

# Limited War and American Political Engagement

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*Prior studies of war and political engagement focus on mass mobilizing, successful conflicts and treat war as a monolithic variable affecting all Americans equally. In this study, we analyze the more limited, less successful conflicts prevalent since 1945, and we examine the influence of disparities in local communities' casualty rates on their residents' patterns of political engagement. Using both individual- and aggregate-level data, we show that citizens from communities that suffered high casualty rates in the Vietnam and Korean Wars were significantly less politically engaged in each conflict's wake than their peers from low-casualty communities.*

How do the scale and outcome of a war affect the way that it shapes American political and civic life? The bulk of existing scholarship focuses on the ability of a successful martial endeavor that mass mobilizes society on a war footing to spur tremendous growth in postwar political and civic engagement. We agree that wars can have a transformative effect on society for years after the last gun falls silent. However, in this article we argue that some wars have diametrically opposite consequences for American democracy and depress political engagement, particularly among the communities that bear a disproportionate share of the conflict's human costs.

Prior research on war and civic engagement has focused primarily on large-scale, ultimately successful conflicts such as the Civil War, World War I, and World War II. Many of these accounts emphasize how resounding military victories bolstered popular trust in government and generated a strong civic ethos that created new and deepened existing levels of popular engagement in politics (Putnam 2000). Moreover, as Skocpol and her collaborators have meticulously documented, government-led war mobilization widely transmitted resources and civic skills that in the postwar era facilitated citizens' involvement in a wide array of civic organizational activities (Skocpol 1999; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson, 2000; Skocpol et al. 2002). In both the political and private realms, these wars proved a boon to engagement.

However, the more limited, less successful conflicts prevalent since World War II have followed a decidedly different script. Vietnam and Korea failed to augment trust in government and solidify faith in the

efficacy of governing institutions. If anything, governmental wartime failures appear to have dampened popular trust in and evaluations of the federal government (Nye 1997). In a similar vein, because these more limited conflicts did not involve mass mobilization, they failed to create and widely distribute the resources and organizational skills that powered postwar growth in civic associationalism in previous decades.

In order to understand the consequences of these small and unsuccessful wars for democratic engagement, new theorizing is required. Looking first at variation in the outcome of war, we hypothesize that because failed wars decrease the expressive benefits citizens derive from participating in politics, these conflicts will actually decrease political engagement, particularly among those who experienced its costs most acutely through the lens of their local communities. Second, we posit that a war's effect on non-political engagement is a function not of its success or failure, but of the way it is fought. Specifically, when the government mass mobilizes the public for war, citizens gain participatory skills and resources which can subsequently be used in civil society after the war is over. Limited wars, however, involve little mobilization. Absent an infusion of new participatory resources, we expect little change in citizens' postwar associational engagement.

Testing our hypotheses also requires a new methodological strategy to isolate the effects of limited, unsuccessful wars on citizens' patterns of political and civic engagement. Most analyses of war and civic engagement have employed a comparative historical approach: they identify differences in pre- and postwar

engagement trends and endeavor to demonstrate the mechanisms by which military involvement produced the observed temporal changes. The major limitation of this historical framework for causal inference is that it treats war as a single exogenous shock and attributes any observed changes in national participatory trends to the war's direct and indirect influences (though for a more nuanced approach, see Crowley and Skocpol 2001). While this may be appropriate for conflicts such as World War II, which dominated American social and political life, applying this conceptual framework to a war such as Vietnam creates causal inference problems because the temporal shock of war is correlated with other significant social and political movements of the 1960s.

Instead, we reconceptualize war not as a single uniform national experience, but as a collection of county-level experiences that differ significantly across the nation. We then examine whether this cross-sectional variation in wartime experience across counties—measured as local casualty rates—correlates with variation in political and civic engagement across those same counties.

After a preliminary analysis establishing that local casualty rates capture variance in war-related effects, the article turns to its central task: analyzing the influence of unsuccessful, limited wars on political and civic engagement. Drawing on individual-level data from National Elections Studies and the Social Capital Benchmark Survey, as well as aggregate electoral turnout data at the county level, we show that citizens from communities that suffered high casualty rates in the Vietnam and Korean Wars were significantly less politically engaged in each conflict's wake than their peers from low-casualty communities. However, these citizens emerged from the war no more or less engaged in their communities and nongovernmental organizations than other Americans.

## War and American Political and Civic Engagement

Prior research has traced how major conflicts such as the World Wars and Civil War have produced both sharp and sustained increases in citizens' political engagement as well as greater public involvement in a myriad of nongovernmental civic organizations (Mettler 2002; Putnam 2000; Skocpol 1999; Skocpol, Ganz and Munson, 2000; Skocpol et al. 2002). This literature proposes two distinct mechanisms driving increased engagement, one driving changes in the political sphere, the other in the nonpolitical sphere.

Most analyses of increased engagement in the political realm emphasize the central role of expressive benefits. Successful wars can increase popular levels of trust in government, feelings of political efficacy and conceptions of civic duty, all of which motivate citizens to bear the costs of participation (Putnam 1993, 2000; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). By increasing the expressive benefits citizens derive from engaging in political life, victorious wars augment political participation.

Alternatively, while wars affect political participation by changing the national mood, they are linked to civic engagement writ large through the provision of tangible resources that can be put to use after the war is over. Conflicts that mass mobilize the public sector behind the war effort and forge public-private partnerships have the potential to spur civic voluntarism. They can create new and bolster existing civic organizations by broadly transmitting the civic skills necessary for a robust civil society (Skocpol et al. 2002; Stein and Russett 1980).

Prior scholarship has thus identified two separate linkages between war and subsequent participatory outcomes: (1) expressive benefits are linked to political engagement, and (2) resource provision is linked to nonpolitical engagement, such as associational life. In the wake of some wars, these mechanisms produce strong increases in political and nonpolitical engagement. However, in this article we argue that the consequences of each mechanism depend on a war's outcome and scale. The effect of a war on expressive benefits is contingent on whether it succeeds or fails, and a conflict's effect on resource provision is contingent on the level of mobilization required to wage it.

Looking first at variation in the outcome of a war, we argue that while a successful war may increase civic pride and trust in government, unsuccessful wars depress the expressive benefits citizens derive from participating in politics. Because citizens participate only when the expressive benefits they enjoy from affirming their allegiance to and efficacy within the political system exceed the costs of doing so (Downs 1957; Fiorina 1976; Riker and Ordeshook 1968), failed wars—far from spurring political activism—should undermine political engagement. Unsuccessful wars can reduce expressive benefits in at least two ways.<sup>1</sup> First, as salient manifestations of failed government policies, they can decrease popular evaluations of

<sup>1</sup>Our emphasis on how perceptions of a war's success or failure determines its consequences for citizens' subsequent patterns of political engagement echoes Feaver and Gelpi's argument (2004; see also Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009) that perceptions of success drive Americans' willingness to tolerate combat casualties.

governmental performance and competence. Second, a failed military action may undermine levels of popular trust in government. Indeed, scholars have explicitly linked the national experience in Vietnam with decreased levels of trust in national governing institutions (Citrin 1974; Miller 1974; Nye 1997; Sparrow 2002). Citizens with weaker evaluations of the federal government's performance and competence and lower levels of trust in government should logically derive fewer expressive benefits from actively engaging in politics and therefore should possess fewer incentives to participate than their peers.

Alternatively, the literature on social movements suggests that a costly, unsuccessful war may paradoxically increase political engagement by creating and fostering grassroots movements to end the conflict (Fendrich 2003; Useem 1973). Indeed, bloody foreign conflicts seem to be ready catalysts capable of helping many overcome the barriers to movement participation (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). Combat casualties, combined with changes in political opportunity structure, which they help create, could both increase the incentives to participate and make mobilization more feasible (Tarrow 1984).

However, while wars may initially spur social movements and hence augment participation, such movements are difficult to sustain. In the case of the Vietnam antiwar movement, McAdam and Su note that after a peak in 1969, the movement waned considerably, and "by the time the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January of 1973, the movement was largely moribund" (2002, 699). There is considerable uncertainty about what happens to movement participants after the initial movement ends. As posed by Useem, "do they migrate to new protest causes or return to less intensely political lives, perhaps withdrawing from politics altogether?" (1973, 25). As a result, while social movements have the potential to counter mechanisms decreasing political engagement, their ability to have a long-term positive effect on political activism, particularly once the movements die, is not certain.

We turn next to mobilization and its consequences for spurring nonpolitical engagement through the provision of new associational resources. Here, the crucial distinction is that just as it was "the way the Civil War was fought . . . [that] served to bolster federated voluntary activities" (Crowley and Skocpol 2001, 815, *italics in original*), it is *how* a war directly involves the citizenry that determines whether those citizens will gain new participatory resources. In mass mobilization wars, the involvement of large segments of the public in the war effort on the home front,

including many who otherwise would lack the skills and resources normally needed for participation, greatly strengthens the ranks of those equipped to engage in civic life in the postwar period. Mass mobilization both strengthens engagement in civil society in the aftermath of victorious conflicts and it may even increase nonpolitical engagement in the wake of a failed war. Evidence from the associational activities of Southern whites after the Civil War is consistent with this expectation. Skocpol et al.'s (2002) data from the Civil War era shows that while postwar associationalism increased most dramatically among the "victors"—northerners and southern blacks, associational memberships among southern whites also grew (see also Kage's analysis (2005) of post-World War II Japan).<sup>2</sup>

In small-scale wars, however, citizens are not mobilized behind the war effort in ways that provide new resources for organizational and associational engagement. Exposure to victory or defeat may affect an individual's political attitudes as described above, but this experience alone is not the equivalent of directly organizing, mobilizing, and participating in domestic war efforts. Regardless of the war's ultimate success or failure, if citizens do not experience these concrete activities during the war, the war will have little effect on their civic life. In short, when citizens don't participate in a war effort, we expect that the war will neither increase nor decrease their nonpolitical civic engagement.

### Testing the Theory: Korea and Vietnam

To test these theoretical expectations, we examine the effect of citizens' wartime experience with Vietnam and Korea on both their incentives to participate and on their actual levels of political and civic engagement. More specifically, we examine how the negative consequences of war are concentrated among citizens who experienced the costs of war most intensely through the lens of their local community.

Korea and Vietnam are excellent test cases for our theory because, in contrast to World War II and the Civil War, they both were less successful, low mobilization wars. Our theory predicts that these wars' ambiguous final results should lower political engagement. Without the unifying experience of national victory to bolster popular faith in government, the motive force behind earlier surges in postwar political engagement is absent. Indeed, Putnam explicitly

<sup>2</sup>See Skocpol et al. 2002 (147–50). Southern whites experienced a sharp decline in associational memberships during the war itself, but such memberships declined among northern whites as well.

identifies the absence of victory as the factor that prevented a boom in political engagement similar to the one that occurred in the wake of World War II from also following American involvement in Korea or Vietnam: "Most Americans in 1945 felt that the war had been a just one and that their terrible collective sacrifice—all those sons and daughters who would not come home—had been in some measure vindicated by victory. This was not a feeling that would be repeated in the 1950s in Korea or in the 1960s in Vietnam" (2000, 272). Instead, because exposure to the government's costly failed policies decreased the expressive benefits citizens gain by participating in politics, we expect political engagement to decrease.<sup>3</sup>

Our theory also predicts that because Vietnam and Korea did not mass mobilize society on a war footing, we should see no changes in postwar associational life. Without high levels of direct involvement in the war efforts, the major public-private partnerships between government, business, labor and civic associations, so prominent in 1917 and 1941, never materialized. As Skocpol has noted: "the aftermath of every previous war in American history brought rising fraternal enrollments, especially among elites, but not the aftermath of the war in Vietnam" (1999, 483). If mass mobilization is the engine that leads to postwar associational booms, then there is little reason to expect limited wars to fuel nongovernmental civic engagement.

## Variance in Experience with War

Just as Mettler (2002) argued that variation in individual experiences with the G.I. Bill matched variations in subsequent civic engagement, so we argue that variation in local experiences with war more generally should also affect subsequent political participation. Our approach is also similar in spirit to the work of Crowley and Skocpol (2001), who recognized that "effects of the Civil War" were not uniform across the states. Crowley and Skocpol operationalized Civil War effects as percent in Union armies and pension dollars per pensioner. In this article we operationalize effects of the Vietnam and Korean conflicts as county casualty rates—the per-capita rate of soldiers killed in an individual's own county.

<sup>3</sup>In a similar vein, Sparrow's analysis of the changing relationship between state and society after Vietnam argues that not only did Vietnam fail to spur increased engagement, but it was also an important contributor to "the growing reluctance of Americans to participate in or assist the government" (2002, 274).

A county's casualty rate is a strong measure of a local community's experience with war on two dimensions. First, casualties, particularly casualties suffered from one's own community, are one of the most important windows through which citizens are exposed to the costs of war. Indeed, an extensive literature has demonstrated the importance of local casualties in shaping political opinions and behaviors from support for war and its political leaders (Gartner, Segura, and Wilkening 1997; Gartner and Segura 2000; Kriner and Shen forthcoming) to congressional and presidential electoral outcomes (Carson et al. 2001; Gartner, Segura, and Barratt 2004; Grose and Oppenheimer 2007; Karol and Miguel 2007; Koch and Gartner 2005; Kriner and Shen 2007).

Second, local casualty rates may also serve as a proxy for local experience with the war more generally. For example, communities that suffered high casualty rates may have sent disproportionately more young men and women to war than other communities. Moreover, soldiers from these communities may well have been more likely to be assigned to dangerous occupations within the military and consequently had greater exposure to combat. If communities experience war through the eyes of their sons, daughters, and neighbors in uniform, then the local effects of war in high casualty-rate communities may be dramatically different from those in low-casualty communities.

To show that county casualty rates do capture variance in citizens' experience with major wars and to demonstrate that citizens' experience with war through the lens of their local community influences their foreign policy attitudes, we begin by analyzing an NES question asking respondents whether they were very worried (3), somewhat worried (2) or not worried at all (1) that the United States would become involved in another war. If our theory is correct, then respondents from counties that suffered high casualty rates in Vietnam or Korea should be more fearful of a future war than respondents from low-casualty communities. The ordered probit models in Table 1 assess this hypothesis.

In the first model, which examines attitudes in the decade immediately following the Vietnam War, the coefficient for respondents' local Vietnam casualty rate is positive as expected and statistically significant. Citizens who saw firsthand the human costs of the Vietnam War through the lens of their local community were more wary that the government would lead the nation into renewed hostilities than those Americans who did not experience the war as directly. To insure that citizens from these counties were not simply always more

TABLE 1 Relationship between County Casualty Rates and Fears of Future War

	1974–82	Pre 1966	Pre 1966
Vietnam Casualty Rate	.032* (.015)	–.016 (.019)	—
Korea Casualty Rate	—	—	.012 (.007)
Republican	.020 (.121)	.069 (.071)	.068 (.071)
Democrat	.169 (.112)	.231* (.069)	.230* (.069)
Education	–.094* (.024)	–.002 (.013)	–.001 (.013)
Income	–.018 (.038)	–.022 (.022)	–.023 (.022)
White	–.157 (.108)	.142 (.081)	.146 (.081)
Male	–.190 (.069)	–.325* (.036)	–.323* (.036)
Married	.037 (.078)	.099* (.048)	.010 (.048)
Age	–.001 (.002)	–.008* (.001)	–.008* (.001)
Own Home	–.111 (.097)	—	—
Length in Community	–.002 (.001)	—	—
% Nonwhite in County	.570 (.449)	.002 (.004)	.002 (.004)
Median Family Income in County	–.027 (.026)	–.055 (.041)	–.047 (.042)
% Unemployed in County	–6.750* (2.11)	–2.743 (1.652)	–2.797 (1.621)
Log-likelihood	–1245.003	–4026.821	–4032.323
N	1,232	4,228	4,235

All models estimated with state and year fixed effects; all models report robust standard errors clustered on county. All significance tests two-tailed. \* $p < .05$

fearful that war would erupt than other Americans, the second model replicates the analysis with pre-Vietnam era data. The relevant coefficient is now actually negative and statistically insignificant. Thus, citizens from communities that would later suffer high casualty rates in Vietnam were no more or less fearful of war breaking out before the Vietnam conflict; rather, this divergence emerged only after the war's conclusion.

Finally, in the third column we replicate an identical model using county-level casualty rates in Korea as the independent variable of interest. In this specification, we observe the same pattern that we did with Vietnam in the late 1970s. In the immediate aftermath of the Korean War, citizens from high-casualty communities were more fearful of renewed war than were their peers from low-casualty communities ( $p = .09$ ). These empirical tests, coupled with a large body of existing research, provide strong support for our use of local casualty rates as a proxy for citizens' divergent experiences with war. We now investigate the effect of local casualty rates on citizens' levels of political and civic engagement.

### The Immediate Effects of Vietnam on Political Participation

By using local casualty rates to capture variance in a war's effects on citizens, we can examine the influence

of citizens' local experiences with the Vietnam and Korean wars on their subsequent political engagement and participation. We begin with Vietnam. To investigate its immediate ramifications for citizens' levels of political engagement, we first analyze National Election Study (NES) survey results for the 10 years following the conflict's conclusion.

The NES affords an opportunity to explore Vietnam's effect on respondents' relationship with, and attitudes toward, the federal government along several dimensions. The first three models examine the effect of their community's experience with the war on respondents' incentives to participate in the political process—their evaluation of the federal government's performance, and trust in the national government. The next set of models explores the influence of local wartime experience on political engagement and participation directly by modeling the effect of local casualty rates on residents' interest in politics writ large and, most importantly, on citizens' propensity to vote.

In keeping with an extensive literature on the individual-level determinants of civic and political engagement, the models begin by controlling for a host of demographic characteristics known to affect rates of participation. Specifically, following Oliver (2000), the models include measures of each respondent's educational attainment (*Education*), family income (*Income*), race (*White*), gender (*Male*), age (*Age*), marital status (*Married*), home ownership (*Own Home*),

length of residence in the community (*Length in Community*), and partisan affiliation (*Republican* and *Democrat*).

In addition to these individual characteristics, the models also include several contextual control variables at the county level. Previous research suggests that poorer, economically depressed counties with greater concentrations of racial minorities may have borne a disproportionate share of the casualties in Vietnam. If so, without suitable controls, we cannot be sure that these communities' experience in Vietnam is producing any observed correlations, or whether other factors unfolding during the period—such as racial unrest, economic shocks, and the failure of Great Society programs—may also have depressed political engagement in precisely the same socioeconomically disadvantaged communities that bore disproportionately large shares of casualties. Accordingly, we control for each county's median income (*Median Family Income in County*), unemployment rate (*% Unemployed in County*), and percentage of residents who are not Caucasian (*% Nonwhite in County*).

The explanatory variable of interest is the casualty rate experienced by each respondent's county in the Vietnam War (*Vietnam Casualty Rate*).<sup>4</sup> All casualty data was obtained from the National Archives' recently updated Richard Coffelt, Richard Arnold, and David Argabright (COFFELT) database: Records with Unit Information on Military Personnel Who Died During the Vietnam Conflict. For each soldier who died in Vietnam, this database provides the name, unit, date of birth, date of death, and home city and state of record. The raw casualty tallies were converted to rates using population data from the 1970 census, which yielded measures of the number of casualties in each county per-thousand adult males aged 18–34.

Finally, because our analysis pools responses across surveys from multiple years, the models also include dummy variables for each survey year (Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998) as well as state fixed effects. Summary statistics for all variables and further details on the data used to construct these measures are available in online Appendix A.

## Results

Results from the NES analysis, summarized in Table 2, strongly suggest that the local effects of Vietnam

significantly dampened citizens' incentives to engage in politics and their actual levels of political participation. Our five models cover a wide range of respondents' political attitudes and behavior: (1) approval of *Federal Government Performance*; (2) *Trust in Federal Government*; (3) whether federal, state, or local government is least trusted (*Trust Federal Government Least*); (4) *Interest in Politics*; and (5) whether respondents *Voted in the Last Election*. Models 1, 2, and 4, which have ordinal dependent variables, were estimated by ordered probit analysis; models 3 and 5, which have binary dependent variables, were estimated using probit models. All models report robust standard errors clustered on county.

In our first model, examining respondents' evaluation of the federal government's performance on a 9-point ordinal scale (Table 2, col. 1), we find that evaluation of the federal government was adversely affected by the casualty rate in a respondent's county. Even after controlling for a host of demographic factors, respondents from counties that suffered disproportionate shares of the national sacrifice in Vietnam gave consistently lower evaluations of the federal government's performance than their peers.

In a pattern repeated across the models, the substantive effects of casualty rates were considerable. The average casualty rate suffered by U.S. counties in Vietnam was just under three soldiers killed per thousand men between the ages of 18 and 34. However, there is considerable variance around that mean. Over 225 counties experienced a casualty rate of one or fewer men killed per thousand, while over 100 counties suffered rates of more than 10 casualties per thousand. Simulations holding all other variables constant at their means or medians show that respondents from counties that suffered death rates of 11 men per-thousand were 6% more likely to give the federal government's performance one of the lowest three ratings on a 9-point scale than were respondents from counties with a casualty rate of 1-per-thousand (34% vs. 28%). This 10-casualties-per-thousand shift represents a three standard deviation increase in the local Vietnam casualty rate. Relative to the influence of other standard control variables, this effect is substantial. For example, the six percentage point shift is double the difference between men and women, and more than three times that produced by a two standard deviation increase in respondent education.

Perhaps more importantly, Vietnam's impact was not limited to respondents' immediate evaluations of the government's performance. Both of our Trust in Government Models (Table 2, cols. 2 and 3) suggest that not only did local casualty rates shape Americans'

<sup>4</sup>Because data on soldiers wounded in Vietnam and World War II are not available at the county level, we define casualties strictly as soldiers killed in a foreign theater.

**TABLE 2** Relationship between Vietnam Casualty Rates and National Election Study Measures of Political Participation, 1974–82

	Fed. Govt. Performance	Trust Fed. Govt.	Trust Fed Govt. Least	Interest in Politics	Voted in Last Election
Vietnam Casualty Rate	-.016* (.007)	-.007 (.004)	.040* (.019)	-.012* (.004)	-.016* (.007)
Republican	.132* (.054)	.182* (.049)	-.033 (.099)	.355* (.042)	.555* (.055)
Democrat	.093 (.049)	.203* (.048)	-.008 (.093)	.371* (.040)	.515* (.052)
Education	.018 (.012)	.038* (.010)	.013 (.021)	.221* (.010)	.228* (.012)
Income	-.023 (.021)	-.013 (.016)	.020 (.032)	.069* (.016)	.067* (.018)
White	-.064 (.095)	.132* (.057)	.030 (.082)	-.013 (.044)	.028 (.049)
Male	-.104* (.031)	.060* (.027)	-.057 (.058)	.289* (.028)	.062 (.036)
Married	-.060 (.041)	-.021 (.037)	.015 (.070)	.072* (.029)	.179* (.044)
Age	-.004* (.001)	-.000 (.001)	-.005* (.002)	.016* (.001)	.018* (.001)
Own Home	.020 (.045)	-.056 (.035)	.042 (.067)	.033 (.034)	.289* (.046)
Length in Community	.000 (.001)	.000 (.001)	.003* (.002)	-.000 (.000)	.004* (.001)
% Nonwhite in County	-.380* (.196)	-.809* (.166)	-1.464* (.347)	.116 (.179)	-.253 (.254)
Median Family Income in County	-.025* (.011)	.002 (.010)	-.008 (.026)	-.017 (.012)	-.015 (.015)
% Unemployed in County	-.531 (1.190)	-.249 (1.339)	-4.412 (2.847)	.600 (1.721)	1.246 (2.184)
Constant	—	—	.609 (.394)	—	-1.478* (.145)
Log-likelihood	-6689.531	-6319.407	-1517.260	-9188.843	-4615.307
N	4,172	7,853	2,334	7,553	8,056

All models estimated with state and year fixed effects; all models report robust standard errors clustered on county. All significance tests two-tailed. \* $p < .05$ .

judgments of the government's job performance, but they also influenced residents' trust in national governing institutions. In the Trust in Federal Government Model, the NES asked respondents on a 4-point scale how much they trusted the federal government. Consistent with the hypothesis that local experience with the human costs of Vietnam may have prompted respondents to become more disillusioned with and alienated from the federal government, the coefficient for Vietnam casualty rates is negative, though it narrowly misses conventional levels of statistical significance ( $p = .12$ ). The results from the binary Trust Federal Government Least Model add further evidence of a genuine link between the severity of a community's Vietnam War experience and its residents' levels of trust in the national government. Even after controlling for a host of individual- and county-level characteristics, this model strongly suggests that local casualty rates affected the probability of respondents having less faith in the federal government than in state and local governing institutions (Table 2, col. 3). First differences derived from simulations show that increasing the casualty rate from 1-per-thousand to 11-per-thousand (a three standard de-

viation increase), while holding all other variables constant at their means or medians, increased the probability of having the lowest level of trust in the federal government by over 15% (from 59% to 74%).

A great deal of existing scholarship on social capital and civic and political engagement places a premium on trust and norms of reciprocity both between private citizens and between citizen and state (Coleman 1990; Fukuyama 1995; Hetherington 1998; Putnam 1993, 2000).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, when coupled with decreased approval of the government's performance, decreased trust in government may lower the expressive benefits citizens stand to reap from engaging in the political process, which in turn should depress their levels of political engagement and participation. The results from our final two models are consistent with this hypothesis.

The Interest in Politics Model confirms expectations that respondents from high-casualty counties

<sup>5</sup>However, other scholars have found little evidence of a significant causal effect for levels of trust on political participation: see Brehm and Rahn (1997), Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), and Teixeira (1992).

were less engaged in politics, as measured by the variable's 4-point scale, than those from lower casualty communities. The relationship is both statistically and substantively significant; simulations suggest that a three standard deviation increase in a county's casualty rate raises the probability of a respondent expressing one of the two lowest levels of interest in politics by 5%. This estimated effect for casualties is only modestly smaller than the 6% point swing caused by a two standard deviation drop in family income. Education, however, remains a much more powerful predictor of respondents' political interest, as the casualty effect is only 40% of that produced by a one standard deviation increase in respondent education.

Finally, our Voted in Last National Election Model demonstrates that Vietnam experiences also influenced the quintessential act of democratic participation: voting. Even with the individual- and county-level controls included, the probit model yields a strong negative coefficient for local casualty rates. This strongly suggests that respondents from high-casualty communities were systematically less likely to vote in national elections in the years immediately following Vietnam than were their peers in lower casualty areas (Table 2, column 5). The estimated size of casualties' effect on voting is substantial. First differences holding all other variables constant at their means or medians suggest that a three standard deviation increase in a respondent's local casualty rate decreases the probability that he or she voted by over 6%, from 68% to 62%. This change in probability exceeds that produced by a two standard deviation increase in family income and is slightly more than half that generated by a one standard deviation increase in respondent education.

As a robustness check, because three of the five questions we analyzed were also asked by the NES *before* the war we are able to rerun the analyses with prewar data to insure that residents of these high casualty rate counties were not always less politically engaged than their peers. The models, presented in online Appendix B, reestimate the Trust in Federal Government, Interest in Politics and Voted in Last National Election Models with prewar data from the 1964 NES.<sup>6</sup> Each model finds no evidence of a

significant relationship between county casualty rates and political engagement, and in the Interest in Politics and Voting models, the relevant coefficients are actually positive.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, we are also able to examine the influence of variance in county casualty rates on electoral turnout at the aggregate level. If our theory emphasizing the causal importance of local war costs is correct, then a relationship between county casualty rates and turnout should only emerge during the war and it should dissipate after its conclusion. Accordingly, we analyze turnout data for over three decades of presidential elections from 1956 to 1988. For each presidential contest, we model the number of citizens voting in each county as a function of the number that voted in the previous presidential election, the county's casualty rate in Vietnam, and three county-level contextual controls: each county's unemployment rate, percentage of the population that was nonwhite, and educational attainment.<sup>8</sup> Results from this analysis are presented in Table 3 below.

Taken collectively, the additional round of analysis provides considerable, if not unconditional support for our theory.<sup>9</sup> Although in most years the casualty

<sup>7</sup>As a further robustness check, we collapsed both prewar and postwar NES data to perform a difference in differences analysis on changes in trust in government, interest in politics and patterns of voting at the county level. Through this differencing approach we are able to control for unmeasured county-level characteristics omitted from the previous analyses that could potentially be producing a spurious result. The results, available in online Appendix B, strongly suggest that, on all three dimensions, the decreases in political engagement and participation were most severe in counties that experienced high casualty rates in Vietnam.

<sup>8</sup>Turnout data was taken from ICPSR 13, General Election Data for the United States, 1950–90. For census demographic data we used the county data books included in ICPSR 2896, Historical, Demographic, Economic and Social Data: The United States, 1790–2000. Because the 1982 county data book did not include median years of school completed, we substituted the percentage of residents 25+ who had completed four or more years of college. Replicating the 1980s models instead with county median education from the 1970 census yielded virtually identical results. For the 1956 through 1968 elections, we used each county's casualty rate as of the 1968 elections as the independent variable of interest. For 1972 and all subsequent elections, we used each county's casualty rate as of the 1972 election as the dependent variable. Less than 100 U.S. soldiers died between the 1972 elections and the withdrawal of American combat troops from Vietnam in March of 1973.

<sup>9</sup>In all but one of the elections, the coefficient for a county's Vietnam casualty rate is negative, even before the war and a full decade afterwards. The consistency of the result is at least suggestive that counties that experienced high casualty rates in Vietnam may have been suffering decreases in political engagement throughout this period for reasons unrelated to the war, particularly before U.S. engagement in Vietnam began in earnest. However, in stark contrast to the wartime and immediate postwar election models, none of the prewar coefficients are statistically significant.

<sup>6</sup>The model specifications are exactly the same as those in Table 2 except for the exclusion of the length of residence in community variable, which the NES did not ask until 1968. The models (full results of which are reported in online Appendix B) were also reestimated for all pre-1966 surveys excluding the home ownership variable, which was only asked in the 1952 and 1964 surveys. Results are virtually identical and, most critically, all three casualty coefficients are statistically insignificant ( $p = .62, .79$  and  $.96$ , respectively).



TABLE 3 Effect of Vietnam Casualty Rates on County-Level Presidential Turnout, 1956–88

	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988
Coefficient (S.E.)	–66 (50)	–76 (60)	–36 (51)	–153 (57)	–107 (50)	–164 (51)	–55 (36)	6 (31)	–6 (37)
P-value	.19	.21	.48	<b>.01</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b>.00</b>	.13	.84	.87
Est. turnout effect	–.5%	–.6%	–.2%	–1.2%	–1.4%	–2.1%	–.7%	0%	0%

Each model regresses the number of voters in a county in that year's presidential election on the county's casualty rate in Vietnam, as well as the number who voted in that county in the preceding presidential election, the county's unemployment rate, percent of population that is nonwhite, and median educational attainment. Results for control variables not reported. Casualty coefficients in **bold** are statistically significant,  $p < .10$ , two-tailed test. The estimated turnout effect is generated by multiplying the coefficient by each county's Vietnam casualty rate, summing across counties and dividing by the total number that voted in that contest.

rate coefficients are negative, the only three that were statistically significant were in the last two war-time elections and in the election immediately following the war's conclusion. Equally importantly, the magnitude of the estimated relationship between a county's casualty rate and decreased turnout is much greater during the war and in the immediate postwar elections. The average decrease in overall turnout because of declining participation in high casualty-communities during the prewar years is about  $-.4\%$  per year.<sup>10</sup> In the three wartime elections, the average decrease in turnout generated by declining participation in high-casualty communities is  $-1.6\%$  per year. And after the war, the estimated turnout effect again declined to an average of  $-.2\%$  per year. As a result, while the evidence is suggestive that there may have been something afoot depressing turnout in counties that would later suffer high casualty rates in Vietnam even before the war, the additional analysis provides strong evidence that turnout in these counties decreased most dramatically in the last two wartime elections and in the first postwar contest.

### The Lingering Effects of Vietnam on Political and Nonpolitical Engagement

The preceding analyses explored the immediate impact of variance in local communities' Vietnam

War experiences on their inhabitants' assessments of and trust in government, interest in politics and patterns of political participation. However, the engagement measures included in the NES are limited, and consequently they afford little insight into the full range of Vietnam's influence on individuals' political and civic activities. Did the decline in trust, interest in politics and the general reevaluation of many citizens' relationship with their government wrought by Vietnam only affect voting? Or did the war also dampen other forms of political participation among citizens from areas that suffered disproportionately the conflict's human costs?

To answer these questions and examine the impact of local casualty rates on a wider range of participatory activities, the analysis exploits the rich array of data in the 2000 Social Capital Benchmark Survey (SCBS). The SCBS is comprised of both a national survey of over 3,000 individuals from over 1,100 counties and an intensive sample of more than 26,000 respondents from 41 communities spread across 29 states. We focus on four broad indices: electoral political participation, nonelectoral political participation, civic organizational participation, and charitable participation. The SCBS *Electoral Politics Index* comprises two measures of political participation—registering to vote and voting in national elections—a measure of respondents' political interest and two questions gauging levels of political knowledge. The *Non-Electoral Politics Index* tracks respondents' participation in a range of political activities from signing a petition to joining a political group to engaging in a rally, march, protest, or boycott.

The SCBS data also allow us to test whether low mobilization wars fail to significantly affect levels of nonpolitical civic activity. Because Vietnam did not mass mobilize the country on a war footing, citizens did not gain the extra experiences, skills, and

<sup>10</sup>These figures represent the estimated number of voters who stayed away from the polls as a result of local casualty rates (the number is generated by multiplying each county's casualty rate by the relevant coefficient and summing across counties) as a percentage of the total number of Americans who voted in that election.

resources that fostered greater postwar associational engagement in the wake of previous conflicts. We use two SCBS measures to test our theory. The *Organizational Activity Index* examines respondents' nonpolitical civic participation including involvement in civic groups and clubs, serving in leadership capacities within these organizations and participating in public meetings. Finally, the *Charitable Activity Index* assesses the scope of respondents' volunteering and financial contributions to a range of secular and religious charitable groups.<sup>11</sup>

For each of these four dependent variables, Table 4 estimates an OLS regression model virtually identical in specification to those in Table 2 above, with state fixed effects and standard errors clustered on county.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the casualty rate suffered by each respondent's home county in Vietnam, the models control for individuals' educational attainment, family income, race, gender, age, marital status, home ownership, and length of residence in the community. To control for community demographics, we again include measures of median family income, the unemployment rate and the percentage of the community that is nonwhite. Summary statistics for all variables are available in online Appendix C.

## Results

The SCBS analysis suggests that Vietnam had lingering consequences for political aspects of citizens' civic engagement, but not for their participation in nonpolitical activities. Consistent with the NES results in Table 2 showing an immediate negative impact of high Vietnam casualty rates on interest in politics and voting, our Electoral Participation Model finds that more than 25 years since the last American troops

evacuated Saigon, respondents from areas with higher Vietnam casualties remained less interested in politics and less likely to participate in them than their fellow citizens from other parts of the country.

That we continue to see a political participatory gap between high- and low-casualty communities 20 years after the Vietnam War ended may seem surprising. However, we should not conclude from this result that the conflict is continuing to *actively* depress engagement in these communities 20 years later. Indeed, our county-level turnout analyses suggest that the negative effects of the war were concentrated in the latter stages of the conflict itself and in its immediate aftermath. What our analysis suggests is that a participatory gap emerged in the aftermath of the Vietnam War between residents of high- and low-casualty communities, and subsequent events have not ameliorated that gap.<sup>13</sup> Other national forces almost certainly have affected aggregate levels of participation in the intervening years, but they have not eliminated the gap that developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s because they have not raised participation more in high-casualty communities than in low-casualty communities.

As in the NES results, the effect of local casualty rates on political participation is smaller than for other traditional predictors of engagement, though still substantial. For example, the decrease in political participation caused by a three standard deviation increase in a county's casualty rate is more than 60% of that produced by a one standard deviation increase in respondent income and is almost a third of that generated by a one standard deviation increase in respondent education.

<sup>11</sup>The specific variable names within the SCBS are ELECPOL2, PROTEST, MACHER, and CHARITY2. Each variable is a continuous index constructed according to the equations outlined in the SCBS codebook. The only exception is ELECPOL2, which only takes on 18 values between 0 and 7; accordingly we reestimated the analysis in column 2 of Table 5 with an ordered probit model which produced virtually identical results.

<sup>12</sup>The SCBS did not ask individuals for their partisan affiliation; hence these indicators are not included in the analysis. For the community-level income and percent minority controls, we used the SCBS' measures of *Mean Family Income in Community* and *% Nonwhite in Community*. We also added county-level unemployment (*% Unemployed in County*) from the 2000 census. Since the community sample comprises the vast majority of the observations, the models were also reestimated with community fixed effects and clustered standard errors with virtually identical results. Alternatively, the models were reestimated with just the national sample with similar results.

<sup>13</sup>To illustrate this dynamic, consider two hypothetical counties that both possessed 55% turnout rates in the 1964 election. The first county experienced high casualties in Vietnam and by 1976 its turnout rate had decreased to 50%. The second county did not suffer high casualties in Vietnam and its turnout rate in 1976 remained at 55%. If turnout in these counties remains unchanged, subsequent year by year models, such as those in Table 3, would show null results for the casualties variable. By contrast, an individual-level analysis in a future year would still show that, *ceteris paribus*, a respondent from the high-casualty county is less likely to vote on average than a respondent from the low-casualty county. The turnout gap between these counties is not increasing, but it does persist. This finding of a persistent gap in political engagement between citizens of communities that suffered high and low casualty rates in Vietnam is not unique. Indeed, in its duration it parallels research by Putnam (2000, 272) which suggests that Vietnam veterans, unlike veterans of previous wars, experienced greater isolation and social alienation for decades after the war's conclusion.

**TABLE 4** Relationship between Vietnam Casualty Rates and Social Capital Benchmark Survey Indices of Political and Nonpolitical Civic Engagement

	Electoral Politics Index	Nonelectoral Politics Index	Organizational Activity Index	Charitable Activity Index
Vietnam Casualty Rate	-.011* (.005)	-.014* (.006)	-.001 (.004)	.033 (.022)
Education	.205* (.006)	.188* (.007)	.147* (.005)	.609* (.020)
Income	.088* (.005)	.064* (.005)	.057* (.004)	.386* (.014)
White	.261* (.036)	-.147* (.036)	-.102* (.026)	-.024 (.090)
Male	.146* (.015)	.078* (.016)	-.054* (.013)	-.587* (.051)
Married	.058* (.018)	-.097* (.024)	-.013 (.014)	.589* (.052)
Age	.025* (.000)	-.002* (.001)	.002* (.000)	.011* (.002)
Own Home	.186* (.021)	.075* (.023)	.105* (.013)	.680* (.065)
Length in Community	.100* (.006)	.055* (.008)	.048* (.005)	.221* (.021)
% Nonwhite in Community	.254 (.161)	.315 (.228)	-.175 (.095)	-.798* (.293)
Mean Family Income in Community	.036 (.062)	-.086 (.106)	-.098* (.035)	-.445* (.127)
% Unemployed in County	-1.924* (.719)	-1.556 (1.248)	.192 (.527)	-1.281 (2.022)
Constant	.054 (.253)	.469 (.403)	-.517* (.144)	1.717* (.488)
R <sup>2</sup>	.35	.11	.12	.19
N	25,245	25,251	25,183	25,242

All models estimated using OLS regressions with state fixed effects and standard errors clustered on county. All significance tests two-tailed. \*p < .05

Moreover, the results from our Nonelectoral Political Participation Model suggest that the lingering effects of Vietnam were not limited to the electoral realm (Table 4, col. 2). Exposure to the costs of the war through the lens of their local community appears to have depressed citizens' willingness to engage government through both direct and indirect means. The statistically significant negative coefficient suggests that respondents from high-casualty areas were less likely to join political, ethnic or labor groups, sign petitions, or actively engage in organizations seeking governmental reform than respondents with identical personal and demographic characteristics from areas with less severe experiences in Vietnam. Substantively, the size of casualties' effect on nonelectoral forms of participation is again large; a 10-per-thousand increase in the county casualty rate decreases nonelectoral participatory activities by the same amount as a one standard deviation decrease in income levels and almost half as much as a one standard deviation decrease in respondent education.

Finally, our Civic Organization and Charitable Giving Models explore whether differences in county Vietnam casualty rates have also had consequences for nonpolitical forms of participation (Table 4, cols 3

and 4). Both models suggest that they have not. The coefficient for casualties' effect on civic organizational participation is substantively and statistically insignificant while the relevant coefficient in the Charitable Giving Model is actually positive.

The lack of significant negative effects for casualties on nonpolitical participation is consistent with our argument that when a war involves low mobilization, it fails to generate the types of participatory resources that citizens can transfer to the nonpolitical realm once the war is over. Put another way, in low-mobilization wars, citizens do not build as many "human links" between each other as they do when they share together the nation's war efforts (Crowley and Skocpol 2001, 818). Without these community links the war does not touch nonpolitical civic life, and when the war ends its effects are restricted to the political realm.

The analyses in Tables 2 and 4 strongly suggest that the most important lasting ramifications of the Vietnam War for the vibrancy of American civic life were concentrated in the political realm. By reshaping the relations between governors and governed and depressing the expressive benefits citizens derived from engaging government, exposure to the human

costs of a failed war dampened political participation in high-casualty communities.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, the very innovativeness of the SCBS measures means that we are unable to replicate the analyses in Table 4 with prewar data. However, an additional robustness check is possible. Given the long time lag between the war and the SCBS, we would expect the effects of local wartime experience to be greatest on long-tenured residents who lived in their current communities during the Vietnam era. To test this hypothesis, we divided all respondents into two groups—those who had lived in their current community for 20-plus years and those who had not—and reestimated the two political participation models from Table 4. Consistent with expectations, this reanalysis finds that the negative effect of casualty rates on political engagement was on average almost 50% larger for long-tenured respondents than it was among respondents who were more recent arrivals to their communities. Full results and additional discussion are available in online Appendix C.

## Korea and Patterns of Political Engagement

The preceding analyses found strong evidence, across data sets and specifications, of a negative correlation between a community's casualty rate in Vietnam and its citizens' subsequent patterns of political engagement. The analyses also confirmed our expectation that small scale wars have little influence on nonpolitical civic engagement. However, generalizing from these models to other wars' likely effects on engagement may be complicated by the tumultuous times of the 1960s and 1970s. Our use of local casualty rates to measure the war's effects partially solved this problem by allowing us to isolate Vietnam's effects on the hardest hit communities from the more general forces that may have decreased the base levels of engagement for the country as a whole over the period. But it is possible that differential wartime experiences may not have the same consequences for political engagement in less chaotic political environments.

To explore this possibility, the analysis shifts focus from Vietnam to the Korean War. If experience with the human costs of failed wartime policies always depresses political engagement in high-casualty

communities, we should observe similar patterns in the aftermath of the Korean Conflict.<sup>15</sup>

Beginning in 1956, the NES reported respondents' home county, and over the next five surveys the NES asked many of the same questions examined in Table 2. This affords the opportunity to examine whether variance in local casualty rates in the Korean War (*Korea Casualty Rate*) also depressed respondents' levels of trust in government, interest in politics, and propensity to vote. Except for the exclusion of home ownership and length of residence measures, which were not asked in this earlier period, model specifications remain identical to those in the Vietnam era. Results are summarized in Table 5 below.

## Korea Results

Beginning with an analysis of trust in government, the first model in Table 5 suggests an important difference between the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. While the estimated relationship between a respondent's community's casualty rate in Korea and his or her trust in government is negative, the coefficient is not statistically significant. Unlike in the Vietnam models, there is little empirical evidence that respondents from counties that suffered disproportionately large casualty rates in Korea held lower levels of trust in the national government than their peers from lower casualty communities.

However, the Interest in Politics and Voting Models both show strong relationships between local casualty rates and respondents' political engagement that parallel those observed in the Vietnam era analysis. In the Interest in Politics Model, the coefficient for a county's Korean War experience is negative and

<sup>14</sup>The SCBS also contains a measure of trust in the federal government. Replicating the Trust in Government Model in column 2 of Table 2 using SCBS data also yields a strong, negative, statistically significant correlation between local casualty rates and trust.

<sup>15</sup>The Vietnam results also offer little insight into whether the observed negative relationship between citizens' local casualty rates and depressed political engagement characterize all conflicts, or just non-mass mobilizing, unsuccessful wars. If local casualties and direct experience with the costs of war inherently diminish participation, then we should observe similar dynamics after all major conflicts. If, however, local casualties and intense community involvement in war only depress engagement when they compel citizens to reevaluate negatively their relationship with the government and lower the expressive benefits of participation, then casualties suffered in successful conflicts enjoying broad-based popular support should not stifle participation. To test for this alternative hypothesis, we replicated our Korean War analyses including an additional variable—each county's casualty rate in World War II. Consistent with our expectations, citizens from high-casualty communities in the successful World War II conflict did not emerge from the war with decreased patterns of political engagement as compared to their fellow citizens from low-casualty communities; if anything, our analysis suggests a possible positive relationship between county casualty rates and the propensity to vote. For a full presentation and discussion of the results, see online Appendix D.

**TABLE 5** Relationship between Korean Casualty Rates and National Election Study Measures of Political Participation, 1956–64

	Trust Fed Govt.	Interest in Politics	Voted in Last Election	Voted in Pres Election
Korea Casualty Rate	-.003 (.006)	-.022* (.011)	-.011 (.010)	-.019* (.008)
Republican	-.002 (.099)	.373* (.089)	.493* (.081)	.514* (.081)
Democrat	.069 (.097)	.260* (.081)	.570* (.072)	.534* (.075)
Education	.037* (.014)	.157* (.017)	.160* (.014)	.165* (.017)
Income	.042 (.025)	.133* (.027)	.189* (.026)	.154* (.027)
White	-.060 (.114)	.005 (.094)	.280* (.096)	.293* (.102)
Male	.132 (.047)	.390* (.045)	.211* (.050)	.166* (.054)
Married	-.091 (.051)	-.013 (.065)	.110* (.057)	.158* (.060)
Age	-.003* (.002)	.011* (.002)	.018* (.002)	.015* (.002)
% Nonwhite in County	.122 (.554)	.018 (.654)	-.190 (.451)	-.028 (.475)
Median Family Income in County	-.054 (.047)	-.103 (.061)	-.158* (.061)	-.163* (.067)
% Unemployed in County	2.673 (2.247)	-.326 (2.674)	-2.881 (1.738)	-2.108 (1.722)
Constant	—	—	-1.699* (.296)	-1.711* (.290)
Log-likelihood	-2415.961	-2848.739	-2812.643	-2078.079
N	2657	2444	5651	4284

All models estimated with state and year fixed effects; all models report robust standard errors clustered on county. All significance tests two-tailed. \* $p < .05$

statistically significant, while the control variables all largely accord with theoretical expectations. Moreover, the relationship is substantively important. As in Vietnam, there was considerable variance in the distribution of Korean War casualties across the country. For example, over 300 counties experienced casualty rates of fewer than .5 casualties per 10,000 residents while more than 100 counties suffered casualty rates exceeding 5.5 battle deaths per 10,000 residents. Simulations holding all other variables constant at their means or medians reveal that such a 5-casualties-per-10,000-residents shift in a county's casualty rate—a one standard deviation increase—raised the probability of a respondent reporting one of the two lowest categories of interest in politics by 4% (from 25% to 29%). Relative to other traditional explanatory variables the size of the effect is considerable; it almost equals that produced by a one standard deviation decrease in respondent income and is roughly half that generated by a one standard deviation drop in respondent education.

In addition to affecting citizens' interest in politics, the experience of a respondent's community in the Korean conflict also appears to have influenced his or her probability of voting in national elections. In the Voting in all Elections Model (Table 5, col. 3), the coefficient for the county's Korean casualty rate is

negative as expected, though it fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. However, if variance in local wartime experiences did influence citizens' voting patterns, the impact should be strongest in presidential elections, which normally mobilize a greater number of less engaged voters particularly susceptible to pressures simply to stay home. When narrowing our scope to the three presidential election year surveys in our sample, the estimated negative coefficient for Korean casualties is even larger and is statistically significant. Simulations suggest that a one standard deviation increase in a county's casualty rate depressed respondents' probability of voting by almost 4% (83% to 79%). This decrease almost exactly parallels that caused by a one standard deviation decrease in respondent income and is almost half that produced by a one standard deviation drop in respondent education.

Shifting to the aggregate level again bolsters our confidence that the observed negative effect of local Korean wartime experience on voting is real. Drawing on county turnout data from seven presidential election results from 1940 to 1964, we again modeled each county's vote total in an election year as a function of the county total in the preceding election, its casualty rate in the Korean War, and three county-level controls: measures of its unemployment rate,

**TABLE 6** Effect of Korean Casualty Rates on County-Level Presidential Turnout, 1940–64

	1940	1944	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964
Coefficient (S.E.)	–11 (9)	–3 (6)	–8 (7)	–37 (23)	–2 (8)	–13 (14)	–9 (11)
P-value	0.24	0.61	0.26	<b>0.10</b>	0.75	0.37	0.43
Est. turnout effect	–0.1%	0.0%	–0.1%	–0.4%	0.0%	–0.1%	0.0%

Each model regresses the number of voters in a county in that year's presidential election on the county's casualty rate in Korea, as well as the number who voted in that county in the preceding presidential election, the county's unemployment rate, percent of population that is nonwhite, and median educational attainment. Results for control variables not reported. Casualty coefficients in **bold** are statistically significant,  $p < .10$ , two-tailed test. The estimated turnout effect is generated by multiplying the coefficient by each county's Korean War casualty rate, summing across counties and dividing by the total number that voted in that contest.

racial composition, and median educational attainment.<sup>16</sup> Results are presented in Table 6 above.

The aggregate results again suggest that local experience with the Korean War, as measured by a county's casualty rate, decreased turnout in presidential elections.<sup>17</sup> In strong accordance with our theoretical expectations, the coefficient for Korean War casualties in 1952, the only election held during the war itself, is by far the largest coefficient for any year; indeed, it is the only statistically significant relationship observed across the seven elections. The estimated size of the casualties effect in 1952 is also by far the largest, more than tripling that for any other electoral contest.

Substantively, the overall size of the estimated decrease in turnout due to Korea is modest, particularly in comparison to the large effects for Vietnam. Our analysis suggests that turnout in 1952 decreased only by about a half a percentage point as a result of war casualties. However, the war's estimated effect on turnout in high-casualty communities was considerable and, even at the national level, our model sug-

gests that in 1952 the war caused more than a quarter million voters to stay home from the polls.

## Conclusion

Prior research has shown that war provides a boost to both political and nonpolitical engagement when it is successful and when it involves mass mobilization. However, when wars are limited and unsuccessful, our analysis shows that they can disrupt and fundamentally alter Americans' subsequent patterns of political engagement. By examining variance in communities' experience with war as measured by their local casualty rates, we were able to isolate the significant, negative effects of the Korean and Vietnam Wars on political participation. Previous scholarship has speculated that Korea and Vietnam were somehow very different from their predecessors in terms of their lasting consequences for the vibrancy of democracy in America. In this article, we demonstrate empirically that not only did these more limited, unsuccessful conflicts fail to trigger the increased levels of political and civic engagement observed in the wake of the Civil and two World Wars, but they also actually depressed political engagement and participation in communities that experienced their costs most acutely. We hope that our findings will spur more cross-national analysis of the relationships between war and civic engagement, as limited conflicts with murky military outcomes are far more prevalent than the major wars ending in unconditional victory featured in almost all prior analyses of war and civic engagement.

Moreover, our emphasis on local casualty rates reminds scholars that wars are not monolithic events that affect all citizens equally. Thus, long literatures in both American politics and International Relations asserting simple causal claims linking mounting national casualties to decreased support for the

<sup>16</sup>Election return data from 1940 to 1964 was taken from ICPSR 8611, Electoral Data for Counties in the United States: Presidential and Congressional Races, 1840–1972. In addition to dropping counties with missing data, our analysis also grappled with several potential errors in ICPSR 8611. Calculating the change in total voters from the preceding to the current election revealed a number of very large outliers—alleged changes in turnout of hundreds of thousands of voters over the course of a single electoral cycle within a county. To control for these outliers, we estimated our models dropping counties greater than the 99<sup>th</sup> and less than the 1<sup>st</sup> percentile in terms of the change in turnout from the preceding to the current election. Using a similar methodology in the Vietnam analysis yields virtually identical results to those presented in Table 3.

<sup>17</sup>Surprisingly the coefficient for a county's casualty rate in Korea is negative throughout the years surveyed, even before the war. The consistent negative relationship suggests that turnout may have been declining, albeit very slightly, in communities that would suffer high casualty rates in Korea even before the conflict began. Yet, as in the Vietnam analyses, none of the prewar casualties coefficients are statistically significant.

president and his military policies (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Eichenberg 2005; Eichenberg, Stoll, and Lebo 2006; Gartner and Segura 1998; Klarevas 2002; Larson 1996; Mueller 1973, 1994) and to increased pressure on democratic regimes to eschew costly military policies more generally (Maoz and Russett 1993; Morgan and Campbell 1991; Morgan and Schwebach 1992; Ray 1995; Russett 1990; Russett and Oneal 2001) should recognize more explicitly that the effects of casualties are far from uniform across society. If casualties are concentrated disproportionately among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups with *ex ante* lower rates of participation, and if the imposition of these human costs only further dampens their political engagement, then the political costs casualties impose on leaders and the democratic brake they exert on military policymaking may be more nuanced than previously supposed.

Finally, our findings raise important questions about the possible negative effects of the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on future American civic engagement. A number of scholars have debated whether September 11 and the War on Terror will provide a unifying surge of patriotism capable of regenerating America's waning civic life in a mold similar to previous national martial endeavors (Galston 2001; Sander and Putnam 2002; Skocpol 2003). Our analysis suggests a pessimistic prediction.

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