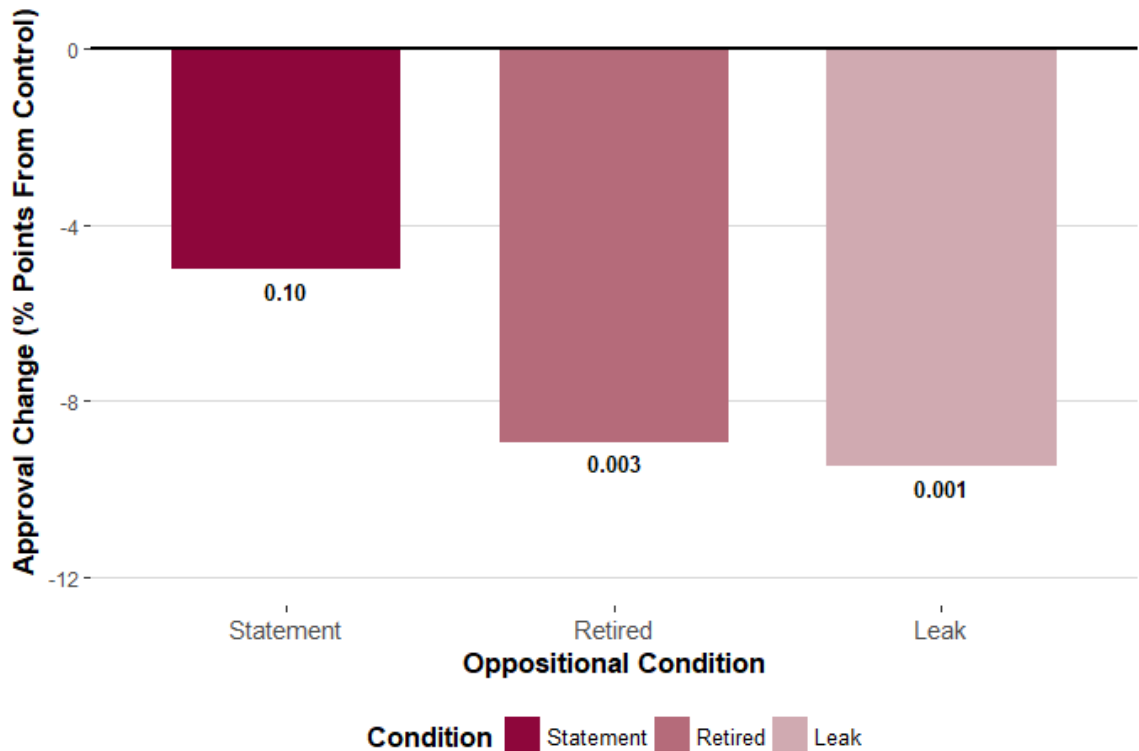
¹⁸Compared to the actual Gallup polls conducted in the previous year (2016), this 55% figure is low compared to the nationally-recorded level of 73%. Newport, 2017. Given the role of expressed confidence in cue persuasion established here, this has the effect of biasing my treatment effect downwards. As such, it is reasonable to believe that a more representative sample with higher levels of expressed confidence in the military would have exhibited even larger treatment effects in response to military cuing.

Robustness of Effects to Different Forms

The third test of the role of source-specific characteristics in this process is the robustness of this effect across different types of military sources. Another unique feature of the survey design was the random assignment of different cue transmission mechanisms; while the different oppositional cue strategies have been quantitatively collapsed thus far, exploring the impact of each in turn provides more insight into how source credibility plays a central role in military influence. Respondents in the oppositional cue condition received either a prepared op-ed from an active senior military commander, a leaked internal memorandum obtained by the press, or a television interview with a retired senior military commander. The predictions of H1C suggest that the effect size should remain statistically and substantively significant across mechanisms, the relevant constant among them being the military identity of the source.

Figure 2.3 depicts these changes in support for intervention in response to different military source cues. Across both scenarios, we observe that all oppositional cues are substantively able to suppress public approval for the policy on their own. Active-duty op-ed statements seem to be the least dramatic in terms of negative influence, depressing public support by roughly 5 percentage points from the control condition. The reduced effect is potentially the product of the more deliberate cue transmission process discussed earlier, in which the assumption of pre-approval by government officials may render them less “surprising”. The media leak strategy was more effective, suppressing public approval by nearly 10 percentage points across both scenarios. These results seem to support the notion that military source credibility combined with private information makes for a potent signal.

Finally, the retired military community displays similar influence among the public in shaping attitudes. The receipt of an oppositional cue from a retired senior military commander suppressed public approval by nearly 11 percentage points across both scenarios. Consistently, retired military elites were able to shape public support for the policy as much or more substantively than their active duty counterparts in both scenarios, indicating that

Figure 2.3: Public Support by Opposition Strategy

Note: This figure reports the effects of oppositional military cue conditions across both conventional and humanitarian scenarios. “Statement”, “Retired”, and “Leak” labels indicate approval levels for those respondents assigned to the deliberate statement, retired commentary, or media leak experimental conditions, respectively. Reported figures display p-values for two-tailed t-test for difference in means between treatment and control conditions. Total oppositional cue sample N=1191.

this community is indeed drawing on a shared credibility pool, while less constrained by norms of public silence on policy. Though they have not been incorporated into past empirical design strategies, these results not only validate the importance of military credibility, but also the increasingly ubiquitous role of retired elites in public attitude formation.

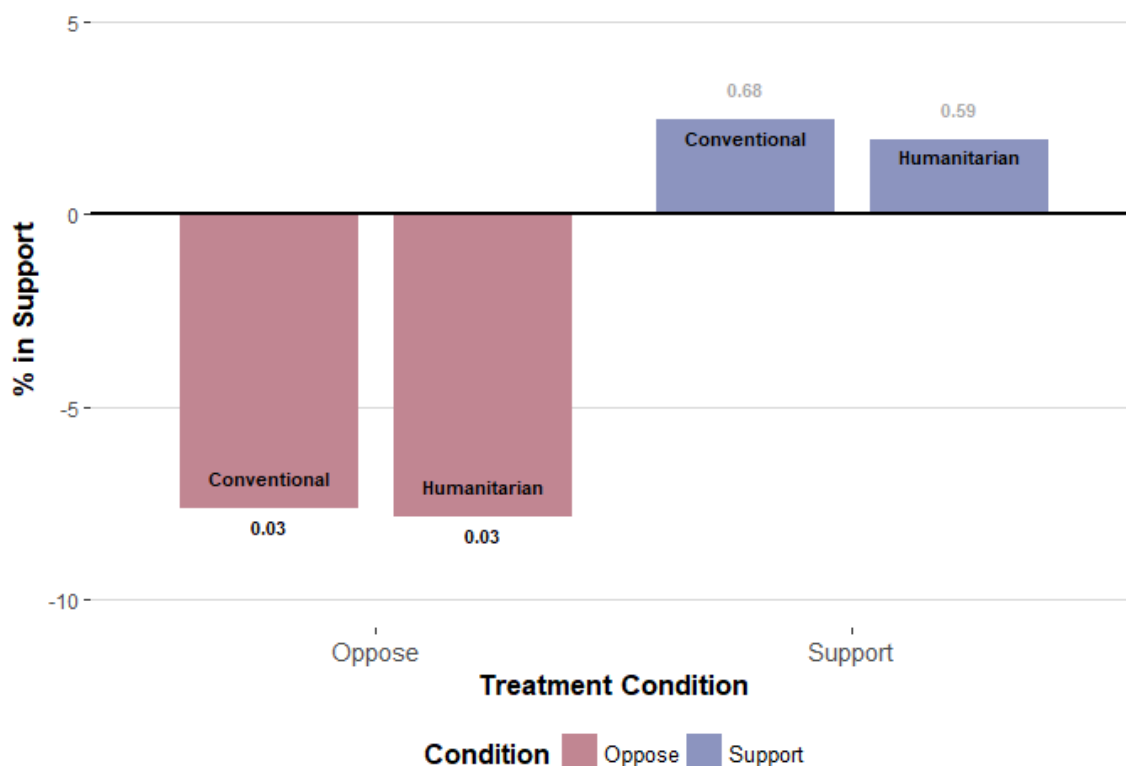
The results indicate strong support for the predictions of H1C. While the different military source results are statistically indistinguishable from each other, they individually maintain statistical significance, indicating the strength of military oppositional cues to different types of sources. Allowing for variation in the specific military cue-giver’s status and

transmission mechanism more broadly demonstrates the robustness of military elite cues; the most crucial characteristic held constant across all conditions is the military identification of the messenger. Future study should consider the relative influence of potential strategies not tested here, such as compelled governmental testimony or collective action by blocs of retired officers. More specific to our purposes, the positive support for H1A-C demonstrates the critical function that source credibility provides in the effectiveness of military elite cues on public opinion.

Signal Direction and Influence

The importance of source credibility does not necessarily negate the substance of the message itself and the information such signals provide. While the cue in my experimental design contains no substantive argumentation, its direction relative to organizational preferences (H2A) or presidential preferences (H2B) may be inherently informative given their respective costs. Figure 2.4 displays the approval patterns among all respondents by intervention scenario. Immediately observable is the congruent distribution of attitudes across treatment conditions between component scenarios and the general trend depicted in Figure 2.1. This conveys a consistency between both conventional and humanitarian interventions; despite vastly different dimensions of cost, probability of success, and baseline approval, the influence of supportive and oppositional cues across both is remarkably similar. The fact that the oppositional cues were effective in both scenarios bears out H2B, as the constant condition across both is open military disagreement with stated presidential preferences. Military support to a humanitarian intervention should have constituted “surprising” preferences by the military establishment according to H2A; as such, it would have predicted that the supportive cue condition of the humanitarian scenario should have elicited much more support. Instead, we observe that contradicting the executive in this competitive framework has more value to the respondent in either scenario.

The substantive value of oppositional cues, revealed by this part of the results, is significant. Military elites offering contrary signals to the commander-in-chief may be providing

Figure 2.4: Public Support for Interventions by Scenario

Note: This figure reports the scenario-specific changes in support for proposed military interventions. Individual responses were recoded as a binary variable for support for the intervention if they answered “strongly agree” or “agree” to the policy, and 0 if otherwise. The “Support” treatment condition reflects those respondents assigned to military cues in support of the policy, where “Oppose” reflects those respondents assigned to any of the conditions where military cues were issued in opposition. Reported figures display p-values for two-tailed t-test for difference in means between treatment and control conditions. Control (N=208, N=213), Support (N=198, N=190), Opposition (N=594, N=597).

updated information about cost or probability of success to the public, degrading confidence in the policy’s potential outcome. These signals may indicate to the public that the elite community charged with policy formulation and policy execution – the president and military, respectively – have divergent attitudes about the same scenario. This uncertainty could influence individual level calculations about whether to support the policy. The substantive value of the oppositional cue is likely heightened due to the costliness of conveying it; as stated previously, perceived professional or institutional costs to the military in issuing such a contrary signal could imbue the signal with greater informational value.

Though the precise pathway is not identified in this design, one observation worth noting is that oppositional cues are likely given influence because of the unique position of the military institution in society. Whether as a statement about elite discord and the potential prospects of the intervention, or as the result of normative costliness for issuing the statement at all, both mechanisms include attributes of the military elite as critical considerations. Military elites, particularly active-duty figures, are therefore powerfully positioned to influence public support through dissent with policy due to their position in the national security structure and in the public's esteem. These findings suggest that civilian decision-makers risk potential damage to a public base of support for intervention by not suitably co-opting military preferences.

Military Cues in a Partisan Context

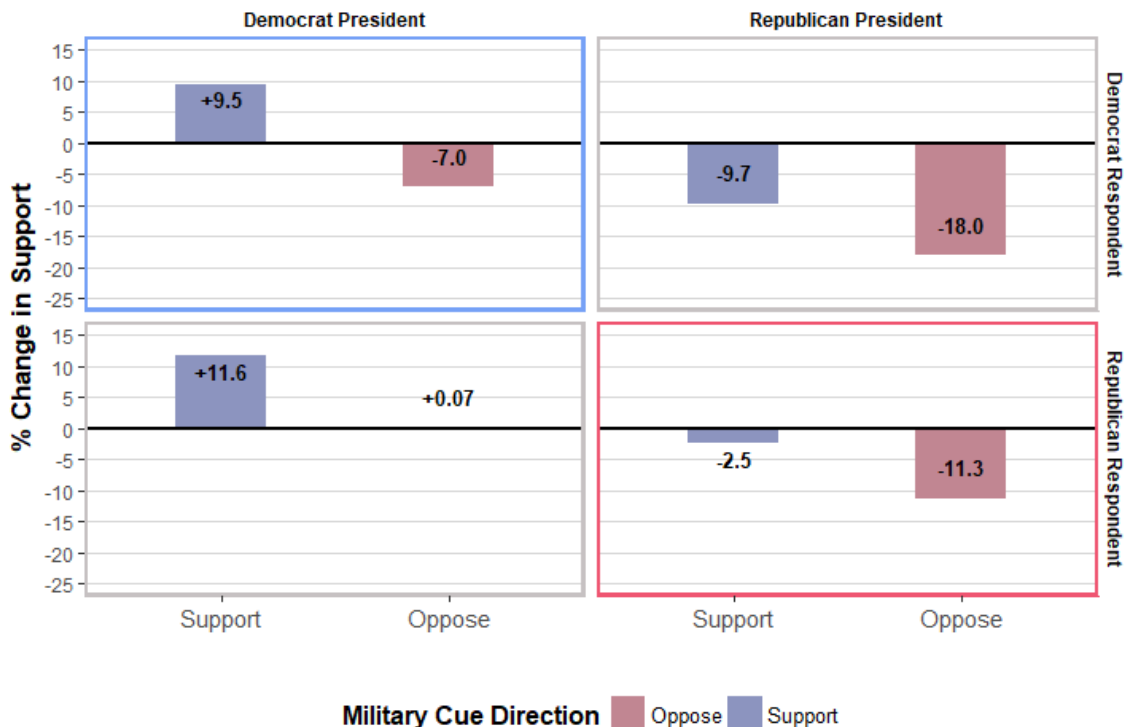
Generally, we find that cues offered by the military prove influential in shaping public approval for military intervention. Additionally, there is strong evidence to suggest that it is the credibility of the military source that facilitates this level of influence with the public. A final contribution of this original empirical design is analysis of how this influence is affected by competing voices in the information space, most importantly those of partisan elites. There has been considerable attention paid to partisan leaders in the elite-driven politics literature and on the effects that partisanship have on perceived credibility (Iyengar and Westwood 2015) or on resistance to new information (Taber and Lodge 2006). However, such analysis has not been conducted when elite signals are in opposition with others, particularly over the subject of armed intervention and when the military elite voice is heard. As a result, measuring military cues in a competitive environment increases our understanding of their effect in a realistic setting.

In order to test the third set of hypotheses, I examine the shift in public approval for an intervention advocated by presidents of either party with respondents of different partisan identities. Figure 2.5 depicts this change in support by partisan identity of the individual

and the president, across both treatment conditions and pooling across both intervention scenarios. Again, these hypotheses analyze the most interesting potential cases, in which military cues may actually be able to create support among contra-partisan dyads (H3A) or erode that support among co-partisan ones (H3B). Faced with information contrary to their individual partisan pre-dispositions, partisan respondents might be expected to marginalize or ignore the military cue in favor of reducing the dissonance that such opposing information presents.

Among co-partisan dyads, however, this expected rejection of the oppositional military signal is not reflected in the results of the experiment. Democratic respondents exposed to an oppositional signal reduced their support for the proposed intervention by roughly 7 percentage-points compared to Democrats in the the control condition, even when the operation was proposed by a Democratic president in both cases. Similarly, Republican respondents exhibited a nearly 11 percentage-point reduction in support for the intervention when exposed to an oppositional signal despite its proposal by a co-partisan Republican president. Collectively, these results offer evidence in favor of H3A: despite a contradictory position from a co-partisan political elite, the military elite cue retains a residual effect when the two are placed in competition.

There are several potential explanations for such a pattern. First, the competitive framework of the design forces individuals to weigh the credibility of the two sources when rendering an opinion about their support for the policy. Given the results of H1A-C, it is likely that the credibility of the military source – given the subject under debate – outweighs that of the co-partisan. As a source with highly-localized expertise and perceived trustworthiness, the military source offers an influential voice even amidst partisan ones. However, this does not suggest the effect is necessarily transferable to other issue domains in which the co-partisan voice is a more helpful heuristic. Second, as previously discussed, it is possible that oppositional cues are more generally indicative of elite discord or a signal about the viability of the policy, which is a pathway discovered in some existing empirical efforts (Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017). These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive,

Figure 2.5: Interaction of Partisan Identity and Military Cuing Effects

Note: This figure reports the effects of military cue conditions in each of the four combinations between respondent and presidential partisan identity. The horizontal axis varies the president's partisan identity while the vertical axis varies the partisan identity of the respondent. Results are pooled across both conventional and humanitarian intervention scenarios. Baseline is control condition for the relevant cell. Respondents identified as Democrats and Republicans includes "leaners" on seven-point scale of partisan identity. Blue and red-bordered cells indicate partisan alignment, gray-bordered cells indicate contra-partisan alignment. $N=1564$.

however, and these results are likely a product of both considerations. Nonetheless, these findings offer a rebuttal to previous assertions that individuals will instinctively side with co-partisans when elites express division over an issue (Adam J. Berinsky 2009); instead, military cues may act as an objective source of information that can confound even partisan predictions.

The pattern of response in contra-partisan dyads offers more mixed support for the hypothesis that military cues can elicit support from outside the president's party. Republican respondents offered a supportive cue by the military elite increase their approval for a

Democrat-proposed military intervention by nearly 11 percentage-points. This constitutes a substantive and surprising challenge to partisan expectations for the Republican audience. However, not only did Democratic respondents exposed to a supportive signal not increase their support for a Republican-proposed intervention, their support actually decreased by roughly 9 percentage-points compared to the control condition. These results offer partial support for H3B in that supportive cues, at least for Republicans, can positively influence support for a contra-partisan policy.

Again, there are several explanations for either pattern among partisans. Given the null effects of the oppositional cue among Republicans for a Democratic president's proposal, it is clear that these indicate "floor effects"; military opposition presents no new or surprising information for Republicans that influence their opinion regarding the policy. However, military support is highly informative given the change in approval patterns. As contra-partisans are likely skeptical of the president's proposal, military elite support may offer a useful "second-opinion" that can calm these uncertainties and offer a useful policy cue (Grieco et al. 2011; Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017). It is also possible that military support for a Democratic president offers a substantively surprising endorsement given the conservative image of the military and party stereotypes regarding national security (Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003a).¹⁹ Democratic respondents, however, seem more rigidly skeptical of Republican proposals, using the military cue not as a "second-opinion" but rather as further reason to doubt the policy's soundness. While we find mixed support for H3B, the potential influence of military cues to elicit support among some contra-partisans is nonetheless significant.

Though not explicitly hypothesized, there are several patterns that warrant consideration. First, controlling for the partisan identity of the president, it appears that Democratic

¹⁹Schake and Mattis (2016) asked respondents "Do you think people serving in the military are more likely to vote Democratic or Republican?", to which 42% replied "somewhat" or "much more" likely to vote Republican, compared to only 11% who replied the same for Democrat. This is unsurprising given both historical and recent works on the partisan identity of military service members (J. K. Dempsey 2009), but confirms for our purposes that public perception often views the military not only as more conservative, but more Republican.

presidents only have support to gain from military elite signals, while Republican presidents only have support to lose through opposition. Second, military support for a Republican offers little substantive information to co-partisan individuals. Insofar as military signals confound traditional stereotypes about the party's management of national security, these results are significant in the prescriptions they create for political leaders courting military support for armed intervention. Democratic presidents potentially benefit from incorporating military leaders into the policy process and earning subsequent public endorsements; these actions can win support even from across the political aisle. However, Republican presidents must be careful not to lose a baseline of support through public military elite defections. While co-opting military leaders into the planning process may mitigate this risk, it is also noteworthy that one of the principal drivers of oppositional cue strength comes from retired officers, over whom the presidency has no direct control.

Taken together, these findings offer additional support to my central argument that military elites possess considerable latent political influence with regards to shaping public opinion on military action, even in a partisan context. The competitive framework forces respondents to sift through multiple voices when rendering an opinion; while the mechanisms may be different, the source credibility of the military cue clearly drives effects on both sides of the partisan aisle. This argument is further supported by the fact that the experiment does not provide respondents with any substantive information about policy preferences by the military cue-giver. Instead, individuals in all treatment conditions are reacting to a simple endorsement or opposition to the policy. This "peripheral" attention to the message makes the source's unique attributes more significant in its persuasiveness.

Collectively, the results of this design have provided a suitable test for the central argument of this analysis. In accordance with H1A, military elites can influence public opinion on military intervention, despite this decision being the purview of civilian political leaders. The importance of source credibility in this process is revealed in the positive moderating effect of institutional confidence in the military (H1B) and the robustness of military elite cueing effects across different types of information sources and elite figures (H1C). Signal

Table 2.1: Summary of Principal Findings and Support for Testable Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Support	Findings
<i>Source Credibility (H1)</i>		
A Military elite cues influence public support.	✓	Military cues create 10 %-pt swing across all conditions compared to control.
B Influence increases with expressed confidence.	✓	Oppositional cues three times more effective with high-confidence individuals.
C Effect robust to different military sources.	✓	Effect statistically and substantively significant across military sources.
<i>Signal Direction (H2)</i>		
A Substance of policy type matters.	✗	Effect size comparable between conventional and humanitarian scenarios.
B Direction of policy cue matters.	✓	Oppositional cues nearly four times more influential than supportive cues.
<i>Effect of Multiple Signals (H3)</i>		
A Oppositional cues can dissuade co-partisans.	✓(D) ✓(R)	Democrats and Republicans reduce support by 7 and 11 %-pts, respectively.
B Supportive cues can attract contra-partisans.	✗(D) ✓(R)	Republicans increase support by nearly 11 %-pts; Democrats actually decrease support.

NOTE: Table 2.1 depicts the level of support for each testable hypothesis and a brief description of the empirical findings for each; hypotheses are grouped by point of analysis (source credibility, signal direction, and the effect of multiple signals). Results for H3A and H3B allow for mixed support based on partisan identity of the respondent; (D) indicates the hypothesis' validity for Democrats, (R) for Republicans.

direction is significant insofar as it relates to the stated preferences of the president; the substantive or normative cost of oppositional signals are more significant relative to supportive cues (H2B), despite variation in the type of policy being considered (H2A). Finally, military cues are able to achieve effects even when considering the competing voice of the president. While these signals can generate a mixed amount of support among members of the presidential out-party (H3B), there is strong evidence that they can erode support even among co-partisans (H3A).

Military Elite Cues in Practice

Given the significance of these results, there remains the question of what these events look like in the actual political-military environment. In order to illustrate the nature of military elite cues and their capacity for shaping public opinion and decision-making, I briefly discuss two recent examples of military dissent in the elite cue context. These brief case studies will seek to demonstrate the observable influence of military cues in the context of military intervention policy and the varying dimensions of costliness that characterize their transmission. This section covers the 2006 retired military community's public appeals over the Iraq war and the 2009 troop estimate leak in the Afghanistan war.

The Generals and the Bush Administration; Iraq, 2006

The US military effort in Iraq following the defeat of conventional Iraqi armed forces in 2003 had stalled considerably by the second term of the Bush administration. Increasing sectarian violence across the country cast doubt in public and elite circles that the administration could effectively resource and manage both the Afghanistan and Iraq theaters with its limited military force structure. Initial misgivings about the need for a much larger force in the run-up to the Iraq invasion, most publicly voiced by former Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki, re-emerged in a new debate about the prospects for the mission's success and the embattled leadership of Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who had marginalized Shinseki in subsequent policy-shaping following the general's remarks to Congress.

Even before the considerable strategic shift that followed the 9/11 attacks and the 'global war on terror', senior military officials in the Pentagon and abroad experienced a major bureaucratic shake-up with the appointment of Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense. Rumsfeld's interpersonal style and managerial philosophy struck many senior military leaders as abrasive and uncompromising, coupled with a desire to 'streamline' the organization and assert more direct control over military leaders. The negative reversal of fortune in the Iraq war seemed to vindicate Shinseki's original warnings and increased criticism of

Rumsfeld's management of the Pentagon, which many military leaders felt perpetuated poor strategic choices by stifling debate (Risa Brooks 2009).

The debate on Rumsfeld's bureaucratic management of the Defense Department evolved into a broader referendum by the retired military community on the wisdom of the Iraq war and its governing strategy. Marine Lieutenant General Greg Newbold, who served under Rumsfeld in a key staff position during the initial phases of the Iraq war planning,²⁰ was the first of several recently-retired senior military officers to voice public disapproval for Rumsfeld's management of the military and the larger Iraq war's strategic direction. In an article written for *Time* in mid-2006, Newbold openly rebuked the secretary's handling of Shinseki's warning in 2003 and characterized the administration's commitment to the Iraq fight as having been "done with a casualness and swagger that are the special province of those who have never had to execute these missions – or bury the results."²¹

Newbold was not alone in this open criticism of the war and its civilian leadership. Retired Army generals Paul Eaton, Charles Swannack, John Riggs, and John Batiste, along with retired Marine general Paul van Riper, all issued public statements or articles calling for Rumsfeld's removal from leadership of the Defense Department. Most of the officers involved had, like Newbold, observed first hand the flaws in the Pentagon's management of the Iraq war and had suffered directly from Rumsfeld's leadership style. Eaton, who had been saddled with the task of rebuilding the Iraqi army in 2004, was marginalized into early retirement following his statements that such an effort would take several years to be completed effectively. Like the rest of the officers involved, Eaton wrestled with professional norms of restraint in his disapproval of the Iraq strategy. However, after viewing the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, a Defense Department articulation of strategic priorities and budgetary forecasts, Eaton found its "appalling" focus on conventional threats during

²⁰LtGen Newbold served as director of operations, J-3, for the Joint Staff at the Pentagon from 2000-2002. A key figure in the war-planning effort, Newbold shared similar misgivings about the wisdom of an Iraq invasion and the acceptable level of resource commitment for it to succeed. Finding Rumsfeld resistant to information that called the Iraq mission's feasibility into doubt, Newbold offered his premature resignation in 2002. Thomas Donnelly, "Testing the 'Fluornoy Hypothesis': Civil Military Relations in the post-9/11 Era", in *Warriors and Citizens: American Views of Our Military*, eds. Kori Schake and Jim Mattis, 2016.

²¹Greg Newbold, "Why Iraq Was A Mistake", *TIME* Magazine, April 6, 2006.

a counter-insurgency war unacceptable, voicing his discontent in a *New York Times* op-ed.²²

The collective furor caused by these elite military figures reinvigorated a debate over the strategic direction of the Iraq war, Rumsfeld's future in the Pentagon, and the political will to see the mission through to completion. The 'revolt of the generals' was all the more difficult to ignore with figures like Swannack and Batiste – recent division commanders in the Iraq war – immediately following their retirement with a foray into the political discourse of the war's conduct. Though Rumsfeld's ouster would not follow for several months after the initial wave of public dissent from this elite group, the outcry among the generals had the desired effect. The generals' discontent ensured public opinion turned sharply against the embattled Secretary of Defense, despite President George W. Bush's statements of support to stand by Rumsfeld through the length of his second term. By the time Rumsfeld offered his resignation in November, the 2006 midterm elections had swung against the Republican party. Congressional Republicans were "infuriated" that Bush had not facilitated the secretary's ouster earlier, convinced that Republican candidates suffered at the polls from carrying the weight of Rumsfeld's public image, irreparably damaged by the generals' 'revolt'.²³

If this public appeal by the retired military elite was influential in achieving its objective, it was also costly for the military institution. A renewed conversation over Iraq strategy was also met with heated debate over the appropriateness of the 'revolt' in the context of the norms of civil-military professionalism. Critics denounced the generals as subversive to the principle of civilian control and setting a dangerous precedent for active-duty officers to more forcefully resist policies with which they did not agree (Owens 2006). While many applauded the 'revolt' as a display of patriotism and professional integrity, many saw the action as potentially damaging to the credibility of the active-duty officer corps. Kohn

²²Quoted in David Margolick, "The Night of the Generals", *Vanity Fair*, April 2007.

²³Though Rumsfeld has officially tendered his resignation before the election, President Bush did not announce this fact until the day after the election, which further heightened partisan in-fighting among Republicans who believed control of the Senate could have been preserved had candidates been relieved of public scrutiny targeted at Rumsfeld. Kristin Roberts, "Rumsfeld resigned before election, letter shows", *Reuters*, August 15, 2007.

(2002) contends that the opinions and misgivings of retired military elites may very well be indistinguishable from those of active officers in the eyes of the public; this community is therefore legitimized by the same credibility of the larger military institution, but less constrained by norms of the civil-military relationship. Many have since used the incident as a cautionary tale of the dangers of the ‘paradox of prestige’ and the potentially costly ramifications of frequent military elite cue-giving (J. K. Dempsey 2009).

This case captures the dynamic of military elite cues in the context of intervention strategy well for several reasons. First, it is a clear example of how ‘surprising’ and credible informational cues from military elites can shape the decision space of political leaders. The source figures, all senior military officers with experience in either planning or fighting the war, carried considerable weight in their efforts to criticize the governing strategy behind its initiation and conduct. Second, it highlights the parity between retired and active military elites in public opinion shaping. As the results of the previous experimental design bear out, this community of military elites warrants inclusion in future analyses about the limits of military influence. Despite being out of uniform, these elites were able to influence the political environment considerably given their position.

Finally, this case highlights the different types of cost that accompany cue-giving by the military. One dimension of cue costliness is the risk to the source in conflicting with powerful political elites, even after retirement; two generals in the ‘revolt’ admitted to having lost subsequent job prospects due to their participation.²⁴ Another dimension of cost is the professional price of having defied the long-held norms of civil-military relations. These norms of restraint have governed the relationship between military and civilian leaders for decades, making public appeals like the ‘revolt’ infrequent. As a result, the historical rarity of military dissent makes cuing costly for the same reason it is credible. Lastly, events such as the ‘revolt’ display the institutional cost of cue-giving from military elites. While successful in its aims, the actions of the generals called the long-term independent credibility of the military into doubt. The fact that the individual cue-giver does not directly internalize

²⁴Margolick, 2007.

this cost creates a potentially damaging ‘tragedy of the commons’ as retired officers try to leverage the institution’s credibility for personal gain.

McChrystal and the Obama Administration; Afghanistan, 2009

Just as a the 2006 ‘revolt’ had created political problems for the Bush White House on the direction of the Iraq war, a series of military public statements and targeted information leaks regarding the future of the Afghan war had a similar effect on the Obama administration. In an effort to re-assess the broader strategy for American military efforts in the country, key advisors in the newly-elected Obama White House advocated for the replacement of serving theater commander General David McKiernan with General Stanley McChrystal. Largely reliant on recommendations from Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, Obama approved the change, with the added responsibility of conducting a review of the state of US efforts in Afghanistan and a recommendation for future strategic decision-making (Rosa Brooks 2016). The recommendation would inform potential troop increases required to support the fledgling Afghan security forces and protect the population from insurgent groups that had gained momentum with the diversion of key resources to support the Iraq conflict.

By early 2009, the new president had already expressed trepidation to increasing US presence in Afghanistan; during the preceding campaign, Obama had stressed a re-prioritization away from the “war of choice” in Iraq and affecting a responsible stabilization and withdrawal from Afghanistan. A troop increase that further entangled the US with the Afghanistan war was largely undesirable among key administration officials, many of whom harbored distrust for the military establishment. Vice President Joe Biden would concurrently push for a competing strategy dubbed ‘counter-terrorism plus’, a smaller-footprint military approach that focused on developing human intelligence networks and decapitating insurgent group leaders.²⁵

²⁵Holly Bailey, “Joe Biden, White House Truth Teller”, *Newsweek*, October 9, 2009; Robert Haddick, “This Week at War: The Biden Plan Returns”, *Foreign Policy*, October 22, 2010.

McChrystal's classified report, passed to the Pentagon by August, seemed to clash directly with any political aspirations of a timely withdrawal. The assessment highlighted a lack of reliable intelligence, unwilling coalition allies, and a restrictive focus on the force protection of US servicemembers as the drivers behind a security environment where the Taliban held considerable advantage. The report offered three force structure alternatives: a increase of 10,000 troops to focus on training Afghan soldiers, of 40,000 troops for a concerted counter-insurgency campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaeda affiliates, and of 85,000 troops for a more dedicated counter-insurgency campaign. Without a resource commitment commensurate with the objectives the president had articulated, the larger operation would result in "mission failure" (Woodward 2011).

The assessment's gloomy forecast for US success and its advocacy for such a potentially large influx of troops into the theater created political problems for the administration officials, who wished to keep the finer details of troop requests out of the public discussion. In mid-September, the assessment was leaked to the *Washington Post*, which promptly published McChrystal's misgivings to the American public. Though the assessment was partially sanitized, the general theme of impending mission failure should the administration not comply with military recommendations had restricted the president's strategic choices. The environment was further destabilized shortly after, when in a speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, McChrystal directly rebuked the feasibility of a small-footprint strategy like the one being advocated by Biden.²⁶

Obama conveyed his frustration over the leak and these remarks to Gates and other key advisors, viewing the incident as a clear attempt by the military to 'box in' the president's options over the Afghanistan conflict and force a troop increase that would involve the US in that war for much longer. With the 40,000-troop request public knowledge and projected to cost in upwards of \$1 trillion over ten years, Obama's ability to explore smaller options

²⁶John F. Burns, "McChrystal Rejects Scaling Down Afghan Military Aims", *The New York Times*, October 1, 2009.

in the face of the McChrystal report was considerably checked. Congressional Republicans conditioned their support for any Afghan strategy on approval by senior military leaders like McChrystal; Senator Lindsay Graham caveated Republican support “as long as the generals are O.K. and there is a meaningful number” of at least 30,000 troops (Baker 2009). The president approved a final compromise option with the National Security Council, promising an increase of 30,000 soldiers that would be ‘surged’ into the country between July 2010 and July 2011.

As with the 2006 ‘revolt of the generals’, the leak of McChrystal’s assessment at least partially achieved the desired effect. While it did not result in the middle-ground option of 40,000 soldiers requested by McChrystal directly, it had forced a more aggressive choice from the Obama administration despite both publicly and privately-announced preferences to the contrary. Obama had intended for the McChrystal review to serve as the basis for a private discussion with the military about future strategy; the leak and London speech had effectively shaped his available options to the American public. Key advisors also made clear that with their advice public knowledge, Obama would likely have to relieve Mullen and McChrystal should he make a decision that contradicted their advice (Woodward 2011).

However, the incident was exceedingly costly for both the key figures involved and for the larger military institution. McChrystal’s leak of a classified mission assessment and his subsequent remarks were interpreted by civilian officials as a clear attempt to circumscribe the president’s decision-making autonomy. Peter Feaver (2009) characterized the incident as “the defining moment in civil-military relations under Obama’s watch” as a new debate on the stability of the political-military relationship emerged again. McChrystal personally found himself on the outside of much of the subsequent strategic decision-making and his open clash with the Obama administration had set the conditions for his removal months later when a *Rolling Stone* article published disparaging remarks on administration officials made by senior military staffers in McChrystal’s headquarters.

McChrystal’s removal did not assuage the fundamentally divergent preferences expressed

by the military and political elite over the issue of wartime strategy. While civilian officials felt manipulated by an indirect military appeal to the public, military elites felt the entire ordeal was representative of a fundamental breakdown in understanding between the two parties on the resourcing of political objectives in war. The feasibility of those objectives for a speedy withdrawal and a stable Afghan government were never questioned by the military elite, only the resources needed to achieve them; the divergence seemed to suggest that “if the president wanted a different answer, he needed to ask a different question” (Rosa Brooks 2016).

As with the ‘revolt’ under President Bush, the Afghanistan incident provides a useful case for analyzing military elite cue-giving for several reasons. First, it again illustrates the potential potency of military cues to the public on influencing policy choices from civilian leadership. The disclosure of private military counsel placed the Obama administration in a difficult position that made disregarding its substance more problematic. The result was a compromise measure that arrived closer to the military’s proposed 40,000-troop figure than to Biden’s 20,000-strong ‘counter-terrorism plus’ proposal. Second, it provides a contextual example of the combined influence of military cues through specific mediums. As the results of the previous experiment confirm, media leaks or indirect attribution mechanisms for military signals can be an influential force for a public trying to form individual preferences for complicated policies.

Lastly, it again displays the different dimensions of costliness for cues of this type. The individual-level costs to the cue-giver are observable with the tarnished relationship between the Obama team and McChrystal’s headquarters after the incident. McChrystal lost a potent voice in Washington as part of the strategic discussion and the general’s removal in 2010 was easier to facilitate in the environment the leak incident had created. The institutional costs of the ordeal are perhaps far more apparent. A reinvigorated debate on the health of American civil-military relations again called into question the apolitical and independent nature of military advice. An already distrustful relationship between the new administration and the military was made worse, as all subsequent military counsel

had to be questioned for exaggeration or self-serving organizational biases. Though partially effective, this type of military elite cue was again costly for the same reason it was credible; the long-term effects of repeated incidents remain to be seen.

Conclusion

While there has been a considerable effort to understand the dimensions of elite-driven influences on public opinion formation, there has been a dearth of knowledge in understanding this dynamic among military elites. One critique of top-down theories of elite cueing is that it is difficult to disentangle the causal channel between elites shaping opinion or being responsive to public attitudes. This is particularly a problem for partisan leaders with electoral motivations for getting in line with popular opinion rather than influencing it. However, military officials are a unique elite community that confounds this problem, as the military has no incentive to bend its signals based on popular opinion. As primary figures in the formation and execution of policy with a durably-high level of trust with the American public, these figures continue to play a key role in political debates on policy both in uniform and after departure from the service. The state of civil-military relations in the US has strong foundations in *objective control* and a division of labor between political and military leaders (Huntington 1957); yet, this dynamic is difficult to sustain in an era where the line between the two areas is increasingly blurred. The norms of Huntington's philosophy oblige an institutionally subordinate military whose elites do not engage in public debate with their civilian superiors.

However, the military has become an increasingly vocal entity in the development of foreign policy. Through targeted survey experimentation, I have demonstrated how individuals substantively attend to elite cues on military intervention, even when they are issued in contradiction to the president, whether a co-partisan or political opponent. When offered information about military attitudes on a proposed policy, some respondents used oppositional cues as a useful "second opinion" or used substantively surprising information on policies with which they have little information, even if the policy was recommended

by a contra-partisan president. Perhaps most importantly, the results of this experimental design demonstrate that not only do these figures possess considerable latent political influence, but that this influence is largely tied to the perception of the military elite as a credible figure and reliable source. Subsequent analysis on the effectiveness of military cuing must consider the different cost dimensions on their continued influence. If common-pool issues over public military dissent in fact degrade its institutional credibility, can we expect decreasing military influence in the future? This also raises the question of the limits of elite influence: does military influence wane as the issue in debate becomes more polarized, less security-related, or more partisan?

Using the Iraq war's 'revolt of the generals' and the Afghanistan troop estimate leak as contextual examples, I have shown that military cues can be effective, if highly costly to the source's credibility. As the retired military community plays a more direct role in policy formation or a more vocal role as critic to those policies, the future stability of US civil-military relations warrants continued study. The results of this analysis therefore have wide-reaching implications for both policy and academic realms. If military officials continue to wade into increasingly partisan political waters, will its institutional credibility begin to suffer with the public? If not, will an emboldened military strain the principles of civilian control that have characterized the stability of liberal democracies? If appeals to the public can help shape civilian decision-making in a way favorable to the military, these are significant inquiries.

Appendix A: Covariate Balance and Regression Results

A.1 Randomization Checks and Covariate Balance

Table 2.2: Covariate Balance Across Treatment and Control Conditions

Respondent Demographic	Control	Support	Opposition
Party Identification			
Democrat	44.7%	40.9%	44.9%
Republican	38.4%	36.3%	31.8%
Gender			
Male	48.0%	46.9%	44.9%
Female	51.9%	53.0%	55.0%
Age			
25th Percentile	35	31	33
50th Percentile	51.5	49	45
75th Percentile	63	62	61
Race			
White	71.1%	76.2%	71.3%
Non-white	28.8%	23.7%	28.6%

NOTE: Percentages reflect segment of survey population assigned to each experimental condition or class of conditions (*Opposition* collapses all oppositional cue conditions into a single population) broken down by key demographic values.

Table 2.3: Randomization Check: Logit Regression with Treatment Assignment as DV

	<i>Dependent variable: Treatment Assignment</i>			
	Opposition	Support	Opposition	Support
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Democrat	0.063 (0.132)	-0.137 (0.163)	-0.086 (0.132)	0.020 (0.164)
Male	-0.100 (0.129)	0.037 (0.159)	-0.167 (0.130)	0.098 (0.162)
Age	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.005)
White	-0.077 (0.149)	0.255 (0.189)	0.086 (0.148)	-0.103 (0.182)
Constant	0.613*** (0.232)	-1.388*** (0.287)	0.472** (0.231)	-1.398*** (0.287)
Observations	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Log Likelihood	-674.263	-496.029	-672.993	-485.841
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,358.526	1,002.058	1,355.986	981.681

NOTE: † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

A.2 Regression-based Analysis of Treatment Effects

Table 2.4: Logistic Regression on Binary Support Variable

	<i>Dependent variable: Binary Support Indicator</i>			
	DV1	DV2	DV1	DV2
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Control1	-0.117 (0.218)		-0.192 (0.226)	
OpposeCue1	-0.534*** (0.184)		-0.644*** (0.191)	
Control2		-0.086 (0.210)		-0.119 (0.215)
OpposeCue2		-0.467*** (0.179)		-0.494*** (0.183)
Congress			0.248*** (0.086)	0.332*** (0.082)
Military			0.339*** (0.082)	-0.010 (0.073)
Presidency			0.160** (0.075)	0.144** (0.071)
Constant	-0.809*** (0.154)	-0.607*** (0.152)	-3.049*** (0.366)	-1.743*** (0.325)
Observations	1,000	1,000	997	997
Log Likelihood	-549.291	-597.601	-517.958	-577.920
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,104.582	1,201.201	1,047.917	1,167.839

NOTE: † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2.5: Ordered Logistic Regression on 5-pt Support Variable

	<i>Dependent variable: 5-pt Ordered Support Variable</i>					
	DV1			DV2		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Control1	-0.152 (0.182)	-0.172 (0.183)	-0.181 (0.183)			
OpposeCue1	-0.375** (0.149)	-0.444*** (0.150)	-0.416*** (0.150)			
Military		0.232*** (0.057)	0.312*** (0.057)		0.067 (0.057)	0.135** (0.057)
Newspapers		0.212*** (0.058)			0.186*** (0.057)	
Presidency		0.220*** (0.056)			0.228*** (0.056)	
Democrat			0.125 (0.150)			0.242 (0.148)
Republican			-0.109 (0.160)			0.050 (0.158)
Control2				-0.020 (0.182)	-0.014 (0.183)	-0.012 (0.182)
OpposeCue2				-0.282* (0.152)	-0.259* (0.152)	-0.262* (0.152)
Male					0.037 (0.116)	
Observations	1,000	997	997	1,000	997	997

NOTE: † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2.6: Logistic Regression on Binary Support Variable

	<i>Dependent variable: Probability of Support for Policy</i>			
	Conventional		Humanitarian	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Control1	-0.117 (0.218)	-0.214 (0.229)		
OpposeCue1	-0.534*** (0.184)	-0.680*** (0.194)		
Male		-0.141 (0.157)		-0.103 (0.147)
Congress		0.245*** (0.089)		0.344*** (0.085)
Military		0.342*** (0.087)		-0.020 (0.078)
Newspapers		0.153* (0.079)		0.104 (0.074)
Presidency		0.095 (0.078)		0.088 (0.074)
Ideology		-0.076 (0.068)		-0.068 (0.062)
News Interest		-0.128* (0.070)		-0.144** (0.063)
Control2			-0.086 (0.210)	-0.119 (0.217)
OpposeCue2			-0.467*** (0.179)	-0.488*** (0.184)
Constant	-0.809*** (0.154)	-2.555*** (0.517)	-0.607*** (0.152)	-1.209*** (0.462)
Observations	1,000	997	1,000	997
Log Likelihood	-549.291	-510.768	-597.601	-571.028
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,104.582	1,041.536	1,201.201	1,162.056

NOTE: † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Appendix B: Treatment Heterogeneity

B.1 Treatment Effects by Demographic Subgroups

Table 2.7: Conventional Scenario, Percentage of Respondents in Support, by Demographic Group

	Support	Oppose	Military Elite Cues Approval Gap	N	p-value
Respondent Party ID					
Democrat	33.3%	19.9%	-13.5%*	348	0.022
Republican	36.1%	22.8%	-13.4%*	261	0.041
Ideology					
Liberal	23.4%	21.7%	-1.7%	231	0.811
Conservative	35.4%	21.9%	-13.5%*	243	0.048
Moderate	35.8%	20.0%	-15.8%*	252	0.018
World View					
Internationalist	47.3%	30.7%	-16.5%**	345	0.007
Isolationist	10.0%	15.5%	5.5%	192	0.299
Military Confidence					
High	40.2%	24.9%	-15.3%**	436	0.005
Low	16.7%	8.1%	-8.6%	104	0.268
Political Interest					
High	34.1%	23.8%	-10.3%†	376	0.079
Low	30.3%	18.8%	-11.5%*	380	0.024
Total	30.8%	20.7%	-10.1%**	792	.006

NOTE: Significance levels refer to two-way t-tests of the difference between concurrent cues (support) and oppositional cues (oppose). † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2.8: Humanitarian Scenario, Percentage of Respondents in Support, by Demographic Group

	Support	Oppose	Military Elite Cues Approval Gap	N	p-value
Respondent Party ID					
Democrat	38.8%	27.9%	-10.9%†	343	0.071
Republican	32.3%	25.6%	-6.7%	272	0.311
Ideology					
Liberal	37.7%	29.2%	-8.5%	232	0.240
Conservative	34.9%	24.3%	-10.6%	248	0.124
Moderate	38.5%	25.0%	-13.5%†	248	0.076
World View					
Internationalist	43.8%	32.1%	-11.6%	351	0.065
Isolationist	27.5%	17.4%	-10.1%	189	0.160
Military Confidence					
High	39.5%	26.9%	-12.6%*	442	0.015
Low	21.1%	22.2%	1.2%	100	0.914
Political Interest					
High	37.9%	27.0%	-10.9%*	373	0.056
Low	33.3%	25.2%	-8.2%	377	0.154
Total	35.2%	25.4%	-9.8%*	787	0.012

NOTE: Significance levels refer to two-way t-tests of the difference between concurrent cues (support) and oppositional cues (oppose). † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

B.2 Cross-Partisan Dyadic Relationships

Table 2.9: Interaction of POTUS and Respondent Party Identification on Approval Rating for Proposed Conventional Intervention

		Executive PID			
		<i>Democrat</i>		<i>Republican</i>	
Respondent PID					
<i>Democrat</i>	Support Cue	32.4%		Support Cue	34.1%
	No Cue	37.2%		No Cue	34.0%
	Opposition Cue	20.9%		Opposition Cue	18.5%
<i>Republican</i>	Support Cue	39.0%		Support Cue	32.3%
	No Cue	22.4%		No Cue	25.8%
	Opposition Cue	25.0%		Opposition Cue	20.6%

Table 2.10: Interaction of POTUS and Respondent Party Identification on Approval Rating for Proposed Humanitarian Intervention

		Executive PID			
		<i>Democrat</i>		<i>Republican</i>	
Respondent PID					
<i>Democrat</i>	Support Cue	52.1%		Support Cue	21.6%
	No Cue	31.4%		No Cue	42.6%
	Opposition Cue	34.1%		Opposition Cue	21.7%
<i>Republican</i>	Support Cue	25.8%		Support Cue	38.2%
	No Cue	20.6%		No Cue	48.6%
	Opposition Cue	18.8%		Opposition Cue	32.1%

B.3 Respondent Partisan Identity

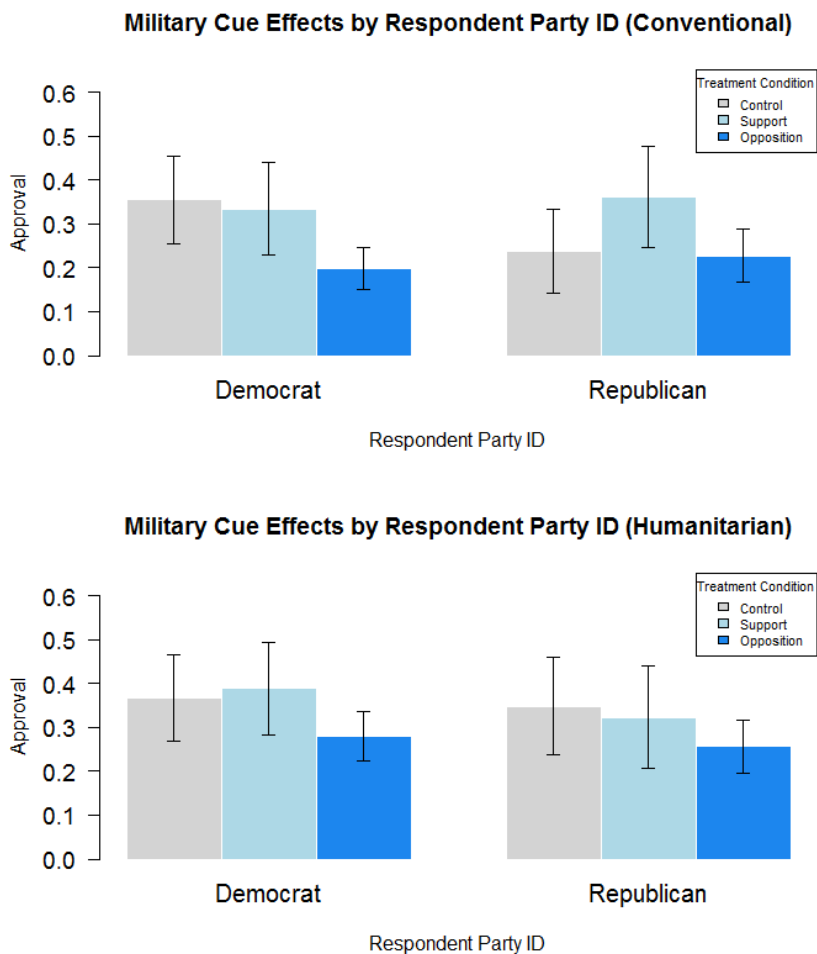


Figure 2.6: Public Support for Intervention, Respondent Partisan Identity

B.4 POTUS Partisan Identity

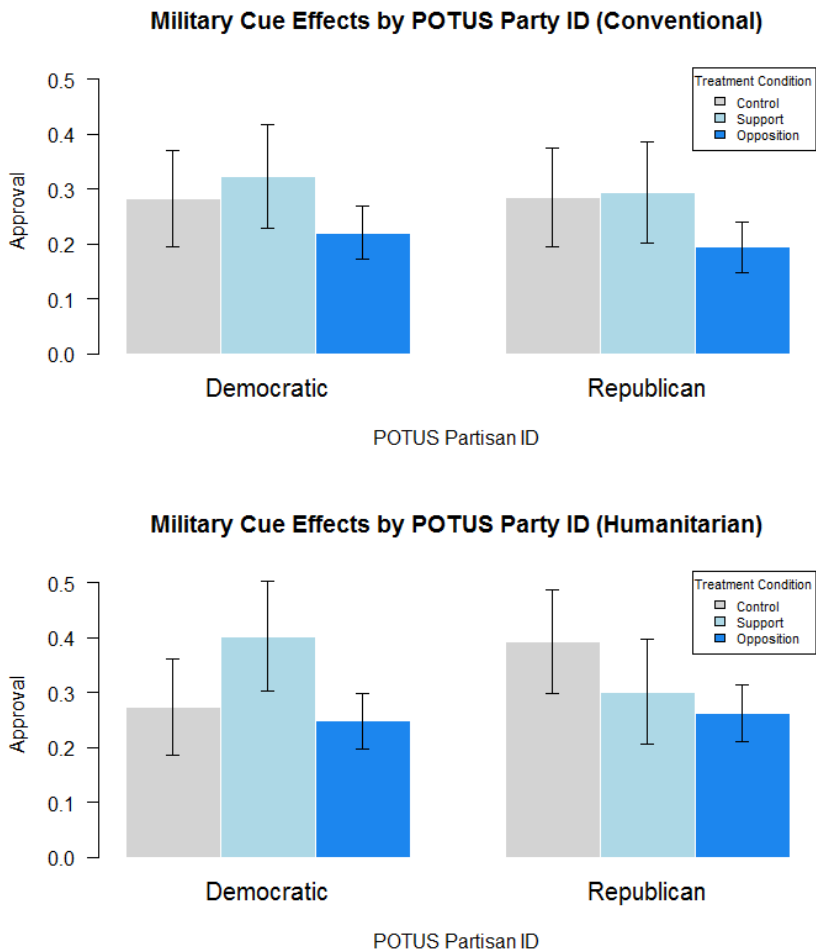


Figure 2.7: Public Support for Intervention, POTUS Partisan Identity

Appendix C: Divided Elites and Uncertainty

C.1 Effects on Uncertainty Levels

Table 2.11: Net Support % of Respondents who Agree/Strongly Agree - % of Respondents who Disagree/Strongly Disagree

	Conventional	Humanitarian	Pooled
Opposition	-21	-12	-16
No Cue	-9	+2	-4
Support	-1	+4	+2

Table 2.12: Net Support % of Respondents who Agree/Strongly Agree - % of Respondents who Disagree/Strongly Disagree by Respondent Party ID (7-pt Scale)

		Conventional	Humanitarian	Pooled
Democrat	Oppose	-21	-8	-14
	No Cue	+4	+10	+7
	Support	-1	+12	+5
Republican	Oppose	-23	-13	-18
	No Cue	-20	+3	-9
	Support	+7	-6	+1

NOTE: Mean approval and disapproval levels calculated using binary indicator *agree* for ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ and *disagree* for ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’. Partisan identity coded using both 3-pt scale partisans and 7-pt scale ‘leaners’ towards one of the major political parties.

C.2 Agree-Disagree Separation

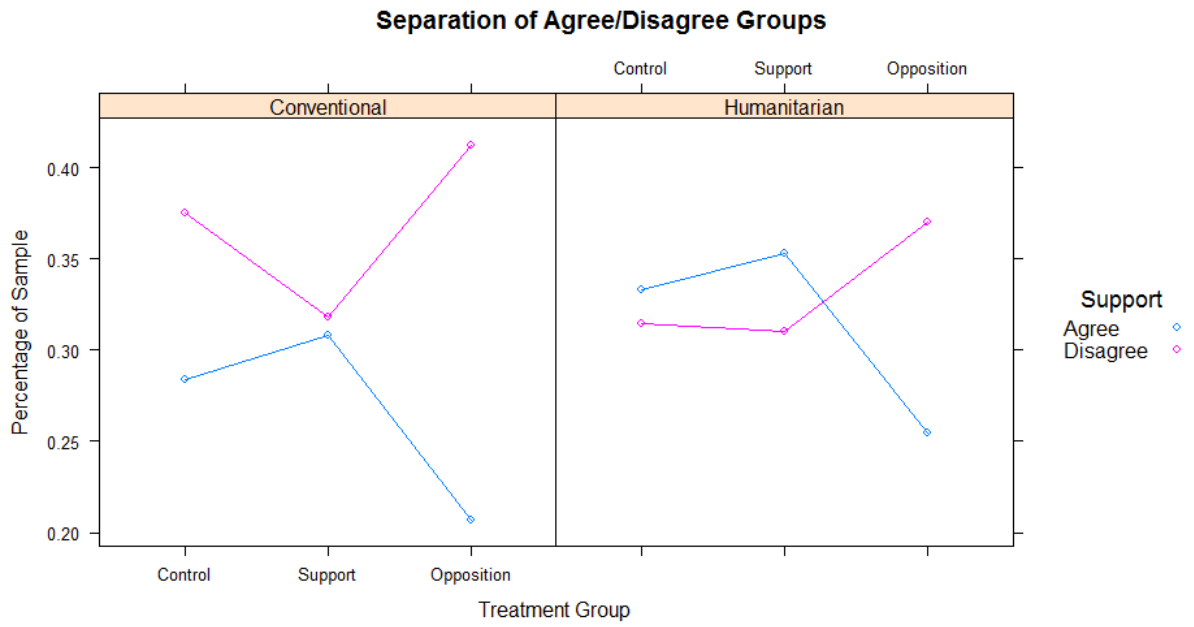


Figure 2.8: Difference in Mean Agree/Disagree Levels, Conventional and Humanitarian Scenario

Appendix D: Questionnaire and Intervention Vignettes

D.1 Scenario-based Vignettes

Respondents were drawn from a nationally-representative opt-in panel organized by YouGov in December 2016. Individuals were uniformly exposed to the following prompt outlining the scope of the experiment:

“You are about to read two news stories depicting a potential US foreign policy decision. These situations and the persons mentioned within do not pertain to any particular real-life case, but reflect events that have happened in the past and may happen again. Please read the articles carefully and imagine your feelings regarding the situation. Afterwards, you will be asked a few questions about the stories.”

Conventional Scenario

The respondent was then prompted with this baseline news story for the conventional scenario:

“**WASHINGTON (AP)** - Tense relations between Russia and a former Soviet state have moved closer to full-scale war. Russian military forces began small-scale bombings inside the country and increased its troop presence along the border. Russia claims it is supporting ethnic Russians within the country.

Relations between the US and the small state have been historically positive, though no formal security agreement exists between them. The American president, after meeting with fellow [POTUSID] policy advisors, stated to the press that the US should strongly consider military intervention to deter further violence. [CUE]”

The value for *POTUSID* was randomized between “Democratic” and “Republican”.

The value for *CUE* was randomized between the following:

- NULL, for *control* respondents
- “A senior military commander for American forces stationed in the region, an Army general, expressed support for the proposed intervention in an article for a highly respected newspaper, stating that the policy would be wise.” , for *supportive cue* respondents
- “However, a senior military commander for American forces stationed in the region, an Army general, expressed opposition to the proposed intervention in an article for a highly respected newspaper, stating that the policy would be unwise.” , for *opposition statement* respondents.
- “However, national media outlets recently obtained a leaked, classified internal memorandum. In the memo, a senior American military commander in the region, an Army general, expressed opposition to the proposed intervention, stating it would be an unwise decision.” , for *opposition leak* respondents.
- “However, a retired Army general, who previously served as senior military commander for American forces stationed in the region, expressed opposition to the proposed intervention in an interview with television news, stating that the policy would be unwise.”, for *opposition retired* respondents.

Humanitarian Scenario

The respondent was then prompted with this baseline news story for the humanitarian scenario:

“WASHINGTON (AP) - The people of a small foreign country have engaged in a recent campaign of protests against a ruling dictator. This leader has committed major acts of violence against his citizens in the past and government forces have now violently clashed with protesters. The conflict has brought on a major humanitarian crisis, internally displacing many citizens and forcing many more to flee the country.

One proposed policy being considered by US security officials is a military intervention to prevent a further humanitarian disaster. The US president, after speaking with fellow [POTUSID] advisers, stated to the press that the US should strongly consider a military intervention. [CUE]”

The value for *POTUSID* was again randomized between “Democratic” and “Republican”. The value for *CUE* was randomized between the following:

- NULL, for *control* respondents
- “A senior military commander for American forces stationed in the region, an Army general, expressed support for the proposed intervention in an article for a highly respected newspaper, stating that the policy would be wise.” , for *supportive cue* respondents
- “However, a senior military commander for American forces stationed in the region, an Army general, expressed opposition to the proposed intervention in an article for a highly respected newspaper, stating that the policy would be unwise.” , for *opposition statement* respondents.
- “However, national media outlets recently obtained a leaked, classified internal memorandum. In the memo, a senior American military commander in the region, an Army general, expressed opposition to the proposed intervention, stating it would be an unwise decision.” , for *opposition leak* respondents.
- “However, a retired Army general, who previously served as senior military commander for American forces stationed in the region, expressed opposition to the proposed intervention in an interview with television news, stating that the policy would be unwise.” , for *opposition retired* respondents.

Appendix E: Additional Remarks on Civil-Military Relations

E.1 Objective Control and Convergence

A central component of liberal democratic governance is the institutionalized control of the military by civilian political leaders. This is both a political imperative and a pragmatic policy, ensuring both a stable regime with the military as an apolitical actor and a unified command structure that engenders more effective conduct in wartime. The formative works in the field identified a fundamental conflict between the inherently martial values of the military and the liberal normative architecture of the states they were designed to defend. Huntington (1957) argues that the fear of the militarization of society could lead to either a marginalization of the military establishment or an acculturation that renders it more in the image of society at large. However, he contends that civilian leaders can maintain the liberal values of society and a competent military establishment by compartmentalizing the latter into a profession that is politically “sterile and neutral”. This theory of *objective control* has underpinned the study of civil-military relations for decades and is the driving force behind the military’s professionalization as an apolitical entity within the larger democratic systems they support.

This concern regarding the seemingly conflictual domains between the military and civilian leaders has been addressed differently over time. Janowitz (1960) posits that military and civilian responsibilities in security decision-making are not so easily subjected to such a clean division of labor. This *convergence* theory assumes that “it is inevitable that the military will come to resemble a political pressure group”, such that the only meaningful insurance for the preservation of liberal values and civilian control is for the larger society to more directly shape the character of the military institution (Nielsen 2002). Cohen (2003) similarly argues that military and political leaders operate in a common, if “unequal” dialogue regarding security affairs given civilian control of the process; as such, political elites are better served by involving themselves more directly in the formulation of policy rather than engendering a blind reliance on military elites.

These explanations have driven much of our understanding of civil-military relations,

particularly in the American context, offering seemingly complementary accounts of the most favorable methods by which the civilian political elite can constrain the military in society. Both *objective control* and *convergence* ideas constitute normative judgments on the influence of the military in civilian affairs, deeming a politically active or independent military elite as a threat to the integrity of democratic institutions designed to ensure the primacy of civilian leaders. In either framework, the military undoubtedly plays a key role as subject matter expert and advisor to civilian officials in the formulation of policy. Once the decision has been made, however, the military establishment is obliged to execute the policy, regardless of any continued misgivings about cost and feasibility.

This creates a structural problem, one more effectively captured by the agency model of civil-military interaction (Feaver 2003). Appropriating the economic concept of principal-agent relationships, civilian leaders find themselves in a structural dilemma with their military. The civilian ‘principals’, with whom decision-making authority resides, effectively delegate the execution of security policy and warfighting to the military ‘agent’. Because of conflicting interests, the military in this framework has a structural incentive to “shirk”, failing to carry out the civilian principal’s directives as ordered or to the fullest possible extent. Because the principal requires some level of assurance that policy will be executed as ordered, they cannot afford to rely merely on the professional norms of the military elite as Huntington or Janowitz would contend. Instead, political leaders structure defense and oversight bodies in such a way as to monitor the military closely enough to ensure compliance, but loosely enough to avoid cost-prohibitive or obstructive levels of observation.

Collectively, these models of civil-military relationships highlight several essential characteristics that are important to this analysis. First, there exists a structural and normative prohibition against military interference in domestic politics that has been formalized into the professional education of the modern officer corps, labeling such behavior threatening to the wider values of democratic society and to the internal values set of the military. Second, prominent defections by the military elite in policy formulation or execution is envisioned as so potentially damaging that considerable organizational effort is spent by civilian leaders to mitigate them. While Feaver’s model assumes a single principal – the executive – modern democracies could be construed to consist of multiple principals, including the legislature

and civilian defense bureaucracy. Although unilateral military involvement in public policy debates has been institutionally discouraged, we empirically observe appeals of these nature in the political discourse.

The nature of this relationship produces interesting considerations when analyzing public cues issued from the military community. First, because of the proscriptions against subversive or independent political activity, cues issued in contravention of civilian preferences are a highly risky prospect for cue-givers. Civilian punishment mechanisms are readily available to the political leadership, including dismissal or punitive action. As a result, however, these cues should be construed as costly, as they are being issued in opposition to civilian leaders in a public forum. Second, insofar as the objective control philosophy has set the military apart as a community of specific subject matter expertise, military cues in the security realm should be deemed especially trustworthy as well, given the high and durable levels of institutional trust and confidence that the military enjoys with the American public.

Chapter 3

Who Follows the Generals?

Partisan Polarization and Military Credibility

Introduction

The credibility of expert communities in society is a central component in elite-driven politics and a critical consideration in theories regarding the receptiveness of the public to new information through elite discourse. Considerable theoretical effort has been made in articulating the ways in which attributes of information sources such as knowledge, trustworthiness, and like-mindedness (Downs 1957; Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998; Zaller 1992) can scale the persuasiveness of their messages. The credibility of elite communities and institutions can most readily be measured by expressed public trust and confidence in those same entities. Public trust in political and social institutions is an essential part of a functioning democracy, not only as a reflection of popular approval of institutional performance, but as an expression of the trustworthiness of information and policy signals that come from these institutions. In an environment where the value and veracity of political information from traditional sources are contentious and increasingly characterized by “echo-chamber” media exposure (Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Jamieson and Cappella 2008; Stroud 2008), the process by which individuals seek credible elite voices and form policy preferences is significant. This is especially true given the tendency for individuals to rely

on these voices the more confusing or distracting the information space becomes (Petty and Cacioppo 1986).

The broad trend of declining confidence in a variety of political and social institutions has been met with renewed debate over the process by which individuals decide to express trust in them and the implications this trend has for the long-term viability of democratic values (Nye 1997; Pharr, Putnam, and Dalton 2000). However, while study of this dynamic has traditionally focused on political institutions with low levels of public confidence and uneven persuasiveness, I direct attention to an institution with unique functional imperatives and high public trust: the military. Given the increasingly central role that active and retired military elites play in policy formation, governance, media commentary, and business, scholars have devoted more attention to the potential influence of this elite bloc. The capacity of military officials to shape public opinion on policy (Post and Sechser 2016), influence public support for military intervention (Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017), inform the public perception of success probability during war (Sidman and Norpoth 2012), or grant credibility through endorsement relies on the military institution's considerable clout with the public. High levels of support for the military come during a time where decisive military victories are elusive and a sizable portion of society admits mixed understanding of the military (Schake and Mattis 2016); however, they also come during a period of increased dissatisfaction with representative institutions, political polarization, and growing acceptance of authoritarian measures in government (Foa and Mounk 2016).

Despite the comparably high public confidence the institution enjoys relative to others in society, pooled data of expressed public trust in the military can be misleading. The institutional trust literature is largely devoid of dedicated study on public attitudes toward the military, while those that approach the subject focus on high aggregate levels of confidence captured in most polls (Gronke and Feaver 2001; Burbach 2017; Hill, Wong, and Gerras 2013). These studies overlook increasing polarization in assessing military credibility within the civilian public itself (Liebert and Golby 2017a), leaving a puzzling pattern of partisan separation in evaluation of the institution's credibility. While the civil-military

relations literature prescribes an apolitical military outside the realm of partisan politics, partisans in US society exhibit widely divergent attitudes in assessing the credibility of the institution. Examination of the military in a partisan context yields the primary research question of this analysis: what explains partisan polarization in perceived credibility of the military?

This polarization in partisan attitudes toward the military requires study for several reasons. First, an inability to objectively evaluate the credibility of select institutions in society contributes to a broader devaluation of fact-driven political discourse. A military institution that can maintain high levels of public confidence among certain partisans despite organizational scandals or frustrations on the battlefield could negatively influence the ability of individuals to properly learn the lessons of foreign policy failures (K. A. Schultz 2018). Second, as partisan sorting deepens political and social polarization, the capture of military confidence into a partisan identity has potentially damaging implications for the preservation of civil-military norms. While democracy and civil-military scholars argue that a military institution removed from partisan political fights is necessary for the preservation of democratic values, the perception of partisan “capture” of the military institution could be damaging to the integrity of the armed forces and of the very credibility it carries with the public (Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017; J. K. Dempsey 2009; Kohn 2002).

While patterns of confidence in the military are unique for several reasons, one of its more puzzling characteristics is a pronounced divergence in partisan attitudes despite the military’s apolitical mandate and non-partisan professional norms. Seemingly out-sized support among conservatives has been explained in the past as the result of partisan realignment (Huntington 1957; M. C. Desch 2001b), defense policy preferences (Kohn 1994), and shifting post-conscription military demography (M. C. Desch 2001b). However, while I believe that these help to explain the static existence of a baseline partisan “confidence gap”, I argue that a complete accounting of this widening divide requires viewing expressed trust as a dynamic process. Because of the necessity of new information in evaluative processing when judging the credibility of an institution like the military, I argue that the

confidence gap between partisans is not simply the result of different preferences, but of divergent pathologies in how partisans receive and employ updating information.

My analysis proceeds as follows: first, I briefly discuss the nature of this growing trend of polarization in assessment of the military institution. The principal aim of this section is to demonstrate the partisan separation on evaluation of the military institution and to review existing explanations for this divide. Second, I propose a complementary theory for the partisan confidence gap that contributes to the existing body of work by (1) considering the impact of selective information exposure and (2) incorporating the influence of partisan attitude polarization on impressions about military credibility. As such, I argue that both *selective exposure* to information and *biased updating* can help to better explain polarization in military trust. Third, I assess the validity of these two explanations incorporating original text data, observational data on media reporting habits, and original survey experimentation designed to test individual attitudes on trust for the military institution. I find that during a critical phase of the Iraq War, conservative Republicans were far less likely to be exposed to useful updating information about military struggles and misconduct based on their media preferences. In keeping with much of the established literature on partisan bias and attitude polarization, I find that this same political subset is more likely to marginalize new or newly-salient information on military misconduct than Democrats or Independents. The result is a segment of society that views the military institution, in many ways, as an extension of its own partisan political identity, with the cognitive biases this entails. I conclude by discussing the potential implications of such patterns on the quality of civil-military relations and the objective evaluation of US foreign policy by the public.

The Partisan Gap in Military Credibility

Polarized attitudes on the credibility of elite voices has significant implications when considering how the public forms attitudes on important policy decisions. As previously noted, the credibility of cue sources to the individual is an irreducible factor in the persuasiveness

of that source and its message. In forming preferences on complex issues, the individual makes cost-efficient choices in seeking out sources and allowing themselves to be persuaded by information advanced by credible actors. Specific articulations of what “credibility” entails vary; while usually requiring some baseline of knowledge about the subject under debate, different theoretical accounts of credibility include consideration of costly signaling (Baum and Groeling 2009), ideological “like-mindedness” (Downs 1957), elite status or unity (Zaller 1992), likability (Brady and Sniderman 1985), and “trustworthiness” in being able to reveal accurate information (Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998). Reliance on source attributes like credibility is more likely under circumstances where the respondent has minimal understanding of the issue or exists in a high-distraction information environment (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). As a result, an understanding of which elite communities carry the most weight in the public debate requires some measure of institutional credibility.

While operationalizing source credibility for political institutions like the legislature can be more easily proxied for by partisan identity or regularly-surveyed job approval metrics, it is difficult to measure the same value for apolitical institutions without public pressure incentives or electoral demands. However, public trust and confidence in institutions is a widely-collected survey device that affords the opportunity to overcome this problem and operationalize perceived source credibility more directly. Though there is considerable theoretical debate over whether expressed public trust is transactional and a reflection of incumbent performance (Citrin 1974; Lipset and Schneider 1983) or a broader statement about satisfaction with the system of government (Miller 1974a; Williams 1985), popular trust in institutions provides a metric for the perceived reliability of these elite communities in society.¹ While individuals should theoretically converge on some common evaluation of institutional performance – particularly for institutions without a partisan function – we will observe that the military evokes increasingly divided attitudes.

Many analyses probing the broader trends of institutional credibility have been limited

¹While the wording of various survey questions phrases these concepts differently, I use the terms *trust* and *confidence* interchangeably insofar as they speak to the individual’s chosen criterion for positive performance.

by two constraints. First, these studies have focused on pooled, aggregate, or cross-national statistics of public confidence, with incidental accounting of how the military institution fits into the public consciousness. However, some efforts have been made to disaggregate specific institutions from the whole in an effort to visualize underlying correlations between individual organizations. Some scholars have found that the military escapes classification as “the only public institution whose performance can be expected to operate and be evaluated according to standards different from those of civic life” (Newton and Norris 2000), while others place the military into the category of “order institutions” valued for their objective enforcement of the law (Rothstein and Stolle 2007). By what evaluative method individuals judge the military remains undetermined even by these efforts. The second limitation is that the public is often envisioned as a political whole. This tendency can be misleading, projecting an image of broad consensus on a dynamic that exhibits many of the same aspects of polarization we observe in other realms of public opinion.² Whereas many studies have focused on the high level of public confidence the military enjoys, failing to examine this trend among political subgroups has prevented more nuanced study.

Challenging these prior limitations in the field of institutional confidence allows for observation of the primary empirical puzzle of this analysis: the partisan gap in military credibility. Table 3.1 reports Democratic and Republican levels of confidence for a variety of institutions in US society, including representative, power-checking, and order institutions. This figure captures not only the divide amongst partisans over the credibility of the military institution, but contextualizes this gap across other institutions in society. Partisan separation regarding the military rivals the same gap among other institutions that

²Regression analysis of the individual-level data from the primary institutional confidence surveys reveals the partisan asymmetry at the core of our research question. Linear probability regression models with year fixed-effects using the Gallup and GSS time-series datasets indicate that identification as a Republican emerges as the strongest predictor of high confidence in the military, even in fully-specified models controlling for education, race, gender, age cohort, and an indicator for whether a political co-partisan was the commander-in-chief at the time. Classification as ‘high confidence’ captures response to the confidence question with “a great deal/quite a lot” rendered as a binary variable; similarly the dependent variable in the GSS models was the top response of expressed confidence on that survey’s three-point scale. Using a similar model with the most recent World Values Survey (WVS) data on US attitudes from 2011, I again observe that Republican vote-intent is a statistically significant predictor; additionally, high military confidence was positively shaped by preference for authoritarian political solutions, national pride, and concerns over terrorism, characteristics commonly associated with political conservatism (Hetherington and Suhay 2011).

Table 3.1: Confidence Among Partisans for Select US Institutions (2017-18)

	Gallup (2017)			NPR/PBS/Marist (2018)		
	<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Partisan Gap</i>	<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Partisan Gap</i>
<i>High Polarization</i>						
Presidency	10*	60*	50*	7	37	30
Democratic Party	–	–	–	26	3	23
Republican Party	–	–	–	2	23	21
Military	45	66	21	44	65	21
Media/TV News	31*	14*	17*	23	4	19
<i>Low Polarization</i>						
Banking System	30*	36*	6*	16	17	1
Small Business	67*	73*	6*	–	–	–
Supreme Court	43*	40*	3*	22	27	5
Congress	4	5	1	7	9	2

NOTE: Reported figures depict levels of partisan confidence in select US institutions across both the Gallup Institutional Confidence survey (2017) and the NPR/PBS/Marist Poll (2018). Partisan Gap column indicates the magnitude (in percentage points) of difference between partisan subgroups on each institution surveyed. Asterisk (*) indicates institutions where figures were computed using both “a great deal” and “quite a lot” of confidence combined due to data format. All other figures computed using highest (“a great deal”) confidence response.

are highly susceptible to partisan calculations, such as the presidency and the media. Surprisingly, while we might expect evaluations of the military to resemble low-polarization institutions such as the courts or the banking system, this is not the case. Rather, partisans seem to be just as polarized about the military institution as they are about the major party establishments.

The notion that partisan calculations should inform impressions about the performance or institutional quality of the military is particularly curious given its apolitical mandate. The military institution has a specific role in society, to fight and win the nation’s wars; however, despite the organization having no explicit partisan role, partisans arrive at different evaluations of the institution’s credibility. What explains this divergence? Existing scholarship would suggest that elite-level alignment on policy preferences or military demography could explain such an arrangement. However, these explanations cannot explain a dynamic sustainment – and expansion – of the partisan gap across different administrations and states of military performance. In the following section, I propose a corollary

theory, that separation in perceived institutional credibility – particularly during wartime – between partisans is the product of the different processes by which these groups receive new information about the institution and form resulting evaluations.

Theoretical Development

Extant Explanations

Many security scholars have studied the importance of partisan identity as a salient consideration in civil-military relations, whether in the context of how civilians and the military divide on the use of force (Golby 2011; Feaver and Kohn 2001), the public’s knowledge and perception of the military in society (Schake and Mattis 2016), or the political demography of the military itself (J. K. Dempsey 2009; Urban 2010; M. C. Desch 2001b). However, while these analyses describe elite-level dynamics or the political identification of the military, they speak less to the polarization that exists between subsets of that public in evaluating the credibility of an institution they commonly observe. Indeed, a conservative Republican preference for the military institution has been a persistent trend for several decades and one addressed laterally in broader discussions of civil-military relations in the United States. What explanations have been advanced that could explain, at least statically, the partisan “confidence gap” in the military institution?

At the elite level, closer proximity between the military and the Republican party has been attributed to a host of factors. The party’s post-Vietnam role in loosening many of bureaucratic restrictions that the Kennedy and Johnson administrations had placed on the military led to a period of autonomy and expansive authorities in the Pentagon, developed further under the patronage of the Reagan-era buildup and the Goldwater-Nichols bureaucratic re-organization (Kohn 1994). The party leadership also seized on a critical opportunity to capture national security and patriotism as key aspects of the its post-war identity, filling the political void left by a Democratic party that retreated from interventionist rhetoric and favored domestic programs over expanded military funding. Indeed,

even the military's image was better rehabilitated under Republican presidents, as William Odom states, that though "the Democrats have treated the military as the source of bad national strategy in Vietnam [...] the Republicans defended the military against the charge" (Kohn et al. 1994). This connection was deepened by increasingly aligned preferences for the use of force abroad (Golby 2011), militant internationalism (Wittkopf 1990), and increasing skepticism of more ideologically-distant Democratic leaders (Kohn 2002).

The rightward-changing demography of the military itself has also been a subject of study among civil-military scholars. Huntington (1957) early identified the emerging southern identity of the post-conscription force, while the post-Vietnam all-volunteer military took on a far less representative profile than society at large. With the adoption of the "southern strategy" by Republicans in the 1960s and 1970s, Republicans leveraged their position as the national security party and its geographical inheritance of the American South to increase its electoral connections to servicemembers. Between 1976 and 1996, military officers had become far more outspoken in their identification with the party, increasing from 33% to 70%, even though the larger society only increased identification with the party from 25% to 33% over the same period (O. R. Holsti 1998; M. C. Desch 2001b). Political attitudes among military officers have swung decisively in favor of the Republican party, with those identifying as Democrats joining at lower rates and leaving at earlier times than Republican counterparts (J. K. Dempsey 2009). Recent survey evidence suggests that conservatives in the broader public find much more common political ground with the institutional values of the military as well.³

These efforts make a collectively compelling argument for explaining the existence of

³Schake and Mattis (2016) find that 58% of Republicans believed military servicemembers to be "more socially conservative" than the rest of society, compared with 9% of Democrats who believed servicemembers were "less socially conservative" than the rest of society. Additionally, 72% of Republicans believed military values to be "about the same" or "less progressive" than the rest of society, compared with 16% of Democrats would believed military values were "more progressive". This speaks to the perception that Republicans feel military veterans are "more like us" than Democrats or Independents. The survey finds that Republicans see the military as more meritocratic and that holding on to an "old-fashioned view of morality" is necessary for the institution. Compared to Democrats, Republicans are also more likely to believe that the military has "a great deal of respect for civilian society" and less likely to believe that civilian society possesses the same respect for the military in turn.

(1) a preference alignment on foreign policy between Republicans and the military at the elite level and (2) an increasing cultivation of military servicemembers as an extension of the party's constituency at the mass public level. However, this does not directly address why the conservative public would continue to imbue the military with high levels of seemingly unconditional trust as an elite source. As I will argue, the missing component is an understanding of how institutional confidence can be less an objective valuation of an organization's performance than it is itself an extension of partisan polarization and cognitive bias. With limited first-hand understanding of an institution, individuals are largely dependent on other elites in society for information by which to form an opinion, such as the organized media (Nye 1997). However, media environments trafficked by different partisans may exhibit widely different sensibilities in their reporting patterns, making information unevenly available for use by the audience.

In the following section, I argue that we currently lack a dynamic understanding of partisan polarization in expressed trust for the military in a way that exceeds mere static explanations of preferences. Individuals with limited exposure to the military institution require third-party elite information to drive attitudes about its performance. Just as strong partisans are more likely to be politically active (Abramowitz and K. L. Saunders 2008), exhibit polarized attitudes (Iyengar and Hahn 2009), and downweight disconfirming information (Taber and Lodge 2006), they are also more likely to display increased in-group bias (Mason 2015) and fail to objectively evaluate the quality of institutions (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). As such, I propose a theory linking how strong partisans acquire and use information about the military institution when making judgments about its credibility.

A Dynamic Theory and the “Confidence Gap”

The fundamental assertion of this analysis is that the confidence gap between partisans can be more completely explained by considering the methods by which individuals acquire and process new information about the military institution; if partisans on either side are more or less likely to acquire new and useful information, or biased in their interpretations of that

information, then even poor performance or unethical activity by the military could prevent individuals in society from converging on some common assessment of the institution. Furthermore, any pattern of partisan polarization must include an account of the role of strong or ideologically “sorted” partisans in the process, as these individuals are both more relevant to the shaping of political discourse and are more likely to be driving polarization writ large (Mason 2015). Because of the strictly non-partisan and apolitical nature of the military, the existence of a bias-driven and partisan confidence gap could be symptomatic of shifting public attitudes about the appropriateness of a political role for the military.

However, how would partisans in society arrive at different expressed opinions about a non-partisan entity they both commonly observe? An incredibly rich literature in political science has focused on the varying processes by which individuals update their impressions of policies or institutions in response to new information. One theoretical school, advanced more recently by Achen (1992) and Gerber and D. Green (1999) contends that even partisan individuals are capable of responsibly using information to update their own prior beliefs in a credibly Bayesian fashion. This conceptualization of fundamentally unbiased learning “holds that new information moves people with different partisan affinities (but similar levels of prior information) in the same direction and to approximately the same extent.” When approval for a policy or leader across different partisan subgroups seems to track in a parallel fashion, they argue, this is clear evidence of unbiased learning.

However, Bartels (2002) argues against this interpretation; if a truly unbiased process were at work, partisan subgroups should not be moving in parallel, but converge on some common understanding as new information outweighs individual-level priors in the Bayesian framework. Instead, the parallel trends observation used by Gerber and D. Green (1999) as validation for their belief in unbiased learning is actually the most potent evidence against it: there is some irreducible partisan bias that separates political subgroups despite observation of some common picture of factual information. Indeed, this perspective has been more recently examined in analysis by Taber and Lodge (2006) that finds strong partisans, particularly those with the political sophistication to mount an informed defense, will seek

out confirmatory information, downweight disconfirming arguments, and lend more credibility to information that confirms their prior understanding. Applied to this case, the failure of partisans to reach a common understanding of the performance of the military institution should lead us to believe that a potentially partisan-motivated bias is at work.

Such thinking is at the core of this theory: an increasingly polarized and ideologically-sorted public, subjected to different information flows and exhibiting different levels of cognitive bias, contributes to widening polarization in what should be an objective evaluation of institutional performance. As such, this theory envisions two complementary elements of the same evaluative process with regards to assessment of the military institution. First, the *selective exposure* hypothesis argues that partisans are predisposed to receive widely different types of information pertaining to military performance, shaping the usable store of data with which partisans issue judgments of credibility. Second, the *partisans bias* hypothesis argues that how partisans use new or newly-salient information in forming opinions differs greatly between subgroups, with affective polarization biases driving uneven levels of perceived military credibility. I incorporate competing arguments regarding the ability of individuals to update rationally (Gerber and D. Green 1999) or in a biased fashion (Bar-tels 2002; Brian J. Gaines et al. 2007) when rendering a judgment on the reliability of the military institution and utilize a multi-method approach to address this question.

Selective Information Exposure

The first portion of my theory regards bias in information acquisition, which I argue could take on any combination of two non-mutually exclusive forms. The first is that partisans are subject to different *volumes* of information regarding military performance or organizational conduct. Demand-based reporting biases and voluntary selective exposure to certain outlets can result in the individual having far less probability of hearing new information. An individual may discredit reporting that focuses on the story or traffic a limited diversity of news outlets, allowing reporting biases to shape the information to which she is exposed. If information availability is minimal compared to other individuals, contrary updates are

easier to dismiss out of hand as unreliable or aberrant. Bartels (2002) argues that while skepticism of new information that challenges one's priors may be Bayesian, it is not rational; indeed this off-hand rejection of new information "in extreme cases [...] may approach delusion" in its censoring of new updating information. In order to account for the possibility that media outlets with partisan audiences – particularly conservative ones – may exhibit this reporting bias, I structure H1A:

- **H1A (Asymmetric Reporting):** News outlets with established partisans audiences will report negative stories about the military at different rates. The reporting volume of these stories will be lower among conservative-favored media outlets than centrist or liberal-favored outlets.

The second form of information exposure bias I propose is that partisans are subject to different *frames* when military information is reported; on issues regarding military competence and professionalism, these stories may be presented in a way that insulates the institution from public criticism or highlights institutional failures. Even if H1A predicts certain outlets would under-report these stories, periods of conflict would still likely oblige reporting on war activities by biased media outlets to their audience. However, the nature of that reporting may be heavily subject to "lead story" effects and issue framing by focusing on some aspects of the military's performance and a war's conduct while ignoring or downplaying others (Iyengar and Kinder 1989). I capture this potential avenue of information selectivity in H1B:

- **H1B (Asymmetric Framing):** When negative military stories are reported, media outlets with established partisan audiences will exhibit different frames with respect to criticism/insulation of the military institution. Conservative-favored outlets will frame war stories in a way that insulates the military from criticism or re-directs blame, while centrist or liberal-favored outlets will report more directly on military failures or scandals.

In both cases, the events of reality fail to effectively update factual beliefs due to filtering by partisan-favored media sources. Given the direction of the partisan confidence gap, in

which Republicans exhibit consistently higher levels of trust in the military, H1A predicts that conservative media outlets reporting on political issues will significantly under-report issues regarding military failures, strategic missteps, professional misconduct, and other stories critical of the military institution. This would logically result in a Republican audience with less access to updating information by which to form new evaluations of the military. Whether this is the result of supply-side news biases, demand-side audience preferences, or a combination of both, is not the purview of this analysis, as all of them contribute to the logic of H1A. In addition, H1B predicts that when these stories are reported, they will be framed in such a way as to minimize direct damage to the prestige and credibility of the institution. I will test both of these hypotheses in the following section by analyzing reporting habits and patterns among news outlets with defined partisan audiences during the Iraq War. This period is particularly useful in testing the information exposure hypothesis because (1) new information about military conduct and performance was readily available and (2) this timeframe is characterized by some of the widest separation between partisans on military attitudes.

Partisan Biases and Affective Polarization

The second portion of my theory asserts that partisans are using different evaluative processes to transfer information into judgments about the credibility of the military institution. Conditional on new updating information reaching the audience, it still may be the case that partisans differ in how they evaluate the performance or institutional quality of the armed forces. However, difference in expressed opinion need not indicate the existence of pronounced partisan bias. I therefore consider three potential explanations for how partisans might arrive at different conclusions about the military institution in response to new or newly-salient information.

The first is that Republicans in society have a larger base of knowledge and working information about the military compared to others. According to this assertion, Republicans are not updating in a biased fashion. Instead, the incorporation of new information does not

influence prior attitudes because that prior is based on a very high number of observations in their “running tally”, against which a new piece of data is relatively insignificant. If Republican respondents are selectively predisposed to have much higher amounts of information about the military institution, have greater expressed interest in military issues, or have more direct familiarity with the institution compared to Democrats and Independents, it may follow that their prior attitudes are harder to reverse because of the relative size between existing beliefs and new information. From this argument I form the following hypothesis:

- **H2A (Bayesian Updating):** Republican partisans possess a larger store of information regarding the military institution than Democrats or Independents *ex ante*, making updating information relatively ineffectual compared to others.

The implications of this hypothesis would be that Republicans have greater interest in military affairs, possess greater command of knowledge in issues regarding the institution, or have higher levels of direct exposure to the military as an organization. As a result, new information regarding military affairs would have a much larger prior to influence compared to centrists or liberals with comparatively less knowledge about the military. I will test this hypothesis using both observational and experimental data regarding Republican knowledge and interest in security issues and the military institution more broadly.

The second potential explanation for the partisan separation in expressed confidence I consider comes from the counterarguments of Gerber and D. Green (1999); if individuals simply have different perceptions of what is preferable, disparate attitudes need not be indicative of biased processing. In order to understand how individuals might have different expectations of the same institution, it is necessary to understand some of the basic arguments in the institutional trust literature. In its broadest form, the debate over the causes of public trust is the product of two divergent attitudes over directionality. The first advocates that cultural factors at lower social levels drive institutional trust at higher ones. This tradition subscribes to an exogenous understanding of trust in government as

the natural extension of a vibrant civic culture and socialization (Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 1993; Fukuyama 1995). The second argues a reverse process in which institutional outcomes drive requisite public trust. In this tradition, expressed trust in institutions is endogenous, a rational valuation of those institutions based on their perceived performance (Hetherington 1998). This top-down process of creating confidence in institutions requires that government produce positive outcomes that are, in turn, rewarded by the public with expressions of trust in the institutions that are responsible for those outcomes. Mishler and Rose (2001) seize on one of the main limitations of this field in that, “although institutional theories agree that political trust is endogenous, they disagree about which aspects of performance are important or how performance is assessed.” In order to correct this gap with regards to evaluation of the military, I establish several categories of potential conduct.

Most of the limited study dedicated to understanding institutional evaluations of the military has relied on *institutionalist* theory, arguing that public trust is a rational valuation of perceived performance. There have been numerous efforts to characterize what types of behavior or performance individuals value most with regards to the military, ranging from purely transactional evaluations of battlefield performance (Gronke and Feaver 2001; King and Karabell 2002b) to organizational professionalism (Hill, Wong, and Gerras 2013; Burbach 2017). As some have noted, the specific challenge in explaining patterns of trust in the military institution comes from the difficulty in capturing a meaningful metric of performance (Garb and Malesic 2016; Yang and Holzer 2006). However, none have considered that these criteria might differ based on the political or ideological leanings of the individual.

I therefore organize the existing literature on military confidence to create three non-mutually exclusive categories of criteria for assessing the military institution. The first potential driver of public esteem for the military is, as Gronke and Feaver remark, “the most obvious” one, a purely transactional assessment of the institution based on its performance in warfare. I categorize this class of criteria as *performance* evaluations. As the military’s singular function within society is to fight and win its nation’s wars, it follows

that the institution's performance under these conditions should provide the clearest signal to the public as to its competency and quality. Using results from a sweeping survey of civilian and military elites in the late 1990s, Gronke and Feaver (2001) examine the potential causes of high expressed confidence among the public as a product of *process*, perception of the organization's governing principles and ethics, and *policy*, an institutional account of performance-based evaluation (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995).⁴ A similar case is made by King and Karabell (2002b), arguing that the military overcame depressed public support after Vietnam by demonstrating consistent and decisive success in Grenada, Panama, Iraq, and the Balkans. I therefore consider that some partisans may value performance in conflict more than others when rendering an opinion on institutional credibility.

A second theoretical approach takes into account the importance of organizational practices and "process", that public regard for the military institution is driven by perceived institutional integrity, ethical quality, and embodiment of cherished social norms. Following the nomenclature of King and Karabell (2002b) and Burbach (2017), I categorize this class of explanations as *professionalism* evaluations. While achieving some quantifiable link between institutional practices and public esteem has been difficult to ascertain, I nonetheless consider this explanation potentially powerful given the concurrence of internal military reforms and rising public esteem during the post-Vietnam era. This does not suggest that concern over the military's moral character supplants public desire for a capable military. For our purposes, the *professionalism* class of evaluations asserts that individuals in society expect the military to embody certain virtues or maintain organizational standards of integrity while preserving warfighting capacity. However, it also assumes that the more active process in public valuation of the institution is not an overt display of battlefield prowess so much as fair practices and accountability.

Third, I capture potential responses to the military's development as an impartial and

⁴The *process* class is significant to the "professionalism" treatment condition in this study, while the *policy* class is analogous to the "performance" condition. While the latter focuses on direct observation of outcomes from the battlefield, the former is a judgment on the institution's ability to fairly regulate its internal processes.

unbiased elite community in society. Though civil-military relations scholars have debated various models for the optimal distribution of political and military power, there is broad consensus across most for the virtue and necessity of an apolitical military (Huntington 1957; Feaver and Kohn 2001; Feaver 1999; J. K. Dempsey 2009; Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017). The typology of institutions laid out by Rothstein and Stolle (2007) includes the armed forces as part of the class of “order institutions” valued for their impartiality and ability to fairly administer policy. While military elites have become more prevalent in the political discourse domestically, Hill, Wong, and Gerras (2013) argue that it is the continued restraint of the institution from engaging in partisan activity and its deeply-ingrained deference to civilian leaders that has contributed to high public confidence. I characterize this class of criteria as *non-partisan* evaluations, distinct from *performance* and *professionalism* preferences in that the public is responding not to battlefield outcomes or organizational ethics, but on the perception of the military as an apolitical source of information. In this framework, overt acts of partisanship or political activism on the part of active or retired military elites would be the most damaging behavior the institution could engage in, as it compromises the image of the military as neutral executor of public security. Indeed, the specter of a politicized military has led many to suggest that repeated forays into the political sphere would damage trust in the military institution directly, and in government more broadly (King and Karabell 2002b; J. K. Dempsey 2009; Liebert and Golby 2017a). From these three preference sets I form the following hypothesis:

- **H2B (Divergent Standards):** Certain partisans will value different classes of military behavior (performance, professionalism, non-partisanship) more in rendering their opinions about institutional credibility. These differing preferences allow for partisans to evaluate the institutions rationally, but on different evaluative criteria.

These different classes of evaluative criteria allow for the possibility that partisans across society merely have divergent preferences with regards to the optimal behavior of their military. As a result, H2B argues that partisan divergence in expressed confidence is the result

of different political subsets expecting certain types of behavior from the military and rewarding or punishing the institution in accordance with their perceived accomplishments or failures in that class. This would be observable if partisans displayed clear and distinct prioritization in which types of military behavior affected their perceptions of trust. I test this hypothesis using experimental methods designed to measure partisan preferences for military performance.

However, if partisan priors *ex ante* regarding knowledge of the military institution are comparable and partisan individuals express no clear preference for military behavior relative to each other, we can no longer assume that unbiased learning is taking place. In this case, a difference in expressed opinion at the conclusion of the updating process between partisan groups is attributable to cognitive biases that prevent an updated evaluation of the institution. Conditional on access to useful information on military failures, one would expect a commensurate re-evaluation of the institution that took this information into account; if they did not, some biased process is affecting the nature of that evaluation:

- **H2C (Partisan Bias):** Republican partisans employ a biased process in evaluating the credibility of the military institution in response to new information. Conditional on receiving negative information on military institutional quality, Republicans will reject, downweight, or “backfire” their estimations of military credibility.

Both H2A and H2B allow for an unbiased process of evaluation to take place: the former attributes rigid confidence in the military to the notion that new information is less influential compared to a larger base of knowledge, while the latter contends that partisans simply disagree on the most important criteria by which to evaluate the military’s credibility. However, H2C captures the possibility that, even without more *ex ante* information on the military and with the ability to express preferences differently, a subset of individuals will actively reject updating information or interpret the meaning of that information in a way that insulates the military institution from damage.

Why might this be the case? A substantial literature in political science has sought to investigate the nature of partisan polarization in American society, particularly with regard to the effect of partisan sorting on the extremity of issue positions and out-group animus (Mason 2015; Abramowitz and K. L. Saunders 2008; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009). A critical distinction is made between traditional issue polarization and social or affective polarization, in which partisans – sorted into closer party-ideology alignment – increase both out-group animus and in-group bias (Mason 2015; Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). In this framework, partisan identity carries with it a social dimension that can distort objective thought processes regarding policy or governmental quality. Bafumi and Shapiro (2009) argue more pointedly that the influence of solidified partisan attitudes may have potentially damaging implications for rational opinion formation more broadly (emphasis added by author):

Strong partisan attitudes may lead to *rigidity of attitudes and opinions in the face of new and credible discrepant information*. Not only might such new information be avoided through selective exposure, but its accuracy and validity might be denied as a result of “motivated bias” or flawed reasoning or no reasoning at all.

Expressions of confidence in the military, within this framework, are not rational evaluations of institutional credibility, but emotional statements of partisan and social identity. Strong partisans have been found to be particularly more likely to counter-argue contrary information (Taber and Lodge 2006), to express anger or bias in response to threats to party status or prestige (Huddy, Mason, and Aaroe 2015), or in the case of political conservatives, to express far more dogmatic thought processes or ideological intensity (Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Lelkes and Sniderman 2016). While many of these patterns have been found in attitudes about co-partisans, it would be particularly curious to find such a dynamic at work in attitudes about an institution with a decidedly non-partisan structure and code of ethics. Nonetheless, I propose through H2C that this process is at work, particularly among strong conservative partisans, influencing how new information about the military is received and processed.

In this section I have argued for the use of a dynamic theory in order to explain partisan

polarization on perceived military credibility. While issued-based explanations are suitable for explaining a static or baseline “confidence gap” between partisans, the persistence and expansion of this gap over time requires a different theoretical approach. This theory argues that special attention must be paid to (1) how individuals receive new information about the military institution and (2) the pathologies that partisans exhibit in how that information is used. In the first part of the theory, I propose two hypotheses arguing that partisan audiences are exposed to vastly different information environments with regards to the volume and tone of military information. In the second part, while I account for the possibility that divergent attitudes are the product of rational processes, I argue that partisan bias – particularly among the strongest or “sorted” partisans – may be driving the broader pattern of polarization we observe.

Partisan Exposure to Military Performance

In this section I evaluate the validity of information exposure explanations for partisan polarization in military confidence. The *institutionalist* school discussed above requires that the public issue judgments of the performance of an institution based on its perceived quality. However, it is a central contention of this analysis that even if individuals have a variety of options in how to evaluate the military institution given new information, they are still largely reliant on third parties to provide that information. Barring personal experience or direct exposure to the institution’s actions, many individuals instead rely on information from other elite communities in society, such as political leaders and the news media when forming attitudes on institutions (Nye 1997; Hanitzsch and Berganza 2012; Wiegand and Paletz 2001). This assumption is particularly valid when considering the military institution, given its increasing distance from the mass public and the decreasing probability of the average citizen having first-hand information on military performance (Liebert and Golby 2017a). Due to the centrality of these additional sources on shaping the information environment, I examine the importance of media reporting habits on the information environment to which partisans are exposed.

Partisan political identity serves as the principal lens through which I envision individuals gaining information about institutional performance. For a structurally and normatively apolitical institution as the military, partisan alignment should theoretically provide no additional information that is predictive of performance evaluation. However, as the previous descriptive regressions and factor analysis have revealed, this is not the case. Instead, I argue that polarization in expressed trust for the military is partially the result of such expressions being subsumed into partisan identities, maintained by controlled information exposure. As Achen and Bartels (2017) observe:

A party constructs a conceptual viewpoint by which its voters can make sense of the political world. Sympathetic newspapers, magazines, websites, and television channels convey the framework to partisans. This framework identifies friends and enemies, it supplies talking points, and it tells people how to think and what to believe. (pg. 268)

Conservative Republicans are far more likely to consume news media from a single source rather than a multitude of news outlets; as such, we should expect that the reliance on third-party information about the military institution is more potent among these individuals, given the increased likelihood for more substantively coherent information.⁵ However, as previously discussed, the existence of media “echo-chambers”, particularly among established partisans, serves to minimize exposure to contrary information (Jamieson and Cappella 2008), “reinforce existing attitudes and beliefs” (Iyengar and Hahn 2009), and increase alignment with pro-attitudinal information (Stroud 2008). Furthermore, the active distrust among political conservatives for a much wider swath of media sources compounds this effect: in addition to trafficking a limited plurality of information sources, this partisan subgroup is also more likely to reject contrary information as non-credible depending on its source. Polling on this phenomenon reveals that while 62% of Democrats believe that the

⁵Pew reports that 47% of individuals identifying as “conservative” or “very conservative” obtain news on government and politics from a single source: FOX News. This compares to smaller outlet followings among political liberals, where MSNBC and CNN have followings of 12% and 15%, respectively. “Consistent” conservatives are also far more likely to actively distrust other media outlets than liberals; of the 36 media outlets surveyed, conservatives held more distrust than trust for 24 of them, compared to 8 out of 36 among liberals. “Political Polarization and Media Habits: From Fox News to Facebook, How Liberals and Conservatives Keep Up with Politics”, Pew Research Center, October 21, 2014.

news media “gets the facts straight”, only 14% of Republicans feel the same way; this distrust of the press permeates every medium, from television to print media to internet news.⁶

If stories that otherwise might update their opinion of the military’s performance or professionalism are rejected or not widely reported by their preferred media outlets, strong partisans may be more likely to dismiss singular disconfirming stories as either untrustworthy, biased, or unrepresentative of the institution writ large. The impact of partisanship has been demonstrated to have a marked effect on perceptions of military operations; respondents identifying as Republican during the Bush administration were more likely to underestimate the number of casualties the US had sustained in the Iraq conflict and more likely to have a higher perceived probability of success for the war’s outcome (Adam J. Berinsky 2007). Rather than support for a conflict specifically, I explore the feasibility of H1A and H1B in that partisans update – or fail to update – their impressions of the military institution in response to different patterns of reporting on war performance and military professionalism. The role of individual level political identity, particularly among ideologically “sorted” partisans, may help to explain the broader trend of polarization in military confidence we observe.

Evaluating Asymmetric Reporting Hypothesis

In order to assess the plausibility of divergent information availability across news outlets with established partisan audiences, I analyze reporting trends on the Iraq War in 2007 across major media sources in different forms. This period is remarkable in that it was arguably the most politically contentious and empirically the most deadly year of the Iraq War; I argue that this period of time exhibits the high watermark of war reporting and public accessibility to updating information about military capability and effectiveness, making it a highly useful case for analysis. The first dimension I examine is the frequency with which stories that might otherwise update partisan attitudes on the military are reported

⁶Andrew Dugan and Zac Auter, “Republicans’, Democrats’ Views of Media Accuracy Diverge”, *Gallup*, August 25, 2017.

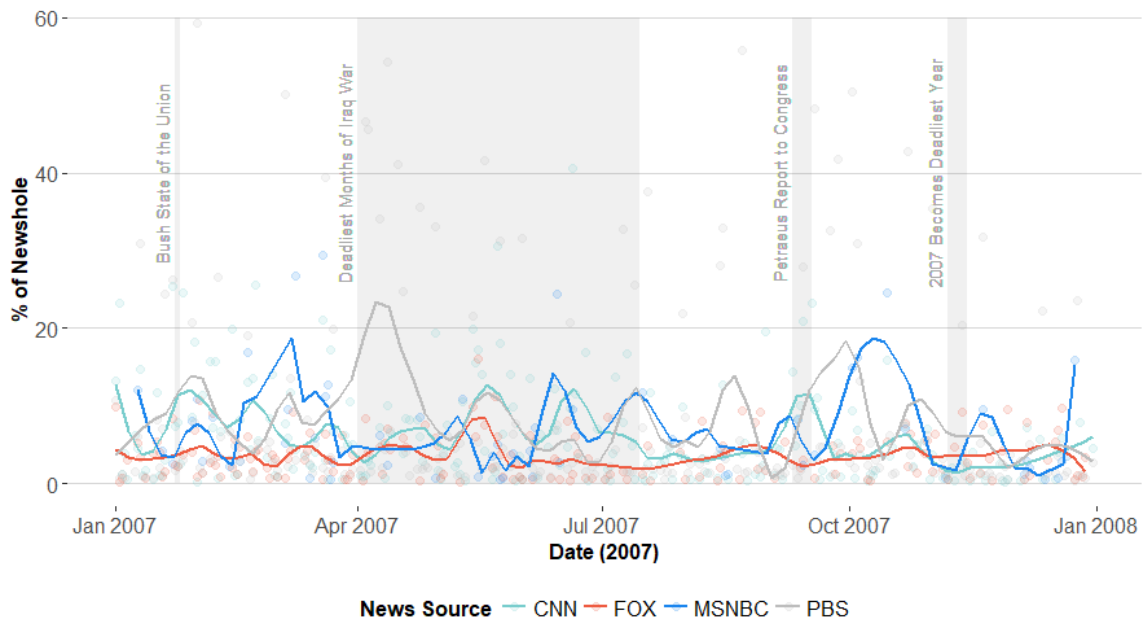
across different sources. In order to test the theory that conservative sources may underreport stories of war performance (H1A), I utilize the Pew Research Center News Content Index (NCI) dataset, which records and codes the duration, substance, and frequency of online, radio, television, and print media news segments based on a series of rotating sampling processes.⁷

I specifically examine the prominence and frequency of stories coded in the NCI dataset as pertaining to combat events, casualties, reconstructions efforts, evaluations of the Iraq troop surge, and other events relevant to the conduct of the war's execution. These stories are coded distinctly from "homefront" stories involving memorialization or Iraq veteran issues and "policy debate" stories regarding political ramifications, general strategy, or anti-war efforts. As a result, this category exclusively captures news stories that best reflect the performance of the military during the critical "surge" period to a national audience. I focus on cable news outlets with the highest ratings exposure in 2007 (CNN, MSNBC, FOX) and print media outlets classified as "Tier 1" by Pew based on national distribution and circulation (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*). I also include radio programs with headline feeds (ABC News Headlines), national audiences (NPR), and the highest cumulative audience programs in 2007 (Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh).⁸ From this I am able to capture a fairly adequate picture of the media environment partisans would have experienced regarding information on the military's performance in Iraq.

Figure 3.1 displays the results of this analysis for the major cable news channels. As previously stated, a preponderance of self-identified conservatives consume most of their news from FOX, while liberals and centrists are more likely to sample from a variety of

⁷See Appendix C for expanded description of NCI sampling processes and procedures.

⁸For television and radio programs, I generate "% of Newshole" by calculating a daily total of duration (in on-air seconds) spent on the Iraq Combat Events topic by each source, divided by the total number of on-air seconds sampled by the NCI database. This yields a daily percentage of the on-air time devoted to Iraq Combat Event stories per day, per source. For print media, I reverse-coded the "prominence" variable from the NCI dataset that rates all newspaper stories on a five-point scale based on location in the paper's print edition (most prominent, second most prominent, other-above the fold, etc...), taking the daily average of these to create a "Prominence Proportion" per day, per source.

Figure 3.1: Media Coverage of Iraq Combat Events by Source, 2007

NOTE: This figure depicts media coverage of Iraq Combat Events (ICE) and related news stories as coded by Pew Research News Content Index (NCI) Dataset. Points represent day totals for percent of newshole for cable news sources with largest audience reach. LOESS smoothers are added to depict broader trend of moving averages over time (span = 0.10). Shaded periods indicate several Iraq-related events of interest during the course of the 2007 news year, including announcement of the “surge” strategy (State of the Union), the Congressional report on its progress (Petraeus Report), and sharp increases in coalition casualties.

sources including CNN, MSNBC, and PBS. For this reason, I focus on the contrast between these groups of media outlets when reporting on the Combat Events category. Evident from these results is that FOX devotes low levels of average air time to such stories in 2007, with segments of far shorter collective duration compared to the other news channels. The most notable gaps in relative coverage between outlets are concurrent with increased concern of the refugee crisis (March), the deadliest months of the year (April-July), and the period following General David Petraeus’ report to Congress (September). During these periods, conservative media is out-reported by as much as two- to three-times by other networks on these stories. As reported in Table 3.2, over the entire measured period of 2007, the average percentage of daily coverage time spent on ICE stories on FOX amounted to roughly half of that spent by CNN and MSNBC, and close to a third of that spent by PBS. Coverage of Iraq stories more generally, including homefront and policy stories, exhibit and even starker

contrast between outlets.

I replicate this analysis to include other forms of news transmission. Incorporation of print newspapers with national distribution yields a similar pattern of reporting asymmetry. Figure 3.2(a) captures the prominence given to ICE stories over time by each of the three Tier 1 print sources sampled; while the *Wall Street Journal* is not a conservative media “chamber” as FOX is for television, recent study has revealed it is the only newspaper that self-identified conservatives trust more than they distrust.⁹ Even at minimum span, the LOESS smoother cannot capture a yearly trend of reporting for WSJ because there are too few data points of reporting on these stories. This should not be surprising; compared to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, the *Journal* is far more business-focused and devotes less column inches to foreign affairs on the whole. However, it remains that among preferred print media sources, an even wider disparity in access to updating information about the military’s war performance exists in this medium than in cable news.

I include consideration of radio sources as an additional medium; of the top five media sources utilized by consistent conservatives, FOX News (88%) and local news (50%) are followed closely by radio programs from Sean Hannity (45%) and Rush Limbaugh (43%).¹⁰ However, Figure 3.2(b) reveals that these do not constitute an unaccounted channel by which information about war events might be communicated. Again, the LOESS smoother has too few reporting points to calculate a yearly trend from the conservative outlets. This is in comparison to National Public Radio and ABC News Headlines which regularly spend in excess of 10% of their sampled air-time on ground events and actions coming from the Iraq War. As a well-trafficked news medium by self-identified political conservatives, these findings contribute to the pattern developed in Figures 3.1 and 3.2(a), in which network

⁹While actually quite centrist based on the ideological distribution of its audience, WSJ is in fact the only news sources out of 36 in the Pew study in which individuals from the entire ideological spectrum express trust over distrust; for this reason, I incorporate this paper as the conservative source for print media as it is the most likely to be consumed by right partisans.

¹⁰Percentages of conservative viewership captured by Pew Research, 2014. Pew Research Center, October 2014, “Political Polarization and Media Habits”

Table 3.2: Descriptive Statistics, Iraq War Reporting: Cable News (2007)

News Source	Mean Percentage of Sampled Newshole			
	PBS	CNN	MSNBC	FOX News
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Combat Events	9.18 (< 0.001)	6.12 (< 0.001)	6.85 (< 0.001)	3.62
Domestic/Homefront	27.12 (< 0.001)	6.57 (0.07)	10.75 (0.01)	4.62
Policy Debate	26.38 (< 0.001)	13.03 (0.01)	25.28 (< 0.001)	9.97
Observations	431	468	243	394

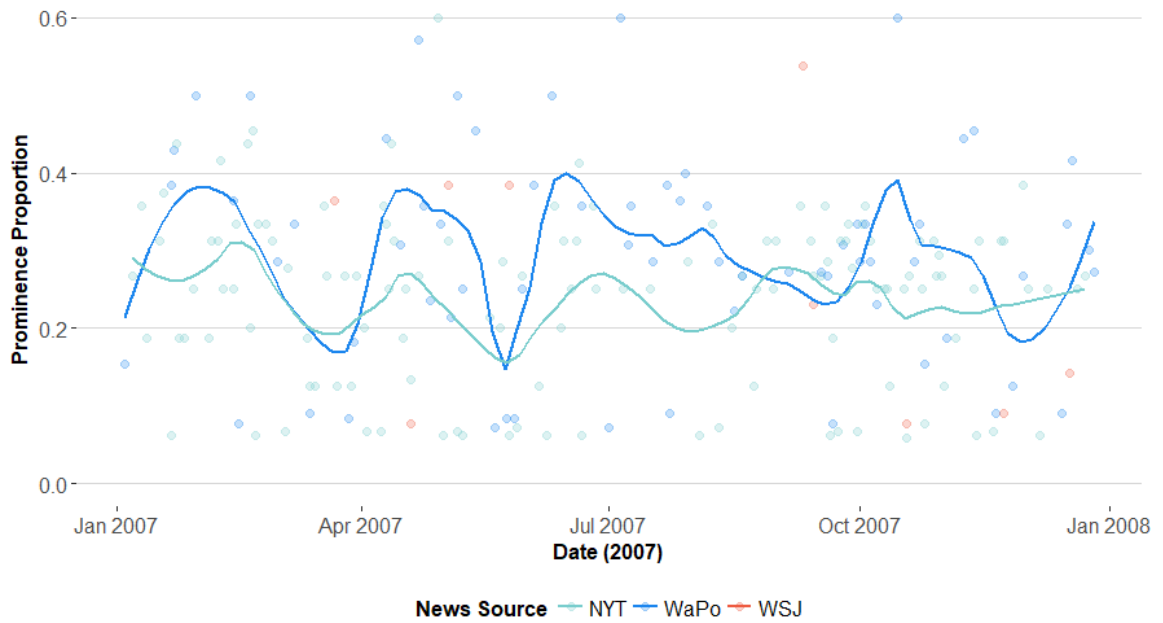
NOTE: Reported figures depict average percent of daily newshole dedicated to segments on Iraq War stories across the entire 2007 news year. Values in parentheses () indicate p-values for two-tailed t-test for difference in means between reported news source and FOX News as reference category.

news entities were far more likely to report on ICE during this period of high military activity.

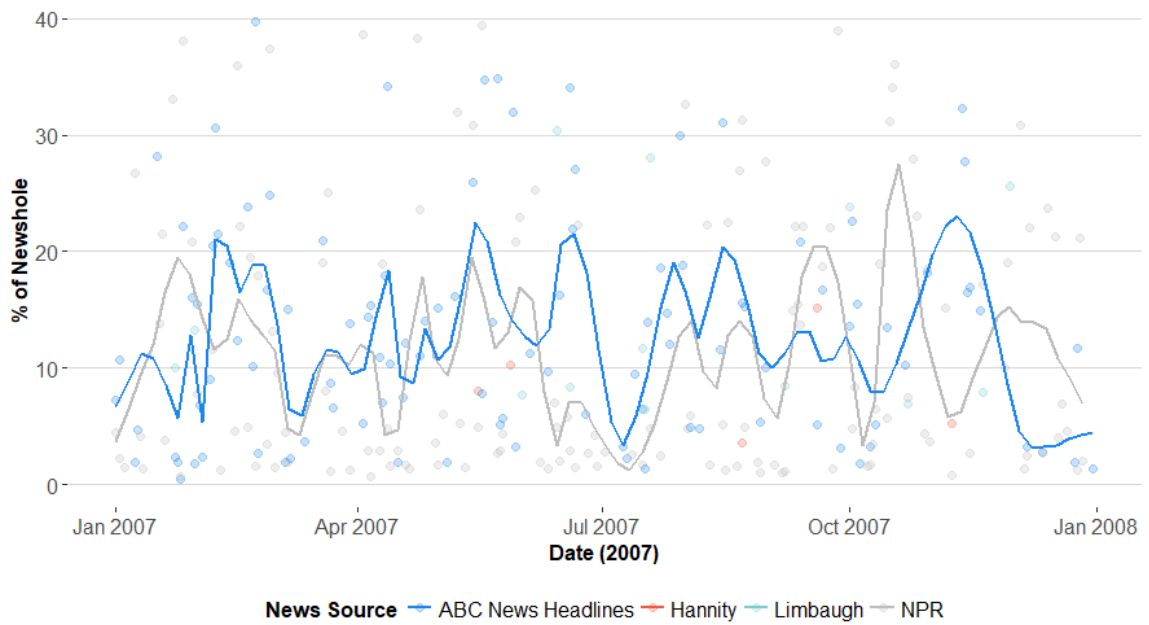
In addition to stories regarding military performance, I extended analysis of the same cable news sources to reporting on specific “sub-story lines” coded by the NCI dataset outside the Iraq Combat Events category.¹¹ Noticeably less airtime was committed by FOX News to stories such as the troop increase, the Pat Tillman friendly-fire cover-up scandal, and stories comparing the conflict in Iraq to the Vietnam War. I conducted a similar extension of reporting habits across print media sources on military scandals including some outside the 2007 timeframe, which shows that *Wall Street Journal* readers were far less likely to be exposed to any stories regarding the Abu Ghraib prison scandal (2004), the Haditha massacre (2006), the Walter Reed Medical Facility scandal (2007), or stories regarding sexual assault in the military (2013) than readers of *The New York Times* or *The*

¹¹The Pew NCI dataset codes component sub-story lines that collectively compose broader or “big stories”. For example, Iraq combat events are broadly coded together (*storyid=100*), but include more specific categorizations based on their nature as “Combat/violence/casualties” (*substoryline=100001*), “Iraqi refugees” (*substoryline=100010*), or “Evaluations of US troop surge” (*substoryline=100014*). Graphical depictions of outlet variation in reporting times is available in Appendix B.

Figure 3.2: Media Coverage of Iraq Combat Events by Source, 2007



(a) Print Media Coverage



(b) Radio Source Coverage

NOTE: This figure depicts media coverage of Iraq Combat Events (ICE) and related news stories as coded by Pew Research News Content Index (NCI) Dataset. Points represent day totals for percent of newshole or prominence proportion. LOESS smoothers are added to depict broader trend of moving averages over time (span = 0.15).

Washington Post over the same periods.¹²

The media environment depicted in this analysis reveals a consistent asymmetry in reporting across conservative and left-center news sources on the subject of Iraq war events, more specifically the stories about casualties, reconstruction frustrations, and regular assessments of the “surge” strategy that might otherwise have informed a new assessment of the military’s execution of the campaign. As a critical story topic for informing the public on military performance, the difference in information between partisan subgroups comes into closer focus. Media outlets such as FOX News, more heavily trafficked by conservative Republicans, were less likely to report on military scandals or poor wartime outcomes. As a result, I find strong support for the assertions of H1A, in that partisans on both sides of the political spectrum would have had different levels of availability to updating information on military performance and institutional quality. In the next section, I examine how this asymmetry in reporting is potentially compounded by uneven framing of military information across news sources.

Evaluating Asymmetric Framing Hypothesis

Examining high-volume news periods like the 2007 phase of the Iraq War provides a unique picture of the reporting patterns of the various news sources frequented by partisans during an important opportunity of evaluation for the military. One potential critique of these patterns is that they speak to descriptive patterns of story frequency, rather than the substance of certain stories – such as Iraq War events – when they are reported. It is reasonable to assert that certain sub-storylines, such as the “Comparisons to Vietnam” or “Pat Tillman Scandal” stories, are damaging enough to military prestige in themselves that a gap in reporting frequency likely results in a commensurate gap in substantive portrayal of the institution. The difficulty US forces encountered during this critical period, with mounting casualties, the “surge” of several brigades into the Baghdad area, and high-level leadership turnover, made even objective reporting on battlefield events potentially damaging news

¹²Graphical depiction of print media reporting on these stories is available in Appendix B.

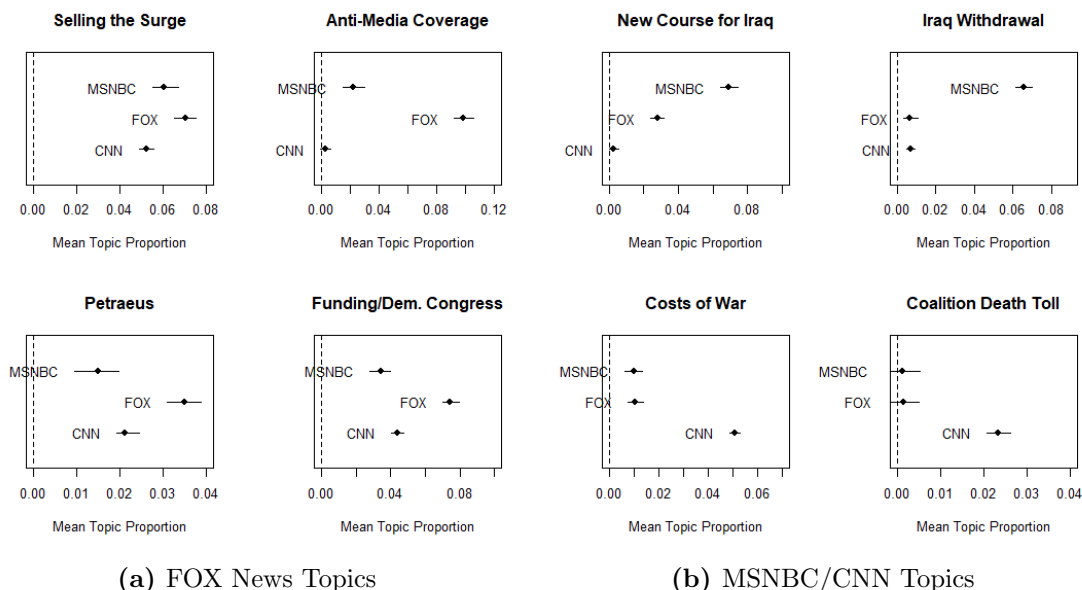
about military performance. Collectively, we observe strong evidence for H1A in the reporting patterns depicted during this period for individuals to update their judgments on military performance; across different media and sources, conservative outlets consistently reported less on war events and combat costs than centrist or left-leaning media outlets.

However, testing the validity of H1B required analysis of substantive data on reporting content. Selecting on the same three primary television news outlets from earlier (CNN, MSNBC, and FOX), I utilized the LexisNexis database to collect all broadcast transcripts between January 1, 2007 and December 31, 2007 which contained the term or root *iraq/iraqi* and were sub-coded as pertaining to the Iraq War. After removing missing data and detectable duplicates, the final dataset of 1,951 broadcast transcripts captured the substantive discussion of news segments dealing primarily with the Iraq War during the same timeframe analyzed previously. This dataset served as the textual corpus for content analysis on the topic distribution across news sources within the Iraq War subject.

Unsupervised machine learning and text-as-data analysis have become an increasingly effective tool for allowing a textual corpus to inform the researcher about the variety of substantive topics being addressed in a body of text. Here I use an extension of the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) multilevel architecture, the Structural Topic Model (STM), in order to utilize the text of the transcripts themselves to inform what subjects are being discussed across news sources. The STM pre-supposes a set of k potential topics being discussed in the text, across which a probabilistic distribution of words exists, and that documents are similarly a mixed distribution across topics (Blei, Ng, and Jordan 2003; M. E. Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014).¹³ This allows the text to characterize its own topic distribution based on those words that occur most frequently.

After collection, I then pre-process the transcripts to produce a functional version of

¹³For more technical description of the quantitative methods behind STM, reference (M. E. Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014).

Figure 3.3: Expected Topic Proportion by Source (STM), Cable Broadcast Transcripts, 2007

NOTE: This figure depicts the expected topic proportion for each of these seven topics estimated by the topic model by source. Topics are grouped by the media outlet that led reporting on those topics. Labels indicate substantive impact of frequently occurring words and the content of top ten broadcast transcripts captured by topic prevalence. Uncertainty bands represent 95% confidence intervals following 100 simulations. With $K=35$, the average expected mean topic proportion $\approx .028$.

the dataset as a textual corpus (stemmed, lemmatized, and stripped of punctuation, numbers, and capitalization), I ran several topic models on the constituent broadcast segments. Several iterations allowed for me to remove proper nouns with high frequency, such as the names of reporters and commentators referenced directly. Once a sufficient number of these “stop words” had been removed, the I implemented a 35-topic structural model to ascertain the thematic threads of the transcripts. Using these words and the substantive material in the top ten articles best captured by each topic, I labeled the topics according to the content of reporting and the tone of the discussion.

Using the news source as a covariate, I am able to plot the predicted topic proportion over the entire text corpus for each news source with uncertainty bands at the 95% level. Figure 3.3 depicts some of the more coherent and clearly identifiable topics based on word probability and the substance of the broadcasts themselves. Each graphical depiction shows how different topics composed various levels of the content share across the media outlets

– expressed as the mean topic proportion – given the substance of the transcripts. Topics depicted in Figure 3.3(a) indicate those with notably higher frequency in the FOX subset of the corpus, while those topics in Figure 3(b) were more prevalent in the MSNBC and CNN transcripts.¹⁴

Indeed, many of the patterns identified during analysis of the Pew dataset seem to re-emerge. The MSNBC and CNN-favored topics in Figure 3.3(b) included direct commentary of material losses, strategic frustration, and mounting coalition military casualties. The “New Course in Iraq” and “Iraq Withdrawal” topics, most heavily reported by MSNBC, were temporally frequent around the announcement of the “surge” strategy in early 2007 and later in the year when the “surge” strategy was coming under increasing scrutiny. The stories drew increased attention to the debate over the viability of the new strategy and discussion of a timetable for removing US forces. Media focus shifting to how the 2008 presidential candidates planned to handle the war came with a commensurate increase in commentary on the complications with the “surge”. The “Costs of War” and “Coalition Death Toll” topics favored by CNN coincided with periods of high-casualties for the coalition, including the 3,000-killed milestone and specific stories on war dead and missing. Again, these topics were more concerned with the personnel and material losses of the war and the military’s difficulty in navigating the Iraq conflict.

However, topics more heavily reported in FOX transcripts, shows in Figure 3.3(a), represented a different tone and thematic focus on military information. Unlike the previous topics that spent considerable airtime discussing the military’s complications in Iraq, FOX reporting focused on political battles with Democrats over war-funding, defense of the “surge”, and lateral admonishment of how other media sources were covering the war. The “Petraeus” and “Selling the Surge” topics were characterized by direct interviews with commanding general David Petraeus or Republican political elites and supportive commentary of President Bush’s “surge” strategy. In addition to allowing the commanding general to directly advocate for the troop increase and his upcoming report to Congress, these

¹⁴Brief metadata summary of top-ten news articles depicted in Appendix B.

broadcasts often led with such remarks as “in Iraq, the surge is working” or critiques of Democratic opposition to the war’s continuation.¹⁵

Framing of the war as a political battle with Democrats and left-wing media were generally more popular topics in the FOX transcripts as well. Broadcasts in the “Selling the Surge” and “Funding/Dem. Congress” topics often led with comments such as “can Democrats force the president to accept a timetable for pulling out?” and “Democrats want to shell out \$21 billion, in all, on non-military programs. And this is part of their war bill?”¹⁶ FOX most heavily outpaced other networks in its reporting of the political battle between President Bush and Congressional Democrats and the manner in which the war was being reported in other outlets. The “Anti-Media Coverage” topic was characterized by admonishments of a PBS war documentary “leaving many conservatives up in arms”, critical stories about “how the far left is handling the U.S. military”, and negative reports on how *The Washington Post*, NBC News, and “the left wing press” were reporting on the military.¹⁷ When newly-retired Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez issued openly critical statements about the war’s governing strategy, the FOX story reported that “lost in the outrage was another statement from Sanchez, condemning media outlets for having political agendas and blasting news agencies for putting soldiers in harm’s way”.¹⁸

Across these topics, we observe support for an asymmetric framing pattern (H1B) during this critical reporting period. As individuals sought out and received various types of information regarding the conduct of the war, they were subject to different distributions of framing or “lead story” effects based on which outlet they were likely to traffic. Whereas centrist and liberal media sources were more likely to frame discussion of the Iraq war as a dialogue on military frustrations, personnel and material loss, rising sectarian violence, or discussion of a rapid withdrawal, conservative outlets were more likely to discuss the conflict

¹⁵ “Interview with David Petraeus”, *FOX News*, Chris Wallace, December 23, 2007.

¹⁶ “Interview with Senators Graham/Levin”, *FOX News*, Chris Wallace, April 15, 2007; “Interview with House Minority Leader John Boehner”, *FOX News*, Neil Cavuto, March 21, 2007

¹⁷ “New Documentary on War Has Some Up in Arms”, *FOX News*, Alan Colmes, April 24, 2007; “Talking Points Memo and Impact: Who Respects the Troops”, *FOX News*, Bill O’Reilly, February 8, 2007; “Talking Points Memo and Top Story”, *FOX News*, Bill O’Reilly, April 24, 2007

¹⁸ “Retired General Blasts Iraq War Effort, Media Coverage”, *FOX News*, Alan Colmes, October 15, 2007.

in terms of homefront political fights over funding and the “surge”, the Democratic opposition in Congress, or criticism of how other media outlets were reporting on the military. In addition to spending less time discussing the military’s performance on the ground, these topics often came to the defense of the military institution by insisting that other media outlets were subverting the armed forces or that Congressional Democrats were harming the war effort.

Given the patterns of reporting measured in the preceding section, these results indicate a strongly skewed information environment between partisans with regards to the volume and content of information they received about the military. The result, particularly among conservative Republicans, is a decidedly “one-sided information flow” whose substance is far more partisan (Zaller 1992; Feldman, Huddy, and Marcus 2015). Given the increased reliance of this partisan subset for fewer news sources, these individuals are less likely to encounter contrary information outside a unified narrative. As I will discuss in the next section, strong partisans who are reliant on a select few media outlets may also be particularly susceptible to biased updating when presented with new and contradictory information.

Partisan Bias and Military Credibility

I now turn to the second part of my dynamic theory, focusing on the way partisans use new or newly-salient information to update their evaluations of the military institution. As discussed previously, I argue that the partisan confidence gap is also the result of biased processing of information critical of the military and its conduct; however, I also consider potential explanations that might otherwise allow for divergent opinions without biased updating. In order to test this suite of hypotheses regarding interpretation of information, I structure an experimental analysis that tests how partisans respond to priming information about the institutional quality of the armed forces, allowing them to express disfavor for different types of military misconduct or failures.

Research Design

Using a design similar to that used by Ladd (2010) in a study of public attitudes on media behavior, the following experiment leverages a broad literature in social psychological studies of public attitude measurement through survey collections.¹⁹ Zaller and Feldman (1992) develop a model for expressed public opinion as a probabilistic draw from a running count of impressions and experiences. Based on accessibility to information, individuals average across all memorable information when forming answers to public opinion queries, with the effect of “ideas recently made salient” being the most influential. The introduction of new or newly-salient information shaping expressed attitudes falls in line with established “top of the head” models of public opinion measurement, as well as experimental “framing” designs bringing specific information to the forefront of the individual’s consideration (Taylor and Fiske 1978; Chong and Druckman 2007). Collectively, these theoretical concepts offer an empirical strategy for measuring expressed attitudes on subjects such as institutional confidence. Experimental framing can raise the short-term salience of specific information in line with the institutionalist hypotheses already developed, providing an opportunity to measure the effect of specific actions by the military on public confidence in that institution.

I construct a experimental environment wherein individuals are subjected to updating information that increases the salience of institutional quality in the military. Respondents were drawn from a nationally-representative opt-in panel through YouGov in March 2017, resulting in a final sample of 1,000 individuals randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. The *control* condition was asked two questions regarding their level of interest in news stories regarding US foreign policy and military operations, but unlike the treatment groups read no news stories or priming vignettes. This group served as the

¹⁹Ladd (2010) himself uses a similar formulation of Gilens (2001), where even though the question asks about awareness of the story, this is not the measurable variable of interest; because the experiment is probing negative attitudes, the intent is to merely bring the information to the top of the respondent’s head without drawing attention to the treatment. My own design differs from Ladd’s in several ways. First, the use of a more compact scale for measurement of trust (rather than the feeling thermometer employed by Ladd for measuring attitudes on the media). Second, the news stories are meant as priming information in themselves, whereas the Ladd study uses elite criticism of the media institution as priming information. I adopt a similar strategy for measuring the control condition, where the only measurable variable is whether the respondent heard the story.

statistical baseline for confidence levels in three measured institutions – the military, the presidency, and the Congress – which were measured on an 11-point scale following the two news interest questions.

All respondents were prompted that the study was measuring the extent to which stories about security issues and the military were reaching the public. In the control condition, respondents were asked (1) if they actively followed news stories about US foreign policy and (2) about US military operations. Each of the other three treatment groups was respectively prompted with two news snippets describing stories related to the military that had occurred in the last several years and asked if they had heard these stories. All groups were then asked at the end to measure their level of confidence in the military, the presidency, and Congress as well. The news stories given to each group were structured to vary the content of new information according to three classes of divergent preference criteria discussed previously. The first treatment group (*non-partisan*) was prompted with news stories that detailed partisan activity by retired military officers during the 2012 and 2016 presidential campaigns. The stories discussed large blocs of retired generals and admirals who had openly endorsed candidates Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, Donald Trump, and Hillary Clinton. This was designed to allow respondents to express preferences of military behavior in terms of non-partisanship and objectivity.

The second treatment group (*performance*) was exposed to two stories that detailed battlefield ineffectiveness or incompetence in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, including a botched hostage rescue attempt by the Navy’s SEAL Team Six in 2010 and the accidental bombing of a Medecins Sans Frontieres clinic in Kunduz, Afghanistan in 2015.²⁰ These were designed to allow respondents to express preferences in terms of battlefield outcomes and strict performance criteria. Finally, the third treatment group (*professionalism*) was

²⁰New snippets reflected substantive information from actual news stories. Anthony Faiola, “British aid worker Norgrove killed accidentally by U.S. soldier, inquiry finds”, *Washington Post Foreign Service*, December 3, 2010; Barbara P. Usher, “Kunduz bombing: US attacked MSF clinic ‘in error’”, *BBC News*, November 25, 2015.

prompted by news stories that described ethical failures by the military institution, including a 2012 Defense Department report describing the firing of nearly 30 generals and admirals due to offenses ranging from sexual assault to misuse of government funds, and a story discussing the 2009 conviction of several US soldiers accused of the rape and murder of an Iraqi family in 2006.²¹ This thread was designed to allow respondents to express preferences in terms of professional or ethical standards of conduct.

Evaluating the Bayesian Hypothesis

The unique design of this experimental effort in military trust provides a multitude of avenues by which to test the validity of some evaluative bias taking place among partisans. The first explanatory hypothesis I consider is the rational Bayesian account (H2A) in which certain partisans simply possess more prior information about the military institution, making new information comparably weaker in influencing their judgment. The experimental design I employ allows for some investigation of this hypothesis, though observational data is more helpful in assessing its validity. Experimentally, the idea that Republican priors are established on much larger collections of data or high *ex ante* interest in the subject of military affairs and foreign policy does not find strong support. Among control group respondents, Democrats and Republicans had nearly identical levels of those expressing “high” political interest according to the demographic battery, at 51% and 50%, respectively. The two partisan groups enjoyed similar distributions in those expressing a high interest in both foreign policy stories and military operation stories in the news, at 59% and 58%, and among those who indicated just a high interest in the military stories, Democrats outweighed Republicans 71% to 64%. While these are self-reported statistics about interest in these types of stories and not an objective measure of the respondent’s actual understanding of them, they provide a measure of internal validity for the experimental design in that respondents did not express widely different levels of knowledge of the military.

²¹Craig Whitlock, “Military brass, behaving badly: Files detail a spate of misconduct dogging armed forces”, *The Washington Post*, January 26, 2014; James Dao, “Ex-Soldier Gets Life Sentence for Iraq Murders”, *The New York Times*, May 21, 2009.

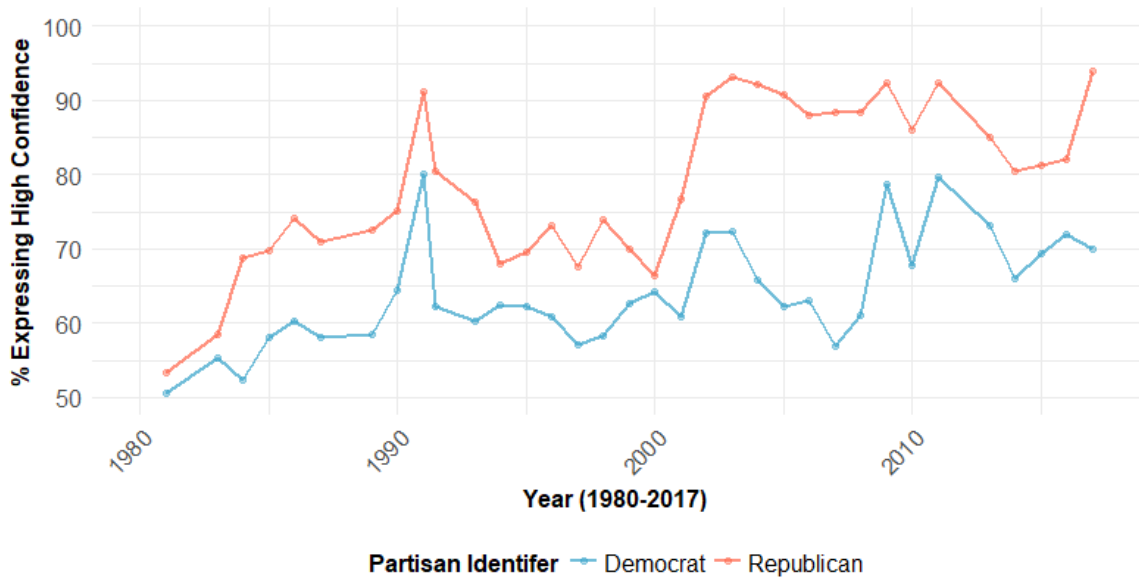
While largely dismissive of H2A, these results are not altogether surprising. The large panel survey of civil-military attitudes conducted by Schake and Mattis (2016) revealed that while Republicans looked more favorably on the institution's values and were more defensive of its standards and performance, there was not a dramatic separation between partisans in those expressing understanding of the institution itself. In response to the question, "how familiar are you with the U.S. military?", 80% of Republicans responded with "very familiar" or "somewhat familiar", which while high does not substantially out-pace the 70% of Independents and 65% of Democrats who answered in a similar fashion. The argument that Republicans may inform their confidence in the institution based on more direct contact is not wholly without merit. A 2011 Pew Social Trends survey identifies that Republicans (73%) were more likely than Democrats (59%) to have a family member who had served in the military (Golby, L. Cohn, and Feaver 2016).²² However, it is important to note that this pools across all living veterans; focusing on the more relevant subset of post-9/11 veterans, the large panel survey conducted by Schake and Mattis (2016) in 2013 found that Republicans and Democrats were comparably likely to have one in their family and far less likely in absolute terms (18% and 12%, respectively).

At a broader level, we have additional reason to doubt the rational process predicted by H2A. While a truly Bayesian process of updating would allow even partisans from opposite ideologies to converge on a common evaluation, this is not a trend we observe in the partisan data for institutional confidence in the military. Figure 3.4 reveals a similar pattern discussed by Liebert and Golby (2017a) through use of the Gallup data, in which recently divergent trends – particularly in the high intervention environment post-9/11 – between groups are readily visible.²³ These non-convergent trends argue against an unbiased process

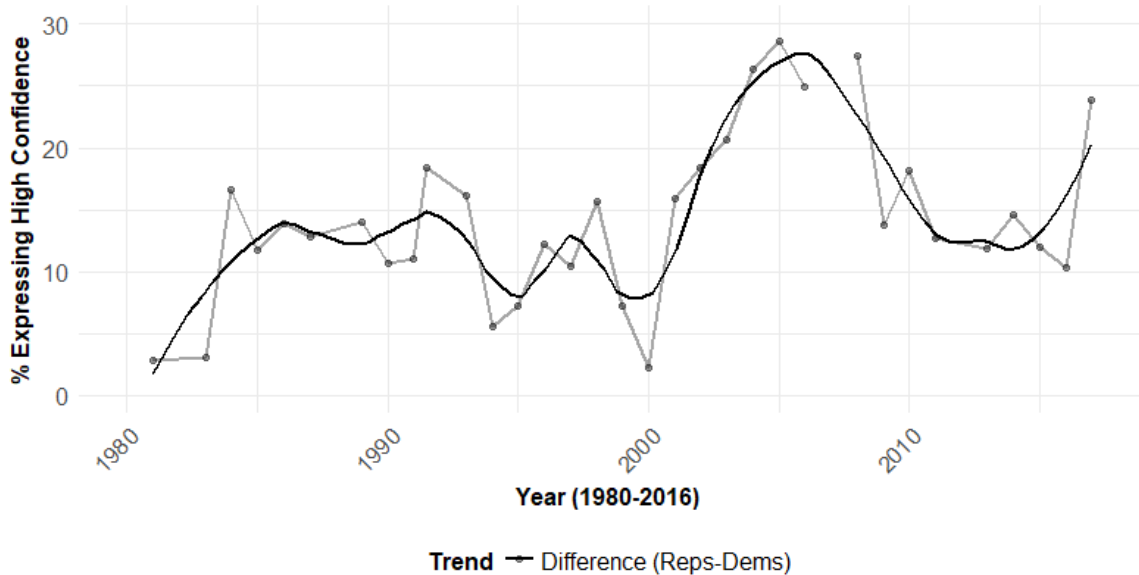
²²However, a July 2017 survey by Gallup probed public attitudes specifically among those who expressed "high" confidence in the military; in this group, Republicans who cited "having a friend or family currently serving" or "having served themselves" (24.5%) as their rationale for expressing such high confidence only slightly outnumbered that community among Democrats (21.9%).

²³While Liebert and Golby (2017a) observe this trend through analysis of the General Social Survey (GSS) Dataset, I depict this pattern through analysis of the Gallup "Confidence in Institutions" surveys for several reasons. First, regression and factor analyses conducted earlier utilized the Gallup dataset, so I employ it here for continuity. Second, the Gallup survey formulation probes public attitudes about the military institution, while the GSS question asks more specifically about "the people running these institutions"; while the distinction is minimal, I focus on the general impression respondents have of the institution writ large rather than specific figures that may come to mind. Finally, the Gallup formulation of the question

Figure 3.4: Public Confidence in Military Institution by Partisan ID (1980-2017)



Confidence in Military by Major Party Identification



Partisan Gap in Expressed Confidence

NOTE: Figure 3.4 depicts high expressed confidence in the military institution conditional on stated partisan identity as captured by Gallup June Wave “Confidence in Institutions” survey instrument. “High” confidence categorized as answer of “a great deal” or “quite a lot” to the five-point Gallup question for institutional confidence. LOESS smoother (span = 0.3) depicts increasing polarization gap between partisan subgroups for clarity.

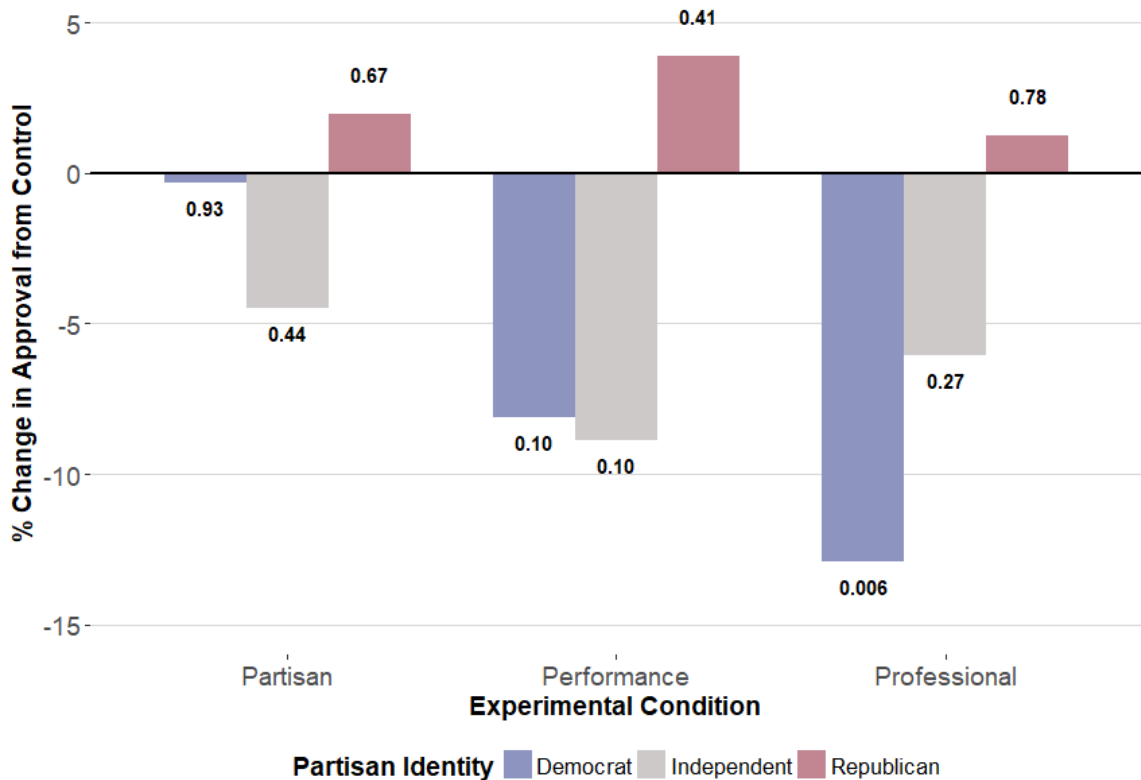
uses a five-point scale against the GSS three-point scale, allowing for increased variation in the measured outcome.

of updating; as Bartels (2002) remarks, “it is quite difficult to produce parallel opinion shifts in a Bayesian framework – *unless* partisan bias is built into different groups’ selection or interpretation of politically relevant information”. Not only does partisan confidence in the last several decades occasionally track in this parallel fashion, it widens considerably since the Iraq War, evidence of an inability among partisans to converge on an unbiased assessment of the same institution (Burbach 2017). This presents additional evidence against a completely rational process in that partisans do not update to changing events, information, or shocks in the same way.

Evaluating the Preferences Hypothesis

However, the nature of this design allows for more specific testing of potential biased updating or the influence of divergent preferences. By varying the nature of newly-salient updating information, we allow partisans to express their preferences in different ways, a flexibility that builds on past empirical efforts (Brian J. Gaines et al. 2007) and offers an avenue for the counterargument made by Gerber and D. Green (1999) that a rational process may be at work if partisans simply have different conceptions of what type of military behavior is positive or negative. If H2B accurately captures the operant process between partisans, Democrats and Republicans should respond negatively to specific classes of military misconduct. For example, if one partisan group values battlefield effectiveness as a criteria for evaluation, but another places more stock in the professional integrity and organizational practices of the institution, than divergent opinions at the end of the updating process need not come from systematic partisan bias.

Despite this accommodation made by the design, the results indicate a profoundly asymmetric use of the new or newly-salient information among partisans. Figure 3.5 reveals the change in expressed confidence in the military institution from the control condition by partisan subgroup, assessed using the respondent’s identification on the three-point partisan identity scale. While Democratic respondents express marginal concern for partisan military activity, they indicate a more defined preference against military performance failures

Figure 3.5: Experimental Results (Partisan Breakdown), YouGov - March 2017

NOTE: This figure depicts deviation in expressed confidence in the military institution as measured by the 11-pt scale in all experimental conditions. Respondent patterns broken down by identification into Democrat, Republican, and Independent subsamples based on self-identification on seven-point partisan identity scale. Reported p-values reflect significance at 95% level for two-tailed t-test for difference in means between experimental and control subgroups. $N_{Total} = 957$

in the tactical setting and professional misconduct, where expressed confidence was reduced by 8% and 13%, respectively. These results seem to provide empirical replication of the broader fluctuations we observe among Democrats in Figure 3.4, where confidence in the military institution responds in tandem with the most violent years of the Iraq War and tracks more closely with Independents overall. Specifically, Democrats more closely exhibit the updating sensibilities of non-partisans in their assessment of the military institution, allowing new information to update their evaluations of the armed forces in the expected direction.

Republican response patterns, however, indicate no change in expressed opinion regardless of treatment condition. In all experimental states, Republican changes in confidence for the military institution were positive and statistically insignificant. This also seems to replicate the broader trend observed in Figure 3.4, where Republican confidence patterns seem unmoved by indecisive foreign wars and internal scandals that affected Independent and Democratic levels of trust while stabilizing or increasing Republican levels. Even though the design allows for Republicans to express different preferences from Independents and Democrats, no negative information about the military results in an updated expressed opinion. Attitudes about institutional quality are expected to be quite rigid and difficult to move with such a design; however, the same treatment moved Democrats and Independents in a negative direction to a statistically significant degree, while Republicans remained unaffected. As a result, the unbiased learning process advocated by Gerber and D. Green (1999) and captured in H2B finds little support with these findings.²⁴

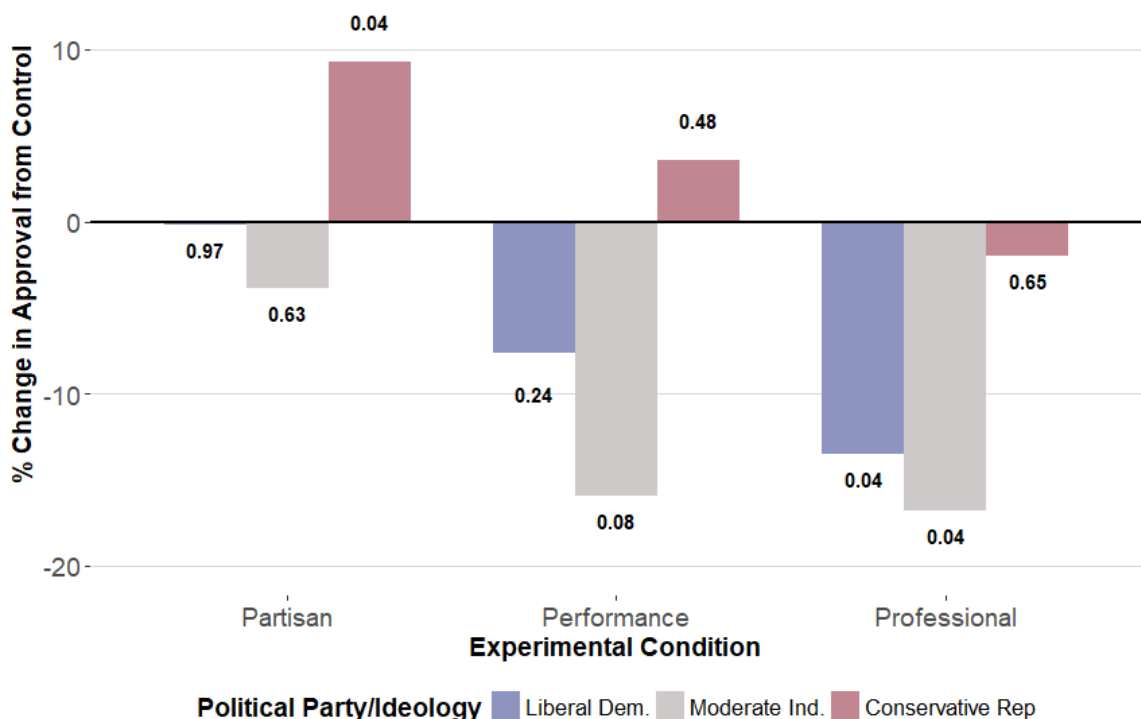
The results indicate that Republican respondents had no pronounced predisposition for greater knowledge of the military institution, nor did they adjust their evaluations of the military in response to information about misconduct, despite Democrats and Independents doing so. While offering small support for H2A and H2B, this obliges analysis of the validity of H2C, in which cognitive biases and rationalization steer disconfirmatory information away from critically affecting Republican assessments of the military institution. Whether by blaming military failures on political leaders rather than the armed forces, attributing misconduct to individual failures rather than organizational ones, or downweighting the value of the information because of its contrary narrative, we have strong reason to believe that even with available information, Republican respondents are interpreting information in a far more favorable fashion or polarizing against its substance.

²⁴This general response pattern is largely robust to re-classification of respondents according to the five-point ideology scale, with liberals and moderates expressing clear disapproval of professionalism and performance categories and conservatives exhibiting statistically insignificant changes to expressed trust across all conditions. Similar patterns are also visible when re-coding partisan identity based on the seven-point scale, allowing “leaners” to be counted as part of a major party. In this setting, Democrats similarly maintain strong disapproval of both the professionalism and performance conditions and Republicans are similarly unmoved across all conditions. Independents, now classified as those who refused to identify even as a leaner to any party, expressed strong disapproval in the partisan condition (10.4% loss) and the professional condition (10.9% loss).

Evidence for Partisan Bias

The importance of partisan bias to this analysis becomes clearer when analyzing the experimental results among strong partisans. Figure 3.6 depicts the percentage change in expressed trust and confidence in the military institution from the control condition by sorted partisan groups. Moderate Independents are also included and remain a useful quantitative baseline for the expressed attitudes of individuals with no incentive for partisan biasing or a desire to minimize dissonance with partisan narratives. At first inspection we observe that sorted Democrats again trend much closer to the attitudes of non-partisans across the different treatment conditions. While similarly unaffected by news of partisan military activity, they express less confidence in the military in response to news of performance failures (-7.6%) and far less in response to professional misconduct (-13.4%). By comparison, moderate Independents expressed similar distaste for battlefield failures (-15.8%) and ethical or professional scandals (-16.7%).

However, closer analysis of strong Republicans reveals a broader polarization than is observable in Figure 3.5 when pooling across the entire partisan subgroup. In addition to strong Republicans expressing no degradation in their evaluation of the military across treatment conditions, this group responded with a substantively and statistically significant *increase* in expressed confidence in the institution of nearly 10% in the *non-partisan* condition. This is particularly surprising given the ostensibly limiting “ceiling effects” one should expect from the conservative Republican control group’s mean confidence level of 9.55 on an 11-point scale. This response indicates a defensive polarization away from the expected direction of the treatment and a dramatic departure from the processing that dictated the response of both moderate Independents and liberal Democrats. While these latter groups expressed a clear distaste for certain categories of military behavior, the sorted Republican subgroup actively increased its support for the same institution being evaluated by political out-groups.

Figure 3.6: Experimental Results (Strong Partisan Breakdown), YouGov - March 2017

NOTE: This figure depicts deviation in expressed confidence in the military institution as measured by the 11-pt scale in all experimental conditions. Respondent patterns broken down by combined identification into Democrat, Republican, and Independent subsamples based on self-identification on three-point partisan identity scale and sorted political ideology as conservative, moderate, and liberal on a five-point scale. Reported p-values reflect significance at 95% level for two-tailed t-test for difference in means between experimental and control subgroups. $N_{Total} = 500$

These results present strong evidence for the assertions of the partisan bias hypothesis (H2C), that polarizing motivated reasoning is affecting what should be a rational valuation of institutional performance. In addition to Republican responses more broadly exhibiting no negative updating, the response pattern displayed by strong conservative partisans is indicative of a motivated counter-arguing of disconfirming information. This “backfire effect” is a well-documented trend in response to weak issue framing (Chong and Druckman 2007) and among strong ideological partisans, particularly when introduced to negative information about political in-group members (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). Past study on this phenomenon has found that in a “direct challenge to the notion of voters as rational

Bayesian updaters”, motivated reasoning led individuals to increase support for a favored candidate after receiving negative information about the candidate (Redlawsk 2002). The response patterns exhibited in my experimental results indicate a similar biasing of new information, in an effort to counter-argue “preference-incongruent information and bolster their pre-existing views” (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). It is telling that such a seemingly unexpected increase in strong Republican trust comes in response to information about military support to co-partisan political candidates, further highlighting the central role played by partisan identity in rendering their evaluation. In comparison, such knowledge did not effect strong Democrats or moderate Independents in their evaluation of the military institution.

This response pattern among Republicans is surprising in its reflexive defense of an outside institution, but finds roots within the existing study of affective polarization and its associated biases. Not only has partisan identity been demonstrated to have strong social components that increase animosity regarding political out-groups (Mason 2015; Iyengar and Westwood 2015), but these same mechanisms strengthen the defense of in-group members against disconfirming information, making rational evaluation of institutional quality unlikely (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). The results of this experimental design indicate that Republicans have to a certain extent incorporated support for the military institution into the social fabric of their partisan identity, defending it as one would a co-partisan. Their defense of the institution in the face of negative information supports recent study that Republicans are more ideologically coherent (Lelkes and Sniderman 2014) and that such “identity politics” are indeed much stronger among Republicans than other political subgroups due to a lack of cross-cutting identities (Mason and Wronski 2018). As I will discuss later, this level of partisan bias risks compromising the ability of these partisans to objectively evaluate an institution’s performance or to properly assess the outcomes of foreign policy ventures.

Additional support for the partisan bias hypothesis (H2C) can be found by examining observational survey data as well, in cases where partisans clearly interpreted a common set of updating information in dramatically different fashions. This process has manifested

in a variety of ways, with different effects on expressed confidence in the military institution, as Democrats and political centrists have responded to updating events with far more skepticism than their Republican counterparts when the military is involved. In 2007, the deadliest year for coalition forces in Iraq, public confidence in the military hit its temporary nadir, with 69% of Americans expressing high confidence in the institution.²⁵ Mounting casualties, uncertainty over the success of the “surge” strategy, shifting leadership, and political divisiveness were compounded by decreasing public confidence in the accuracy of battlefield reporting. Between 2003 and 2007, Democratic confidence in the accuracy of battlefield reports from the military dropped from 78% expressing “a great deal” or “fair amount” to 32%. Republican confidence dropped as well, but three in four still had high confidence in reporting by the military. Instead, Republicans passed their distrust to the press, in whom only 29% of Republicans expressed high confidence, down from 81% in 2003. Half of Democrats, by contrast, maintained high confidence in the press reporting from Iraq.²⁶ In the midst of growing distrust about the military’s wartime performance, Democrats attributed blame to the institution itself, whereas resistant Republicans instead passed blame for inaccuracy to the news media. In addition to highlighting Republican distrust of competing media reports (H1A/B), it also sheds light on how updating information was rationalized to support a prior rather than influence an updated evaluation (H2C).

When military misconduct and accusations of large-scale sexual assault problems within the institution peaked in 2013, partisans again split over the nature of the problem and its proposed solutions. While half of Democrats directly attributed the reports of sexual assault to “underlying problems with military culture”, nearly 70% of Republicans ascribed the incidents to individual acts of misconduct detached from the institution as a whole. When considering the best way of handling the problem, 58% of Democrats stated that Congress needed to directly intervene to change military law or strip military commanders of their legal authority. In contrast, a similar percentage of Republicans believed that the military

²⁵Gallup, “Confidence in Institutions, June Wave Survey”, 2007

²⁶The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “Little Confidence in Military or Press Depictions of Iraq”, April 5, 2007.

should be left to handle the problem internally without outside interference.²⁷ Again, with partisans given similar information about negative military activity, these groups interpret and employ that information in widely different ways. Conditional on both subgroups believing the factual nature of the information, Democrats negatively updated their evaluation against the military institution, whereas Republicans drew fundamentally different interpretations that insulated the institution from more direct criticism.

These cases lend additional credence to the validity of H2C, that biased interpretations driven by partisan sentiment lead Republicans to draw systemically more friendly interpretations from the same information about the military, when that information is substantively negative, compared to Democrats and Independents. Though not decisively inferential, examination of the cognitive resources expended by partisans on either side can inform our understanding of the mental process at work. Taber and Lodge (2006) argue that the sort of disconfirmation bias predicted by H2C could manifest in those respondents taking “more time processing counter-attitudinal arguments than pro-attitudinal arguments, [...] to spend the extra time denigrating, deprecating, and counter-arguing the incongruent arguments”. Across treatment groups, we observe these patterns in a similar fashion. *Non-partisan* group Democrats and Republicans spent almost the same amount of time completing the survey; this is unsurprising as this experimental condition was where partisans actually expressed similar attitudes. However, Republican respondents in the *professionalism* and *performance* conditions spent on average nearly 20-25% more time completing the survey than their Democrat counterparts.²⁸ Again, though not conclusive in its own right, further study should examine this causal pathway more closely.

Collectively, both this complementary data and the results of the experiment promote strong support for a cognitive bias born of partisan affiliation when interpreting information

²⁷Pew Research Center/Washington Post Survey, “Sexual Assault in the Military Widely Seen as Important Issues, But No Agreement on Solution”, June 12, 2013.

²⁸After removing outliers who took more than 1000 seconds to complete the survey, I found that Republicans and Democrats in the *non-partisan* condition spent approximately 83 and 86 seconds on the survey instrument, respectively. In the *professionalism* condition, the same subgroups spent approximately 84 and 100 seconds, respectively, and 76 and 97 seconds, respectively, in the *performance* condition. The amounts to a 19% increase in Republican time expenditure in the former and a 27% increase in the latter.

regarding the military institution. While political liberals and centrists seem to utilize new or newly-salient information in the expected fashion, updating their opinions of the organization based on knowledge of negative actions or behavior, conservatives seem to defend the institution as they would an extension of their own political party. Given the apolitical nature of the military, this is particularly puzzling and potentially dangerous. If conservative confidence in military elites is seen by politicians to be highly durable, the latter may increase appeals to the military as a political device for electoral gains or policy support, bringing the military institution closer into the political fold and risking a dangerous erosion of civil-military balance.

Discussion

The results of both of my observational and experimental design strategies generate several points for discussion. What are the implications of these empirical findings? As I have stated, neither Republican favor for the military establishment at the elite level, nor popular military identification with the Republican party are particularly novel concepts. However, this analysis makes the case for a complementary and dynamic process in which partisan Republicans in society are less likely to accurately evaluate the military institution based on its conduct. The core of institutionalist theory envisions that citizens continually update their evaluations of social and political institutions, rewarding positive performers and pressuring negative ones to reform and improve. However, these results indicate that the military may benefit from a nearly unconditional deference from targeted partisans. I organize the principal findings of this analysis and briefly discuss their potential implications.

First, these findings suggest that both polarization over military credibility and military politicization will likely continue into the future. The principal findings of my analysis include (1) the wide variation in reporting on military conduct and performance across media outlets and (2) that even when offered the opportunity to express expectations of

military conduct differently, Republicans display a biased processing reflective of political in-group members. Indeed, this analysis likely exists in the midst of a consistent loop of demand-based media biases, wherein media outlets respond to audience preferences. While this study makes no claim as to the direction of this process, it is not significant to the observations made through analysis of media reporting on the military. Whether reporting biases exist in response to audience preferences, actively shape them, or some combination of both, conservative partisans are observed to be more likely to receive only limited information on military failures.

The lack of response to new or newly-salient information displayed further by this group in my experimental framework mirrors both the aggregate confidence trends we observe over time and the sensibilities of a literature in partisan resistance and “perceptual screening” in which contrary information is more easily dismissed for challenging prior beliefs (Campbell et al. 1980; Zaller 1992; Gerber and D. Green 1999). One implication of these findings is that both information exposure and partisan bias in evaluating the military interact to collectively solidify this polarization between partisans: if a subset of society is less likely to receive contrary information, it is less cognitively costly to dismiss the residual information or for the news to create a “backfire effect”, even if that information is useful to an informed evaluation. Consistent exposure to positively-framed or under-reported information on military failures could perpetuate this inaccurate prior among partisans, particularly strong Republicans, making new information less likely to update their evaluations.

The fact that strong Republicans in this analysis exhibit a seemingly partisan bias in defense of an apolitical institution is particularly curious and potentially damaging to preserving the non-partisanship of the military. Both the experimental results and observational survey data on military failures have shown Republicans are more likely to consider military misconduct a product of individual actors rather than large organizational flaws. These defensive patterns reflect a political tribalism among Republicans with respect to the military, conforming to patterns of in-group favoritism and partisan biases (Hewstone, Rubin, and

Willis 2002; Iyengar and Westwood 2015). When confronted with the prospect of inaccurate information coming from the battlefield, Republicans were far more likely to blame the news media, while Democrats and Independents more directly charged the military itself. It is telling that just as military confidence has been consistently high among Republicans, an equivalent pattern is found among Democrats for the mass media.²⁹ Though it may be overly simplistic to ascribe partisan affiliations to either institution writ large, Republican distrust in a liberal-favored institution like the mass media has the dual effect of discrediting new information and striking at a perceived partisan opponent. As such, Republican trust in the military would not be a purely rational valuation, but rather an expression of partisan attitudes. Collectively, these patterns provide strong reasons to suspect that the partisan “gap” in confidence is likely to continue.

Second, a reflexive defense of the military institution from criticism can prevent not only an objective evaluation of that institution’s quality, but of foreign policy ventures in which the military is a principal actor. In-group defensiveness not only insulates the military from direct criticism, but also re-directs blame for the outcomes of military intervention to other sources. Recent polling on public attitudes about ongoing US military interventions has revealed that a plurality of individuals believe that civilian decision-making is to blame for a lack of strategic victory, rather than military incompetence (Schake and Mattis 2016). Partisan defense of the military institution risks compounding the problem that polarization over foreign policy already presents; namely, that partisans will base their impressions of war outcomes on inaccurate information (Adam J. Berinsky 2009) or partisan narratives (Brian J. Gaines et al. 2007), as evidenced by previous study on the Iraq War.

If civilian leaders are sensitive to public attitudes on the merits of military interventions, this type of biased processing compromises the ability of the public to effectively learn the proper lessons of select foreign policy ventures and aggregate them into effective choices.

²⁹Democratic trust in the mass media has remained consistently high since 2001, with a nadir of 51% expressing “a great deal” or “fair amount” in 2016; however, Democrats expressed more traditionally high levels of trust in the media in 2017 at 72%, as Republican trust cratered to 14% in the same year. Art Swift, “Democrats’ Confidence in Mass Media Rises Sharply From 2016”, *Gallup*, September 21, 2017.

The inability to concede when out-group partisans are successful – or in this case, when in-group members fail – has been advocated by some scholars as another product of polarization (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). As K. A. Schultz (2018) argues, this is one of the principal challenges of polarization’s intersection with foreign policy: more than any time in recent US history, wars are seen as the extension of a specific party’s agenda rather than a national effort. The incorporation of military interventions into a partisan dialogue may therefore “impede the country’s collective ability to learn and adapt from foreign policy failures.” If partisan biases already threaten the ability of the public to objectively evaluate war outcomes, a subjective defense of the military institution from criticism compounds this problem.

The third dimension I consider is the potentially damaging influence of this partisan incorporation of high military trust on the stability of US civil-military relations. The maintenance of a non-partisan and apolitical military is a foundational characteristic of a functioning democracy where civilian control of the armed forces is assured. Furthermore, a broad consensus across civil-military relations scholars concludes that continued military interference into the political sphere will damage institutional credibility among the public and weaken the voices of active-duty officers seeking to responsibly advise civilian leaders (Golby 2011; Liebert and Golby 2017a; J. K. Dempsey 2009; Urben 2010). However, a military institution with perceptibly rigid levels of appeal to a subset of the public could become an increasingly politicized instrument in partisan debates through several mechanisms.

First, political leaders may be tempted to continue to incorporate military elites into the political debate in an attempt to leverage high credibility with their audience. Prominent endorsements from military elites for political candidates, though they have been found ineffective in absolute terms (Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012), have become increasingly frequent across both parties. Military appointments to posts typically occupied by civilian experts have also increased across both parties. Though high-profile ex-military appointments are not new, the Trump administration placed such figures closer to the political

functions of the executive branch. The installment of recently-retired James Mattis as Secretary of Defense met with consternation from political opponents concerned about the preservation of civilian control of the military.³⁰ The elevation of John Kelly to the post of White House Chief of Staff was similarly admonished by civil-military scholars on the grounds that “having a retired general serve in such an unabashedly partisan role further blurs the boundaries between the military and politics, and erodes the long-standing reputation of the U.S. military as an apolitical institution”.³¹ The result has been an increasing discussion on the emergence of a “tipping point” in American confidence in the military.³² Yet the principal utility for politicians in such appointments comes from the clout of the military institution with a public audience. The desire to utilize highly-trusted military elites as a source of public-facing credibility may be irresistible to political elites cognizant of the seemingly unconditional trust their audience places in such figures.

Second, a more politically-active military is inherently problematic for traditional theories of stable civil-military relations. If military elites are continually sought out for incorporation into a partisan political agenda, military leaders themselves may recognize their position with the conservative public as irrevocably durable and embolden them to intervene more in the political sphere. Remarking on the military’s seemingly immovable trust with the public, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey remarked in 2011 that, “maybe if I knew what it would take to screw it up, I could avoid it”.³³ This wide latitude with the public, specifically the subset of political conservatives, combined with an increasingly political role for the military, is likely to create strong incentives for an activist military institution that leverages its clout with the public as a means for securing its own policy preferences. While J. K. Dempsey (2009) argues that a “paradox of prestige” will incrementally damage military credibility with each new foray into the political debate,

³⁰Rebecca Shabad, “How unusual is Trump’s Cabinet of generals?”, *CBS News*, December 9, 2016.

³¹David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “Why No General Should Serve as White House Chief of Staff”, *War on the Rocks*, September 12, 2017.

³²Daniel Drezner, “Is this the tipping point for trust in the U.S. military?”, *The Washington Post*, October 26, 2017. Drezner remarks on the 2017 Gallup data directly, saying that “[s]eventy-two percent of trust is pretty high. But it is worth noting that this number was 82 percent a decade ago. I am beginning to wonder if Trump’s elevation of the military to such a high-profile role risks the reputation of the armed forces.”

³³Quoted in Jim Gourley, “Where is the Tipping Point for Trust in America’s Military? And are we near it?” *Foreign Policy*, February 14, 2014.

a high level of trust in the military among Republicans – crystallized by biased processing and limited information exposure – could render that process inert. The result is a potentially damaging and reciprocal process of political leaders designing a more partisan role for military elites, who in turn use that placement for agenda-setting or partisan activity of their own.

The central claim of this analysis is that political polarization in institutional confidence for the military cannot be explained solely by a baseline difference in preferences across parties, but must account for dynamic processes of updating and re-evaluation. Partisans on both sides have neither converged on a common understanding of the institution’s quality – the only true “rational” process according to Bartels (2002) – nor have they responded in parallel during wartime or other key shocks. Instead, the divergence in partisan confidence in the armed forces indicates a fundamentally different evaluation process between these groups. However, as I summarize here, it is equally important to understand the negative externalities of polarization in this domain. A large segment of the public observes the military as a credible voice in the political debate, especially with regards to the prospect of military intervention.³⁴ Such an unconditional trust in the institution to provide credible information, as traditional expert communities have been increasingly discredited, can have potentially negative ramifications for the preservation of an apolitical military.

Conclusion

Elite communities perform an essential function in democratic society, providing the public with information about the functioning of government and cues for opinion-formation on complex policy. In an environment of increasing skepticism for traditional social and policy elites, the process by which individuals choose to select and trust specific elite sources in the political discourse is of great importance. As the most respected and trusted institution in American society, the military factors prominently into the discussion regarding elite source

³⁴Scott Clement and Philip Rucker, “Poll: Far more trust generals than Trump on N. Korea, while two-thirds oppose preemptive strike”, *The Washington Post*, September 24, 2017.

credibility; however, theoretical and empirical efforts to explain differences in public trust in that institution among different political subgroups have been limited in scope. Indeed, aggregate trust and confidence figures, usually referenced as indicative of broad public support for the military's performance, conceal an underlying polarization in which different partisans observe information about an institution in society and yet render different levels of expressed confidence in that organization.

This analysis has contributed to the broader bodies of study in civil-military relations, elite credibility, political polarization, and institutional confidence by proposing a potential cause of polarization in expressed trust for the military as a dynamic process. While a considerable literature has utilized elite-level policy preferences or mass politicization as an explanation for Republican-military proximity, this does not explain why polarization would persist or even intensify, particularly during periods of wartime without a decisive victory. I argue that a dynamic theory of evaluative updating helps to complete this picture. Using text-data and observational data on reporting trends, I have demonstrated that during a key period in the Iraq war, conservative media consumers were much less likely to be exposed to useful updating information about military performance, misconduct, or scandals. When these stories were reported, they were often framed in such a way that minimized direct criticism to the institution or to draw attention away from the costliness of war. With the persistent effect of media "echo-chambers" in the modern information environment, there is little reason to believe this trend will end into the future.

Even if information regarding military misconduct or failures is directly provided to individuals, my experimental design reveals that Republicans, particularly strong or "sorted" ones, are far more resistant to this new or newly-salient information. While liberals and moderates express clear preferences for military behavior – losing more confidence in response to professional misconduct or performance failures – conservatives are almost uniformly undeterred. I find that this is less likely to be the result of a rational updating process, better-informed priors, or divergent preferences, and more likely to be the result of

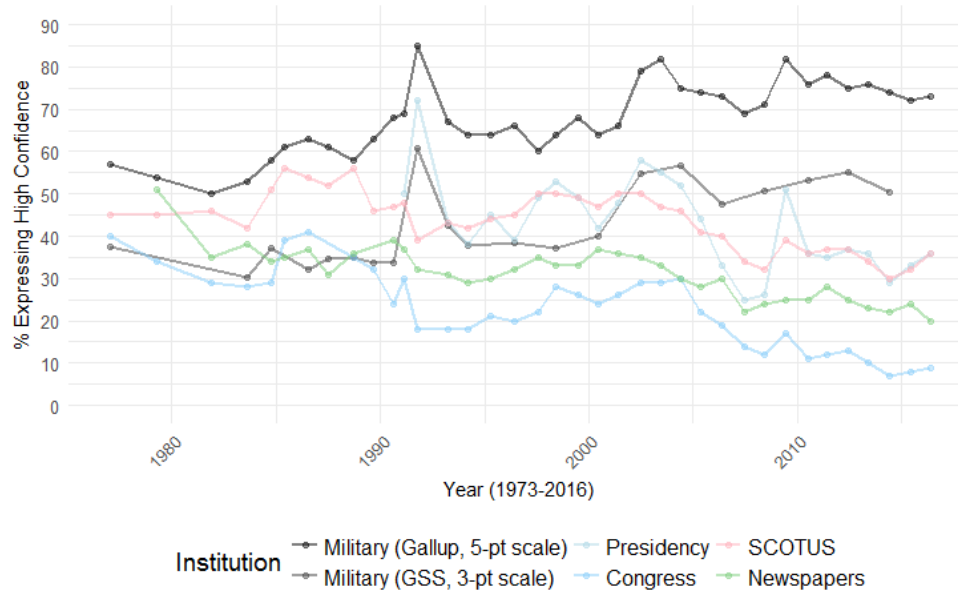
biased evaluative processes, in-group affective polarization, and motivated partisan reasoning. Limited information exposure makes contrary information cognitively easier to dismiss; however, there is also evidence of the type of partisan bias and “backfire” attitude polarization that indicates Republicans see the military as an extension of their political in-group.

As I have discussed, the negative ramifications of unconditional trust in the military are self-evident: reflexive insulation of the military institution from criticism risks compromising the public’s ability to effectively judge its performance and the merits of foreign policy outcomes. Furthermore, political elites seeking to leverage the reflected credibility of the military may pull that institution into the partisan debate with increased frequency. Though many civil-military scholars have stressed that restraint among military elites from political interference is necessary for the preservation of an apolitical military, it is also contingent upon a similar restraint among political elites not to incorporate such interference into partisan strategies. Further study into the processes by which individuals in society choose credible elites requires increased focus on the military, especially as active and retired officers play an increasingly central role in the political discussion.

Appendix A: Covariate Balance and Regression Results

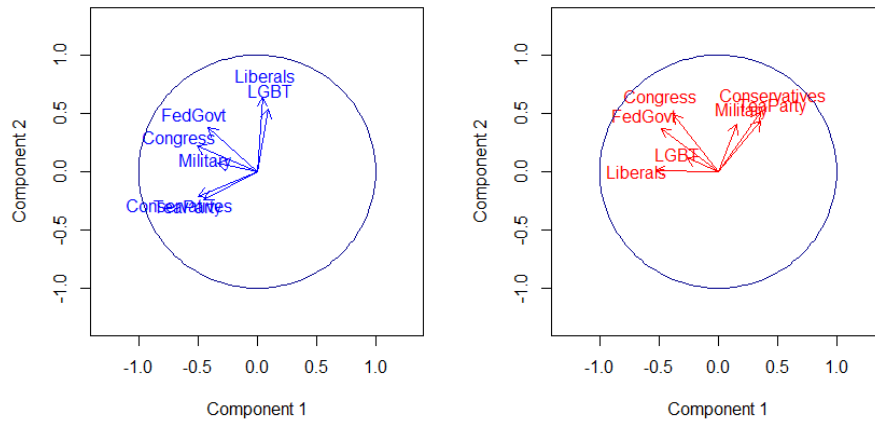
A.1 Confidence in US Institutions

Figure 3.7: Public Confidence in US Institutions (1973-2016)



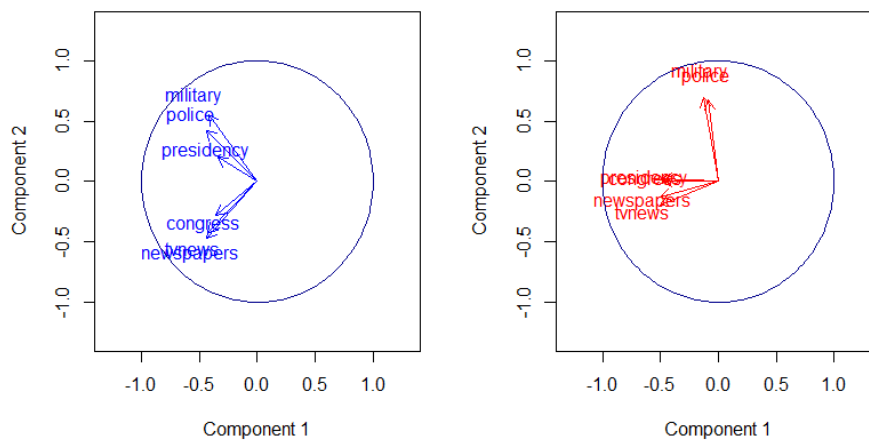
NOTE: Figure 3.7 depicts aggregate levels of public confidence in institutions as measured by Gallup “Confidence in Institutions” annual survey; additional information on military confidence comes from General Social Survey (GSS). Note: Gallup collection on Presidency confidence did not begin until 1991 survey fieldings.

Figure 3.8: Principal Component Analysis of Institutional Feeling Thermometer Ratings, ANES (2012)



NOTE: Figure 3.8 depicts the results of principal component analysis (PCA) on the feeling thermometer scores for several institutions in US society according to the 2012 ANES, broken down by partisan subgroups. First two principal components depicted for clarity. Unit circle denotes maximum value of factor loading for each institution's rating among these subgroups. Relative proximity and angle between vectors denotes similar factor loadings on the first two principal components.

Figure 3.9: Principal Component Analysis of Institutional Confidence, Gallup (2016)



NOTE: Figure 3.9 depicts the results of principal component analysis (PCA) on the institutional confidence ratings for several institutions in US society according to the 2016 Gallup poll, broken down by partisan subgroups. First two principal components depicted for clarity. Unit circle denotes maximum value of factor loading for each institution's rating among these subgroups. Relative proximity and angle between vectors denotes similar factor loadings on the first two principal components.

A.2 Regression-based Analysis for Predictors of High Military Confidence

Table 3.3: Gallup Institutional Confidence Dataset, 1977-2016

	DV = Binary Confidence Indicator (Great deal/Quite a lot)	
	(LPM - Base)	(LPM - Full)
Republican	0.136*** (0.006)	0.115*** (0.006)
Democrat	0.005 (0.005)	0.002 (0.006)
College Educ		-0.062*** (0.005)
Male		0.060*** (0.004)
White		0.074*** (0.007)
GenX Cohort		0.001 (0.007)
Millennial Cohort		-0.051*** (0.013)
Silent Cohort		0.039*** (0.005)
Co-Partisan POTUS		0.028*** (0.006)
Constant	0.546*** (0.012)	0.430*** (0.014)
Year FE	✓	✓
N	41,722	41,718
R ²	0.055	0.067
Adjusted R ²	0.054	0.066
Residual Std. Error	0.458 (df = 41684)	0.455 (df = 41674)
F Statistic	65.600*** (df = 37; 41684)	69.739*** (df = 43; 41674)

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

Table 3.4: General Social Survey (GSS) Dataset, 1973-2016

DV = Binary Confidence Indicator (Top 1 of 3 Scale)	
White	0.040*** (0.009)
Republican	0.134*** (0.047)
Democrat	-0.005 (0.047)
Independent	-0.045 (0.047)
Co-Partisan POTUS	0.016** (0.007)
Constant	2.086*** (0.050)
Year FE	✓
N	39,317
R ²	0.039
Adjusted R ²	0.038
Residual Std. Error	0.656 (df = 39284)
F Statistic	50.088*** (df = 32; 39284)

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

Table 3.5: World Values Survey, Wave 5 (2011), US Sample

	DV = Binary Confidence Indicator, Military		
	(LPM-1)	(LPM-2)	(LPM-3)
Male	-0.011 (0.016)	0.012 (0.015)	0.007 (0.015)
College	-0.002 (0.016)	-0.005 (0.016)	-0.013 (0.016)
Republican Vote Intent	0.132*** (0.020)	0.079*** (0.020)	0.067*** (0.020)
Independent Vote Intent	-0.016 (0.019)	-0.004 (0.018)	0.010 (0.018)
Expert_Govt		-0.001 (0.015)	0.014 (0.016)
Interpersonal Trust		-0.076*** (0.016)	-0.058*** (0.015)
Democracy_Good		0.083*** (0.020)	0.077*** (0.020)
Defiance Score		-0.479*** (0.045)	-0.301*** (0.057)
Worry_War		-0.034*** (0.011)	-0.029** (0.011)
Worry_Terror		0.075*** (0.012)	0.065*** (0.012)
Worry_Surv		-0.036*** (0.008)	-0.029*** (0.008)
Strong_Ldr			-0.042** (0.018)
Autonomy Score			0.015** (0.007)
Disbelief Score			-0.063** (0.028)
Auth. Score			0.110** (0.050)
Natl Pride			0.082*** (0.014)
Science_Faith			-0.006* (0.003)
Constant	0.813*** (0.017)	0.886*** (0.040)	0.558*** (0.081)
N	2,189	2,150	2,069
R ²	0.029	0.138	0.157
Adjusted R ²	0.027	0.134	0.150
Residual Std. Error	0.365 (df = 2184)	0.341 (df = 2138)	0.330 (df = 2051)
F Statistic	16.222*** (df = 4; 2184)	31.231*** (df = 11; 2138)	22.421*** (df = 17; 2051)

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

A.3 Randomization Checks and Covariate Balance

Table 3.6: Randomization Checks and Covariate Balance

Respondent Demographic	Control	Professionalism	Performance	Partisanship
Party Identification				
Democrat	37.5%	44.1%	34.7%	35.7%
Republican	20.8%	21.4%	22.1%	28.4%
Gender				
Male	44.1%	46.1%	40.0%	46.3%
Female	60.0%	54.0%	60.1%	53.6%
Age				
25th Percentile	37	35.75	29	33
50th Percentile	50	47	46	48.5
75th Percentile	62	61	61	60
Race				
White	69.0%	67.5%	71.1%	65.4%
Non-white	31.0%	32.4%	28.8%	34.5%
Sample Size	245	256	253	246

NOTE: Percentages reflect segment of survey population assigned to each experimental condition broken down by key demographic values. Subjects were assigned on a random basis to each of the four conditions.

Table 3.7: Randomization Check: Logit Regression with Treatment Assignment as DV

<i>Dependent variable: Treatment Assignment</i>				
	Control	Partisan	Professional	Performance
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Democrat	-0.069 (0.174)	-0.206 (0.171)	0.232 (0.171)	0.037 (0.173)
Independent	0.212 (0.207)	-0.365* (0.215)	-0.038 (0.215)	0.174 (0.207)
Male	-0.024 (0.150)	0.132 (0.149)	0.125 (0.147)	-0.236 (0.149)
Age	0.007 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.004)
White	0.002 (0.165)	-0.227 (0.162)	-0.024 (0.161)	0.250 (0.165)
Constant	-1.459*** (0.290)	-0.757*** (0.285)	-1.241*** (0.286)	-0.958*** (0.284)
Observations	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Log Likelihood	-554.703	-555.304	-567.054	-562.331
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,121.407	1,122.608	1,146.109	1,136.662

NOTE: † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Appendix B: Media Reporting Supporting Results

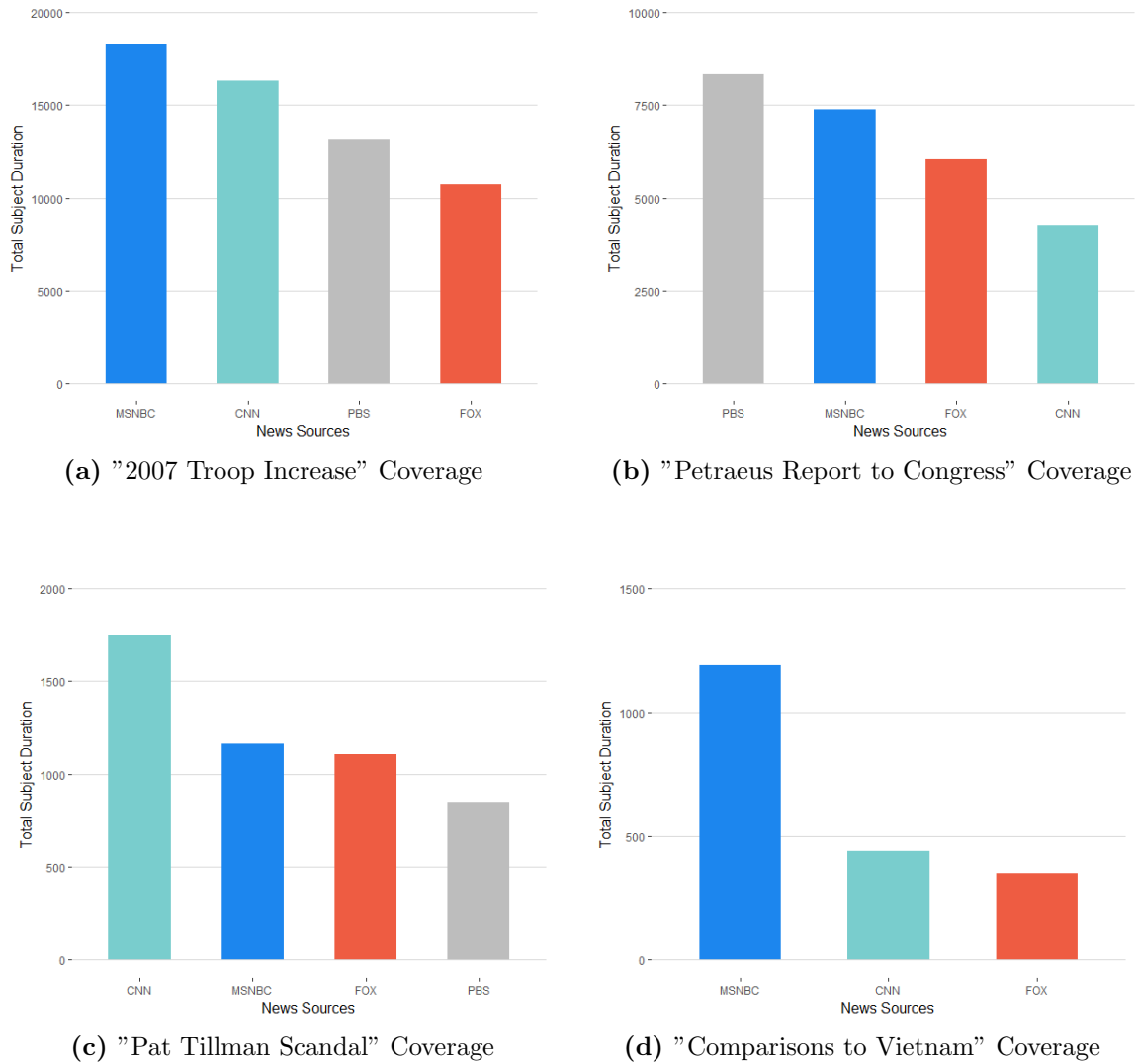
B.1 Supplementary Wartime Reporting Statistics

Table 3.8: Descriptive Statistics, Iraq War Reporting: Cable News (2007)

News Source	<i>Mean Percentage of Sampled Newshole</i>			
	PBS	CNN	MSNBC	FOX News
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Combat Events	9.18 (< 0.001)	6.12 (< 0.001)	6.85 (< 0.001)	3.62
Domestic/Homefront	27.12 (< 0.001)	6.57 (0.07)	10.75 (0.01)	4.62
Policy Debate	26.38 (< 0.001)	13.03 (0.01)	25.28 (< 0.001)	9.97
Observations	431	468	243	394

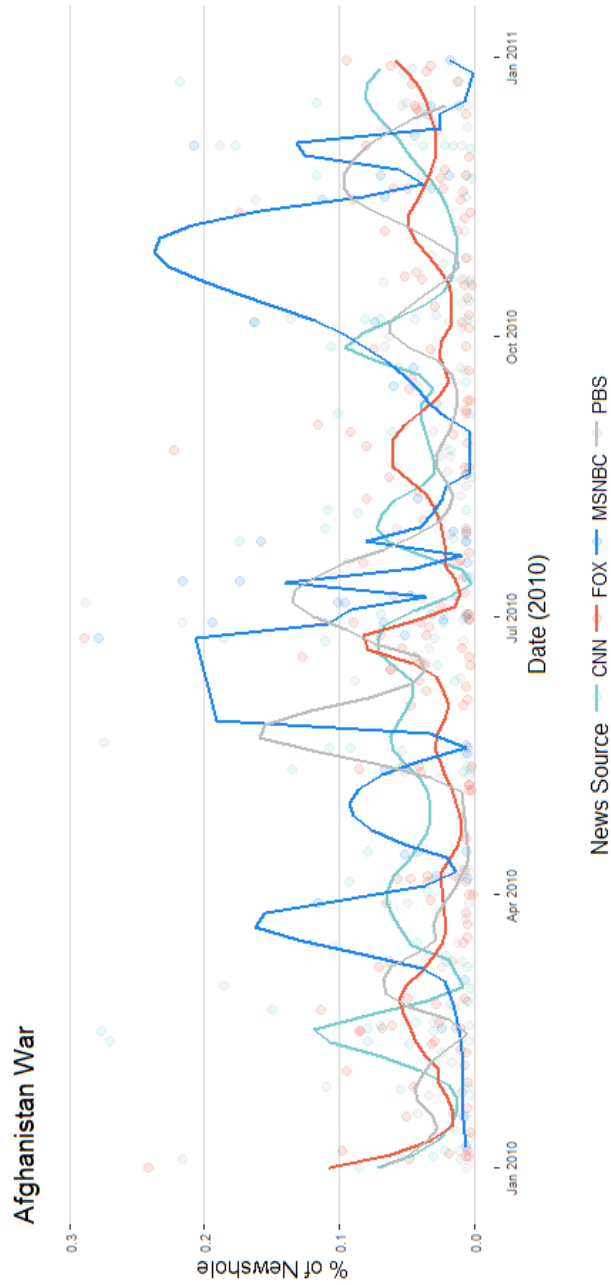
NOTE: Reported figures depict average percent of daily newshole dedicated to segments on Iraq War stories across the entire 2007 news year. Values in parentheses () indicate p-values for two-tailed t-test for difference in means between reported news source and FOX News as reference category.

Figure 3.10: Media Coverage of Military News Stories by Source, 2007



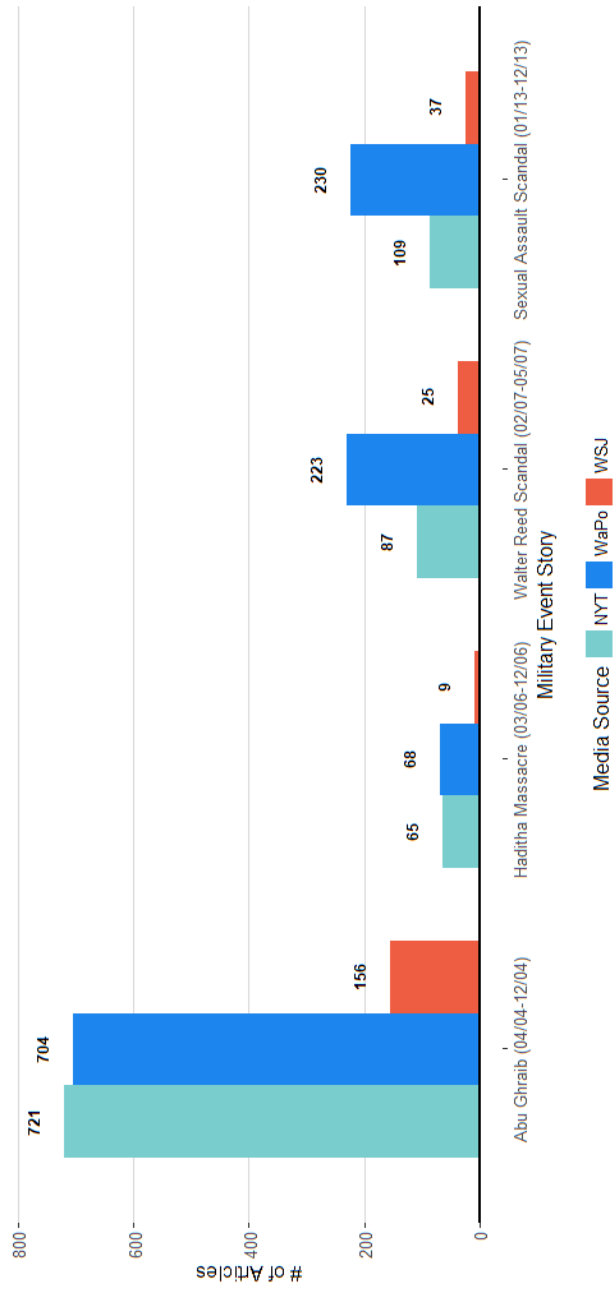
NOTE: These figures display the total duration (in on-air seconds) devoted by each of the major television news sources to each of the indicated sub-storylines as coded and sampled by the 2007 Pew Research News Content Index (NCI) dataset. Total source broadcast time calculated by summing total on-air time spent on each sub-storyline across all segments in each source.

Figure 3.11: Media Coverage of Afghanistan Events by Source, 2010



NOTE: This figure depicts media coverage of Afghanistan events and related news stories as coded by Pew Research News Content Index (NCI) 2010 Dataset. Points represent day totals for percent of newshole or prominence proportion. LOESS smoothers are added to depict broader trend over time (span = 0.15).

Figure 3.12: Print Media Coverage of Other Military Events, 2004-2013



NOTE: This figure depicts the number of print media articles per source dedicated to select military events outside of the 2007 NCI coding scheme. Article counts were obtained for the New York Times and Washington Post through the LexisNexis database and for the Wall Street Journal through the ProQuest database. Dates of search fields are included in parentheses. Abu Ghraib stories were those containing “Abu Ghraib/Ghuraib” in the article body; similarly, Haditha stories had to contain “Haditha” and “killing OR murder” in the body, to distinguish it from other combat events in the area; Walter Reed stories contained the name of the medical facility in the article body, and sexual assault stories contained both “military” and “sexual assault”.

B.2 Topic Model Articles

Figure 3.13: Media Coverage of Iraq Combat Events by Source, 2007

New Course for Iraq

MSNBC 2007-06-26 HARDBALL for June 26, 2007 CHRIS MATTHEWS, HOST: Ann Coulter, author of "Godless: The Church of Liberalism," plays HARDBALL. Le

MSNBC 2007-02-02 HARDBALL for February 2, 2007 CHRIS MATTHEWS, HOST: U.S. intelligence says Iraq is in a civil war, that the big problem is not ter

MSNBC 2007-02-02 HARDBALL for February 2, 2007 CHRIS MATTHEWS, HOST: U.S. intelligence says Iraq is in a civil war, that the big problem is not ter

MSNBC 2007-08-07 POST-DEBATE COVERAGE For August 7, 2007 MSNBC CHRIS MATTHEWS, MSNBC ANCHOR: It was not an NFL football game, but it was pretty close. I think that

MSNBC 2007-04-27 For April 27, 2007 MSNBC CHRIS MATTHEWS, HOST: Carolina in the morning. So how do things look now, the day after the first bi

MSNBC 2007-07-18 HARDBALL for July 18, 2007 MSNBC CHRIS MATTHEWS, HOST: President Bush has now told friendly journalists that God wants us to fight to

MSNBC 2007-09-26 HARDBALL 2300 Hour for September 26, 2007 CHRIS MATTHEWS, HOST: Well, tonight moderator, Tim Russert, nailed down the candidates on issues lik

MSNBC 2007-08-08 For August 8, 2007 MSNBC CHRIS MATTHEWS, HOST: What's with Hillary? Why is she the favorite of hawks and at the same time the

MSNBC 2007-06-19 HARDBALL for June 19, 2007 MSNBC CHRIS MATTHEWS, HOST: Hillary Clinton plays HARDBALL. The New York senator and Democratic frontrune

MSNBC 2007-09-27 HARDBALL for September 27, 2007 MSNBC CHRIS MATTHEWS, HOST: Does the country have two war parties now? In last night's Democratic debate,

Petraeus

Fox News Network 2007-12-23 interview With David Petraeus CHRIS WALLACE, HOST: I'm Chris Wallace, and this is "Fox News Sunday." In Iraq, the surge is working

Fox News Network 2007-12-23 interview With David Petraeus CHRIS WALLACE, HOST: I'm Chris Wallace, and this is "Fox News Sunday." In Iraq, the surge is working

Fox News Network 2007-09-11 interview With James Woolsey COLMES: Welcome back to "Hannity & Colmes." For more reaction to General Petraeus' Iraq war testimon

CNN 2007-09-11 Senate Grills General Petraeus Over Iraq Progress; The Hunt For bin Laden ANDERSON COOPER, CNN ANCHOR: Good evening. We're coming to you again tonight from Camp victory, a sp

Fox News Network 2007-06-17 interview With David Petraeus CHRIS WALLACE, HOST: I'm Chris Wallace. A top American general says security forces control only 40

Fox News Network 2007-06-17 interview With David Petraeus CHRIS WALLACE, HOST: I'm Chris Wallace. A top American general says security forces control only 40

CNN 2007-09-11 Live from Iraq: Top General's Testimony: Sunnis and Americans: New Afghan Strategy, Terror's Popularity, Troop Morale-ANDERSON COOPER, CNN ANCHOR: Tonight, we will take you to the so-called Triangle of Death, where Sun

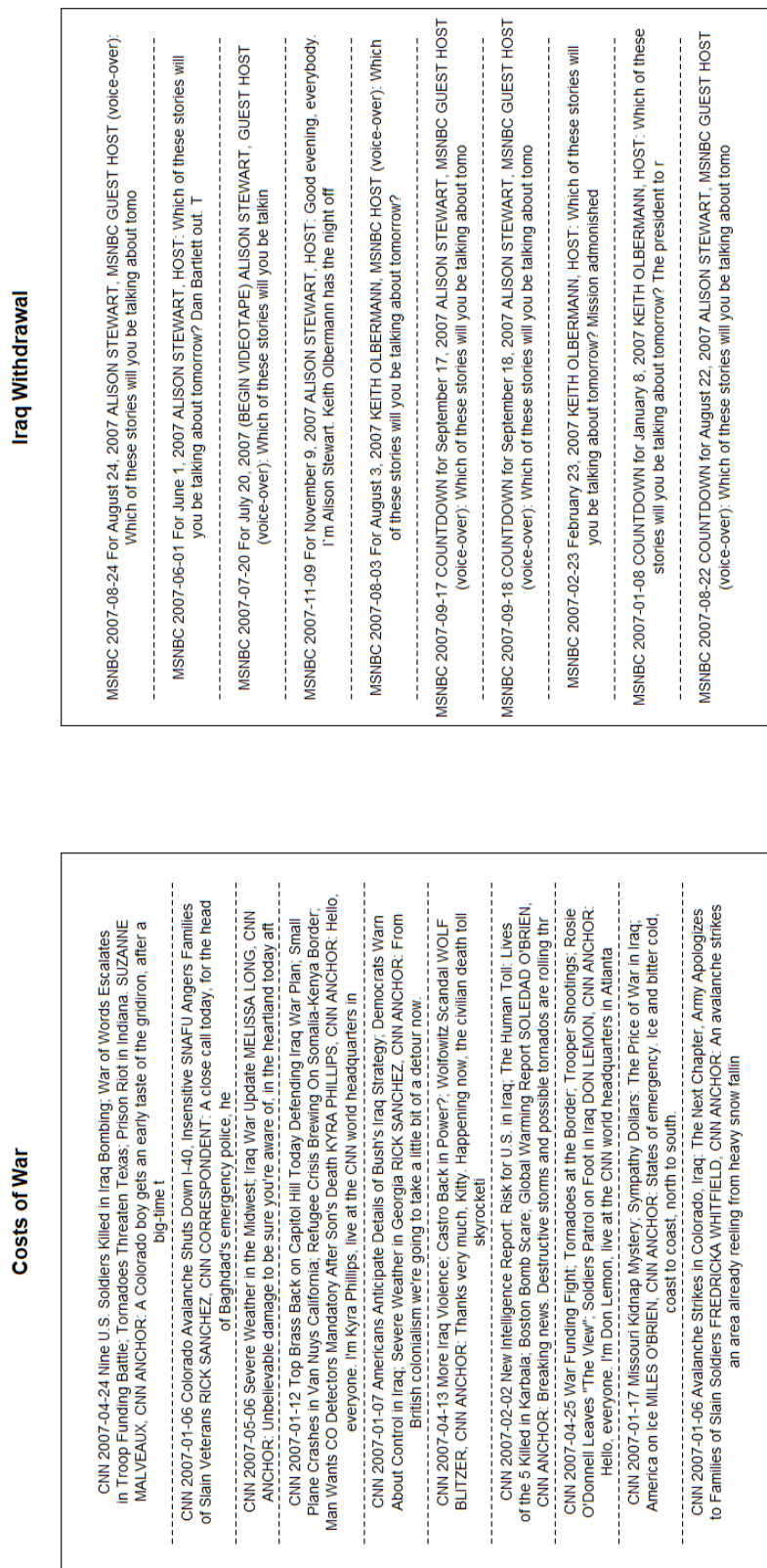
Fox News Network 2007-07-13 Terror Report COLMES: A new national intelligence report says Al Qaeda is stepping up its efforts to sneak terror

CNN 2007-09-11 Making His Case; How Safe Are We?, 9/11 Remembered: Missing Maccdie; The Battle Continues; Minding Your Business KIRAN CHETRY, CNN ANCHOR: CNN exclusive. The director of the FBI six years after the 9/11 attacks. W

Fox News Network 2007-07-14 War Policy Debate PAUL GIGOT, FOX HOST: This week on the "Journal Editorial Report," Democrats and a growing number of

NOTE: This figure depicts metadata for the top 10 articles with the highest topic prevalence for the "New Course for Iraq" and "Petraeus" topics estimated by the structural topic model.

Figure 3.14: Media Coverage of Iraq Combat Events by Source, 2007



NOTE: This figure depicts metadata for the top 10 articles with the highest topic prevalence for the "Costs of War" and "Iraq Withdrawal" topics estimated by the structural topic model.

Figure 3.15: Media Coverage of Iraq Combat Events by Source, 2007

Funding/Dem. Congress

Fox News Network 2007-12-18 Budget Battles BRIT HUME, FOX NEWS ANCHOR: Next on SPECIAL REPORT, congressional Democrats strive to fund the gover
 CNN 2007-01-04 Momentous day On Capitol Hill: Some Things May Get Lost in Shuffle Next Week On Capitol Hill: Jim Webb interview, House Administration Committee Investigating Contested Florida House Race WOLF BLITZER, CNN ANCHOR: And to our viewers, you're in THE SITUATION ROOM, where new pictures and I
 CNN 2007-01-04 Congress Prepares for a Historic Transfer of Power WOLF BLITZER, CNN ANCHOR: Under the Capitol dome, Democrats stand ready to take back the reins of p
 Fox News Network 2007-12-14 President Bush Takes Action to Keep Government in Business BAIER: Attorney General Michael Mukasey has told leaders of the House and Senate Judiciary Committee
 Fox News Network 2007-03-23 House Passes Iraq Spending Bill With Withdrawal Timeline JIM ANGLE, FOX NEWS ANCHOR: Next on SPECIAL REPORT, the House passes a standing bill, Speaker Pelosi
 CNN 2007-05-24 Iraq War Funding: Congress on Edge Over Immigration; Bumper Sticker Politics: Presidential Candidates Battle It Out WOLF BLITZER, HOST: Happening now, President Bush warns of a bloody summer Iraq. As the House nears
 CNN 2007-05-24 Iraq War Funding: Congress on Edge Over Immigration; Bumper Sticker Politics: Presidential Candidates Battle It Out WOLF BLITZER, HOST: Happening now, President Bush warns of a bloody summer Iraq. As the House nears
 Fox News Network 2007-03-21 Interview With House Minority Leader John Boehner NEIL CAVUTO, HOST: Ahead of the House vote on Iraq tomorrow, picking apart the pork today: 283 mill
 Fox News Network 2007-01-13 Angry Democrats, Nervous Republicans Greet New Bush Iraq Strategy With Skepticism FRED BARNES: "WEEKLY STANDARD": Coming up on "The Beltway Boys," President Bush's new strategy for I
 CNN 2007-04-03 The White House and Congress Still Fighting Over Iraq Funding: The Latest Developments in the Race for the White House SUZANNE MALVEAUX, CNN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: Happening now, President Bush fires back at Democra

Coalition Death Toll

CNN 2007-01-01 Honoring President Ford, Denver Broncos Cornerback Darrent Williams Killed in Drive-by Shooting: U.S. Deaths in Iraq Reach 3,000 DON LEMON, CNN ANCHOR: Hello everyone, I'm Don Lemon, live at the CNN world headquarters in Atlanta
 CNN 2007-05-28 Memorial Day in Iraq, U.S.-Iran Talks: Separated By Iraq, Summer Travel & Gas Prices: Fires & A Portrait: Gay Rights Violence in Moscow TONY HARRIS, CNN ANCHOR: To discuss security in Iraq, The first formal U.S.-Iranian talks since the
 CNN 2007-01-01 3,000 U.S. Troops Dead in Iraq Since Start of War: Thousands Line Up to Pay Final Respects to General Ford DON LEMON, CNN ANCHOR: Hello, everyone I'm Don Lemon at the CNN world headquarters in Atlanta, JELLS
 CNN 2007-05-28 Anniversary of Vietnam War Marked: Troops Remember the Fallen: Iranian, U.S. Ambassadors Meet to Talk about Iraq: Nation Remembers War Dead, Stranded Whales Head Toward Ocean, U.S. Has First Meeting with Iran in 27 Years KYRA PHILLIPS, CO-HOST: They died serving our nation. Today the nation remembers the sacrifice of th
 CNN 2007-05-25 Airplane Has Engine Problems, Lands at Duilles Airport: White House Victory with Iraq War Funding Bill; More Soldiers Needed on the Ground in Iraq; Whale Rescue Continues; Making History in Birmingham FREDRICKA WHITFIELD, CNN ANCHOR: pilot and we want to ask you general, you know your expertise
 CNN 2007-01-14 Miracle in Missouri: Information on Alleged Abductor, Could Kidnapped Boy be Victim of Stockholm Syndrome?: Fatal Fire in Huntington, West Virginia: Wicked Weather Across Midwest: Selling the Surge FREDRICKA WHITFIELD, CNN ANCHOR: Hello, I'm
 CNN 2007-01-21 Firecracker Unleashed at the CNN Headquarters in Atlanta: Senator Clinton Heads to Iowa Next Weekend to Begin Campaigning: Winter's Wailop: America Votes 2008: Capital Punishment: Justice Served or Denied?: New Orleans: Tale of Two Cities (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) GOV. BILL RICHARDSON (D), NEW MEXICO: Today I'm announcing the formation of a
 CNN 2007-05-12 Wildfires Burning on Both Coasts and in Between: Courtroom Battle: Five Soldiers Killed and Three Missing in Iraq; Rising Gas Prices FREDRICKA WHITFIELD, ANCHOR, CNN NEWSROOM: Wildfires burning on both coasts and in between this
 CNN 2007-05-24 Bush invokes ISG ideas on Iraq: Search for 2 G.I.s Continues; 9/11 Death Toll Rises DON LEMON, CNN ANCHOR: Every parent knows a child can hide almost
 CNN 2007-03-19 Officers Surrender to Police in Fatal NYC Shooting: Four Years Later: Life Dangerous in Iraq; Boy Scout, 12, Missing in North Carolina Mountains DON LEMON, CO-HOST: Hello, I'm Don Lemon live at the CNN world headquarters in Atlanta. BRIANNA KEIL

NOTE: This figure depicts metadata for the top 10 articles with the highest topic prevalence for the "Coalition Death Toll" and "Funding/Dem. Congress" topics estimated by the structural topic model.

Figure 3.16: Media Coverage of Iraq Combat Events by Source, 2007

Selling the Surge

Fox News Network 2007-01-10 President Bush Addresses the Nation: Dick Durbin Delivers the Democratic Response BRIT HUME, FOX NEWS ANCHOR: You're looking at the White House. That's a live picture where tonight.

CNN 2007-01-10 President Bush's Address to the Nation: Analysis of Bush's Speech WOLF BLITZER, CNN ANCHOR: All right, Larry. That's coming up right after the president wraps up. You

Fox News Network 2007-02-04 Interview with Lindsey Graham WALLACE: Joining us now, one of the strongest supporters of the president's Iraq war policy. Senator

Fox News Network 2007-02-04 Interview with Lindsey Graham WALLACE: Joining us now, one of the strongest supporters of the president's Iraq war policy. Senator

Fox News Network 2007-04-15 Interview With Senators Graham, Levin CHRIS WALLACE, HOST: I'm Chris Wallace. Attorney General Gonzales makes his case to keep his job, ne

Fox News Network 2007-04-15 Interview With Senators Graham, Levin CHRIS WALLACE, HOST: I'm Chris Wallace. Attorney General Gonzales makes his case to keep his job, ne

MSNBC 2007-01-10 HARDBALL for January 10, 2007 KEITH OLBERMANN, MSNBC ANCHOR: Good evening again, with Chris Matthews in Washington, I'm Keith Olbe

CNN 2007-01-10 President Bush Goes Before Nation With High Stakes Strategy Change in Iraq. Vote To Raise Minimum Wage Passes Overwhelmingly in House. Interview With Senator Jack Reed WOLF BLITZER, CNN ANCHOR: And to our viewers, you're in THE SITUATION ROOM, where new pictures and

MSNBC 2007-01-10 HARDBALL for January 10, 2007 CHRIS MATTHEWS, MSNBC ANCHOR: In two hours, the president sells America on an escalation of our part

CNN 2007-01-10 What will Mr. Bush Say Tonight?: Early Reaction to Speech Coming in From Capitol Hill: President Bush Attempts to Get War Strategy Right WOLF BLITZER, CNN ANCHOR: Thanks very much, Lou. And to our viewers, you're in THE SITUATION ROOM

Anti-Media Coverage

Fox News Network 2007-04-24 New Documentary on War Has Some Up in Arms COLMES: Citizen journalist Bill Moyers is returning to PBS after a two-year hiatus with a weekly sho

Fox News Network 2007-02-08 Talking Points Memo & Impact: Who Respects the Tro O'REILLY: "Impact" segment tonight, the "Talking Points Memo," how the far left is handling the U.S.

Fox News Network 2007-10-15 Retired General Blasts Iraq War Effort. Media Coverage (NEWSBREAK) COLMES: Retired General Ricardo Sanchez made news this weekend, calling the United State

Fox News Network 2007-04-24 Talking Points Memo and Top Story BILL O'REILLY, HOST: "The O'Reilly Factor" is on. Tonight. (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) JESSE WATTERS, FACTOR

Fox News Network 2007-02-05 Talking Points Memo and Top Story BILL O'REILLY, HOST: "The O'Reilly Factor" is on. Tonight. ... (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) UNIDENTIFIED MALE: D

Fox News Network 2007-11-14 Cuban Movie Endangers Americans BILL O'REILLY, HOST: "The O'Reilly Factor" is on. Tonight. U.S. troops making solid gains in Iraq, b

Fox News Network 2007-10-26 Pinheads and Patriots: Stephen Colbert, Dave Matthews O'REILLY: Time now for "Pinheads and Patriots". Dave Matthews and his band will give two free concer

Fox News Network 2007-11-12 is Movie Just Propaganda? (NEWSBREAK) (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) TOM CRUISE, ACTOR: You've already sold the war. I'm asking you to hel

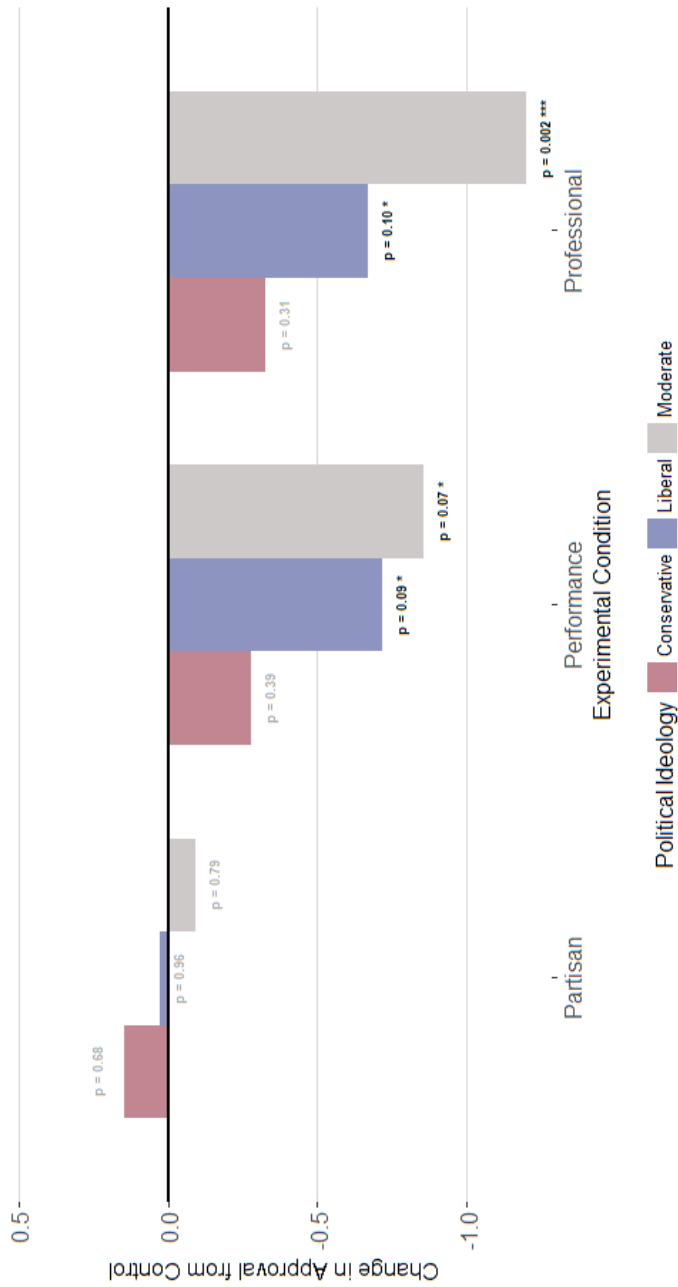
Fox News Network 2007-10-02 interview With Kristen Powers, Dennis Prager (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) BRIAN MCGOUGH, IRAQ WAR VETERAN: Rush, the shrapnel I took to my head was real.

Fox News Network 2007-04-26 Talking Points Memo and Top Story BILL O'REILLY, FOX NEWS HOST: THE O'REILLY FACTOR is on. Tonight ... (BEGIN VIDEO CLIP) UNIDENTIFIED

NOTE: This figure depicts metadata for the top 10 articles with the highest topic prevalence for the "Selling the Surge" and "Anti-Media Coverage" topics estimated by the structural topic model.

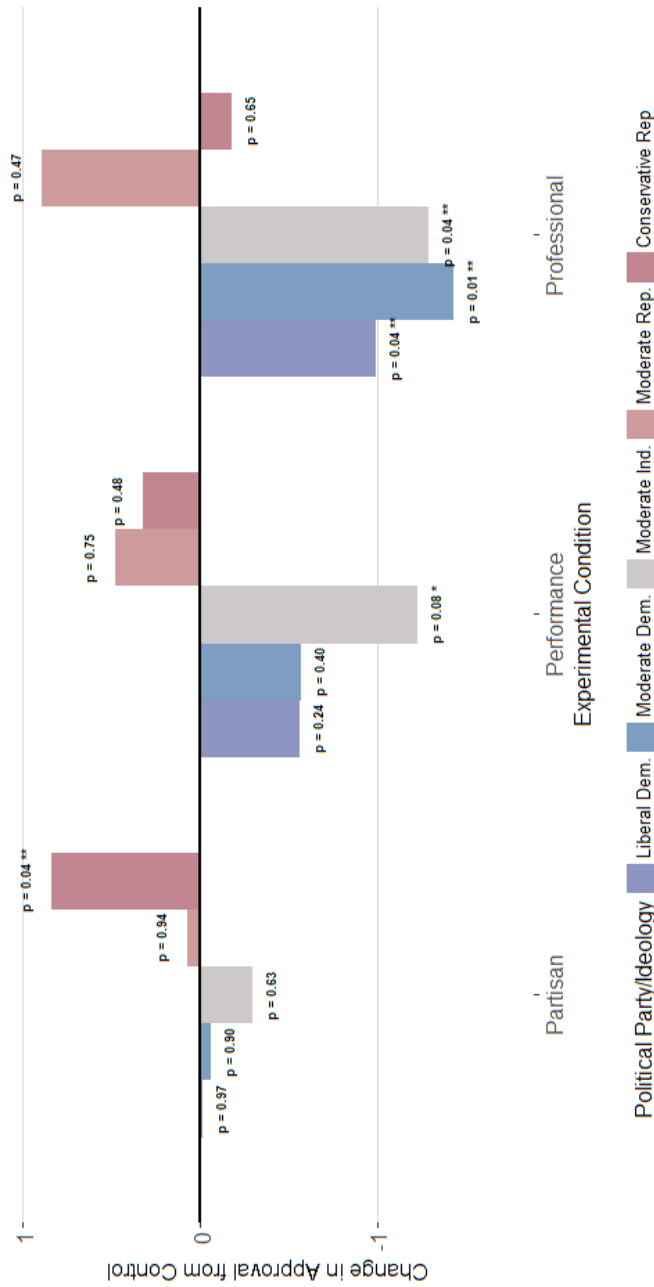
B.3 Supplementary Experimental Results

Figure 3.17: Experimental Results (Ideology Breakdown), YouGov - March 2017



NOTE: This figure depicts deviation in expressed confidence in the military institution as measured by the 11-pt scale in all experimental conditions. Respondent patterns broken down by identification into liberal, conservative, and moderate subsamples based on self-identification on five-point political ideology scale. Reported p-values reflect significance at 95% level for two-tailed t-test for difference in means between experimental and control subgroups. $N_{Total} = 907$

Figure 3.18: Experimental Results (Expanded PID Breakdown), YouGov - March 2017



NOTE: This figure depicts deviation in expressed confidence in the military institution as measured by the 11-pt scale in all experimental conditions. Respondent patterns broken down by identification into cross party-ideology subsamples based on self-identification on five-point political ideology scale and identification on the seven-point party ID scale (including learners). Reported p-values reflect significance at 95% level for two-tailed t-test for difference in means between experimental and control subgroups. $N_{Total} = 678$

Appendix C: Pew Research News Content Index (NCI) Dataset

C.1 Dataset Methodology

Analysis of the selective exposure hypotheses conducted in the main body of the text draw extensively on media reporting data provided by the Pew Research News Content Index (NCI) Dataset, a sampling-based index of stories reported by major media outlets across television, the internet, radio, and print newspapers. A full description of the dataset's methodology can be found on the Pew Research website.³⁵ However, for the purposes of this analysis, I provide an overview of the collection and coding schemes for the NCI dataset, as the selective exposure argument uses this data in 2007 to make the case for limited reporting across conservative outlets on Iraq Combat Events.

The population of data points captured by the dataset's sampling process produces an image of the media information environment per day, meant to be "illustrative but not strictly representative". This is to say that the dataset employs quasi-random sampling of news stories across the different media, weighting these observations based on the number of outlets per medium, the number of programs per outlet, and the volume of news to be collected during given periods of time. Coding the entire content of a news segment or newspaper is prohibitively time consuming. As a result, the collection process increases efficiency at the cost of completeness by focusing on the most prominent aspects of these segments, such as using the first 30-minutes of television news segments or the front page of print media sources in order to provide an accurate picture of the predominant stories during a given news cycle. While this means the image captured by the dataset is a sampled subset of prominent stories, this does not pose a serious threat to inference in the selective exposure argument discussed in the main body of the text. Lead stories and newspaper headlines are precisely the high-salience, high-exposure stories that this hypothesis is attempting to test for distribution and acceptance by the public; as a result, "D-block" television segments or non-front page, under-the-fold print stories are less important to our

³⁵Pew Research Center Journalism and Media, News Content Index Methodology,http://www.journalism.org/news_index_methodology, accessed October 18, 2017.

consideration.

Network Television News

The network television news medium includes morning and evening segments broadcast by the three major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) and the evening segments of PBS. The three primary networks typically air two daytime programs (such as the *Today Show* or *Good Morning America*) and one evening program, whereas PBS is typically captured in a sampling of *Newshour with Jim Lehrer*. Collection of story topics for these programs codes the substance of the first 30 minutes of one or two of the three programs, which typically focus on stories of national importance. Though this means that stories at the end of the broadcast are less likely to be collected, Pew Research asserts that “we have learned that the morning shows generally move away from the news of the day after the first 30 minutes”. Evening news segments are collected in a similar fashion, with the entire 30 minutes of two of the three programs a day being sampled. Finally, the PBS *Newshour* broadcast rotates to be coded based on the first 30 minutes, followed by the second 30 minutes, followed by its non-collection.

All television programs, both network and cable news, are coded based on the entire 30 minutes time frame of collection, discounting inserts from local affiliates, advertisements, promotions, or weather reports. Furthermore, segments within a programs will be coded in their entirety even if they run past the 30 minute time window (for instance, a three-minute segment that started at the 28-minute mark would be coded even though it concludes at the 31-minute mark). Removing local inserts, non-substantive information, and “teasers” of upcoming stories narrows the collected sample to the top stories of national importance. Therefore, despite the rotating sample scheme, the information collected is representative of the prevailing news stories of the day.

Cable Television News

Cable news focuses on particular sources in a similar fashion, utilizing the top three cable news distributors by audience reach (MSNBC, CNN, and FOX). Selection on these subsets precluded the inclusion of corporately-related by unsampled news source like CNBC, or CNN Headline News. Because cable news broadcasts on a continuous basis, a different scheme of collection is adopted due to the indistinguishability of segments from the same network to a broad audience. Instead, Pew breaks the reporting day into four time periods: early morning, daytime, early evening, and primetime. Early morning segments are not collected due to the fact that they are not uniformly available to a national audience; east coast segments are broadcast too early for west coast audience to consume. Daytime segments are collected in a manner similar to network news, with two 30 minute segments collected per day, rotating among the three networks.

Early evening and primetime, taken together, form a news block typically lasting from 6PM to 11PM on weekdays. Prior to 2009, CNN and FOX had three of their four cable news programs coded, with MSNBC having two of their four coded. This was done in reflection of the audience reach at the time, in which MSNBC had lower ratings than CNN and FOX. Since 2009, this has been amended to sample one or two segments from CNN, one or two segments from MSNBC, and two segments from FOX, for a total of between 30-60 minutes of coded substance per source per day, for a total of nearly 3.5 hours of coded substance per day.

Figure 3.19: Pew Research NCI Dataset, Cable News Sampling Scheme Post-2011

Below is the current list of evening cable programs included in our sample as of August 2011.

	CNN	Fox News	MSNBC
6 p.m.	Situation Room	Special Report w/ Bret Baier	
7 p.m.	John King, USA	Fox Report w/ Shephard Smith	Hardball
8 p.m.	Anderson Cooper 360	The O'Reilly Factor	The Last Word
9 p.m.	---	Hannity	The Rachel Maddow Show
10 p.m.	---	---	The Ed Show

NOTE: This figure depicts the post-2011 collection scheme for cable news segments during the critical early evening-primetime joint period. This is an amendment from the collection scheme used for the main body's data from 2007 in that while CNN and FOX would have had three of their programs sampled, MSNBC would only have had two sampled. Figure created by Pew Research available at http://www.journalism.org/news_index_methodology.

For our purposes, the sampling scheme for collection of the news story data warrants several considerations. First, the rotating basis of the collection during the relevant time period of analysis (2007) means that liberal news source MSNBC would have had far fewer opportunities to be collected; as a result, the gap in reporting trends between conservative and liberal media outlets on Iraq Combat Events may actually be biased downward since more MSNBC stories were not collected to this end. FOX and CNN would have been, on average, collected 50% more than the MSNBC segments; while this is reflective of differing audience reach, it also heightens the importance of reporting biases between sources as discussed in the main analysis. Second, the rotation scheme does not harm inference based on ‘% of newshole’ dependent variable use. The graphically displayed reporting trends in Figure 3.1 utilize daily percentages of the Iraq Combat Event-related segments as a percentage of the collected outlet airtime. Because of the rotating collection scheme as it was conducted pre-2011, this means that day-to-day total time per outlet would have remained fixed, while segment length devoted to this story, our main variable of interest, was allowed to vary based on news source. These daily percentages were then plotted as individual

pointed that the LOESS smoother could visually depict in a more substantively useful fashion.

Newspapers

Analysis of print media relied on collection of same-day delivery of electronic, full-text versions of the major newspapers through various providers available to Pew Research. The newspapers are organized on a three-tiered system of audience reach and level of distribution. As of 2007, when the substantive data used in the main analysis was collected, Tier 1 included *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *LA Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Washington Post*, though the latter has since fallen to Tier 2 due to lower circulation. Tier 2 newspapers typically include regionalized print media with local audiences and non-national distribution, such as the *Atlanta Constitution-Journal*, while Tier 3 are more localized. Collection on a daily basis included coding two of the four Tier 1 papers per day. Since no Tier 2 or Tier 3 papers enter in our analysis, I leave discussion of that analysis scheme out.

Again, complete coding of the entire newspaper is cost prohibitive for minimal quantitative value. Two of the four Tier 1 papers are sampled each day, with the sampled newspapers being coded based on the stories which appear on page A1, both above and below the fold, and any substance continued inside the newspaper so long as it begins on the front page. The logic for consideration of these stories is that editors make a conscious choice to allocate finite column-inches to stories of particular import. Just as non-collection of local inserts or the last 30 minutes of network news increases efficiency with little loss of substance, so too does ignoring inside-the-fold stories that were not prominent or important enough to be placed on the front page. The purpose of the index, and its application for this study, is the frequency and location of specific story topics in the information environment; as such, study of headlines and lead stories is precisely where focus ought to be. This scheme results in about 20 newspaper stories collected and coded per day.

For this analysis, newspaper prominence was calculated using the NCI's five-point scale of story prominence, inverting the scale, and dividing the selected story by the sum of all stories from that paper per day. For example, a story about Iraq Combat Events featured on the front page of *The New York Times* that was coded as "Front Page/Second Prominent", would have been entered as 102 in the dataset, on the scale of 101 (Front Page/Most Prominent) to 105 (Front Page/Other, Below the Fold). I repurpose this measure into an inverse five-point scale of importance; the above story would be given a score of 4, just as a story that was 104: *Front Page/Other, Above the Fold* would have been given a 2. I sum the total prominence of stories reported by that source as divide it by the prominence of the observed story, in order to ascertain a proxy measure of the percentage of finite prominence the editor's devoted to the story. As argued here, this is a fair measure of the importance of the story to this source and its availability to its audience.

Radio

Because online news sources do not factor in my analysis, I also forgo discussion of their collection scheme. Radio sources, however, factor prominently in my analysis as a decidedly conservative-heavy transmission medium for information. Because of the wide variation in types of radio sources, Pew subsets the available radio outlets into one of three categories. First, *Public Radio* collects rotating 30-minute segments of National Public Radio's (NPR) *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*. The scheme of sampling rotates between the first 30 minutes of the former, the second 30 minutes of the former, the first 30 minutes of the latter, and the second 30 minutes of the latter. NPR broadcasts are typically two hours in length for either segment, with member stations picking which parts of that broadcast to incorporate into their own. The dataset includes additional 30-minute sampling of WFYI, the member station from which Pew collects NPR broadcasts.

The second category, *Talk Radio*, includes those outlets with a public affairs of news-oriented tone. Just as larger conservative audiences on cable news leads to a sampling

scheme that favors FOX over MSNBC, the vastly larger conservative audience for talk radio favors *Hannity* and *Rush Limbaugh* over *Ed Schultz*; as of 2007, Schultz and Hannity were sampled every other day and Limbaugh was sampled everyday, with all coded based on the first 30 minutes of the broadcast. Again, this upweights the conservative outlets measured in the 2007 version of the dataset, with conservative media outlets collected more frequently in line with their larger audience reach. The third category is *Headline Feeds*, which are hourly news feeds from larger national outlets like CBS or CNN, but are of limited length and typically sum up national or international headlines from the parent news source. Pew NCI collects two Headline Feeds per day, at ABC and CBS Radio, each for five minutes in length for a total of 10 minutes per day.

This analysis calculated the length of the segment spent of specific topics (like Iraq Combat Events) as a percentage of the total length of the segment. Again, the total length of the recorded segment is fixed while the time spent on specific subjects is allowed to vary. One key consideration for this analysis is the large oversampling of conservative radio outlets compared to only five-minute headline feeds from more centrist or liberal news sources. In any given day, Hannity or Limbaugh have nearly 5-10 times more airtime to discuss high-salience news stories than the headline feeds. This imbalance biases the expected result of our analysis downward, making the gap in reporting trends even more stark. With less time to report on specific stories, headline feeds still spend more time talking about war events than conservative radio hosts, as seen in Figure 3.1.

Appendix D: Survey Experiment Supplementals

D.1 Questionnaire Design

Programming Instructions: Assign random integer from 1 to 4, record this integer as *assignment*. Assignment of this integer is recorded and dictates the value of **[Prompt1]**, **[Prompt2]**, and **[Text]**.

Assigning Textual Prompt

The variable **[Text]** takes on the following values depending on integer assignment:

- *Assignment=1, [Text]= We are interested in how well certain news stories regarding US foreign policy can reach the public. The length of the ‘war on terror’ and associated US military activities have created a large amount of information that can be hard to follow.*
- *Assignment=2, 3, 4, [Text]=We are interested in how well certain news stories regarding US foreign policy can reach the public. The length of the ‘war on terror’ and associated US military activities have created a large amount of information that can be hard to follow. We want to ask about some stories that occurred and were reported to see if you happened to hear about them.*

Assigning News Vignette #1

The variable **[Prompt1]** takes on the following values depending on integer assignment:

- *Assignment=1, [Prompt1]= Would you say that you follow stories about US foreign policy in the news?*
- *Assignment=2, [Prompt1]=Story 1: The 2012 presidential election saw candidates Barack Obama and Mitt Romney receive many high-profile endorsements, several hundred of which coming from the military community. Among these were retired military officers General Wesley Clark, former Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, and General Tommy Franks, former commander of US forces in the Middle East, who publicly supported Obama and Romney, respectively.*
- *Assignment=3, [Prompt1]=Story 1: In 2009, several former Army soldiers received multiple life sentences for an event in 2006 where the men had participated in the rape and murder of*

a 14-year old Iraqi girl. The soldiers, stationed near the town of Mahmudiyah at the time, were convicted of this crime along with the murder of the girl's mother, father, and younger sister.

- *Assignment=4, [Prompt1]=Story 1: A British development aid worker named Linda Norgrove was captured by Taliban forces in eastern Afghanistan in late 2010. During an attempted raid to free the captured civilian, members of the Navy's SEAL Team Six accidentally killed Norgrove when one of the sailors mistakenly threw a grenade into the area where she was hiding.*

Assigning News Vignette #2

The variable **[Prompt2]** takes on the following values depending on integer assignment:

- *Assignment=1, [Prompt2]= Would you say that you follow stories about US military operations in the news?*
- *Assignment=2, [Prompt2]=Story 2: During the 2016 presidential campaign, both presidential candidates announced broad support from retired military officers like General Mike Flynn and General John Allen, who supported Trump and Clinton, respectively. Donald Trump released a list of 88 retired generals and admirals that publicly supported his candidacy, while Hillary Clinton released a similar list of 110 retired generals and admirals that supported her campaign.*
- *Assignment=3, [Prompt2]=Story 2: In the last few years, the military has experienced problems with misconduct by high-ranking officers, prompting the resignation of figures like former General David Petraeus, for example. A report commissioned by the Defense Department in 2012 found that nearly thirty generals and admirals had been investigated for offenses ranging from sexual assault, misuse of government funds, gambling scandals, and inappropriate statements about members of Congress.*
- *Assignment=4, [Prompt2]=Story 2: In October 2015, US and Afghan forces fighting in the city of Kunduz struggled to remove Taliban elements from the town. During the fight, US combat aircraft misidentified a nearby medical facility staffed by Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) and destroyed the hospital, killing more than 30 aid workers and wounding many more. A follow-up investigation attributed the accident to "human error" by US service members.*

Survey Progression

Standard demographic battery precedes the experimental portion of the survey.

[TEXT]

[PROMPT1]

Question 1: SINGLE CHOICE. Interest/Knowledge

- Control Group (*Assignment=1*) Foreign Policy Interest
- Treatment Groups (*Assignment=2,3,4*) News Knowledge 1

Did you hear this story?

- Yes/No

[PROMPT2]

Question 2: SINGLE CHOICE. Interest/Knowledge

- Control Group (*Assignment=1*) Foreign Policy Interest
- Treatment Groups (*Assignment=2,3,4*) News Knowledge 2

Did you hear this story?

- Yes/No

Question 3-5: DYNAMIC GRID. Institutional Confidence

On scale of 0-10 (with 0 being the least and 10 being the most), how much trust and confidence do you have in each of the following institutions?

Rows [randomized order]

- Congress
- The presidency
- The military

D.2 News Vignette Analogs

Each of the treatment conditions in this experimental design was exposed to news stories that were intended to provoke “top-of-the-head” thinking and introduce specific types of newly-salient information regarding military misconduct of poor performance. In order to minimize deception and increase external validity, the stories used were actual cases of partisan, professional, and performance-based events reported in multiple news outlets. Below, I provide a short summary of each of the cases used for vignettes in this experiment and the relevant cites for these stories in the information environment.

Partisan Activity

The first partisan vignette included information about retired military elites, including General Wesley Clark and General Tommy Franks, providing high-profile endorsements to presidential candidate Mitt Romney and President Barack Obama in the 2012 presidential campaign. Clark, a retired Supreme Allied Commander of NATO Force Europe and former 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, was one of several prominent military officers to endorse the incumbent president; along with retired Major General Paul Eaton, these officers opposed Mitt Romney’s take on foreign policy early in the campaign season and touted Obama’s successful operation to kill Osama bin Laden.³⁶ Obama’s campaign co-chairs included retired Admiral John Nathman, the former second-highest ranking officer in the Navy, who would go on to speak at the Democratic National Convention.³⁷ The endorsements for Mitt Romney were considerably more numerous; on the eve of the election, nearly 500 retired generals and admirals sponsored a full-page ad in the *Washington Times* endorsing Romney. The list involved five former Chairmen of the Joints Chiefs of Staff – including Clinton appointee General Hugh Shelton – and General Tommy Franks, the former Central Command (CENTCOM) commander in 2003 during the Iraq invasion

³⁶Nia-Malika Henderson, “Gen. Wes Clark set to pound Romney on foreign policy”, *The Washington Post*, November 21, 2011.

³⁷Byron Tau, “Obama campaign announces co-chairs”, Politico44 Blog, February 22, 2012.

under President Bush.³⁸

In the second vignette, similar information is exposed to the respondent regarding endorsement in the 2016 president campaign, though in this election both candidates displayed both high-profile individual endorsements and large blocs of retired officers. Republican nominee Donald Trump released a letter in September 2016 with the endorsement of 88 retired generals and admirals, including former commander of US forces in Korea General Burwell Bell and former commander of the US Army's Delta Force, Lieutenant General Jerry Boykin. Trump's list boasted officers who were more advanced in age and had retired ten or more years previously, though most notable among his military endorsements was that of retired Lieutenant General Mike Flynn, a close adviser and former intelligence officer who would go on to speak at the Republican National Convention.³⁹ Democratic nominee Secretary Hillary Clinton responded with her own list of 110 retired officers' endorsements, including recent Afghanistan forces commander General John Allen and General Wesley Clark once again. Allen would go on to speak at the party nominating convention that year as well, with Clark leading a cadre of 15 officers who independently voiced their fears over a Trump presidency and the denigration of fellow veteran Senator John McCain that Trump has stated earlier.⁴⁰

Professionalism Failures

In the second treatment condition, individuals were exposed instead to priming information regarding professional or ethical failures by military elites or the institution as a means for making such calculations salient to the respondent's calculation of confidence in the military. The intent in this treatment condition was to focus on events of singular or collective

³⁸Stephan Dinan, "Retired top military brass push for Romney", *The Washington Times*, November 4, 2012.

³⁹David Wright, Ryan Browne, and Naomi Lin, "88 former military leaders write letter backing Donald Trump for president", *CNN*, September 6, 2016.

⁴⁰Dianna Cahn, "Former admirals and generals warn Trump is 'dangerous' to military and country", *Stars and Stripes*, September 21, 2016; Dan Merica, "Clinton to Trump: My military endorsements are bigger than yours", *CNN*, September 9, 2016.

values violations in which the driving mechanism was not incompetence, but rather motivated harm or ethical faults. In the first vignette, respondents were exposed to a news story regarding the trial and conviction of several US soldiers in 2009 for an event which occurred in Mahmudiyah, Iraq in 2006. A group of five soldiers led by Private Steven Dale Green, raped a 14-year old Iraqi girl before proceeding to kill both her and her family. Green's unit was serving in the famed Sunni "Triangle of Death" outside of Baghdad when the incident occurred, followed by his arrest and the arrest of four other soldiers who participated in the crime. The event was all the more damaging to the military's institutional reputation as Green had been arrested shortly before his enlistment, admitted to the Army on one of the many "moral waivers" the military had issued in an attempt to boost recruitment in the worst years of the Iraq war.⁴¹

In the second vignette, respondents were exposed to a news story that focused on the elite-level of the military institution and its misconduct. This involved the 2014 publication of the increasingly list of senior military officials relieved of command or fired due to various forms of misconduct and professional failures. Citing the 2012 resignation of retired General David Petraeus from his post as Director of Central Intelligence due to an unknown affair as the impetus, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta commissioned a study of ethical standards for senior officers. Resulting media exposure captured misconduct ranging from sexual assault, sexual misconduct, forgery, public intoxication, bribery, unauthorized gift acceptance from foreign entities, and misuse of government funds.⁴² In many cases, the hypocrisy of the violations was particularly egregious, from a South Carolina-based one-star general advocated "zero-tolerance for sexual harassment" while being investigated for assaulting his mistress, to the relief of a high-ranking nuclear commander for public drunkenness while with Russian military officials in Moscow.

⁴¹Jim Dwyer and Robert F. Worth, "Accused G.I. Was Troubled Long Before Iraq", *The New York Times*, July 14, 2006.

⁴²Craig Whitlock, "Military brass, behaving badly: Files detail a spate of misconduct dogging armed forces", *The Washington Post*, January 26, 2014.

Battlefield Performance Problems

In the third treatment condition, respondents were subjected to news stories regarding military failures of a standard variety: battlefield results. This included cases of incompetence, miscalculation, miscoordination, or tactical lack of proficiency designed to make salient the standard calculation of confidence in the military institution according to the institutionalist theory. The first vignette detailed the failure of a 2010 mission by the Navy's SEAL Team Six to rescue Linda Norgrove, a British national and aid worker captured by elements of the Taliban. Norgrove was moved outside the compound in which the SEALs believed she was housed by her captors and one of the team's members accidentally killed Norgrove with a grenade believing her to be an enemy combatant.⁴³ In addition to drawing attention to a tactical failure by the military institution, it also invokes the popularly-recognized SEAL Team Six, made famous from successful operations in anti-piracy off the coast of Somalia in 2009 and in Pakistan to kill Osama bin Laden in 2011. Using such an organization is meant to draw a stronger contrast in the miscalculation between expectation and newly-salient information.

In the second vignette, respondents were exposed to a story detailing the accidental bombing of a Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders) clinic in Kunduz, Afghanistan, in 2015. The clinic's staff were administering to the increasing number of wounded created by Taliban resurgence in Kunduz. Part of coalition response to the increased violence included fire from a nearby AC-130 Spectre gunship, which despite initial reports was called in to support US efforts on the ground. In the subsequent investigation, it was clear that the location of the hospital was in dispute at numerous points, resulting in a nearly 30-minute barrage on the clinic that left 42 dead and dozens more wounded. President Obama apologized directly to the president of MSF, admitting US miscalculations in the incident.⁴⁴ In this case, miscalculations of targeting and tactical proficiency

⁴³Anthony Faiola, "British aid worker Norgrove killed accidentally by U.S. soldier, inquiry finds", *Washington Post Foreign Service*, December 3, 2010

⁴⁴"Obama apologises to MSF president for Kunduz bombing", *BBC News*, October 7, 2015. Obama's apology was also given amidst increasing rumors that the attack was a deliberate move by the US to dislodge Taliban fighters "holed up" in the clinic, though this was eventually denied by both the US and MSF.

not only failed to produce a positive outcomes, but created a tangibly negative one in the destruction of a medical facility crewed largely by third-party nationals.

Chapter 4

What Discord Follows:

Partisan Polarization and Civil-Military Norms

Introduction

Individuals navigate a diverse and competitive information space when forming attitudes on complex political issues. The influence of elite communities, whether in the form of policy experts, partisan leaders, or media outlets, are some of the most important actors in this process. As issues increase in technicality or complexity, individuals are more likely to focus on the credibility of the source of information as a guide for attitude formation (Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998; Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Hovland and Weiss 1951). This connection between elite credibility and political influence is particularly significant amidst an ever-changing information environment and decreasing public trust in traditional expert institutions.¹ As an elite community with high levels of public trust and localized subject matter expertise, the military and its representatives are ideally placed to be influential speakers, providing seemingly objective and unbiased information. However, a broad consensus among civil-military relations scholars argues that such political activity by military

¹Recent polling on public skepticism towards experts has found this trend is broad. In December 2016, 53% of those surveyed agreed with the statement “Everyday Americans understand what the government should do better than the so-called ‘experts’”. Peter Moore, “Poll Results: Civil Service”, YouGov, December 7, 2016.

elites is functionally and normatively problematic (Huntington 1957; J. K. Dempsey 2009; Cohen 2003; Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012; Owens 2015). Paradoxically, the elite community most trusted by the public is the one most heavily proscribed from using that influence in political activity.

However, the influence of military elites in the political sphere has nonetheless increased, particularly due to retired military officials whose post-service careers include media commentary, political activism, or legislative lobbying. Recent scholarship in military politicization has asserted that continuous interventions by these figures into politics will be met with a broad public devaluation of the institution's credibility (Urban 2017; Liebert and Golby 2017a; Owens 2015; Hill, Wong, and Gerras 2013). The central assumption of these arguments is that military credibility is conditional on its image as a non-partisan entity. However, while the salience of this "apolitical norm" is nearly a consensus among civil-military scholars, the proposition that the public objectively considers this norm important has been subjected to surprisingly little empirical scrutiny. Despite increasing political activity and partisan activism by both active and retired officers, public confidence in the armed forces remains the highest among institutions in US society.² This potential weakening of a critical civil-military norm occurs amidst increasing partisan polarization, changing attitudes about the role of government, and a broader shift among younger Americans in acceptance of illiberal governance (Foa and Mounk 2016).

In this study, I address this research question directly: how does political activity by military elites influence public perceptions of their credibility and that of the military institution? Review of the extant literature would suggest that the public can respond to such information in one of several ways. First, as a *principled* public that uniformly sanctions elite sources that are perceived as violating the professional norm against such activity. This pattern, reflective of the civil-military normative consensus, would reveal that individuals lend less credibility to partisan sources and do so objectively, with no bias towards their

²Frank Newport, "Americans' Confidence in Institutions Edges Up", *Gallup*, June 26, 2017. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/212840/americans-confidence-institutions-edges.aspx>

own political ideology. Second, as an *indifferent* public that does not allow political activity to update their impressions of military elite credibility in a significant way. Such a response would indicate a weakening of the normative consensus embraced by civil-military scholars as the expected consequence of partisan behavior. The limited empirical work conducted towards this question has suggested that the public may indeed be unmoved by such activity (Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012).

However, I argue that while the *indifferent public* underestimates the influence of military political activity, the *principled public* overestimates the objectivity of the audience. As a result, I argue a third hypothesis: the *partisan public*. This image of the public departs from the previous two in that it is neither principled nor objective; individuals selectively view military partisans as less credible not for violating a professional norm, but for adopting a politically contrary position. In this framework, military credibility is not conditional on adopting non-partisan attitudes, but rather on adopting the “correct” partisan attitudes. Focusing on retired military elites in original survey experimentation, I find significant evidence for this version of the public, indicating a weakening of an apolitical norm considered to be an important structural component of democratic regime quality. Furthermore, I discuss how such an environment of partisan polarization both incentivizes further military politicization and limits the reach of military elites in broadcasting information.

I conduct this analysis as follows: first, I outline the fundamental conflict between the normative demands of civil-military scholarship and the predictions of the body of work in public opinion formation. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that while military elites satisfy many of the theoretical criteria to be credible sources in providing political information, that civil-military theory broadly considers such activity to be normatively and functionally problematic. Second, I argue that an objective norm against political activity by the military may be weaker than previously contemplated and argue a comprehensive theory for the different attitudes the public may adopt in response to knowledge of military politicization. This section will outline the potential response patterns empirically measured by my survey instrument, in whether such norms against a political military are objectively

strong (*principled public*), objectively weak (*indifferent public*), or selectively weak (*partisan public*). Third, I will incorporate the results of original survey experimentation designed to measure how military politicization (1) influences the public's estimation of the endorser's credibility and (2) influences the perceived credibility of the larger institution. Whether the public adopts indifferent, principled, or partisan attitudes in each domain has decidedly different and significant implications for civil-military relations and elite-driven politics.

Political Activity and Military Credibility

Credible Elite Sources

Examining the impact of military politicization on elite credibility requires placing two distinct literatures in political science into a common frame. While theories of elite-driven politics suggest that a highly-trusted and knowledgeable organization like the military should be an effective cue-giver to the public, the civil-military relations literature extensively argues the necessity of an apolitical military. Theorizing on this conflict first requires an understanding of the role of elites in public opinion development. Underlying the study of elite cues is the assumption that individuals in society lack the resources to form expert opinions on every issue in politics; instead, these citizens can reach “reasoned choices” from the heuristic offered by information given through trusted elites (Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998; Downs 1957; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993). However, with access to a substantial variety of voices in the information space, individuals seeking to reach informed opinions must make similarly reasoned choices about the messages – and sources – to which they attend.

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) find that when issues are personally important, individuals ‘centrally’ attend to the substance of the argument; however, when the information environment is distracting or the issue is exceedingly complex, these same individuals ‘peripherally’ attend to the attributes of the source itself. Political issues like military intervention (Baum and Groeling 2009; Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017), foreign policy (Grieco

et al. 2011; Guardino and Hayes 2017), or international agreements (Guisinger and E. N. Saunders 2017) have been found to fit into this mold of complexity and distance, where individuals rely more on attributes of the source of information than its substantive content. Among the characteristics most closely tied to source credibility are *trustworthiness* (Hovland and Weiss 1951; Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998) and *knowledgeability* (Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998; McGuire 1969). These attributes collectively speak to the source’s credibility in the eyes of the individual; elite communities with high public esteem and subject matter expertise should be the most influential, particularly in technical or complex political issue domains.

While this analysis similarly incorporates expertise and trustworthiness as suitable measures of credibility, I capture these attributes on two distinct levels: the individual source and the broader institution. The relationship between both levels of credibility has been studied at length in the research governing the effectiveness of corporate sponsors and their public brand. The extent of elite *endorser credibility* from an individual source operates in conjunction with the *corporate credibility* of the larger institution that the individual represents (Goldberg and Hartwick 1990). Both the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the individual source and its parent organization act as reinforcing or supportive forces in persuading the public about the reliability of their claims (Ohanian 1990; Hovland and Weiss 1951; Newell and Goldsmith 2001). As such, this analogous literature in business research envisions both trustworthiness and expertise as significant insofar as they influence attitudes towards the endorser, the corporate firm, and “purchaser intent”, linking perceived credibility to a higher likelihood that the “product” will be accepted by the public (Newell and Goldsmith 2001; Lafferty and Goldsmith 1999).

I extend this logic to public opinion formation on political issues, in which an individual source and its institution operate in the roles of endorser and corporate entity, respectively. Just as corporate endorsers and firms seek to develop public credibility in order to increase purchaser intent, so too do political elites look to maintain the same public credibility in an effort to persuade individuals in society to adopt specific policy preferences. As I will

discuss later, this more comprehensive framework for understanding public perceptions of elite credibility allows for a better method of examining changes in trustworthiness and expertise among specific elite communities like the military. As an institution with high levels of public confidence, the military and its elites should serve as powerful voices of influence, combining broad public appeal, subject matter expertise, and a professional reputation as trustworthy dispensers of information.

Collectively, these efforts make clear why the military should – at least theoretically – possess considerable “latent political influence” on complex policy issues (Risa Brooks 2009). For the purposes of this study, I characterize *military elites* as those officials – active and retired – whose rank, status, or notoriety provides a sufficient base of influence with the public. Such figures include general officers, media commentators, political activists, or even ex-military elected officials. With high and consistent levels of public trust, a broad potential audience, and perceived expertise, individual military elites have the ability to transmit informative signals that have a high probability of acceptance as credible. Furthermore, the institutional credibility of the larger military establishment may have a strong interactive effect in the persuasiveness of representative endorsers. Indeed, empirical efforts exploring the influence of military elite cues have become a subject of increasing focus, examining their impact on presidential candidate approval (Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012), the acceptability of nuclear weapons use (Post and Sechser 2016), military intervention policy (Golby, Feaver, and Dropp 2017), and wartime success probability (Sidman and Norporth 2012). However, while the potential of this community to influence public attitudes may be high, the prospect of political interference by military elites runs afoul of a substantial normative consensus in political science regarding the role of the military in civic society.

Military Credibility and the Apolitical Norm

If the study of elite-driven politics theorizes that military elites should be seen as credible, much of the civil-military relations literature would argue that this is because of their perceived objectivity and adherence to a long-held standard of non-partisanship. Through a

normative lens, civil-military theory has attempted to capture the optimal power arrangements that ensure civilian supremacy of the armed forces and the political decision-making process (Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960; Kohn 1994; Kohn 1997). As these scholars argue, durable democratic governance requires a high degree of civilian control, which in turn demands an apolitical, yet effective military. Huntington (1957) captures this as the military's precarious position between two forces: the *functional* imperative requiring a competent institution capable of securing the national defense and a *societal* imperative requiring its deference to liberal democratic values of government. Huntington advocates for a system of *objective civilian control*, in which an institutionally subordinate military and a superior political elite engage in a pure division of labor between military and political affairs, a system he argues is best achieved by the professionalization of the officer corps while "rendering them politically sterile and neutral". This framework has shaped both subsequent civil-military theory and the professional standards of the American military itself, ascribing normative and practical utility to a military institution that exists outside the realm of politics, particularly the partisan variety.

However, while I examine how partisan activism might harm this normative framework, this is not to suggest that a politically knowledgeable military is fundamentally undesirable. It is therefore important to distinguish between the types of political competency that satisfy the two "imperatives" and those that violate them. The complexities of modern warfare have made striking the delicate balance between the functional and societal imperatives increasingly difficult. While a politically "neutral" military may be desirable from the societal perspective, a military that does not understand the political dimensions of warfare quite clearly violates the functional imperative. This philosophy springs from one of Clausewitz's most significant observations, that political concerns are inseparable from war: "its grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic" (Clausewitz 1989). A politically "neutral" military, therefore, is quite different from a politically illiterate one. Rather than achieving a pure division of labor between political and military spheres, recent scholarship has theorized on the tenuous nature with which military leaders must balance an understanding of politics with a professional abstention from the partisan strain of politics (Owens 2015).

In her typology of political activity by military elites, Risa Brooks (2009) describes the potential gains that such partisan actions can achieve for the military institution through alliances with legislative members or public appeals; however, these benefits are theorized as transitory and ultimately damaging. Cohen (1997) similarly argues that in increasing their efforts to understand political processes, military elites posture themselves to engage in it directly, to the detriment of both the military and the public good.

A politically-competent military may well satisfy a functional imperative for effectiveness in wartime; however, an ostensibly partisan one violates the societal imperative for civilian control and the corresponding norm against partisan activity. As a result, it is important to distinguish political awareness and understanding among military elites from active participation or agenda-setting in that process. This distinction in the civil-military literature between political activity conducted within the constraints of functional military performance and normatively subversive partisan activity is best captured by Owens (2015):

Political activity from which officers should be expected to refrain are those acts of partisanship, including attempts by political parties to enlist soldiers – including retired officers – to endorse candidates, as happened during the 1992 and 2000 presidential elections, or public criticism by an officer of an administration’s policy.

Though this apolitical norm has been broadly codified in the legal proscription against serving military servicemembers publicly advocating for a political cause or candidate in person,³ the recent availability of social media platforms has made the proliferation of political attitudes less costly and more threatening to traditional civil-military norms (Urben 2017). This gap between normative standards and the law is particularly pronounced among retired military elites unencumbered by such regulations and – acting as political appointees, media commentators, policy activists, or business lobbyists – nonetheless “represent the culture and the profession just as authoritatively as their counterparts on active duty” (Kohn 2002).

³This is most pointedly captured by Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 1344.10, which specifically enjoins servicemembers from serving in partisan clubs, engaging in public endorsement or advocacy, perform duties for political campaigns, or display signs or posters on their vehicles or property if living on a military installation. The complete list of these banned activities can be found in paragraph 4.1.2 in DoDD 1344.10, “Political Activity by Members of the Armed Forces”, *US Department of Defense*, February 19, 2008.

Despite professional efforts to keep the military outside of partisan politics, the institution has nonetheless drifted into politically murky territory. More recent scholarship has drawn attention to the creeping influence of partisan polarization on the ability of the military to remain an apolitical entity in society. Part of this trend has been the changing demography of the military itself. The development of the post-conscription force in the United States has led to a military that is demographically both decreasingly representative of society and increasingly partisan in political identification. This has manifested in wider partisan alignment with the Republican party, (O. R. Holsti 1998; Feaver and Kohn 2001), decreasing alignment with the Democratic party due to attrition of junior officers (J. K. Dempsey 2009), and a broad demographic shift to the states of the American South (Liebert and Golby 2017a). This shift has not gone unnoticed among members of the broader public. Among individuals asked in a comprehensive 2013 YouGov survey on civil-military attitudes by Schake and Mattis (2016), 42% of respondents believed military service-members were “much more” or “somewhat more” likely to vote for Republicans, compared to only 11% that believed the same for Democrats. Another contributing force to this trend is increasing political activism by military elites. Retired military officers have become increasingly vocal in policy debates, including editorial challenges to US foreign and domestic policy, and frequent endorsements of political candidates (Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012).

Numerous scholars have expressed concern that the very credibility the military enjoys among the public is inextricably tied to its ability to remain an apolitical institution. J. K. Dempsey (2009) argues that a failure by military elites – both active and retired – to refrain from political activity will result in a loss of trust from the public and an increasingly politicized force. In addition to compromising the veracity of military advice provided to civilian leaders while in uniform, Dempsey argues that the very credibility that provides military advice its value will be degraded by a broader society that only imbues trust in the military because “it is seen as being above the political fray.”⁴ Owens (2015) similarly argues that while the military must be politically literate for its functional role in warfare,

⁴Quoted in Bryan Bender, “Twitter and Facebook are politicizing the military”, *Politico*, February 26, 2017.

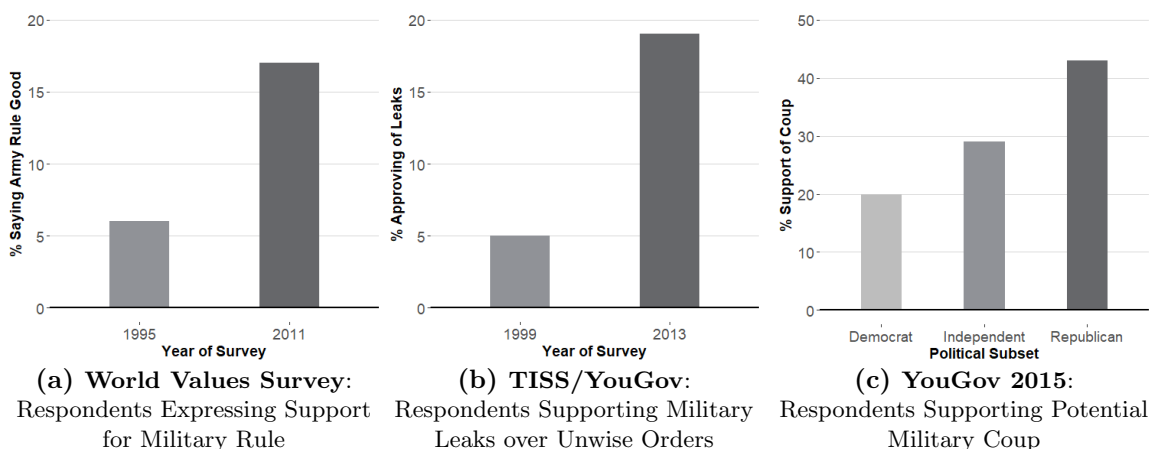
a politicized military “will lose legitimacy in the eyes of the American people” and hamper its ability to functionally contribute to the maintenance of national security. However, this conditional relationship between military credibility and non-partisanship requires a principled audience for whom the apolitical norm is salient.

Civil-military scholars have consistently placed the apolitical norm at the center of nearly every substantive model of the military institution’s place within a democratic society. Though theories of elite-driven politics predict that such a seemingly trusted and competent institution should be an effective source of political information, military elites are normatively and structurally discouraged from such behavior. The argument that military credibility with the public is tied to a non-partisan image is prevalent in recent studies of US civil-military relations (Golby, L. Cohn, and Feaver 2016; Urben 2017; Hill, Wong, and Gerras 2013; Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012). However, while there appears to be considerable theoretical consensus on this point, there is little empirical validation for the argument that the apolitical norm is salient among the public; as I will discuss in the next section, there is instead strong reason to believe that this norm has weakened considerably.

Challenging the Normative Consensus

The notion that the civil-military norm of an apolitical military is strong among the American public should generate considerable skepticism. As it exists, this theoretical consensus hinges on a key assumption about the public: that it objectively views civil-military norms as salient. First, there is strong reason to believe that the public is not as principled or normatively-grounded as scholars believe. Figure 4.1 depicts levels of public approval for select surveys items in the World Values Survey (WVS), the 1999 Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS) survey conducted by Feaver and Kohn (2001), the 2013 YouGov Civil-Military Attitudes survey conducted by Schake and Mattis (2016) and a 2015 YouGov survey on military interventions in politics.⁵ Between WVS waves in 1995 and 2011, US

⁵Peter Moore, “Could a coup really happen in the United States?”, YouGov, September 9, 2015.

Figure 4.1: Degradation of Civil-Military Norms Among the Public

NOTE: This figure depicts changes in select civil-military norms across several historical surveys, the World Values Survey (1995, 2011), the Triangle Institute for Security Studies Survey (1998-99), the Schake/Mattis YouGov Survey (2013), and a YouGov survey exploring attitudes on domestic political military intervention (2015).⁷ Figure 4.1(a) depicts the percentage of WVS respondents who answered “fairly good” or “very good” to the question: “I’m going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing this country?” Figure 4.1(b) depicts a comparison of the percentage of respondents who approved of military officers responding to unwise orders by deciding to “leak the material to the press to alert others to this problem”. Figure 4.1(c) depicts the percentage of respondents in the 2015 YouGov surveying answering “yes” to the question “Is there any situation in which you could imagine yourself supporting the U.S. military taking over the powers of the federal government”, displayed by partisan identity on a three-point scale.

respondents believing that “having the army rule” was a good or fairly good “way of governing the country” went from 6% to 17%, with even larger support among “millennials” (Foa and Mounk 2016). Though still a minority opinion, this constitutes a significant increase in support for illiberal governance in clear violation of not only the military’s apolitical norm, but broader democratic norms of civilian control.⁶

The YouGov survey conducted by Schake and Mattis (2016) similarly uncovers a weakening of traditional civil-military norms against political or activist behavior. Compared to respondents asked the same question in the TISS survey, the percentage of respondents

⁶Analysis of the WVS data reveals that respondents under the age of 30 in the 2011 wave expressed 23% support for army rule. Foa and Mounk (2016) specifically draw attention to this trend among rich, younger Americans, whose expressed support for army rule was nearly 35%. These patterns match with a broader shift in acceptance for both technocratic rule and for leaders who don’t have to “bother with parliament and elections”.

believing that leaking material to the press was an acceptable action by military officers in response to “unwise orders” increased from 5% to 19%.⁸ Liebert and Golby (2017a) draw attention to this trend, noting that one of the most “disturbing” findings was the high levels of individuals who seemed accepting of “improper civil-military norms”.⁹ The 2015 YouGov survey audience expressed a similarly weak resistance to the notion of domestic political intervention: nearly 30% of respondents would support the military taking control of the federal government, a figure which increases to 43% in the event of a perceived constitutional violation. More than half (53%) agreed that “active duty military personnel should be active in politics if they want to be”. These shifts in public attitudes regarding the proper role of the military in politics and society provide strong reason to believe that traditionally-held norms of the apolitical military may be less salient than previously believed.

Second, there is some empirical evidence to suggest that the public may not only be less principled than previously theorized, but more systematically indifferent. Activism among military elites has increased over the same period with no aggregate decrease in public confidence for the institution.¹⁰ This activity has manifested in a variety of forms. Political endorsements by military elites have become more prevalent in partisan campaigns, from the singular endorsements by retired General P.X. Kelley for George H.W. Bush in 1988 and retired Admiral William Crowe for William Clinton in 1992, to the list of nearly 500 retired generals and admirals supporting Mitt Romney in 2012 in a full-page advertisement in *The Washington Times* (Urben 2017; Kohn 2002). Golby, Dropp, and Feaver (2012) evaluate one way in which such endorsements effect public perception of the broader military institution. They find that while public knowledge of this political activity – in violation of

⁸The TISS and YouGov surveys included both elite and mass subsamples; this increase is among the non-veteran masses, the most salient subsample for our purposes, as it indicates a shift in attitudes about civil-military norms among those citizens with no military experience.

⁹In response to the same question, the 2013 audience expressed much higher levels of approval for military officials retiring in protest or refusing to carry out the order at all compared to the TISS sample, and far lower levels of approval for “carrying out the orders anyway”.

¹⁰Newport, Gallup’s annual Confidence in Institutions survey has found a stable or steadily increasing level of public confidence in the armed forces, despite decreasing confidence in legal, media, representative, and business institutions across US society. The most recent survey (2017) found that 72% of respondents expressed “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the military.

theoretical norms – had little influence on public trust in the military, it did make individuals more likely to feel that this activity was appropriate, potentially indicating that “such norms are obsolete”. In this view, a weakening of the apolitical norm not only questions the theory of a principled public, but suggests the public may be indifferent enough that political activity has no effect on expressed confidence in the military source.

However, if my analysis challenges the theoretical consensus of a principled public, it also tests this empirical claim for an indifferent one. While Golby, Dropp, and Feaver (2012) find evidence for the latter, they concede that their survey instrument “does not adjudicate decisively between these competing views” that political activity by the military does or does not influence public trust negatively. While the authors measure the level of confidence individuals have in the military, the metric used was a low-resolution five-point semantic scale analogous to that used by Gallup, preventing a granular detection of effects. Specific claims about effects on credibility would instead benefit from a measurement device that is more appropriately calibrated to detect changes in both overall credibility and its component dimensions. Additionally, while the authors remark on the potential damage that individual retired elites can inflict on military credibility through political activity, both measurement and treatment information focused on the institutional level, informing respondents that “most members of the military and veterans” supported a particular candidate. While useful for their purpose of measuring the endorsement effect, this broad characterization provides less insight into the effect of such political activity by elites on their own credibility. This misses the micro-foundational incentives and effects of individual elite activity, a problem compounded by the relatively mild treatment employed when measuring military confidence; while it broadly informs the respondent about an endorsement, this type of action is likely to be correlated with a variety of other types of partisan behavior.

Partisan activity therefore exceeds simple endorsements for political candidates. Media commentary and political activism by military elites have also become increasingly present in political debates over a wide range of issues. Across several administrations, retired general officers have engaged in collective activism over defense policy, security strategy, or

budgetary priorities.¹¹ Retired military officers commonly serve as analysts and commentators on cable news, pen independent editorials on foreign policy and security strategy,¹² and have been appointed to increasingly central and partisan roles in government (P. Carter et al. 2016). A more targeted analysis of the effects of political activity on military credibility would benefit from including knowledge of these types of behaviors among the public as well.

In this section I have discussed how public influence by military elites places two large scholarly efforts in political science into a single frame: while these figures are normatively – and in some cases structurally – proscribed from engaging in such activity, they are also perceived by the public as exceedingly knowledgeable and trustworthy, the two principal components of source credibility. I have also demonstrated how the civil-military relations literature offers two potential theories of public response to political activity by military elites: a principled and norms-based public in which credibility hinges on the perception of non-partisanship and an indifferent public in which political activity has little effect on public trust. While recent trends in public opinion and normative sentiment call the first into question, testing the second requires more precise measurement that explores not only institutional-level effects, but the micro-foundational influence of partisan behavior on the credibility of individual elites. As I will outline in the following section, there is reason to believe that the public may be responsive to knowledge of partisan behavior, but outside the normative framework that much of the civil-military relations literature asserts. As such, I argue a third potential image of the public, neither normatively-grounded nor indifferent,

¹¹On torture and the budget, these figures included former commander of US Special Operations Command Admiral William McRaven, former CENTCOM commanders General David Petraeus and General James Mattis, and nearly 100 other general and flag officers who co-signed the open letters to the administration. The transgender ban was opposed by former Afghanistan commander General John Allen and ‘revolt’ figure Major General Paul Eaton, though was more remarkable in that it was also openly opposed by active military elites such as serving Coast Guard commandant Admiral Paul Zukunft. Dan Lamothe, “Retired generals cite past comments from Mattis while opposing Trump’s proposed foreign aid cuts”, *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2017; Kristine Phillips, “‘Greatest threat to democracy’: Commander of bin Laden raid slams Trump’s anti-media sentiment”, *The Washington Post*, February 24, 2017; Michael D. Shear, Nicholas Fandos, and Jennifer Steinhauer, “Trump Asks Critic of Vaccines to Lead Vaccine Safety Panel”, *The New York Times*, January 10, 2017; Chris Kenning, “Retired military officers slam Trump’s proposed transgender ban”, *Reuters*, August 1, 2017.

¹²Robert H. Scales, “U.S. military planners don’t support war with Syria”, *The Washington Post*, September 5, 2013; Michael G. Mullen, “I Was on the National Security Council. Bannon Doesn’t Belong There”, *The New York Times*, February 6, 2017; Anna Fifield, “Retired military leaders urge Trump to choose words, not action, to deal with North Korea”, *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2017.

but rather decidedly partisan.

Theorizing Public Response to Military Politicization

The central inquiry of this analysis is to determine how partisan political activity by military elites affects public perceptions of credibility. In order to address this question, I develop a series of testable hypotheses that envision different pathologies for the public in responding to knowledge of partisan military activity. Each of these images serves either to empirically validate existing theoretical assumptions about the public's preferences or to challenge these same consensus opinions. In addition, I examine how each of these depictions of the public would manifest along two measurable levels: (1) how knowledge of political activity by a military elite source affects impressions of that source's credibility and (2) how this knowledge influences the perceived credibility of the broader military institution. Both patterns have independent and interactive implications for the quality of civil-military relations and the future of potential military politicization.

The Principled Public

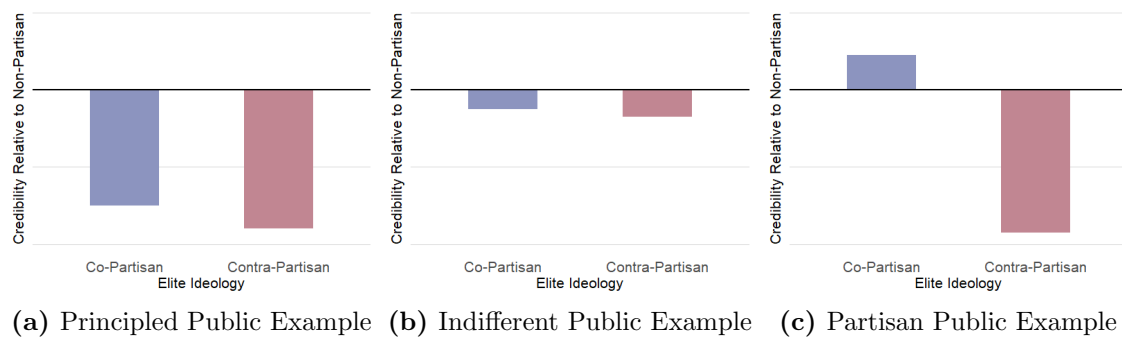
The first image of the public I examine is that most commonly embraced by the existing civil-military scholarship, which I term the *principled public*. In this framework, military credibility indeed depends upon the preservation of a non-partisan image; the public commensurately embraces the norm of an apolitical military and the necessity of such an institution to the proper functioning of democratic society. In line with the basic assumptions of the formative civil-military theorists, the military is viewed as a fundamentally martial and conservative organization whose institutional subordination to civilian leadership – regardless of partisan identity – is essential to the preservation of both democratic norms and effective government (Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960). As discussed previously, considerable theorization in this regard has more recently predicted that partisan activity will directly damage military credibility due to public backlash (Owens 2015; Golby, Dropp, and

Feaver 2012; J. K. Dempsey 2009). Knowledge of political activity by representatives of this institution would therefore be greeted by broad disapproval from the public, regardless of the position espoused by these representatives.

This notion is rooted in a generalized image of the public as a an objective audience with fixed collective preferences in favor of non-partisan military behavior. Feaver and Kohn (2001) argue that partisan behavior or the perception of being “just another interest group” would degrade public trust and make the professional advice of uniformed officers less credible to civilian leaders and the public. This sentiment has been more recently voiced by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey in reference to remaining apolitical: “That’s how we maintain our trust with the American people. The American people don’t want us to become another special interest group. In fact, I think that confuses them.”¹³ The distinguishing feature of the *principled public* is that it responds with generalized distrust for the military speaker – and potentially the institution – to perceived partisan activity. This erosion in credibility, however, is not sensitive to the ideological substance of such activity; instead, this image assumes an audience that shares a common preference for the military to remain out of politics, regardless of its direction.

The testable implications of the principled public form the theoretical baseline of this analysis and the empirical test of this consensus opinion in the civil-military relations literature. An idealized example of this pattern is depicted in Figure 3.2(a); the perceived credibility of partisan military elites are objectively diminished, while partisan identity plays no significant role in their evaluation. In this framework, civil-military norms against such behavior are both highly salient and broadly accepted. As such, the principled public would respond according to the predictions of the following hypothesis:

¹³Quoted in Jim Garamone, “Dempsey: Political Activity Erodes Trust in Military”, *Armed Forces Press Service*, August 12, 2012.

Figure 4.2: Idealized Representations of Credibility Effects

NOTE: This figure depicts idealized examples for each of the proposed hypothetical images of public response to knowledge of military partisan activity. The conditions “Co-Partisan” and “Contra-Partisan” refer to the ideological direction of activism by the hypothetical military elite in reference to that of the individual. The y-axis depicts the change in perceived public credibility in either condition relative to a non-partisan military elite with no known partisan activity. Figure 3.2(a) depicts the principled public, with uniform sanctioning of the source across conditions. Figure 3.2(b) represents the indifferent public, with little response to information across conditions. Figure 3.2(c) shows the partisan public, combining both a significant sanctioning of contra-partisan elites with a negligible or marginal increase in co-partisan credibility.

- **H1A – Principled Public (Elite Source)** If the public is informed of partisan activity by a military elite source, that source’s credibility will be less than that of a non-partisan military elite source.

The principled public hypothesis incorporates the same assumptions regarding the normative value of an apolitical military that much of the civil-military scholarship has advocated. Compared to a non-partisan source with the same expertise and qualifications, the public would objectively devalue the credibility of a partisan source due to his participation in partisan behavior that contradicts public preferences. More specifically, we should expect to see a reduction in the perceived trustworthiness of the source relative to a non-partisan source. However, if the effects of partisan behavior are particularly strong, the principled public may even reduce its estimation of the source’s expertise, even if held constant across elite profiles.

At the second level of analysis, I apply a similar logic by which exposure to such partisan sources aggregates to attitudes about the larger military institution. While I expect the effects of partisan activity by a single elite source to have more modest effects on the individual’s judgment of the broader military establishment, the principled public hypothesis similarly predicts that the public will generally reject this behavior as normatively inappropriate or functionally undesirable. This assertion is strongly represented in civil-military studies exploring the partisan identity of the military itself and the implications of a perceived partisan shift of the institution (Owens 2015; J. K. Dempsey 2009; Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012; Urben 2017). Once again, the public is envisioned as a principled whole that broadly embraces a shared preference for an apolitical military:

- **H1B – Principled Public (Institution):** If the public is informed of partisan activity by a military elite source, the institution’s credibility will be less than with those exposed to a non-partisan military elite source.

Collectively, these hypotheses capture the logic of the principled public envisioned by much of the existing research in this field. Empirical observation of such patterns would

have several significant implications for the quality of civil-military relations into the future. First, the validation of such a principled audience would confirm a long-held belief that not only is the apolitical norm salient among the public, but that partisan or ideological variation among the public itself is not a significant factor in updating perceptions of military elite credibility. This would also confirm the existence of a mutually-valued political norm that has escaped polarization or self-serving partisan attitudes. Second, the appearance of such a sentiment among the public would indicate that the incentive structure for military politicization is, as Golby, Feaver, and Dropp (2017) argue, “a self-negating tool”. Military elites seeking to leverage the high public esteem of the institution for their own purposes risk, as scholars suggest, reducing the public’s valuation of both individual and institutional credibility.

The Indifferent Public

The second image of the public I hypothesize portrays a starkly different set of observable implications. While the *principled public* broadly embraces the apolitical norm, the *indifferent public* places little value in adherence to such standards of conduct by military elites. As previously discussed, there is strong reason to believe that, across several areas of interest, there has been a weakening of civil-military norms in society with regards to the proper role of the military institution in politics. Golby, Dropp, and Feaver (2012) conduct one of the few empirical efforts in evaluating the impact of political activity by military elites; while they find that political endorsements can have localized effects in swaying public opinion, they find that knowledge of such endorsements did not produce negative effects on estimations of public trust in the institution. Respondents who were told of military endorsements for presidential candidates were, on average, no less likely to express confidence in the military than those without such information.

The basic intuition of the *indifferent public* is that military elite participation in partisan activity only marginally effects military credibility and that weakened or non-existent norms regarding such activity contribute to indifferent attitudes. There are several reasons

why such patterns might be observed. First, the broader trend of low confidence in traditional elite or expert communities may be drawing individuals to attend to sources they perceive as credible, regardless of the propriety of their engaging in public opinion-shaping. Second, it is possible that the public already views the military and its elites as influenced by partisan attitudes, making additional information about such activity relatively unpersuasive (Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012). Third, frustration over government performance in foreign policy may be leading to the emergence of new norms where the military is asked to perform more active roles in policy planning and execution. This may be the result of the perceived “unwinnable” nature of modern wars (Schake and Mattis 2016), the belief that military failures are due to unwise civilian policy (Hill, Wong, and Gerras 2013), or a resulting desire for more activist military elites (Feaver 2011; Milburn 2010; Kohn 2002). In either case, the indifferent public’s estimation of military elite credibility is neither strengthened nor weakened due to partisan activity.

Accordingly, the observable implications of this image at the individual (endorser) level are quite clear. Figure 3.2(b) reflects an idealized example of the indifferent public, with partisan behavior resulting in insignificant effects on perceived credibility relative to a non-partisan source. If civil-military norms are indeed generally weaker than previously theorized, than being informed of political activity by a specific military elite source should elicit a minimal response in accordance with the following hypothesis:

- **H2A – Indifferent Public (Elite Source)** If the public is informed of partisan activity by a military elite source, that source’s credibility will not be significantly different than that of a non-partisan military elite source.

This hypothesis predicts that individual sources who engage in partisan political behavior will not suffer noticeable damage to their perceived credibility with the public. It is possible that such a pattern, even if it appears in the aggregate, could be localized to separate heterogeneous political subgroups in society. For instance, evidence of an indifferent public may be present among partisans of one identification, but not another. Alternatively,

it may be the case that the broader audience embraces such indifference, indicative of a more generalizable degradation of the apolitical norm across the public. In either scenario, the incentive structure for continued military elite influence would be very different than that predicted by the *principled public*; elites would not need to worry about losing credibility with the public when engaging in political debates.

Such an incentive structure for partisan activity would be even more durable if the public rendered such indifferent attitudes regarding the larger military institution. An indifferent public at the endorser level (H2A) would make political activity a low-cost enterprise for individual elites; however, a similar attitude at the organizational level would make such activity even less costly. The common-pool credibility problem predicted by many civil-military scholars does not exist in this framework, as neither the institution nor the individual suffers in terms of credibility with the public for the partisan activity of representative elites:

- **H2B – Indifferent Public (Institution):** If the public is informed of partisan activity by a military elite source, the institution’s credibility will not be significantly different than with those exposed to a non-partisan military elite source.

These hypotheses capture the broader logic of the indifferent public. While the principled public indicates that the apolitical norms of civil-military theory are salient and objectively viewed, patterns reflective of the indifferent public are representative of substantially weakened norms regarding the same behavior. As previously discussed, recent survey instruments examining civil-military attitudes and the findings of Golby, Dropp, and Feaver (2012) suggest there is reason to believe this may be the case. Public perception of trustworthiness and expertise will remain largely unchanged in response to information about partisan activity, showing that such behavior is not informative to the public nor offensive to its normative sensibilities. Such weakened norms pose little obstacle to increased future military politicization.

The Partisan Public

The third image of public response to military political activity I propose is the *partisan public*. In this framework, individuals sanction military elites for partisan behavior not because it is normatively prohibited, but because it is politically incongruent to the individual's partisan identity or ideology. This hypothesis departs from the previous two images in several significant ways. First, while the *principled public* takes as given a strong normative consensus among the public against partisan military behavior, the *partisan public* hypothesis assumes that these norms are weak or non-existent. Second, the *partisan public* engages in selective sanctioning of elite credibility based on partisan leaning, rather than the objective patterns of credibility loss predicted by the *indifferent* and *principled public* images.

Additionally, I allow for the prospect that the partisan public may not only selectively lower their estimation of elites on the other side of a political debate, but may actually increase their perceptions of credibility among military elites who endorse an opinion closer to their own. This assertion draws on existing study on social polarization and the biasing effects of shared partisan identity on objective thought processes (Mason 2015; Mason 2016). I expect that erosion of contra-partisan elite credibility will outweigh any potential increase in co-partisan credibility in magnitude. This is largely in line with past study that has found that out-group animosity is both strongest when phrased in partisan terms (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012) and substantively more powerful than in-group favoritism (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). In its simplest form, the *partisan public* weighs military elite credibility as they would any other source of information, not according to principled adherence to civil-military norms, but according to partisan like-mindedness:

- **H3A – Partisan Public (Elite Source)** If the public is informed of partisan activity by a military elite source, that source's credibility will be less among those of the opposite partisan identity, compared to the non-partisan source. Source credibility among like-minded partisans, however, will be unaffected or will increase.

The observable implications of this hypothesis can take on several forms. Figure 3.2(c) depicts the most likely manifestation of the *principled public*, wherein elite credibility is asymmetrically sanctioned by the public based on the individual's partisan or ideological leaning. The *partisan public* assumes a subjective audience; sanctioning of credibility is limited to contra-partisan elites, rather than the objective sanctioning observed among the principled public. In accordance with H3A, I expect that individuals will devalue the credibility of contra-partisan elites, while evaluations of co-partisans will be marginally affected. Particularly strong indicators of this hypothesis include co-partisans evaluating the military source as *more* credible for having engaged in such behavior, relative to the non-partisan source.

Extended to the institutional level, the *partisan public* should similarly weigh the military's credibility in the context of the source's direction of partisanship, not the normative implications of that partisanship. As before, I expect these effects to be more modest than at the endorser level; however, the same general pattern should emerge, where ideologically-incongruent military activism negatively influences attitudes on the institution's credibility, while exposure to a co-partisan elite elicits marginal effects:

- **H3B – Partisan Public (Institution)** If the public is informed of partisan activity by a military elite source, the institution's credibility will be less among those of the opposite partisan identity, compared to those exposed to the non-partisan source. Institutional credibility among like-minded partisans, however, will be unaffected or will increase.

In both hypotheses, total expressed credibility should be much lower when the military elite's partisan activity and the individual's partisan identity are in conflict; I expect this to manifest mostly as a shift in perceived *trustworthiness* of the source or institution. However, particularly strong partisan effects may even influence the perceived *expertise* of these sources relative to the non-partisan source, even if the qualifications of both profiles were held constant. This extreme version of the partisan public not only changes their impression about the more subjective reliability of the source, but also the seemingly more objective

experience or knowledgeability of that same source based on partisan thought processes.

The theoretical implications of such a public are numerous and significant. First, the incentive structure for continued military politicization is very different from that predicted by the principled public. Civil-military scholars concerned with a common pool problem of military credibility, where individual elites draw on the institution's credibility for political advocacy, appeal to the inherently self-defeating logic of such activity. J. K. Dempsey (2009) argues that this "paradox of prestige" ensures that the institution will be seen as increasingly partisan and less credible with each new foray into partisan affairs. However, the *partisan public* creates an even more problematic incentive structure, because this credibility loss is compartmentalized only among those who already disagree with the military elite's position. Furthermore, the prospect of *gaining* public credibility with a specific subset of the polity may actually embolden such activity by individual military actors. This image of the public not only depicts a weak state of civil-military norms across individuals, but suggests that the self-defeating logic of military politicization predicted by many civil-military scholars is similarly inert.

Testing Elite Credibility and Partisan Activity

Research Design

In order to test the validity of these hypothesized images of the public – and by extension, the strength and salience of the apolitical norm – I incorporate the results of original survey experimentation designed to measure how partisan political activity by military elites affects public perceptions of credibility. As discussed, empirical study towards this question has been limited, while the extant body of knowledge has revealed minimal effects (Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012). This experimental survey contributes to the theoretical and empirical understanding of elite credibility and military partisan activity in several ways. First, I improve on the measure of credibility by utilizing existing metrics from the business research literature. As I will discuss, these scale metrics have high internal construct

validity and allow for more precise measurement of the two principal components of elite credibility: expertise and trustworthiness (McGuire 1969; Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998; Ohanian 1990). Second, I focus on the role of retired military officers as part of this elite community. Given the increasing prevalence of these figures in government, political advocacy, media commentary, government service, and academia, I envision this subset of the military elite as perhaps the most influential and the most likely to have engaged in partisan political activity. Third, I evaluate how political behavior affects public impressions of elite credibility at both the individual and institutional levels. Measuring the public's patterns of sanctioning at both levels is important for understanding the incentive structure elite actors face when considering partisan activity.

The survey was fielded in November 2017 to an opt-in panel of 1,038 respondents acquired through the survey firm Qualtrics; respondents were prompted that the survey's intent was to ascertain public attitudes on several policy issues under debate. Before answering these questions, however, respondents were randomly assigned to one of three conditions and asked to view a profile of a prominent elite who had offered public opinions on these issues. In all three categories, respondents were exposed to a profile of a retired military officer that contained information on six broad attributes. The first three included *overseas experience*, *academic qualification*, and *command responsibility*, attributes that speak directly to expertise and experience of the profiled elite and that were fixed across all treatment conditions. The profile also included information about post-retirement activity, such as *media presence*, *partisan alignment and endorsements*, and *policy advocacy or criticism*, which were intended to provide an image to the public of the elite's affiliation and level of partisan involvement.

These latter three attributes varied according to the assigned treatment condition of the respondent. In the baseline and functional control group, *non-partisan*, respondents were exposed to the profile of a retired senior military commander with multiple combat tours, command experience at the highest levels, and several academic degrees, whose post-retirement activity included historical research, non-partisan research council membership,

and a lack of political endorsements for major party candidates. In the second and third groups, respectively categorized as *activist left* and *activist right*, the elite's military experience and qualifications were the same as the non-partisan; however, their post-retirement activity included prominent media presence on cable news networks, joining major party campaigns as national security advisors, and public advocacy or opposition to administration policy. These profiles were developed using attributes from several prominent military commentators and political activists, with the post-retirement attributes designed to draw maximum contrast to the non-partisan category and ensuring the respondent has a clear picture of the elite's partisan alignment and behavior.¹⁴

After being exposed to the elite's profile, respondents were asked two four-question batteries measuring the perceived credibility of (1) the individual source and (2) the source's organization, in this case the military. Both of these measurement scales are adapted from an analogous literature in business research; as previously discussed, the concepts of "endorser" and "corporate" credibility in this literature can be effectively applied to the realm of political information. It is an assertion of this analysis that the credibility of individual elite voices or "endorsers" and their organization's "corporate" reputation are just as important to the sale of a political message as they are to a business's sale of a product. The connection between these two measures has been well-established as reinforcing and influential, with impressions about endorser credibility affecting larger "attitudes-toward-the-brand" that shape corporate or organizational reputation (Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell 2000). I depart from this framework in that this design adapts the same general logic to assess not how perceptions of credibility affect attitudes towards an endorsement (termed "attitude-toward-the-ad"), but rather how negative information measurably affects these perceptions of credibility.

In order to capture these attitudes of endorser credibility, I adopt a strategy similar to Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell (2000), which uses a modified version of the Likert scale

¹⁴See Appendix B for military elites used to compose the composite profiles used in the experimental conditions and basic logic for development of the experimental profiles.

measures of individual *expertise* and *trustworthiness* developed by Ohanian (1990) in measuring credibility.¹⁵ The measure of individual source expertise asked respondents to offer a seven-point score on the degree to which the source is “experienced” and “knowledgeable”; similarly, respondents were asked for the same measurement on the source’s perceived level of being “trustworthy” and “reliable” as an analogous measure for the source’s trustworthiness. These attributes were selected from a longer list provided by Ohanian (1990) based on their high internal construct validity and in order to reduce survey fatigue and unnecessary redundancy. This four-question battery provides three dependent variables for later analysis: (1) a 14-point additive scale for expertise, (2) a 14-point additive scale for trustworthiness, and (3) a collective 28-pt scale for total source credibility of the individual military elite.

Next, I utilize the literature on corporate credibility in order to develop a similar additive construct for measuring institutional credibility. Newell and Goldsmith (2001) build an eight-question battery designed to measure perceptions of corporate reputation and credibility that exhibits similarly high internal construct validity. Similarly to the measurement for individual credibility, this scale is built from two four-question batteries that gauge attitudes on institutional expertise and trustworthiness, respectively. Just as for the previous dependent variable set, I use a modified version of this larger battery that limits redundancy and employs those questions with the highest factor loadings from the confirmatory analysis conducted by Newell and Goldsmith (2001). After registering individual elite credibility attitudes, respondents were then asked for a seven-point, semantically-anchored Likert measurement on the degree to which they agreed or disagreed that the military “has a great amount of expertise” and “is skilled at what they do” (expertise) and that the respondent trusts the military and believed it “makes truthful claims” (trustworthiness). This again

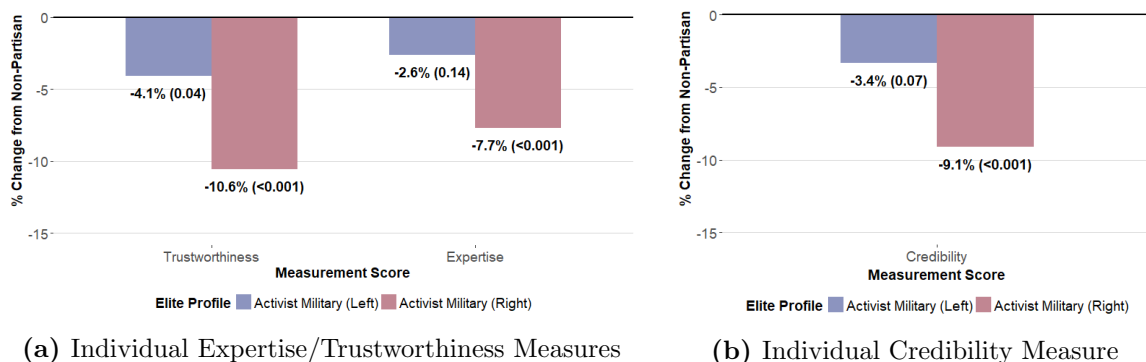
¹⁵The scale as developed by Ohanian (1990) includes three scales for expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, the last category being in accordance with McGuire (1969) on the significance of source appearance on perceived credibility. The modified scale used by Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell (2000) and others focuses more specifically on the expertise and trustworthiness dimensions, placing it closer in line with established political science theorization on the key components of elite credibility (Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins 1998).

provides three measures for subsequent analysis: (1) a 14-point additive scale for institutional expertise, (2) a 14-point additive scale for institutional trustworthiness, and (3) a collective 28-point scale for total institutional credibility. Finally, respondents were asked for their opinions on two issues under debate, after exposure to the position of the military elite being reviewed. These included the level of support for a pre-emptive strike on the North Korean nuclear program, in which the military elite is on record as an advocate, and a federal budget proposal for reducing funding to the State Department and foreign aid, for which the military elite was a vocal opponent.

Data Analysis

The first dimension of this analysis is the effect of partisan activity on the measurable credibility of an individual elite source. As previously discussed, this is a level of analysis that has escaped close empirical scrutiny and speaks more directly to the micro-foundational incentives for military elites to engage in partisan activism. The images of the public described by the individual-level hypotheses (H1A, H2A, H3A) have distinctly different features and significant implications for the strength and salience of civil-military norms among the public; the validity of these hypotheses depends not only on the aggregate trends among the public, but how these patterns emerge among established partisans. Figure 3.3 depicts the aggregate effects of partisan activism on perceptions of individual elite credibility. Immediately clear is the statistically and substantively significant decrease in the credibility of activist military elites across each metric. Partisan military elites with left- and right-alignment suffered a 3.3% and 9.1% loss to their total assessed credibility, respectively.

There are several significant observations that result from these initial findings. First, that right-activist military partisans are subject to a significantly higher loss in credibility from the general public than activist-left partisans. This trend was apparent across both the expertise measure (-7.7%) and the trustworthiness measure (-10.6%). This is due to the attitudes of political independents responding to knowledge of partisan military elite activity. Second, there is a surprising decrease in the perceived *expertise* of the elite source (-2.6%

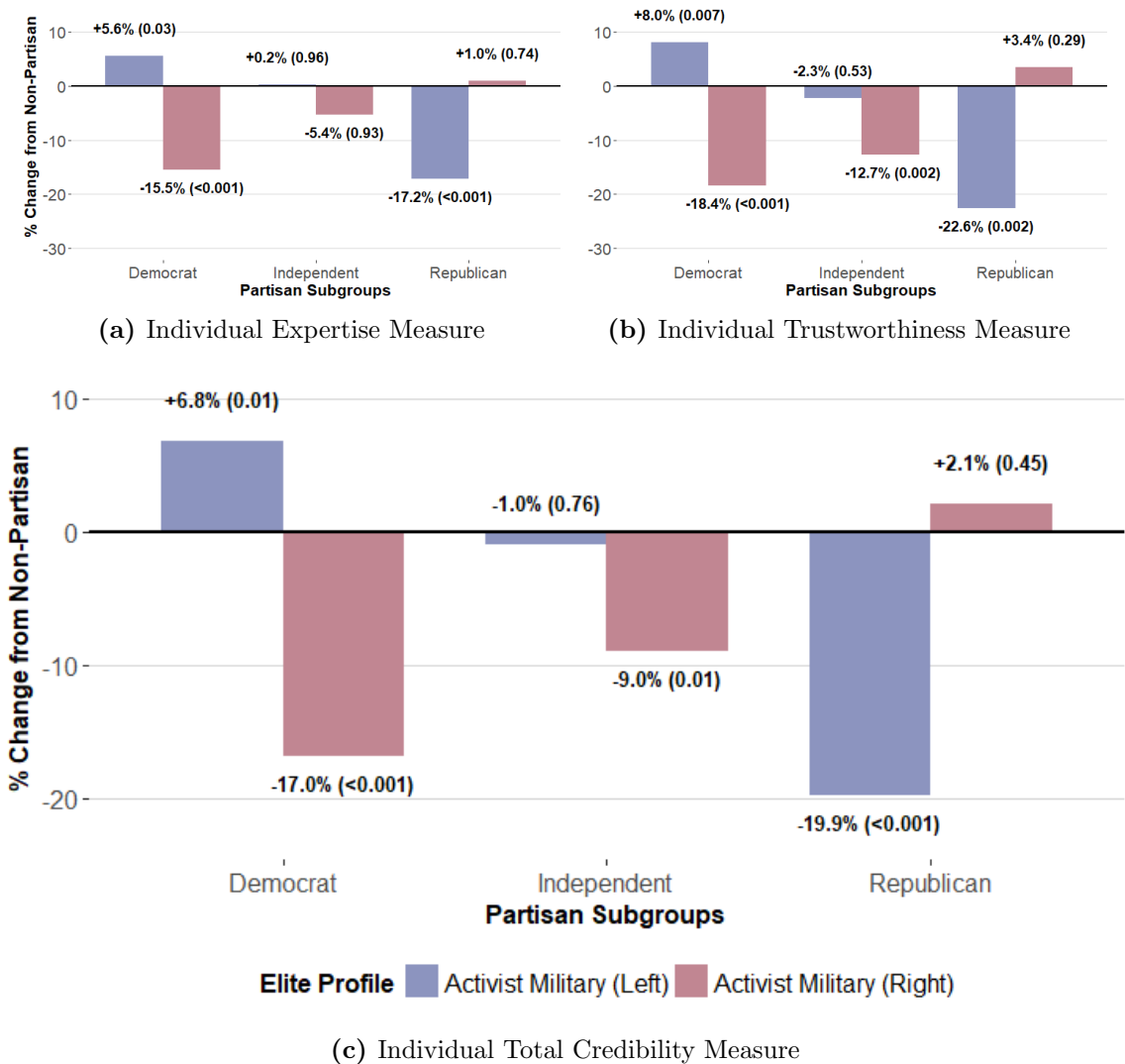
Figure 4.3: Loss of Credibility for Military Activists, Aggregate Results

NOTE: This figure depicts the change in perceptions of expertise, trustworthiness, and credibility for military partisans in reference to the non-partisan elite profile. This measure pools across all respondent attributes including partisan identity and education. Posted figures reflect magnitude of effect and p-values for two-tailed test for difference in means between activist categories and the non-partisan reference category. Respondents assembled from opt-in panel from Qualtrics during November 2017, N=1038.

and -7.7%, respectively); despite the source's qualifications remaining fixed across conditions, partisans are actually viewed as less knowledgeable or qualified than non-partisans. Finally, these pooled findings do not allow for outright dismissal of H1, in that partisan military figures of both types are sanctioned by the larger public. Validation of this hypothesis requires analysis of these trends among political partisans; for H1 to be accurate, this seemingly principled response to military political activity should be robust to consideration of individual partisan identity.

However, analysis of these heterogeneous treatment effects provides little support for this claim. Figure 3.4 depicts the change in measured expertise, trustworthiness, and total credibility for military activists among political subsets of the public. These results, which show consistently selective and asymmetric sanctioning of contra-partisans, provide strong evidence for the predictions of the partisan public hypothesis (H3A). Across both partisan groups, these results are strikingly similar and substantively significant. Among Republicans, activist-left military elites experienced significant reductions in both perceived trustworthiness (-22.6%) and expertise (-17.2%), losing substantial overall credibility (-19.9%).

Figure 4.4: Loss of Credibility for Military Activists, by Partisan Identity



NOTE: This figure depicts the change in perceptions of expertise, trustworthiness, and credibility for military partisans in reference to the non-partisan elite profile, according to self-identification on three-point partisan identity scale. Posted figures reflect magnitude of effect and p-values for two-tailed test for difference in means between activist categories and the non-partisan reference category. $N_{Dem} = 402$, $N_{Ind} = 367$, and $N_{Rep} = 269$.

However, these same measures for activist-right elites were marginally positive and statistically insignificant. A similar pattern is observable among Democrats: activist-right military elites suffered lower perceived trustworthiness (-18.4%) and expertise (-15.5%), resulting in a sizable erosion in total credibility (-17.0%). Perhaps even more indicative of the partisan public than their Republican counterparts, Democrats not only sanctioned contra-partisan

military elites, but expressed a statistically significant *increase* in the perceived trustworthiness (+8.0%), expertise (+5.6%), and overall credibility (+6.8%) for co-partisan activist-left elites.

This strong asymmetry in response reflects the expected patterns of the partisan public (H3A). Individuals strongly sanction the credibility of contra-partisan military elites, while the reliability of co-partisans is either unaffected (Republicans) or increased (Democrats). The difference in magnitude reflects the predictions of previous study in partisan affective biases, in which out-group animosity is a more potent force on political perception than in-group favoritism (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). In short, once the aggregate treatment effects are analyzed conditional on individual partisan identity, there is comparably little support for either the principled (H1A) or indifferent (H2A) publics, but considerable support for the partisan public (H3A).

Even among political independents, there is little support for H1 and the image of a principled public. This bloc should theoretically be the most likely to exhibit the characteristics of the principled public. However, there is a demonstrable asymmetry in that group's sanctioning of partisan elites. Independents ascribed significantly less trustworthiness and overall credibility (-12.7%, -9.0%) to activist-right elites compared to activist-left figures (-2.2%, -1.0%).¹⁶ While this analysis does not argue for a specific explanation of this trend, it is possible that independents – more sensitive to partisan activity – find conservative political activism more problematic to democratic governance than liberal activism. Regardless, the magnitude and direction of suppressive effects regarding elite credibility among all political subgroups provides little support for either the indifferent public (H2A) or the principled public (H1A). As I will discuss later, this evidence of a partisan audience indicates (1) that the apolitical norm of civil-military theory may be much weaker than previously believed and (2) as military elites engage in increasing level of partisanship, they

¹⁶ Respondents who identified as independents in this sample were asked for the major party that they “leaned” toward if forced to choose; the asymmetry observed in these responses cannot be attributed to a left-leaning independent sample, as this group broke 55%-45% Democrat-Republican when coded according to their leaner party.

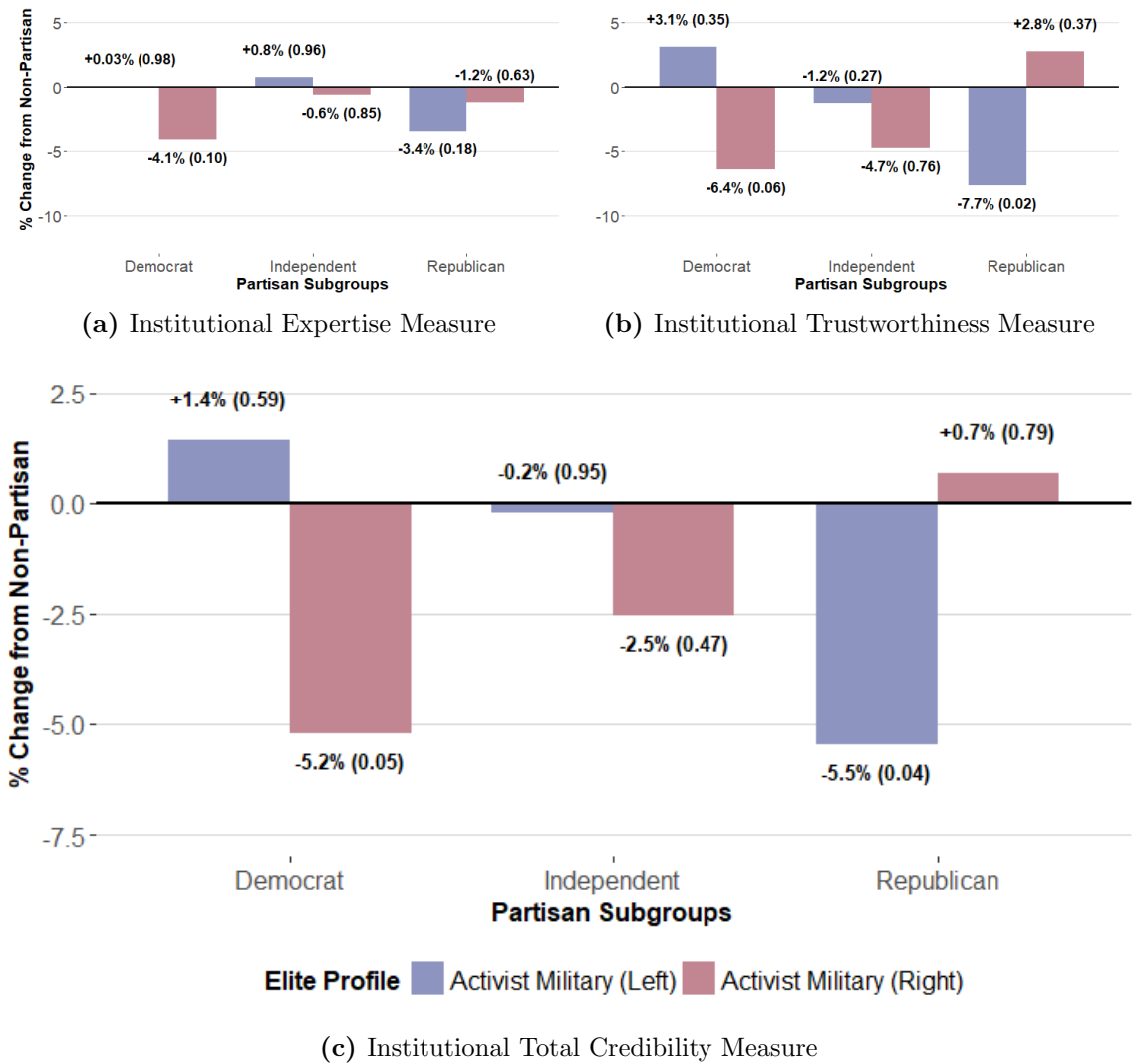
more closely resemble elected politicians in terms of the audience they attract and their inherent reliability.

The second dimension of this analysis is the impact of exposure to such partisan sources on individual attitudes of institutional credibility. As previously discussed, the significance of “corporate credibility” on the influence of individual representative elites is a highly developed field of the relevant literature in business research; Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999) argue that “the impact of the endorser, even if highly credible, will not be as important as the credibility of the company” when rendering opinions about that organization’s trustworthiness and expertise. Of particular interest in this analysis is the reverse effect: how attributes of individual representative elites might influence attitudes about the organization. Civil-military scholars that warn against the politicization of the military elite frequently focus on the institutional ramifications of such activity, including the prospect of a significant common-pool problem if partisan activism results in a loss of institutional credibility rather than individual sanctioning (J. K. Dempsey 2009).

The sequence of the survey makes the partisan activity and behavior of the individual elite “newly-salient information”, providing a useful opportunity to allow such calculations to influence attitudes about the broader institution by bringing this information to the “top of the head” (Zaller and Feldman 1992). In order to evaluate the image of public attitudes about the institution, I conduct a similar analysis using the credibility metrics from Newell and Goldsmith (2001) employed in the survey. As in the individual-level analysis, the aggregate results are more balanced, with exposure to left- and right-aligned activists resulting in a modest but statistically significant reduction in the overall credibility (-1.6%, -2.8%) of the military institution. However, it is again necessary to examine these patterns among political subsets of the public in order to more directly test the institutional-level hypotheses (H1B, H2B, H3B).

This method of analysis regarding the credibility of the broader military institution again reveals evidence of the partisan public (H3B). Figure 3.5 depicts this change in measurable

Figure 4.5: Loss of Credibility for Military Institution, by Partisan Identity



NOTE: This figure depicts the change in perceptions of expertise, trustworthiness, and credibility for military partisans in reference to the non-partisan elite profile, according to self-identification on three-point partisan identity scale. Posted figures reflect magnitude of effect and p-values for two-tailed test for difference in means between activist categories and the non-partisan reference category. $N_{Dem} = 402$, $N_{Ind} = 367$, and $N_{Rep} = 269$.

expertise, trustworthiness, and overall credibility of the military institution among the same political subgroups. Though more modest in size, exposure to contra-partisan military elite activism translated into similar effects as we observed at the individual level. Democrats exposed to activist-left elite profiles found the military marginally more trustworthy (+3.1%)

and credible (+1.4%); however, those exposed to activist-right profiles found the same institution far less trustworthy (-6.4%) and credible (-5.2%). Again, the same trend emerges among Republicans, who found the military less trustworthy (-7.7%) and credible (-5.5%) when exposed to activist-left profiles when compared to the non-partisan condition. These trends are comparable in magnitude and inverse in direction, largely in line with the predictions of H3B. Similar to the results at the endorser level, there is little support for the other hypotheses as the effect on co-partisan credibility is marginal (in opposition to H1B) and substantively significant (against the predictions of H2B). As I will discuss later, this selective pattern of response at the institutional level has potentially damaging implications for the salience of the apolitical norm and the prospect of de-politicizing the military elite.

The principal findings of this experimental design are numerous and potentially significant for the study of civil-military relations amidst substantial partisan polarization. Collectively, the results present strong support for the partisan public hypothesis. Individual elites lose substantial credibility among the public when engaging in partisan behavior, but only among those on the opposite side of the political debate. This asymmetry seems to contradict both the empirical case for an indifferent public and the theoretical claim of a principled one. With regards to the former, there are several explanations for why my results differ from previous empirical findings. As previously discussed, my design utilized a stronger treatment for partisan identity of the military elite, including not only endorsement history, but media presence and policy activism as well. Incorporating a more sensitive measurement device in the credibility score allowed for detecting changes in perceived trustworthiness and expertise that would have gone unnoticed in the five-point Gallup scale. Examining effects at both the individual source and institutional levels provided visibility on both the macro-level effects on the military's corporate reputation and the micro-foundational effects on single elites. Finally, the existing work in this vein explored only effects in the aggregate; analyzing the heterogeneity of these effects among political partisans allowed for more granular investigation of individual responses to knowledge of partisan activity.

These findings also challenge the hypothesis of a principled audience with an objective consideration of the apolitical norm. Indeed, military elites with established partisan records are viewed as less trustworthy – making political messaging more difficult to a substantial portion of the public – and less qualified, even when these objective facts about the source were held constant. However, this effect is compartmentalized to politically incongruent military elites; sanctions to credibility occurred not because military activity in politics principally offends the public’s sensibilities, but because it was of the wrong type. Not only do military elites suffer only among contra-partisans, they may actually benefit from increased perceptions of credibility among co-partisans for having engaged on the “correct” side. As I will discuss later, this could indicate a significantly different incentive structure for military elites weighing a partisan role or political ‘afterlife’ to their military careers. Finally, the exposure to a single profile of a partisan military elite resulted in a similarly skewed pattern when evaluating the military’s “corporate” credibility. Though the effects are more modest, it is reasonable to argue that as military involvement in the political information space increases in scope and frequency, these effects could accumulate considerably.

Discussion

These findings have several significant implications that warrant further discussion. First, evidence of the partisan public casts substantial doubt on the broadly-accepted assertion among civil-military scholars that not only is the apolitical norm important to individuals in society, but that military elite credibility is conditional on its preservation. The starkly asymmetrical pattern of sanctioning that we observe among partisans reveals that while partisan activity by military elites clearly degrades their credibility with individuals across the political aisle, co-partisans consistently find little issue with this activity. In fact, like-minded individuals on nearly every measurable scale ascribe slightly higher levels of credibility to the military elite under analysis. These patterns call into question the strength and salience of the apolitical norm; if partisan activity by military elites is not

principally opposed by the public, but only insofar as that activity is politically incongruent to the individual, then what are the ramifications of such a weakened state of civil-military norms?

First, evidence of such a partisan-minded public is potentially damaging to traditional standards of democratic regime quality and civilian control of the armed forces; the weakening of norms designed to keep the military out of politics are even more problematic given its co-occurrence with a broader rise in anti-democratic sentiment across US society. As previously discussed, the attitudes of Americans – particularly those in the “millennial” age cohort – possess far less attachment to traditional democratic institutions and processes than their predecessors. Americans on the whole have increasingly favorable views of both technocratic and authoritarian approaches to governance, while support for strictly democratic structures has experienced a noticeable decline (Foa and Mounk 2016). In 1995, only 9% of Americans in the World Values Survey described having a democratic system as a “bad” or “very bad” mode of government; in 2011, this had risen to 17% (for comparison, this bloc of respondents in the Russian Federation was 18%).¹⁷ Combined with a similar increase in support for military rule, this concurrent weakening of both traditional norms against partisan military activity and against authoritarian governmental structures is both unsurprising and potentially damaging to democratic governance.

A shifting sense of propriety with regards to military elite activity has also been observed on numerous instruments measuring public attitudes. As previously discussed, a weakening of traditional civil-military norms is evident in the increasing acceptability of actions like media leaking or protest resignations in response to “unwise orders” (Schake and Mattis 2016). The same 2013 YouGov survey also found that a plurality of respondents (34%) believed that modern wars were indeed “winnable”, but that civilian policy decisions are

¹⁷The pattern among millennials is similar across the two countries as well, with 26% and 23% of Russian and Americans, respectively, categorizing a “democratic system” as a “bad” or “very bad” form of government in the 2011 Wave 6 survey. Yascha Mounk and Roberto Stefan Foa, “Yes, people really are turning away from democracy”, *The Washington Post* Wonkblog, December 8, 2016.

responsible for preventing the military from achieving decisive victory.¹⁸ The notion that civilian overreach, politicization, or unwise policy is responsible for security failures has gained increasing notoriety, leading to advocacy of a more activist role for military advisors in policy planning and execution in line with a particular reading of “McMasterism” (Milburn 2010). This divide in public confidence between military and civilian leaders has manifested both in the aggregate trust individuals express in political and military institutions and the confidence they express regarding management of foreign policy crises.¹⁹ If public frustration over democratic political processes has led to acceptance of authoritarian solutions at the cost of traditional norms, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a similar frustration over foreign policy failures would lead to acceptance of an activist military at the cost of civil-military ones.

Collectively, evidence for the partisan public in my experimental design presents a significant challenge for civil-military theorists: the weakening of political norms among the public has seemingly reached into attitudes regarding the proper place for military elites in the political discourse. The increasing acceptability of illiberal governance – such as military rule – has occurred alongside an erosion of public opposition to military assertiveness in policy planning, media leaking, and now partisan activity. As a result, the weakened state of the apolitical norm revealed in this experimental analysis presents a rebuttal to the argument that military credibility is conditional on the appearance of non-partisanship. While my design focused on retired military elites rather than serving officers, it is exactly these figures who have the ability to leverage public esteem for the military institution towards personal gain, doing so with increasing visibility.²⁰ The increasing frequency and

¹⁸ Respondents were asked which statements were closer to their own beliefs: “Modern wars are unwinnable”, “Modern wars are winnable, but our military hasn’t figured out how to win them”, “Modern wars are winnable, but civilian policy decisions prevent the military from winning”, and “Modern wars are winnable, and our military is winning them”. After those responding “Don’t Know” (28%), the next largest bloc of respondents believed that modern wars were “unwinnable” (19%) (Schake and Mattis 2016).

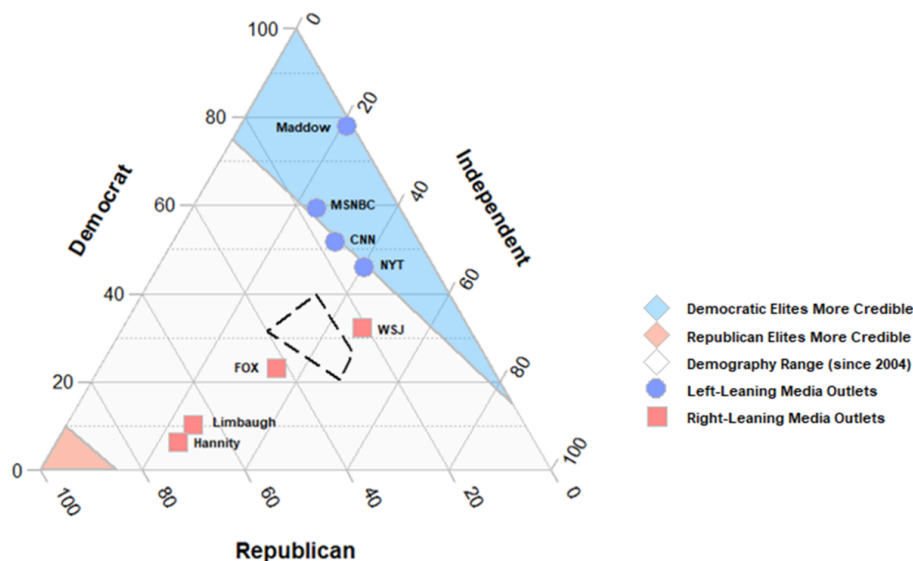
¹⁹ Scott Clement and Philip Rucker, “Poll: Far more trust generals than Trump on N. Korea, while two-thirds oppose preemptive strike”, *The Washington Post*, September 24, 2017. In a 2017 Washington Post-ABC News poll regarding the North Korean nuclear threat, 72% of Americans expressed positive confidence in the military to handle the situation responsibly, only 37% expressed similar confidence in the commander-in-chief.

²⁰ Jim Michaels, “What’s at risk when retired generals plunge into partisan politics”, *USA Today*, August 4, 2016; Leo Shane III, “Retired generals keep pushing their politics; some say it’s getting uncomfortable”, *Military Times*, August 6, 2016.

acceptability of this behavior finds an empirical validation in this analysis: while the individual elite risks losing credibility with contra-partisans, they also have the ability to gain credibility with a like-minded, if narrower audience.

This leads to a second point of discussion: for military elites weighing political activism, the partisan public reflects an environment that can incentivize such activity, rather than deter it. As discussed earlier, much of the existing civil-military scholarship argues that the image of non-partisanship is what preserves the credibility of the endorser and the institution (Owens 2015; Liebert and Golby 2017a; Burbach 2017; Hill, Wong, and Gerras 2013). J. K. Dempsey (2009) argues specifically that such political activity would create a considerable common-pool problem: if the public does not sanction individual military elites for partisan activity, but rather the larger military institution, then the very credibility that these endorsers draw on for influence will be continually degraded over time. However, the results of this analysis suggest that while a common-pool problem may indeed exist, the incentive structure for military elites to avoid politics is not as self-defeating as previously theorized. Instead, there is strong reason to believe that military elites can garner increased credibility and influence – or at least not lose them – among a select and politically like-minded audience, losing influence only among those on the opposite side of the ideological spectrum. While this environment may deter those seeking a broad audience among the public, it would have no such effect on those trying to cultivate a political ‘afterlife’ to their career, seeking favor with an major partisan establishment, or searching for a suitable base for policy activism.

This prospect is easier to observe by visualizing how narrow partisan audiences may be attractive to military elites due to the environment of the partisan public. As the result of the previous experiment demonstrate, military elites risk losing considerable influence with contra-partisans by wading into political issues, regardless of direction; however, they also have the opportunity to benefit from increased credibility and influence with co-partisans for the same action. Understanding how the partisan public may incentivize continued partisan behavior can be understood through analysis of the demographics which allow for

Figure 4.6: Ternary Graph of Demographic Influence on Partisan Military Elite Credibility

NOTE: This figure is a ternary depiction of the relative proportions of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans in any given US demography. The area shaded blue indicates those demographic arrangements, based on my data, that predict an increase in credibility for displaying politically-left partisan behavior relative to a non-partisan with the same qualifications. The area shaded red indicates those demographic arrangements where politically-right activism yields a similar increase in credibility relative to an equally-qualified non-partisan. The dotted-black area graphically depicts the range of actual US demographies since 2004 according to Gallup's collection of national partisan identity. The blue circles and red squares indicate the partisan demography of select media outlets according to 2012 data collected by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

that benefit. Figure 3.6 graphically depicts this reality: along the three axes are potential demographic percentages for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans in the US, envisioning each possible division of the electorate in the triangular space. Those areas shaded blue or red indicate the demographies in which, based on my experimental results, left- or right-activism is beneficial to the military elite in terms of increased credibility, relative to a non-partisan with the same qualifications. The 'feasible' range of demographic arrangements is depicted in the black dotted-line area, which represents the limits of actual demographies since 2004 according to Gallup's collection of national partisan identification.

Immediately evident is that there are far fewer opportunities for partisans to gain influence on the whole rather than lose it. All areas not in blue or red indicate areas of negative

credibility change. If one assumes an environment where all partisan activity by military elites is made known to all individuals, there are narrow avenues for individual benefit for Democrats and even fewer for Republicans. However, this may not present military elites with the ostensibly self-defeating logic this graphic implies. First, a total information environment of this type is unlikely. It is important to consider that partisan audiences are not equally likely to be exposed to contra-partisan military elite activism, which can also shape the incentives for military figures to engage in such behavior. One key finding in Chapter 2 of this dissertation is that during a critical phase of the Iraq War, conservative media outlets were far more likely to report the supportive comments of military elites than critiques from across the political aisle. While reporting biases also respond to the newsworthiness of elite conflict, it is reasonable to assume that media outlets with in-party or out-party alignment are unlikely to report military elite partisanship with equal frequency.

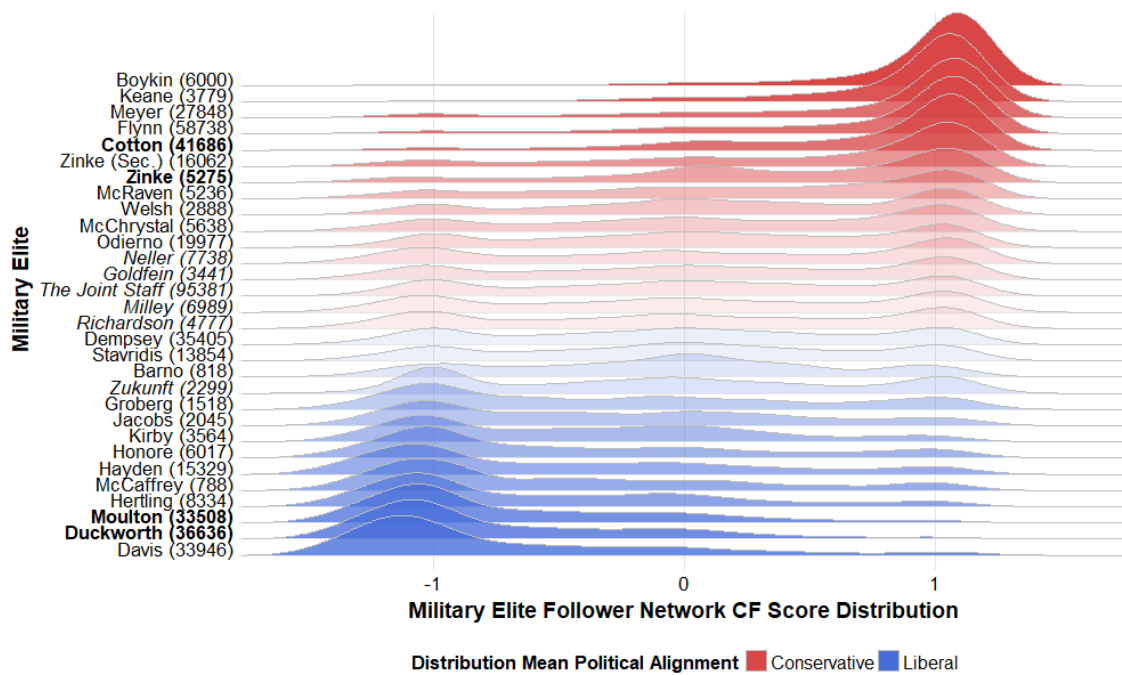
Second, a loss of broad credibility may still offer seemingly positive outcomes for elites who do not value a broad audience. While the total US demography may never approach the extreme areas depicted as favorable in Figure 3.6, news audiences provide partisan demographics more suitable for political activism. The blue circles and red squares in Figure 6 respectively represent the demographic breakdown of the audiences for left- (MSNBC, *The Rachel Maddow Show*, CNN, and the *New York Times*) and right-leaning (*Hannity*, Rush Limbaugh, FOX News, and the *Wall Street Journal*) media outlets as collected by the Pew Institute in 2012.²¹ While Republican military elites are still unlikely to replicate the environment shaded in red, conservative media outlets offer an opportunity to get close. This incentive is even stronger for Democratic elites, where several cable news and print media sources offer demographics amenable to partisan activism. Though they are unlikely to observe this environment directly, it is more difficult for conservative military elites to cultivate an increase in their credibility through revealed partisanship compared to their more liberal counterparts.

²¹ “Trends in News Consumption 1991-2012: In Changing News Landscape, Even Television is Vulnerable”, The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, September 27, 2012.

Finally, military elites can replicate these favorable demographics by tailoring political audiences through social media. In order to illustrate this point, I utilize data collected on the social media follower networks of several military elites. As thoroughly studied by Urben (2017), social media platforms have become an increasingly popular mechanism for military servicemembers to communicate political information; as such, I examine the ideological identity of the followers that military elites draw based on their level of activism. This process leverages the principal assumptions used by Barbera (2015) in modeling political ideal points through Twitter data. Individuals incur a cost by deciding to receive information from specific sources through “following”, both in terms of minimizing cognitive dissonance and in the opportunity cost of forgoing access to competing information; in short, “these decisions provide information about how social media users decide to allocate a scarce resource – their attention”. While Barbera uses follower network information for Bayesian analysis of elite ideal points, the distributions themselves are of specific interest here in understanding the audience attracted by certain military elites. In a similar fashion, I utilize the political ideal points estimated through the CFScore measurements based on campaign finance contributions developed by Bonica (2014), a metric for ideological measurement that has demonstrated strong internal validity and adaptive use over traditional roll call measures (Poole and Rosenthal 2007). Using this ideal point measurement for political elites, we can construct ideological distributions for the follower networks of different military elites.

Figure 3.7 depicts the distributions of these military elite follower networks on a single ideological dimension provided through the CFScore measure, from -1.5 (most liberal) to 1.5 (most conservative).²² Perhaps unsurprisingly, active duty officers such as Army Chief of Staff Mark Milley, Chief of Naval Operations John Richardson, Marine Corps Commandant

²²These distributions were calculated using information gathered through the Twitter API, capturing the follower networks user identification numbers and similarly capturing the CFScores for all political elites followed by the military elite follower network. The ideological distribution is based on the subset of followers who followed at least two politicians on Twitter (excluding Barack Obama). Extreme ideology values were coerced to maximum (1.5) or minimum (-1.5) for ease of observation, leaving a total number of 505,696 observations across all military elite profiles. Military elite accounts were chosen based on senior or elite status possessing at least 1,000 base followers, in order to examine those with the greatest audience reach and latent/practical influence.

Figure 4.7: Military Elite Follower Network Distributions (CF Score Ideology)

Note: This figure depicts the ideological distributions of military elite Twitter follower networks, measuring political ideal points based on Bonica's CF Score measurement of other elected officials followed by the same users. Height of distribution re-scaled based on distribution maximum values. Darker coloration indicates more extreme mean values for the distribution. Bold faced military elites indicate elected officials whose principal pre-political careers were as military officers. Italicized elite profiles indicate active-duty serving figures at time of collection. Figures depicted in parentheses are counts of ideologically-assessed users who followed at least two political officials, not a count of the entire follower base. Profile information gathered between October-November 2017.

Robert Neller, and Air Force Chief of Staff David Goldfein have decidedly balanced distributions, indicating access to a broad political audience. As partisan activity by uniformed officers is the most closely scrutinized and easily detectable, such centrist follower networks conform to expectations.²³ Similarly balanced military elite accounts include those of the Joint Staff and retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey, who has been

²³Among active duty officers, the only potential outlier in this regard is that of Coast Guard Commandant Paul Zukunft, who received media visibility for openly contradicting a series of July 2017 tweets by President Donald Trump calling for a ban on openly-serving transgender soldiers and sailors. Zukunft gave a speech shortly after to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in which he stated he would continue to support transgender servicemembers under his command. It is possible the increased density in the left of the distribution is due to this action, seen as subversive of the Trump administration's directive. Ron Nixon, "Coast Guard Still Supports Transgender Troops, Commandant Says", *The New York Times*, August 1, 2017.

particularly vocal in his opposition to partisan activity by military elites.

However, we can observe that these distributions become increasingly skewed towards a more narrow audience as elites become more involved in political opinion-shaping. Just as the previously discussed experimental conditions took care to draw a strong contrast between different types of post-retirement media exposure, policy activism, and political endorsements, so too do we observe that activity along these dimensions draws an increasingly partisan follower network. For substantive comparison, I have included the distributions of elected officials (in bold) whose principal pre-election careers were military service, in order to demonstrate a theoretically upper bound for perceived partisanship by military elites. For balance, I include members of both parties in both houses of Congress (Senators Tammy Duckworth (D) and Tom Cotton (R), and Congressmen Seth Moulton (D) and Ryan Zinke (R)). Retired officers who have since taken posts in academia, such as Yale senior fellow Stanley McChrystal and Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy dean James Stavridis, possess slightly less centrist distributions, though they maintain access to a generally broad audience.

Military elites serving as media commentators or security analysts on major cable news networks, such as Mark Hertling (CNN), Jack Jacobs (MSNBC), Barry McCaffrey (MSNBC), Morris Davis (MSNBC), and Jack Keane (FOX), instead possess some of the most partisan audiences in the sample. Elites with notable records of policy activism possess similar follower networks. These include Russel Honore, the former commander of Hurricane Katrina relief efforts who criticized Trump administration efforts in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria, and Jerry Boykin, the former commander of the Army's Delta Force, whose politically-divisive evangelism and "incendiary rhetoric regarding Islam" generated significant controversy in military circles.²⁴ Advocacy for specific issue domains with

²⁴For Honore critiques of Hurricane Maria relief, Jack Healy, Frances Robles, and Ron Nixon, "Aid Is Getting to Puerto Rico. Distributing It Remains a Challenge.", *The New York Times*, October 3, 2017; for fallout from Boykin's remarks and his subsequent removal from a prepared speech at West Point, Erik Eckholm, "General Withdraws From West Point Talk", *The New York Times*, January 30, 2012.

established partisan bases of support, such as climate change policy, evangelicalism, or immigration may be just as influential in drawing a partisan audience as more direct political endorsements or contributions.

Military elites who have found post-retirement service as political appointees attract an expectedly one-sided audience as well. Former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn drew a follower network strikingly similar to elected Republican officials on the same side of the ideological spectrum. At the same time, former NSA and CIA chief General (Ret.) Michael Hayden drew an audience more akin to Democratic politicians. Hayden was a frequent critic of the Trump administration's relationship with the US intelligence community and management of Russian cyber intrusion, going so far as to caution serving intelligence analysts to "think twice" before taking assignments in the White House.²⁵ Finally, it is also clear that military elites with high visibility – even without high rank – are capable of garnering partisan audiences through activism. Medal of Honor recipients Dakota Meyer and Florent Groberg, though relatively junior in rank and responsibility, demonstrate this potential. Meyer appeared on FOX News segments in support of Trump administration policies and its relationship with the media; Groberg, a "self-described lifelong Republican", was a speaker at the 2016 Democratic National Convention and a public supporter of the presidential candidacy of Hillary Clinton.²⁶ Both figures attract distributions of followers more representative of elected partisans than active-duty officers.

While, as Barbera (2015) concedes, the "self-selected minority" of Twitter users constitutes a small sample relative to the American electorate, it is cross-sectionally diverse and allows for measuring the partisan appeal of non-political figures, such as military officers. Across the spectrum of measurable military elites, increased political activity results in ideologically far narrower audiences. At the highest levels of media presence and partisan activism, these military elites are indistinguishable from elected politicians in terms

²⁵Joe Uchill, "Former intel chief Hayden: Think twice on a Trump job offer", *The Hill*, November 13, 2017.

²⁶"Dakota Meyer: Trump is Following Through on His Promises to Veterans", *FOX News Insider*, July 3, 2017; Miranda Green, "Medal of Honor recipient explains why he's a Republican voting for Clinton", *DecodeDC*, July 28, 2016.

of the public audience they attract. As our experimental results demonstrate, it is possible that co-partisans who attend to these types of military elites may even view them as more credible than non-partisan or contra-partisan elites. However, this comes at the cost of access to a broad audience in shaping policy preferences, with potentially negative consequences for the ability of this expert community to influence public attitudes on policy.

The uneven and selective nature of the partisan public's response to political activity represents a departure from the previously theorized assumptions of the principled public. The latter assumes an objective audience, in which individual elites engage in political behavior to the detriment of the very institution that provides its credibility; taken in repeated interventions, partisan activity that "trade[s] on the reputation of the active force" results in decreasingly credible military elite voices across the whole of society (J. K. Dempsey 2009). However, the partisan public presents a different incentive structure. A similar common-pool problem of credibility exists, but rather than individuals leveraging the institution's credibility to the detriment of both, politically-active military elites can potentially increase their favor among like-minded partisans while only damaging institutional credibility among those on the other side of the political debate. The narrow and ideologically coherent follower distributions articulated previously, in addition to the experimental results of this analysis, demonstrate that the partisan public is an environment susceptible to *increasing* military politicization, rather than the self-defeating logic of the principled public.

This leads to my third point of discussion: if weak apolitical norms continue to draw more military elites into the political discussion, what impact could this have on the future of policy decision-making? First, an increasingly vocal retired military elite could create friction with serving members of the active force, who rely considerably on the credibility of their military counsel when advising civilian leaders on the proper courses of action in foreign and security policy. As the results of this analysis reveal, the partisan public creates an environment amenable to military elites who (1) do not necessarily value a broad audience, but also (2) wish to cultivate an ideologically coherent audience. Though the prospect of increasing credibility broadly is unlikely, it is also worth noting that elites risk

very little through activism in support of co-partisans. Previous study has examined the relationship between military elite campaign contributions and nomination to positions of advanced responsibility by co-partisan presidents (Golby 2011). Political activism provides an alternate currency for retired elites to similarly gain favor with a partisan establishment and cultivate a political ‘afterlife’ with no loss to their credibility.

However, such activity among the retired military elite risks jeopardizing the veracity of advice given by uniformed officers ostensibly representative of the same institution. This prospect is potentially problematic for forming coherent policy; retired senior officer David Barno argues that “Civilians will now be asking, ‘is the J.C.S a Democrat or Republican?’ and men and women in uniform will begin to wonder whether some day they can become the secretary of defense, or national security adviser.”²⁷ The negative externalities of such behavior are heightened in that the retired community draws on the same pool of credibility as their active-duty counterparts. In response to retired senior officers speaking at both major party conventions during the 2016 presidential campaign, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey stated that “They were introduced as generals. As generals, they have an obligation to uphold our apolitical traditions. They have made the task of their successors – who continue to serve in uniform and are accountable for our security – more complicated”.²⁸

The challenges that such activity can cause to the active-duty force have become evident in the growing politicization of military efforts. For example, disaster relief efforts in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria in 2017 were complicated by considerable friction in the media between President Donald Trump and local Puerto Rican leadership, including harsh criticism of the president’s efforts by Honore.²⁹ The resulting partisan skirmish forced serving Lieutenant General Jeff Buchanan, commander of the relief efforts in Puerto Rico, to have to actively distance himself from the conflict, stating to the press that “I’m not a

²⁷Quoted in Mark Perry, “Are Trump’s Generals in Over Their Heads?”, *Politico*, October 25, 2017.

²⁸Quoted in Richard Sisk, “Former Joints Chief Chairman Slams Retired Generals’ Political Remarks”, *Military.com*, August 1, 2016.

²⁹Brandon Carter, “General who oversaw Katrina response slams Trump for Puerto Rico attacks”, *The Hill*, September 30, 2017.

Republican. I'm not a Democrat. I'm not a member of the blue party, I'm not a member of the green party. I'm a soldier and I'm here to help people."³⁰ A similar politicization of the active duty elite occurred several months earlier, when statements made by the military service chiefs denouncing extremism and violence were viewed by many as a repudiation of Trump's efforts to "evenly redistribute blame" over a violent white supremacist rally in Virginia.³¹ Even if the active force is able to keep itself out of the partisan sphere, the actions of the retired military elite or the heightened state of political polarization can still directly influence their ability to offer objectively-valued military advice.

A second potential challenge that this environment poses to policy decision-making is the influence of such elites on specific issues. While partisan activity may result in garnering a like-minded, if narrow audience among the public, one must consider that input from these elites will be less broadly influential. Following the primary experimental measurements of the survey detailed in the previous section, respondents were asked for their level of support or opposition to a proposed pre-emptive strike on the North Korean nuclear program, while being informed that the military elite whose profile they had reviewed was in support of such a policy. Table 4.1 displays the levels of support for the strike across treatment conditions and respondent partisan identity. While Democrats and Independents are less supportive of the action when advocated for by an activist-right military elite, Republicans fall below 50% support themselves when the same policy is proposed by an activist-left elite. The effect among strong partisans is also substantively large, with Democratic support halved by activist-right advocacy and Republican support increasing by 11 percentage points when an activist-right elite called for the strike. Though these results escape statistical significance in all but a few cases, the shifting direction of public attitudes reveals how partisan elites elicit support among co-partisans while creating "backfire" effects among contra-partisans.

³⁰Quoted in Richard Sisk, "General Tried to Avoid Political Firestorm over Puerto Rico Relief", *Military.com*, October 2, 2017.

³¹While spokesmen for the service chiefs ensured the press that such remarks were "not meant as a stab at the president", the furor that such seemingly benign statements of opposition to violent extremism generated because of their contrast to the commander-in-chief's highlights the state of political polarization in the US and the extent to which this affects perceived military credibility. Andrew deGrandpre "Trump's generals condemn Charlottesville racism – while trying not to offend the president", *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2017.

Table 4.1: Support for North Korea Pre-emptive Strike, by Partisan Identity

	Partisans				Strong Partisans	
	<i>Aggregate</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
Non-Partisan	30	17	26	56	20	58
Activist Left	28	18	25	48	13	53
Activist Right	26	12	19	57	11	69
<i>N</i>	1,038	402	367	269	249	155

NOTE: Reported figures depict percentage of respondent in each treatment condition who “strongly support” or “somewhat support” pre-emptive action in North Korea with military elite endorsement of the policy. Column 1 aggregate category pools across all political identities. Columns 2-4 partisan categories represent respondents who identified as Democrat, Independent, or Republican on a three-point scale (PID3). Columns 5-6 strong partisan categories are those respondents who identified as “strong” Democrats and Republicans on the extended six-point scale (PID6).

Both of these challenges are intended to bolster the argument that partisan activity, particularly by undeterred retired elites, can limit their ability to influence a broad public while compromising the integrity of military advice offered by active duty elites.

Collectively, the principal findings of this analysis present several significant challenges to the future quality of civil-military relations, democratic norms of civilian control, and the value of military advice on policy matters. Empirical evidence for a *partisan public* is indicative of a deeper weakening of the apolitical norm, long-held to be both salient and broadly-accepted among the public by civil-military scholars. Such a lack of aversion to military intervention into political affairs provides little reason to doubt that military politicization into the future will continue, particularly among those elites seeking to cultivate favor with a partisan establishment. The prospect of garnering an ideologically coherent and attentive audience is evident in the types of networks different military elites draw conditional on their level of partisan behavior. The weakening of the apolitical norm is more problematic for the preservation of democratic regime quality when viewed alongside the concurrent rise in public acceptance of authoritarian processes, illiberal rule, and unprofessional military elite behavior. Finally, there is strong reason to believe that with repeated forays into the political arena, retired military elites risk jeopardizing the integrity of the larger institution with civilian leaders who rely on their objective counsel.

Conclusion

The study of civil-military relations has consistently embraced the imperative of maintaining an apolitical military, as both a normative defense of liberal standards of civilian control and a functional requirement for coherent and successful security policy. While the military has emerged as one of the most trusted organizations in society, civil-military scholars often contend that this is because of the careful maintenance of an objective image to the public. The very credibility of the institution is, in this framework, conditional on the institution's appearance as non-partisan. However, amidst broader trends in selective information exposure, partisan polarization, and the discrediting of expert communities, the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the military institution makes it a source of considerable latent influence regardless of the norms against political activity. Indeed, the level of military elite activism – whether in commentary, advocacy, or partisan endorsements – has steadily increased despite these traditional norms. However, reconciling these seemingly contradictory narratives has gone largely unstudied.

In this analysis, I have outlined several theoretical images of the public's preferences with regards to the "apolitical norm". These included the *principled* image theorized by much of the existing civil-military literature and the *indifferent* image suggested by the limited empirical work towards this question. I add to these constructs the *partisan* image of the public, in which the apolitical norm is weakened to the extent that military elites only risk suffering a loss of credibility among a specific political subset of the public and may even be able to gain credibility among another. Using original survey experimentation designed to measure how exposure to partisan military elites effects both individual- and institutional-level perceptions of credibility, I find that there is little evidence for an objectively-enforced and mutually-embraced apolitical norm across the public. Instead, military elites with a record of partisan behavior are only sanctioned among political opponents; as such, these elites more closely resemble partisan figures or elected officials, but with the imprimatur of

the military institution. The institution itself similarly suffers a loss of credibility among those exposed to contra-partisan elites, drawing a firmer connection between the actions of representatives and the preservation of the military's corporate credibility.

This environment creates several challenges for the stability of civil-military relations and the durability of traditional norms of liberal governance. First, this analysis reveals a weakened state of civil-military norms amidst broader shifts in public sentiment away from other traditionally taboo concepts, such as military, technocratic, or authoritarian rule. Increasing military politicization is therefore a potentially damaging prospect for the maintenance of traditional democratic processes, even if the regime is not existentially threatened. Second, the partisan public creates a unique incentive structure for military elites seeking to cultivate a political 'afterlife' to their careers, by allowing access to an ideologically-coherent – if narrower – audience. Third, if the environment of public sentiment presents fewer obstacles to military politicization, this could complicate the relationship between serving active-duty elites and civilian leaders who rely on non-partisan military counsel. Finally, trading a broad audience for a partisan one possibly limits the reach and potential influence of military elites when they offer political information on issues of importance.

Future study into this question would benefit from analysis of different types of partisan behavior and the marginal effects of each on public perceptions of credibility. While this analysis focused on creating an ecologically realistic profile of a partisan military elite figure, more refined study could examine how specific actions – such as public criticism, political endorsements, or partisan fundraising – individually influence the perceived credibility of the source. Similarly, the continued use of social media platforms by military elites may allow for the calculation of their political ideal points in a fashion similar to other non-political occupations. Measuring military and political figures on a common ideological spectrum would allow various opportunities for understanding at what level of advocacy military figures begin to resemble political ones in the public's vision. As retired military officers continue to play an increasing role in government service and public discourse, understanding the implications of this political activity will remain an important target of

research.

Appendix A: Covariate Balance and Regression Results

A.1 Descriptive Statistics and Balance Checks

Table 4.2: Balance and Covariate Balance Statistics

Respondent Demographic	<i>Non-Partisan</i>	<i>Activist Left</i>	<i>Activist Right</i>
Party Identification			
Democrat	39.60	37.46	39.11
Republican	27.63	23.63	26.47
Gender			
Male	45.58	50.14	50.29
Female	54.41	49.85	49.70
Age			
25th Percentile	33	29	30
50th Percentile	46	40	44
75th Percentile	59	58	59
Race			
White	68.66	73.19	64.70
Non-white	31.33	26.80	35.29

NOTE: Reported figures depict average percent of daily newshole dedicated to segments on Iraq War stories across the entire 2007 news year. Values in parentheses () indicate p-values for two-tailed t-test for difference in means between reported news source and FOX News as reference category.

Table 4.3: Randomization Check: Logit Regression on Dichotomous Assignment Variable

	<i>Dependent variable: Treatment Condition Assignment</i>		
	Non-Partisan	Activist Left	Activist Right
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Democrat	0.114 (0.155)	-0.178 (0.153)	0.067 (0.155)
Republican	0.223 (0.172)	-0.281 (0.173)	0.057 (0.173)
Male	-0.230* (0.136)	0.128 (0.135)	0.104 (0.136)
Age	-0.001 (0.011)	0.006 (0.011)	-0.005 (0.011)
GenX	0.108 (0.272)	0.089 (0.279)	-0.203 (0.276)
Millennial	-0.329 (0.429)	0.496 (0.431)	-0.171 (0.430)
Constant	-0.535 (0.724)	-1.110 (0.728)	-0.452 (0.726)
Observations	1,038	1,038	1,038
Log Likelihood	-658.491	-657.105	-655.712
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,330.983	1,328.210	1,325.425
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

A.2 Additional Survey Statistics

Table 4.4: Mean Values for Endorser Credibility Metrics, Non-Partisan Treatment Condition (By Respondent Party ID)

	Partisans			Strong Partisans	
	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
Knowledgeable	5.57	5.26	5.95	5.54	5.93
Experienced	5.72	5.48	5.97	5.56	6.00
Trustworthy	5.20	5.00	5.67	5.18	5.72
Reliable	5.38	5.04	5.60	5.36	5.64
Expertise	11.30	10.74	11.93	11.11	11.93
Trustworthiness	10.58	10.05	11.27	10.55	11.37
Credibility	21.88	20.79	23.21	21.66	23.30
<i>N</i>	139	115	97	90	62

NOTE: Reported figures depict mean values for measured endorser credibility metrics in the non-partisan condition. Columns 1-3 partisan categories represent respondents who identified as Democrat, Independent, or Republican on a three-point scale (PID3). Columns 4-5 strong partisan categories are those respondents who identified as “strong” Democrats and Republicans on the extended six-point scale (PID6). Rows 1-4 indicate items utilized for construction of additive measures on scale of 1-7; rows 5-6 indicate additive scores for expertise and trustworthiness, respectively, on a scale of 1-14. Row 7 depicts mean total credibility scores, on scale of 1-28.

Table 4.5: Mean Values for Endorser Credibility Metrics, Activist Left Treatment Condition (By Respondent Party ID)

	Partisans			Strong Partisans	
	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
Knowledgeable	5.89	5.24	4.76	5.86	4.71
Experienced	6.03	5.51	5.10	6.00	4.95
Trustworthy	5.64	4.84	4.20	5.64	4.17
Reliable	5.78	4.97	4.51	5.68	4.31
Expertise	11.93	10.76	9.87	11.86	9.66
Trustworthiness	11.43	9.82	8.71	11.32	8.48
Credibility	23.36	20.58	18.59	23.18	18.15
<i>N</i>	130	109	82	79	45

NOTE: Reported figures depict mean values for measured endorser credibility metrics in the activist left condition. Columns 1-3 partisan categories represent respondents who identified as Democrat, Independent, or Republican on a three-point scale (PID3). Columns 4-5 strong partisan categories are those respondents who identified as “strong” Democrats and Republicans on the extended six-point scale (PID6). Rows 1-4 indicate items utilized for construction of additive measures on scale of 1-7; rows 5-6 indicate additive scores for expertise and trustworthiness, respectively, on a scale of 1-14. Row 7 depicts mean total credibility scores, on scale of 1-28.

Table 4.6: Mean Values for Endorser Credibility Metrics, Activist Right Treatment Condition (By Respondent Party ID)

	Partisans			Strong Partisans	
	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
Knowledgeable	4.55	4.93	6.01	4.61	6.27
Experienced	4.99	5.23	6.03	5.12	6.08
Trustworthy	4.17	4.25	5.74	4.13	5.97
Reliable	4.45	4.51	5.91	4.47	6.22
Expertise	9.54	10.16	12.04	9.73	12.35
Trustworthiness	8.63	8.76	11.65	8.61	12.20
Credibility	18.18	18.93	23.70	18.35	24.56
<i>N</i>	133	117	90	80	48

NOTE: Reported figures depict mean values for measured endorser credibility metrics in the activist right condition. Columns 1-3 partisan categories represent respondents who identified as Democrat, Independent, or Republican on a three-point scale (PID3). Columns 4-5 strong partisan categories are those respondents who identified as “strong” Democrats and Republicans on the extended six-point scale (PID6). Rows 1-4 indicate items utilized for construction of additive measures on scale of 1-7; rows 5-6 indicate additive scores for expertise and trustworthiness, respectively, on a scale of 1-14. Row 7 depicts mean total credibility scores, on scale of 1-28.

Table 4.7: Opposition for Federal Budget Decrease to State/USAID, by Partisan Identity

	Partisans			Strong Partisans		
	<i>Aggregate</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
Non-Partisan	37	42	37	29	38	31
Activist Left	36	51	28	27	57	33
Activist Right	39	47	40	24	45	27
<i>N</i>	1,038	402	367	269	249	155

NOTE: Reported figures depict percentage of respondent in each treatment condition who “strongly oppose” or “somewhat oppose” budgetary decreases to the State Department and USAID with military elite opposition to the policy. Column 1 aggregate category pools across all political identities. Columns 2-4 partisan categories represent respondents who identified as Democrat, Independent, or Republican on a three-point scale (PID3). Columns 5-6 strong partisan categories are those respondents who identified as “strong” Democrats and Republicans on the extended six-point scale (PID6).

Appendix B: Survey Experiment Supplementals

B.1 Questionnaire Design

Programming Instructions: Assign random integer from 1 to 3, record this integer as *assignment*. Assignment of this integer is recorded and dictates the value of **[Prompt1]**, **[Prompt2]**, and **[Image]**.

Assigning Textual Prompt

The variable **[Image]** takes on the following values depending on integer assignment:

- *Assignment=1*, see Figure 4.8
- *Assignment=2*, see Figure 4.9
- *Assignment=3*, see Figure 4.10

The variable **[Prompt1]** takes on the following value:

- “General (Retired) Wilson has publicly written and spoken in support of the proposed strike, considering such a move to be necessary. In a recent interview, Wilson stated that “the risk posed by North Korea is too great; the US needs to take action”.”

The variable **[Prompt2]** takes on the following value:

- “In several editorial articles and interviews, General (Retired) Wilson has argued against the reduction, calling instead for Congress to increase funding to the State Department and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).”

Figure 4.8: Experimental Military Elite Profile (Non-Partisan)

Morgan L. Wilson

Morgan Wilson retired from the United States Army after 36 years of service at the rank of four-star general. Wilson's long career includes the following:



- Multiple combat tours in command of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, earning awards for both merit and valor.
- B.S. United States Military Academy, West Point; M.A. International Relations, University of Chicago
- Following retirement, General (Retired) Wilson joined the non-partisan Council on Foreign Relations and is currently authoring a scholarly book on the history of US foreign policy.
- Wilson did not endorse a major party candidate in the 2016 general election.
- Wilson has appeared on National Public Radio in a discussion on US security policy during the Cold War.

Note: This figure represents the elite profile viewed in the non-partisan category, ASSIGNMENT=1.

Figure 4.9: Experimental Military Elite Profile (Non-Partisan)

Morgan L. Wilson

Morgan Wilson retired from the United States Army after 36 years of service at the rank of four-star general. Wilson's long career includes the following:



- Multiple combat tours in command of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, earning awards for both merit and valor
- B.S, United States Military Academy, West Point; M.A, International Relations, University of Chicago
- Following retirement, General (Retired) Wilson joined the national security team for prominent Democratic primary candidates in both the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections.
- Wilson publicly endorsed Hillary Clinton during the 2016 general election.
- Wilson appears regularly on MSNBC and CNN as a vocal critic of President Trump's foreign and security policy.

Note: This figure represents the elite profile viewed in the activist-left category, ASSIGNMENT=2.

Figure 4.10: Experimental Military Elite Profile (Non-Partisan)

Morgan L. Wilson

Morgan Wilson retired from the United States Army after 36 years of service at the rank of four-star general. Wilson's long career includes the following:



- Multiple combat tours in command of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, earning awards for both merit and valor
- B.S. United States Military Academy, West Point; M.A. International Relations, University of Chicago
- Following retirement, General (Retired) Wilson joined the national security team for prominent Republican primary candidates in both the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections.
- Wilson publicly endorsed President Donald Trump during the 2016 general election.
- Wilson appears regularly on FOX News and talk radio as a vocal critic of President Obama's foreign and security policy.

Note: This figure represents the elite profile viewed in the activist-right category, ASSIGNMENT=3.

Survey Progression

Standard demographic battery precedes the experimental portion of the survey.

This survey is being conducted by Qualtrics on behalf of researchers at varying organizations. The survey will ask you about a variety of topics, and the results will inform academic research and press releases. Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be held confidential. As specified by the online research panel which invited you to participate in this survey, you will receive an incentive for your participation. We have tested the survey and found that, on average it takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. This time may vary depending on factors such as your Internet connection speed and the answers you give. To indicate that you consent to participate in this research, please click on the "Next" button below.

We are interested in public attitudes on different policy issues in American society. In the following short survey, you will be presented with a few short questions on several issues currently under debate, along with the opinion of one of many relevant voices on these subjects. We have included a brief summary of the qualifications and experience of the commentator as well. Please read all information carefully and offer your honest opinion on each of the questions.

Question 1: SINGLE CHOICE. Manipulation Check

Before considering your position, this is the profile for one of the voices that has offered their own opinion on the issue we'd like to ask you about.

[IMAGE]

Before proceeding, we just want to make sure you have read the above information about this individual's background. Which media outlet did this individual appear on as a commentator?

- MSNBC
- National Public Radio
- FOX News

Question 2A-D: SLIDER. Individual Endorser Credibility

On a scale from 1-7, how would you rate General Wilson on the following characteristics?

Rows [randomized order]

- Knowledgeable
- Trustworthy
- Reliable
- Experienced

Columns [1-7]

Question 3A-D: SLIDER. Institutional Credibility

*Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with these statements with regards to the following institution: **The military***

Rows [randomized order]

- The military is skilled at what they do.
- The military makes truthful claims.
- The military has a great amount of experience.
- I trust the military.

Columns

- 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- 2
- 3
- 4 (Neither Agree/Disagree)
- 5
- 6
- 7 (Strongly Agree)

Question 4: SINGLE CHOICE. North Korea Strike

North Korea

As you may know, there is a lot of debate over potential military action in North Korea. The North Korean regime has defied the international community and US warnings against developing and testing their nuclear weapons. One of the options being considered is a pre-emptive strike with conventional weapons on the North Korean military.

[PROMPT1]

What is your opinion on the proposal to pre-emptively strike North Korea?

Choices [random direction]

- Strongly oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Neither support nor oppose
- Somewhat support
- Strongly support

Question 5: SINGLE CHOICE. Foreign Aid/Federal Budget

Federal Budget

Another issue being discussed is how to spend taxpayer money in the federal budget. One proposal has been to dramatically reduce funding to the State Department, the agency that manages US diplomatic efforts around the world, and to cut its spending on foreign and humanitarian aid to other countries.

[PROMPT2]

What is your opinion on the proposal to decrease funding to the State Department and foreign aid programs?

Choices [random direction]

- Strongly oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Neither support nor oppose
- Somewhat support
- Strongly support

B.2 Military Elite Profile Analogs

As discussed in the main body of the analysis, the characteristics of the military elite profiles used in this experimental design encompassed six broad categories. The *overseas experience*, *academic qualification*, and *command responsibility* portions of each profile were kept fixed, with values representative of many high-ranking retired military elites. Overseas experience values reflect the current pool of retired elites, which include those with experience in the Vietnam War to those with more recent command tenures in Iraq, Afghanistan, and various peacekeeping missions. The composite profile developed here used recent overseas deployments, as this subset of retired officers is considerably larger and more politically active.

The information regarding academic qualifications and command responsibility was developed using the experiences of several high-profile military elites with both experience commanding large formations abroad and advanced degrees. These included H.R. McMaster, David Petraeus, David Barno, Stanley McChrystal, and James Stavridis, all retired elites with undergraduate degrees from the country's military service academies and graduate or post-graduate degrees in international relations, history, public policy, national security, or law and diplomacy. Most of these figures also commanded at the three- and four-star level during their military service, from regional combat headquarters elements such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan to major combatant commands such as Central Command (CENTCOM) and EUCOM (European Command). While command at these levels is not necessarily a common trait among politically active elites, nor is it a requisite for engagement in media commentary or partisan activism, setting the expertise at its highest realistic levels made all subsequent devaluing of that expertise based on partisan behavior easier to measure.

The remaining three characteristics, experimentally varied in the above design, were also drawn from the profiles of existing military elites. This was done in order to develop

an ecologically realistic set of characteristics that was both rooted in realism while also allowing for the maximum contrast between partisan and non-partisan elites. I briefly detail some of the actual figures used to develop these categories below according to each of the experimental dimensions varied in the experimental design used for this analysis.

Media Presence

Perhaps one of the most visible methods by which military elites can engage in activism or partisan behavior is through media commentary, editorialism, or analysis. This avenue has few barriers to entry and can magnify the voices of even relatively junior elites by providing a larger, and potentially partisan audience. The *media presence* value was varied across treatment conditions in order to reflect the different outlets that military elites might appear on in order to broadcast information. I chose to have the non-partisan elite appear on National Public Radio, the activist-left elite on MSNBC, and the activist-right on FOX News, in order to attach decidedly partisan audiences to their messaging. While print media outlets would have been equally realistic in terms of an avenue that military elites often utilize for messaging, it is more difficult to draw strong liberal-conservative contrast using these outlets than to use cable news outlets with decidedly partisan followings, such as MSNBC, CNN, or FOX.³² The current media environment makes it difficult to establish a truly non-partisan source for broad messaging. I chose the non-partisan elite to appear on National Public Radio, despite it appearing as left-leaning in some political circles; to mitigate this, I ensured that the elite's comments were infrequent (in that Wilson's media presence was low) and benign (in that they were observational rather than critical).

Some examples of military elites used to develop this profile include cable news analysts, media commentators, or print media editorial writers. Military elites such as former US

³²These outlets have both large audience followings and stark partisan divergence on trustworthiness. In 2014, 52% of those classified as consistent liberals expressed trust in MSNBC as a news source, against 9% who distrusted it. The same category of liberals contained only 6% who trusted FOX News, compared to 81% who distrusted it, by comparison. Consistent conservatives included 7% trusting MSNBC against 75% distrust, and 88% trust for FOX News over 3% distrust. "Political Polarization and Media Habits: From Fox News to Facebook, How Liberals and Conservatives Keep Up with Politics", Pew Research Center, October 21, 2014.

Army Europe commander Lieutenant General (Ret.) Mark Hertling, former Army Vice Chief of Staff General (Ret.) Jack Keane, former SOUTHCOM commander General (Ret.) Barry McCaffrey, and Medal of Honor recipient Colonel Jack Jacobs appeared regularly on cable news outlets CNN, MSNBC, and FOX News, respectively.³³ Recently, Hertling and Jacobs have commented regularly on President Donald Trump’s relationship with veteran families, Keane on the state of national security policy and US military efforts in Iraq and Syria, and McCaffrey on the state of US-North Korea affairs.³⁴ These networks frequently include interviews or editorials with other retired military elites including former Guantanamo Bay military prosecutor Colonel Morris Davis, former Supreme Allied Commander for NATO Admiral (Ret.) James Stavridis, who both appear on MSNBC, and Medal of Honor recipient Dakota Meyer, who appears on FOX News. The strong contrast offered by appearance on these networks was incorporated into the experimental profiles by ensuring the partisan conditions made clear that media exposure was both frequent and politically-charged; the substance of the manipulation check question also sought to embed this information more directly with the respondent. The ubiquitous appearance of these figures on cable news networks demonstrates their potential reach. However, the perception of a partisan slant to the elites themselves is not merely a product of their appearance through an outlet with established partisan audiences, but also in the substance of the commentary itself.

³³“Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling: Military Analyst”, CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/profiles/mark-hertling-profile>; “Col. Jack Jacobs: MSNBC Military Analyst”, MSNBC, December 14, 2007; “Jack Keane: Retired army four-star general”, FOX News, <http://www.foxnews.com/person/k/jack-keane.html>; “Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, USA (Ret.)”, MSNBC, January 17, 2008. All accessed December 21, 2017.

³⁴“Col. Jack Jacobs: Trump Gold Star Family remarks ‘almost obscene’”, video clip, *NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt*, October 17, 2017; Hertling quoted in Stephen Collinson, “Trump has repeatedly politicized military service and sacrifice”, CNN.com, October 18, 2017; “Trump’s national security strategy a departure from the past”, video clip, FOX News, December 19, 2017; “Gen. Barry McCaffrey: Trump could lead U.S. to war with N. Korea”, video clip, *The 11th Hour with Brian Williams*, MSNBC, October 13, 2017.

Political Activism and Advocacy

In addition to regular exposure to partisan audiences through outlets such as cable news, the tone and tenor of military elite activism is itself revealing of partisan sentiment. The previously mentioned cable news analysts often provide commentary which exceeds objective analysis, instead mounting an ardent defense of or attack on specific political leaders. However, certain elites engage in regular policy activism even if their media profile is comparably low. Former Katrina relief commander Lieutenant General (Ret.) Russel Honore became a staunch environmental activist after retirement and in 2017 was an outspoken critic of administration response to the devastation in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria; Honore made headlines by reprimanding the president directly during the crisis, stating “the mayor’s living on a cot, and I hope the president has a good day at golf”.³⁵ Former special operations commander Lieutenant General (Ret.) William Boykin engaged in a variety of evangelical activists groups upon retirement. He was removed from a speech at the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2012 due to a record of comments characterizing US military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan as “Christian battle”, denouncing Islam as a “totalitarian way of life”, and offered that the religion should not protected under the First Amendment.³⁶

Policy advocacy or criticism has also included security policy more directly. Major General (Ret.) Robert Scales denounced Obama administration efforts in managing the humanitarian crisis in Syria in 2013, describing them as “amatuerism”.³⁷ As mentioned in the main body of the analysis, blocs of military officers have collectively denounced Trump administration policy on a host of issues, including its position on torture, relations with the media, climate change, immigration, and diplomatic efforts with North Korea. While a sizable bloc also opposed a Trump administration directive to ban transgender soldiers from openly serving in the military, 16 retired general and flag officers, including regular

³⁵Quoted in Brandon Carter, “General who oversaw Katrina response slams Trump for Puerto Rico attacks”, *The Hill*, September 30, 2017.

³⁶Erik Eckholm, “General Withdraws From West Point Talk”, *The New York Times*, January 30, 2012.

³⁷Robert H. Scales, “U.S. military planners don’t support war with Syria”, *The Washington Post*, September 5, 2013.

FOX News commentator Lieutenant General (Ret.) Thomas McInerney, penned a letter of support for the ban through Boykin's Family Research Council in 2017.³⁸ The partisan overtones of military activism, in some cases on both sides of an issue, were adapted into the design of the experimental profiles by ensuring that while the non-partisan profile contained no such policy advocacy, the partisan profiles had an established record of opposition or support to the agendas of specific political elites.

Partisan Endorsements

Finally, the experimental profiles drew on established actions of partisan support or endorsements to political candidates, a form of military elite activism that is occurring with increased frequency and visibility. Though the impact of these types of endorsements has been found to be relatively small, their significance to the perceived objectivity of military elites and the institution of the armed forces is potentially large (Golby, Dropp, and Feaver 2012). This pattern was readily observable during the 2016 presidential campaign, in which retired general officers played a prominent role in both major party conventions and in public endorsements for the candidates. Despite Martin Dempsey's admonishment that "the military is not a political prize", nearly 200 former officers offered public endorsements of either Secretary Hilary Clinton or Donald Trump during the campaign. The majority of the four-star officers, the highest ranking elites in the military, who offered endorsements supported Clinton, including former Democratic presidential candidate and Supreme Allied Commander for NATO General (Ret.) Wesley Clark. Female officers were also outspoken supporters of the Clinton campaign, including former intelligence chief Lieutenant General (Ret.) Claudia Kennedy. Trump's position on torture also drove elites such as Major General (Ret.) Antonio Taguba, the former Abu Ghraib investigator, into the Clinton camp as well. However, Trump drew support from evangelical activists like Boykin, as well as from McInerney, who made headlines in 2010 for supporting an Army officer who refused to deploy to Afghanistan because he believed President Barack Obama was not born in the

³⁸Letter enclosed in Peter LaBarbera, "Retired generals praise Trump's 'courageous' transgender military ban", LifeSiteNews, August 1, 2017.

United States.³⁹

Both major party conventions included high-profile speeches by senior officers, with former Afghanistan commander General (Ret.) John Allen speaking at the Democratic Convention and former DIA commander Lieutenant General (Ret.) Michael Flynn speaking at the Republican Convention, actions which were decried by a host of civil-military theorists, political commentators, and retired officers such as Dempsey. Medal of Honor recipient and self-professed Republican Florent Groberg also spoke at the convention in support of Clinton's campaign. Again, while the magnitude of these endorsements is debatable, their increasing regularity has significant implications for the perceived credibility of the military and its representatives. Furthermore, the profiles included reference to these elites having advised campaigns in national security and foreign policy. Both Lieutenant General (Ret.) Keith Kellogg and Flynn served on the Trump campaign as security advisers and members of transition team.⁴⁰ Former CIA chief and CENTCOM commander General (Ret.) David Petraeus advised the Clinton campaign, while Stavridis was vetted as a possible vice presidential candidate.⁴¹ As such, the experimental profiles used in this analysis incorporated similar endorsements for or services on the staffs of political candidates in the 2016 election. In addition to high media presence on partisan networks and open policy advocacy or criticism, the profiles were designed in this way to maximize contrast to the non-partisan category while remaining to the the form of actual military elites in the informational environment.

Supporting Media Sources

(Bailey 2009; Baker 2009; Bender 2017; Burns 2009; Cahn 2016; B. Carter 2017; P. Carter et al. 2016; Clement and Rucker 2017; Cloud and Schmitt 2006; Dao 2009; deGrandpre 2017; M. Dempsey 2016; Dinan 2012; Drezner 2017; Dwyer and Worth 2006; Eckholm 2012; Faiola 2010a; Fifield 2017; Garamone 2012; Haddick 2010; Healy, Robles, and Nixon

³⁹Eric Schmitt, "Clinton and Trump Each Lay Claim to Military Brass", *The New York Times*, September 7, 2016.

⁴⁰Michael Crowley, "Trump's foreign policy team baffles GOP experts", Politico, March 21, 2016.

⁴¹Gabriel DeBenedetti, "Clinton to convene meeting with Petraeus, other national security experts", Politico, September 8, 2016.

2017; Henderson 2011; Kenning 2017; Lamothe 2017; McMaster and G. D. Cohn 2017; Michaels 2016; Foa and Mounk 2016; Mullen 2008; Mullen 2017; Petraeus 2004; Phillips 2017; C. L. Powell 1992b; K. Roberts 2007; Rowlatt 2015; Scales 2013; Schmitt 2016; Shabad 2016; Shalikashvili 2007; Shane III 2016; Shear, Fandos, and Steinhauer 2017; Usher 2015; Whitlock 2014; Zegart 2017; Zelizer 2018; Barno and Bensahel 2017; BBC News 2016; Dugan and Auter 2017; Farley 2016; Kennan 1948; Margolick 2007; Merica 2016; Moore 2016; Moore 2015; Newport 2017; Sisk 2016; Sisk 2017; Tau 2012; Uchill 2017; D. Wright, Browne, and Lim 2016)

Appendix C: Social Media Distribution Supplementals

C.1 Ideological Distributions for Select Military Elite Follower Networks

Figure 4.11: Social Media Distributional Data (Davis, Duckworth)

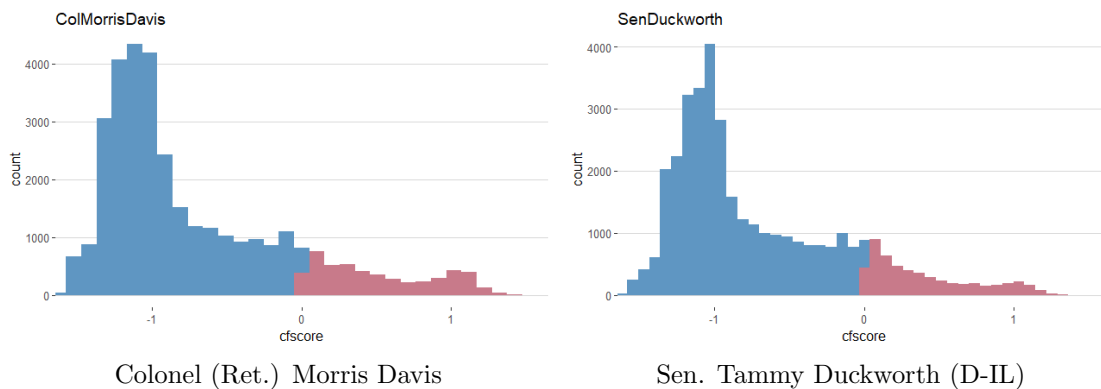


Figure 4.12: Social Media Distributional Data (Moulton, Hertling)

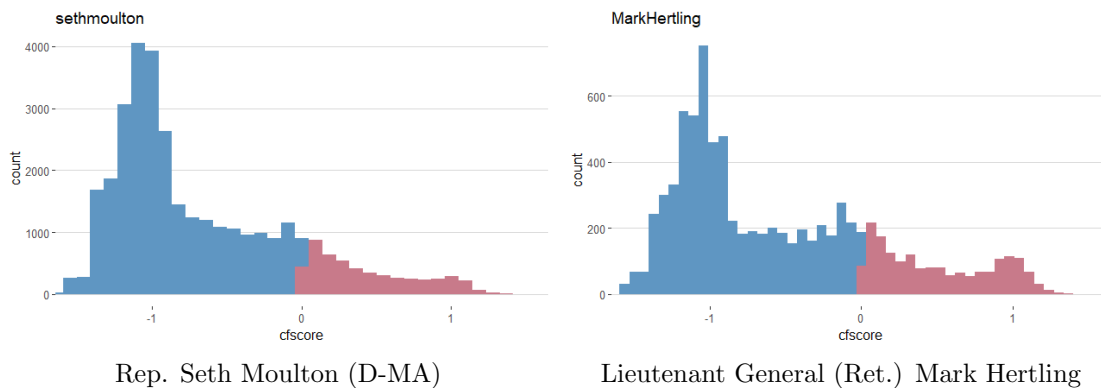


Figure 4.13: Social Media Distributional Data (McCaffrey, Hayden)

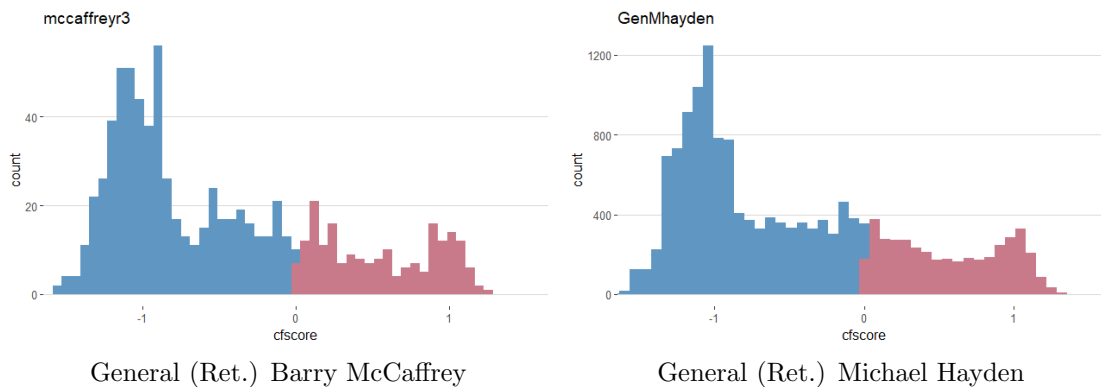


Figure 4.14: Social Media Distributional Data (Honore, Kirby)

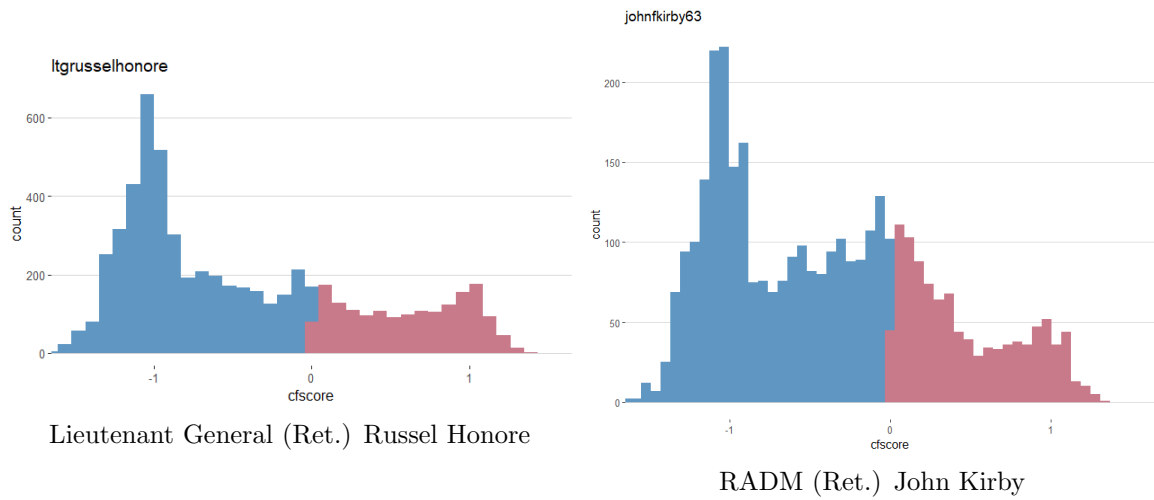


Figure 4.15: Social Media Distributional Data (Jacobs, Groberg)

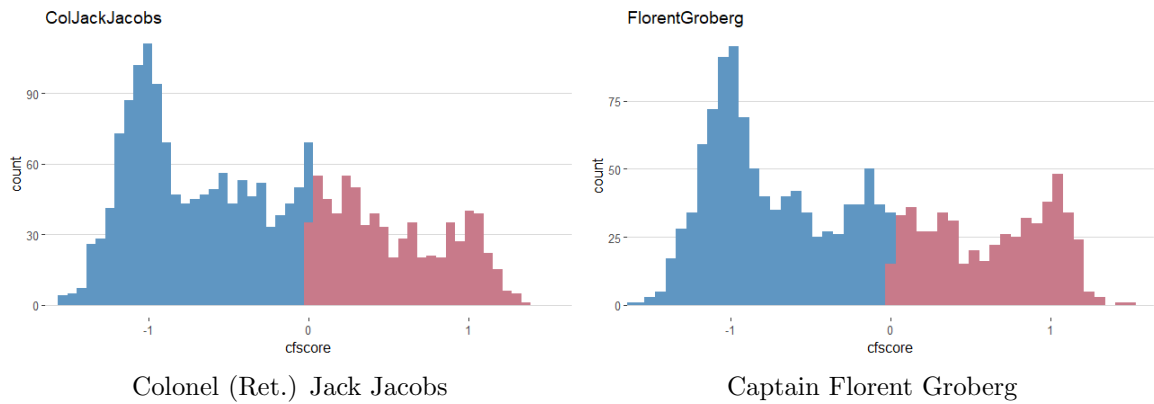


Figure 4.16: Social Media Distributional Data (Zukunft, Barno)

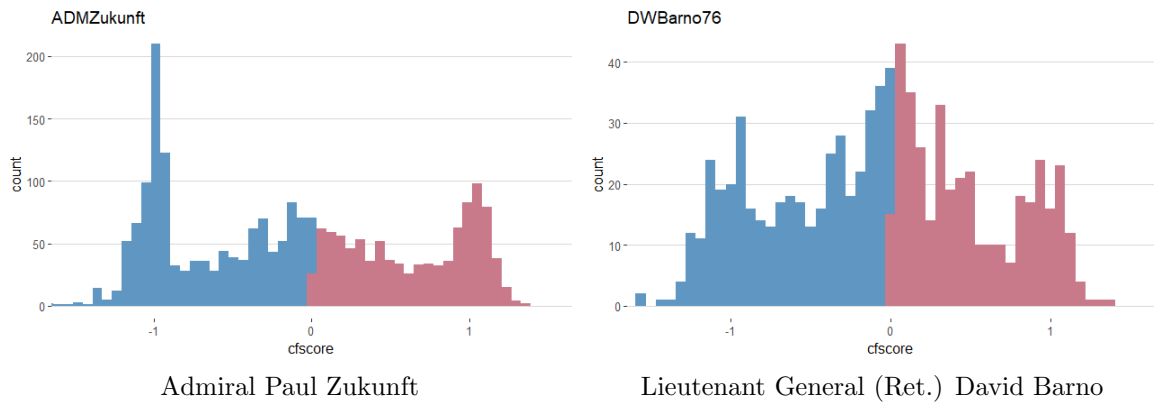


Figure 4.17: Social Media Distributional Data (Stavridis, Dempsey)

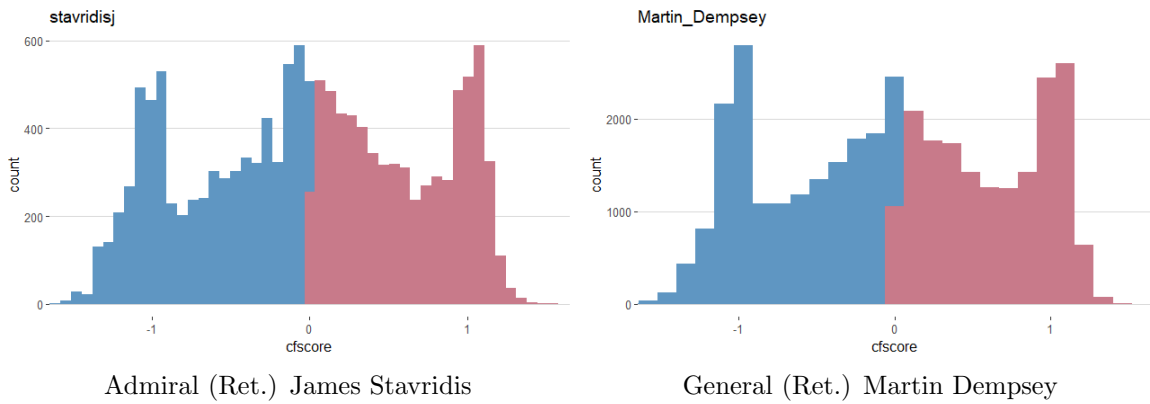


Figure 4.18: Social Media Distributional Data (Richardson, Milley)

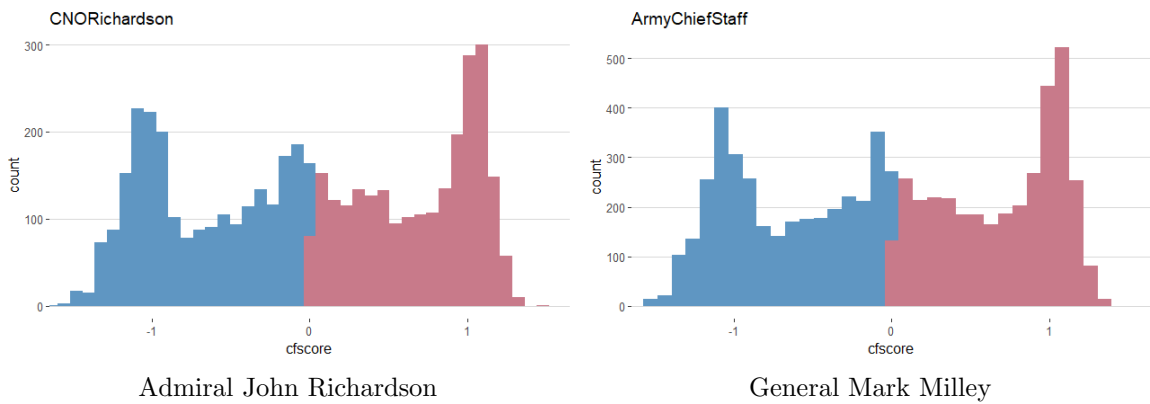


Figure 4.19: Social Media Distributional Data (Goldfein, Neller)

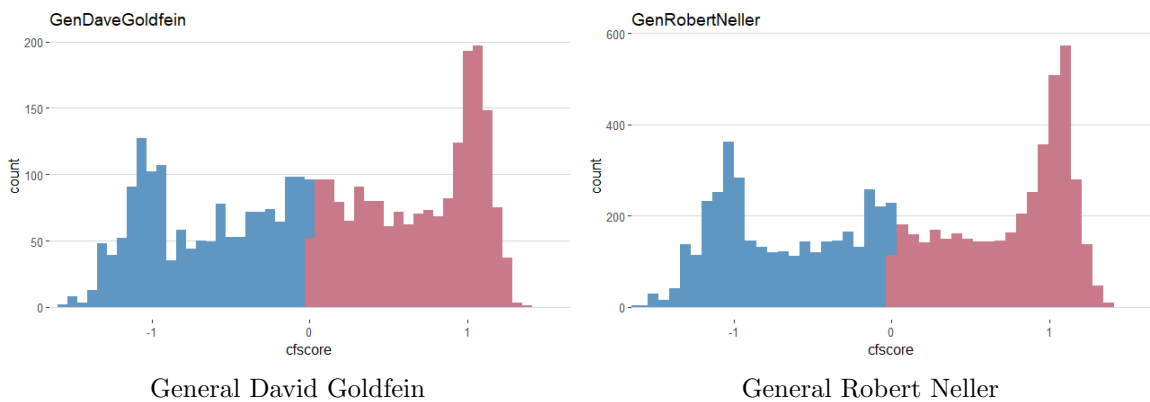


Figure 4.20: Social Media Distributional Data (Odierno, McChrystal)

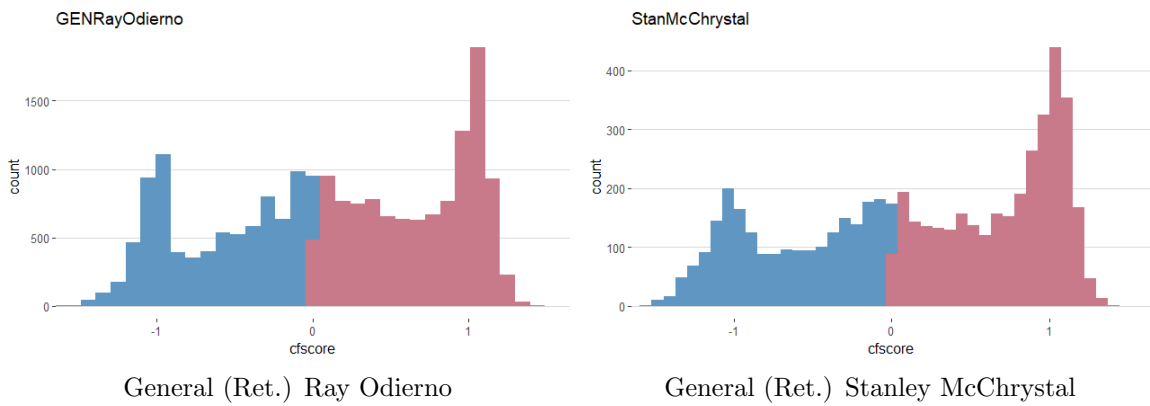


Figure 4.21: Social Media Distributional Data (Welsh, McRaven)

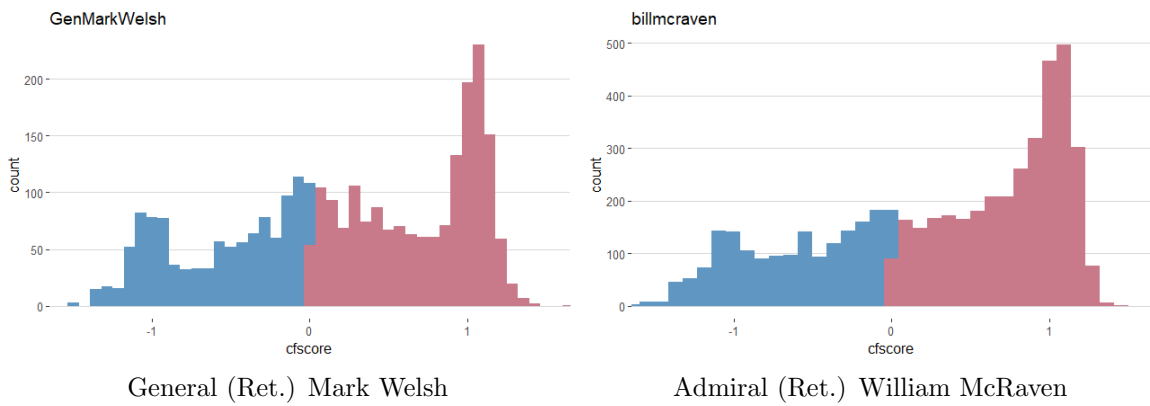


Figure 4.22: Social Media Distributional Data (Zinke (R), Zinke (Sec))

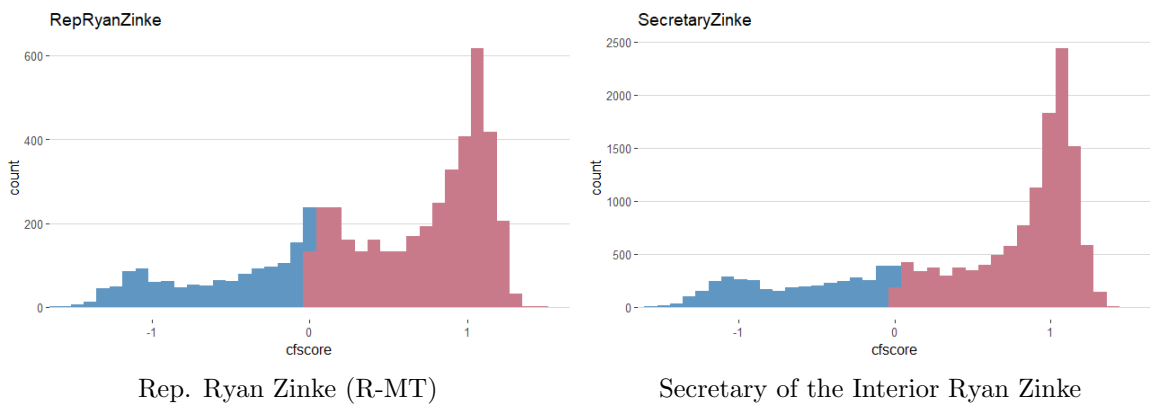


Figure 4.23: Social Media Distributional Data (Cotton, Flynn)

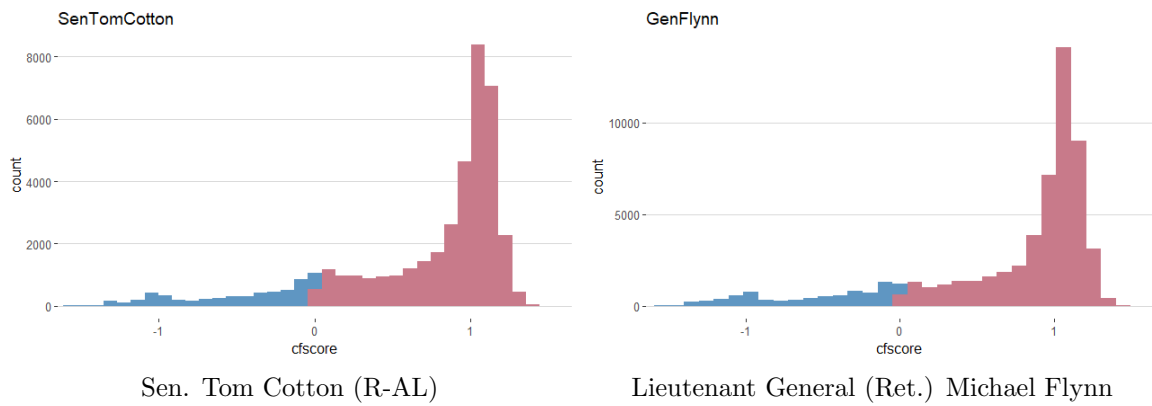


Figure 4.24: Social Media Distributional Data (Meyer, Keane)

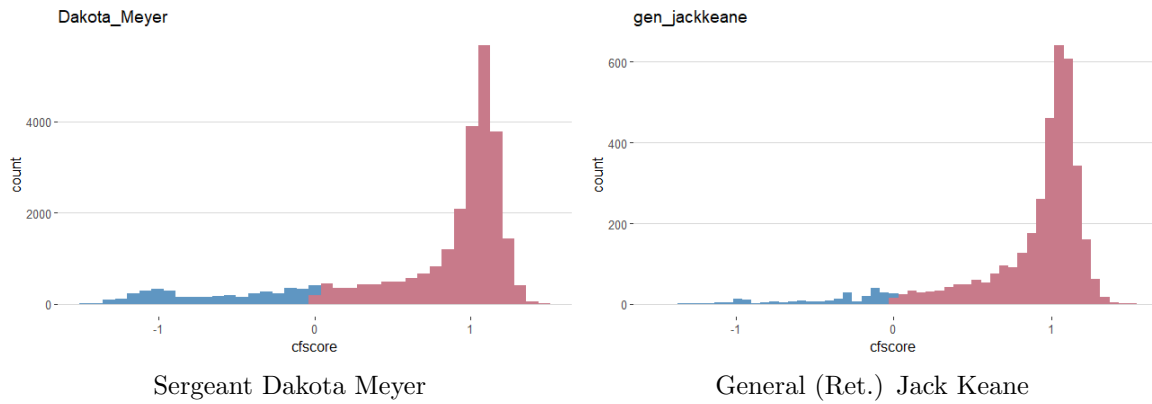
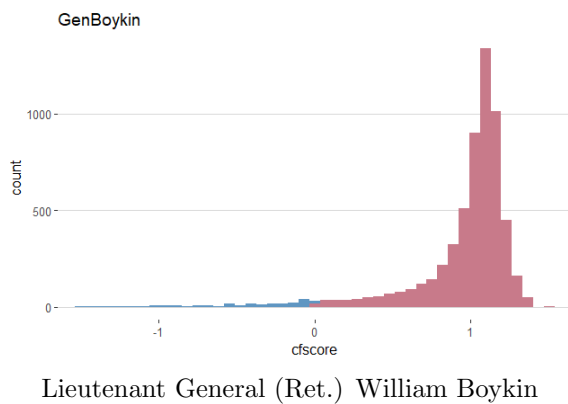


Figure 4.25: Social Media Distributional Data (Boykin)



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