

# Conscription, Inequality, and Partisan Support for War

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## Abstract

While recent scholarship suggests that conscription decreases support for military action, we argue that its effect is contingent both on a draft's consequences for inequality in military sacrifice and on partisanship. In an experiment examining public support for defending South Korea, we find that reinstating the draft significantly decreases support for war among Democrats; however, this effect is diminished if the draft reduces inequality in sacrifice. Support for war among Republicans, by contrast, responds neither to information about conscription nor its inequality ramifications. A follow-up experiment shows that conscription continues to significantly decrease support for war, even in the context of a retaliatory strike against a foreign state that targeted American forces. Moreover, partisanship and the inequality ramifications of the draft continue to moderate the relationships between conscription and public opinion. More broadly, our study emphasizes the importance of examining how Americans evaluate foreign policy–relevant information through partisan lenses.

## Keywords

domestic politics, use of force, belief structure, war, casualties

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Identifying the conditions under which citizens in a democracy will support a costly military conflict is of paramount importance to scholars and policy makers alike (inter alia: Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Klarevas 2002; Russett 1990). As such, a voluminous literature has evolved over the last forty years exploring the drivers of Americans' support for war. Scholars have identified a host of factors that shape citizens' military policy assessments, including the nature of elite discourse (Berinsky 2007, 2009; Brody 1991; Zaller 1992), combat casualties (Gartner 2008; Gartner and Segura 1998; Mueller 1973), beliefs about the mission's prospects for success (Eichenberg 2005; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009), and the type of policy objective for which American troops are placed in harm's way (Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Jentleson 1992). Most recently, several studies have expanded the scope of analysis to include the manpower policies employed to recruit the nation's fighting force, specifically whether the army sent into battle is comprised of conscripts or exclusively of volunteers (Bergan 2009; Erikson and Stoker 2011; Horowitz and Levendusky 2011; Levy 2013; Vasquez 2005).

Kant's ([1795] 1983) first definitive article for perpetual peace argued that democratic publics would be reluctant to rush into armed conflict, knowing that doing so would be "decreeing for themselves all the calamities of war," most specifically its costs in blood and treasure. In the era of mass citizen armies whose ranks were largely filled via conscription, such pressures may have been particularly acute as the costs of war fell diffusely on wide swaths of the populace (Porter 1994). For example, describing the American experience during the Civil War, Drew Gilpin Faust (2008, xiii) has argued that "death's threat, its proximity, and its actuality became the most widely shared of the war's experiences." When risks are widely shared, public apprehension is great, and support for war is reduced. However, by the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in the United States, the advent of the all-volunteer force (AVF), a revolution in military technology allowing aggressive casualty minimization, and an increasing reliance on private military contractors have insulated many Americans from the direct costs of war (Avant 2005; Avant and Sigelman 2010). By changing the costs a rational actor expects to pay from a given policy course, the manpower mechanisms used to recruit and sustain a fighting force, particularly the presence or absence of conscription, may significantly influence a democratic public's willingness to support going to war.

While the renewed emphasis on manpower policies is important, we identify two lacunae in the literature. First, because they shape how a war's costs are allocated across society, manpower mechanisms have important implications for social inequality in military sacrifice. Throughout the twentieth century, military and civilian policy makers were influenced by domestic political pressures and egalitarian norms of shared sacrifice when designing conscription mechanisms (Chambers 1987; Flynn 1993). Moreover, even in the era of the AVF, inequality concerns continue to shape Americans' casualty sensitivity and willingness to back costly military policies (Kriner and Shen 2010). As a result, the influence of conscription on public support for war may be conditional on whether it succeeds or fails in reducing

inequality in sacrifice. Second, prior research has acknowledged that some citizens may be more affected by conscription than others and has suggested that self-interest is the key moderating factor. However, given the normative inequality considerations raised by conscription, we argue that political partisanship will play an important role in moderating the influence of the draft on Americans' support for military action.

This article proceeds in five parts. The following section briefly reviews the relationship between public opinion and conscription in the United States and demonstrates the historical importance of equality norms. The second section explicates the theory in greater detail, proposing two pathways through which conscription can influence citizens' cost-benefit calculations concerning war: by exposing a greater number of people to the risks of military service and by addressing (or failing to address) concerns about social inequality in sacrifice. We also posit that contemporary Americans evaluate information about conscription mechanisms and their inequality consequences through distinctly partisan lenses. The third section describes and presents the results of an original survey experiment conducted on a nationally representative sample of 1,200 Americans. It shows that both the presence or absence of conscription and its consequences for inequality influence support for a hypothetical military mission to defend South Korea against aggression from the North; however, political partisanship critically moderates the influence of both factors. The fourth section presents results from a follow-up experiment examining whether similar dynamics emerge in support for a military action more immediately connected to vital national interests: a retaliatory strike against a state sponsor of terrorism against American forces abroad. The final section concludes.

## The American Experience with Conscription

In his seminal *History of the United States Army*, Russell Weigley (1984, 496) argued, "The historic preoccupation of the Army's thought in peacetime has been the manpower question: how, in an unmilitary nation, to muster adequate numbers of capable soldiers quickly should war occur." For most of its early history, to meet its manpower needs the United States eschewed national conscription and relied instead on a decentralized system of state militias. From the Revolution up until World War I, the draft, when it was employed, was limited and designed primarily to encourage volunteers (Levi 1997). Nevertheless, throughout its history whenever the United States has grappled with conscription, concerns about inequality have risen to the fore of the national debate.

The Civil War produced the first national draft, which provoked considerable outcry and even violence. Opponents of conscription assassinated thirty-eight officers of the Provost Marshall General charged with implementing the draft and wounded sixty more. Particularly odious to many was the inequity explicitly built into the draft mechanism. The first Civil War draft allowed individuals to pay a US\$300 commutation fee to avoid military service for three years. The resulting backlash

culminated in open rioting, most famously in New York City, which erupted in open class and racial warfare (Bernstein 1990). In the second Civil War draft, the protection afforded by commutation was reduced to apply only to the current draft, and by 1864 President Lincoln was compelled to eliminate commutation (McPherson 1988). Throughout the Civil War, however, individuals wishing to avoid service were permitted to hire a substitute to serve in their place. The end result was that conscription directly reached only a small segment of the population, and only 2 percent of those who served in the Union Army were draftees (Perri 2008).

The outbreak of World War I led to the creation of the selective service system. As Flynn (1993, 7) notes, the very name captures a fundamental tension faced by policy makers: how to balance the desire to selectively recruit military manpower in the most efficient way possible against widespread public norms of equity in service. For example, skilled workers were more economically valuable on the home front than in uniform; however, bowing to political pressure, President Wilson rejected blanket occupational deferments for fear that widespread exemptions would undermine public support for the draft (Chambers 1987).

The appearance of fairness and equality in manpower policy mechanisms remained of paramount importance to the Roosevelt administration throughout World War II (WWII). Courting popular support for the peacetime draft, President Roosevelt emphasized its compatibility with egalitarian norms: “[the draft bill] has broadened and enriched our basic concepts of citizenship. Besides the clear and equal opportunities, we have set forth the underlying duties, obligations and responsibilities of equal service” (quoted in Flynn 1993, 2). The implementation of the draft fluctuated over time in response to public concerns about fairness. For example, whereas early drafts provided some protections for professional baseball players, by 1943 all professional athletes were reclassified as “nonessential” and eligible for conscription (Flynn 1993, 62).

The draft was again used to provide manpower for the Korean conflict; however, the smaller scale of the Korean era mobilization allowed for significantly more exemptions and deferments than the WWII era draft. And while the draft continued to operate throughout the 1950s, a shrinking army coupled with a population boom allowed the system of exemptions and deferments to grow considerably (Flynn 2002). This all but ensured that concerns over equity and fairness would again rise to the fore.

Whereas public support for the draft remained high throughout WWII, Korea, and the periods of peace following each war, when the Johnson administration turned to the draft to recruit forces for a major expansion of the war in Vietnam, public attitudes toward conscription soured in tandem with support for the war itself. Many critics of the draft emphasized the stark inequalities in who was drafted and who escaped service in their calls for a new manpower policy. Echoing these concerns, George Reedy, a confidant of President Johnson and a member of the Marshall Commission appointed to study alternatives to the current draft, supported a draft lottery, in large part because he believed that its more egalitarian character would minimize

equity concerns (Flynn 1993, 197). A Gallup survey conducted in 1966, when support for the current draft system was still high, showed only 32 percent of Americans favored replacing the current draft with a lottery system. However, among those who supported the lottery, concerns about inequality in the current draft were of paramount importance. In an open-ended follow-up question, 49 percent of lottery proponents independently volunteered concerns about inequality as the chief factor motivating their support for a change.<sup>1</sup> The lottery would eventually be instituted under President Nixon in December 1969, but it was unable to stem the tide of public animus toward the draft. Nixon ended the draft in 1973, and the United States has relied on an AVF ever since.

The AVF remains popular with the American public. Yet, military leaders have periodically raised concerns about the capacity of the AVF to meet the nation's manpower needs. This concern was particularly acute at the height of the Iraqi insurgency in 2005 to 2007, as military recruiters repeatedly failed to meet their manpower targets. Stretched to the limit by dueling wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army was forced to issue stop-loss orders to force those in theater who had completed their service obligations to remain in uniform for the entire period of their unit's deployment. Military recruiting standards were lowered to expand the pool of potential targets, and significant financial inducements were used, including quick-ship bonuses for those willing to expedite their entry into basic training as well as significant reenlistment bonuses (Korb and Duggan 2007). Manpower costs rose meteorically, echoing the fears of many early opponents of the AVF.

The manpower crisis of the mid-2000s eventually waned, first with the onset of the global financial crisis, which made it much easier for the military to meet its recruitment goals, and then with the gradual drawdown of the war in Iraq (McMichael 2008). However, a string of contemporary crises across the globe—the Islamic State ascendant in Iraq, anarchy in Libya, a resurgent Russia and crisis in Ukraine, and continued difficulties in Afghanistan and Pakistan—has again raised questions about the military's capacity to mobilize the requisite manpower to meet a range of threats and challenges. Will Americans accept a return to conscription if military necessity requires it? And is the willingness to accept conscription contingent on the degree to which manpower systems meet democratic norms of egalitarianism and shared sacrifice?

## **Inequality and the Cost–Benefit Calculation of Conscription**

While previous scholarship has identified several mechanisms through which conscription might affect public opinion, most analyses conclude that the draft lowers support for war by raising the costs many Americans stand to pay should the nation go to war. The reinstitution of a draft would significantly broaden the number of Americans likely to be directly affected by the prospect of military service and battlefield losses. Whereas the AVF insulates most citizens from direct exposure to these costs, conscription spreads the risk more evenly across the country (Kester

1986; Moskos 1970). This, in turn, affects individuals' cost-benefit calculations by increasing the probability that they, or those they know, will have to fight (Vasquez 2005). Prior analyses have shown that Americans with direct personal or community connections to the men and women fighting and dying in America's wars see their costs more acutely and hold different policy preferences than those Americans who are more insulated from a conflict's human toll (Althaus, Bramlett, and Gimpel 2012; Davenport 2014; Gartner 2008; Gartner, Segura, and Wilkening 1997; Kriner and Shen 2010). This leads to the expectation that conscription should decrease support for war by increasing the costs a rational citizen expects to incur from a military response.

Yet, the probability that they or their loved ones may have to fight and die in a foreign war are not the only costs Americans may consider when deciding whether or not to back a military response to a foreign crisis. Rather, more than a century of experience with conscription mechanisms strongly suggests that Americans also care about whether the human costs of war are borne equally across all segments of society.<sup>2</sup> Even in the contemporary context of the war on terror, recent research demonstrates that how the costs of war are borne across society significantly shapes Americans' willingness to support a range of future military endeavors. In an experimental analysis, Kriner and Shen (2010) find that respondents informed of socioeconomic inequality in sacrifice in prior wars were significantly more casualty phobic across a range of hypothetical mission types than those not informed of inequality.

Depending on their design, conscription mechanisms can significantly reduce inequality in sacrifice. Under the AVF, the United States has experienced levels of inequality in sacrifice in Iraq and Afghanistan significantly larger than those observed in Vietnam and Korea. And even within the Vietnam War, the shift to the draft lottery in December 1969 appears to have significantly decreased socioeconomic inequality in casualties (Kriner and Shen 2010).

As a result, citizens' cost-benefit calculations in response to conscription may be more complicated than previously acknowledged. If a draft will reduce inequality, this may mitigate the negative impact of the draft on war support. However, if citizens are informed that the draft is unlikely to ameliorate inequality in military sacrifice, then this may only exacerbate the negative impact of conscription on public support for the use of force.

### *The Moderating Role of Political Partisanship*

Undoubtedly, the influence of the draft on citizens' wartime cost-benefit calculations will vary across individuals. For instance, some Americans may be unaffected by conscription or may even become more likely to support the use of force when they learn of a draft, because they believe this signals that vital national interests are in play (Moskos 2001). However, most research has focused on the moderating role of self-interest. A draft spreads the risks of combat more evenly across society, but

some citizens will bear these increased risks more acutely than others. As a result, past scholarship has argued that the effect of the draft should be concentrated among those most likely to be directly affected by it, namely, the young and parents with children (Bergan 2009; Erikson and Stoker 2011; Horowitz and Levendusky 2011). The logic underlying this expectation is sound; yet, in many other policy areas from health care to taxation systems, self-interest often appears only loosely related to Americans' policy preferences (e.g., Bartels 2005; Hacker and Pierson 2011; Sears et al. 1980).

We hypothesize, instead, that political partisanship is the key factor moderating the relationships between manpower policy and support for the use of force. Specifically, we argue that Democrats and Republicans will respond to information about conscription and its ramifications for social inequality in different ways. Studies of wartime public opinion have long explored the presence or absence of partisan divides in war support (Jacobson 2007, 2010; Larson 1996; Verba et al. 1967; Zaller 1992). More recently, scholars have begun to emphasize the importance of the partisan lenses through which Americans receive and process information about developments in foreign theaters.<sup>3</sup> For example, survey data show that respondents' knowledge of even an "objective" indicator, such as the number of casualties the United States had suffered in the Iraq War, is in large part a function of partisanship (Berinsky 2007). Similarly, Gaines et al. (2007) find that how citizens interpret the meaning of basic facts, such as the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, is also significantly influenced by partisan allegiances.<sup>4</sup>

In a similar vein, we argue that Democrats and Republicans may respond in quite different ways to military manpower policies and their inequality ramifications, even in a much less explicitly politicized setting than attitudes toward the Iraq War. Despite the old adage that politics stop at the water's edge, there is good reason to expect that partisanship remains a salient lens through which Americans view and evaluate policy-relevant information in military matters. A central tenet of the venerable Almond–Lippman view (Almond 1950; Lippmann 1922) is that the public is largely a *tabula rasa* on questions of military policy. Whereas most citizens have immediate experiences on which to draw when formulating their domestic policy preferences, on questions of foreign policy most lack direct experience or knowledge. As a result, when confronted with new information concerning a military venture, citizens often rely heavily on their partisan predispositions to process it and incorporate it into their policy preferences. Failing to account for partisan processing may obscure politically important differences in the dynamics underlying Americans' willingness to support the use of force.

Drawing on past scholarship on partisan ideologies, including their differences on foreign policy (e.g., Gerring 1998; Reichley 2000; Mandelbaum and Schneider 1978; McCormick and Witkopf 1990), we posit two hypotheses. First, we argue that Democrats will be more sensitive to the presence or absence of conscription than Republicans when forming their military preferences. Particularly since 9/11, the Republican Party has consistently embraced a more aggressive military posture than

the Democratic Party. For example, a 2010 Pew Global Attitudes Project survey asked Americans whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "It is sometimes necessary to use military force to maintain order in the world." A full 50 percent of Republicans "completely agreed" that force is sometimes necessary. By contrast, only 22 percent of Democrats expressed the same level of certitude.<sup>5</sup> In the specific context of a North Korean attack on South Korea—the hypothetical scenario described in the next section on which our first experiment was based—a CNN poll taken shortly before our experiment went into the field showed that 68 percent of Republicans would back military action to defend South Korea versus only 52 percent of Democrats.<sup>6</sup> As such, we argue that Republicans in the mass public will both be more supportive of the use of force in general, particularly when the proposed military action is closely tied to the national interest, and less influenced by information about its likely costs, such as the return of conscription.

Second, we argue that Democrats will also be more responsive than Republicans to information about the inequality ramifications of military manpower policies. Given the Democratic Party's historical emphasis on redressing socioeconomic inequality, the effect of conscription on Democratic respondents' willingness to support a military venture should be conditional on the draft's consequences for inequality in military sacrifice. Republicans, by contrast, have few partisan incentives to adjust their support of military action in response to information about inequality.

## **Conscription, Inequality, and Support for War: A Survey Experiment**

Now forty years removed from the end of the Vietnam era draft, it is all but impossible to assess the potential influence of changing manpower policies and their broader social consequences on contemporary public support for war using observational data. Instead, to investigate these dynamics, we embedded a survey experiment within a nationally representative online survey. While the long absence of an American military draft may raise questions about external validity, periodic calls for reinstituting the draft and arguments for its necessity remain a part of the national political discourse.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the experimental manipulations concerning continued reliance on the AVF or the necessity of reinstating the draft are plausible and mirror arguments made in the contemporary political arena by policy makers on both sides of the aisle. The survey was administered by YouGov Polimetrix in February 2011 to a nationally representative sample of 1,200 subjects.<sup>8</sup>

All subjects were asked to read the following hypothetical scenario: "North Korea has begun massing troops on its border and has threatened to invade South Korea. To defend our long-time ally, the President has decided to send a large number of American troops to South Korea." The scenario was crafted to be as plausible and realistic as possible to minimize inevitable concerns about external validity in survey experimental research. Moreover, we selected this particular scenario



Inequality Consequences of Manpower Policy			
	No information	Reduce inequality	Will not reduce inequality
AVF	Treatment 1	—	Treatment 5
Draft	Treatment 2	Treatment 3	Treatment 4

**Figure 1.** Summary of experimental treatments.

*Note:* The experiment did not contain a treatment in which continued reliance on the AVF is held to reduce socioeconomic inequality in military sacrifice, because such a scenario is not plausible.

because it involved coming to the defense of an American ally and a direct threat to long-standing American interests. Past research suggests that uses of force with this type of policy objective, firmly rooted in key national interests, should enjoy strong levels of public support (Jentleson 1992; Feaver and Gelpi 2004). As a result, this experiment allows us to examine whether public support for a mission that fits Jentleson's (1992) foreign policy restraint type remains robust even if a significant shift in manpower policies is required to achieve American objectives.

After reading the text of the scenario, subjects were then randomly assigned to one of the five treatment groups. The five treatments combined two different experimental manipulations: (1) whether or not the president and Congress decided to reinstitute the draft and (2) whether the chosen manpower policy would reduce or fail to reduce inequality in military sacrifice. The value of each treatment on these two dimensions is summarized in Figure 1.

The first treatment group was informed that the United States has enough troops to successfully repel a North Korean invasion and that there is no need to reinstitute the military draft. The second treatment group was told that the United States does not have enough troops to repel the North Korean threat and that, as a result, the president and Congress have decided to reinstitute the military draft.<sup>9</sup> The elite opinion leadership branch of wartime public opinion scholarship suggests that elite consensus behind and legislative support for presidential policies is an important driver of public support for war. Thus, our experimental design should return a conservative estimate for the adverse influence of the draft on public support for war. If elite opposition to the draft should arise, its corrosive effect on war support should only intensify.

The final three treatments explore the influence of the inequality ramifications of manpower policies on public support for war. Subjects assigned to treatment 3 were told that, because the United States lacks sufficient troops, the president and Congress have decided to reinstitute the draft. However, these subjects were also told that the draft would significantly reduce socioeconomic inequality in military sacrifice. Subjects in treatment group 4 were also told that the president and Congress were reinstituting the draft. However, these subjects were informed that, even with a draft in place, casualties would come mainly from low-income communities whose

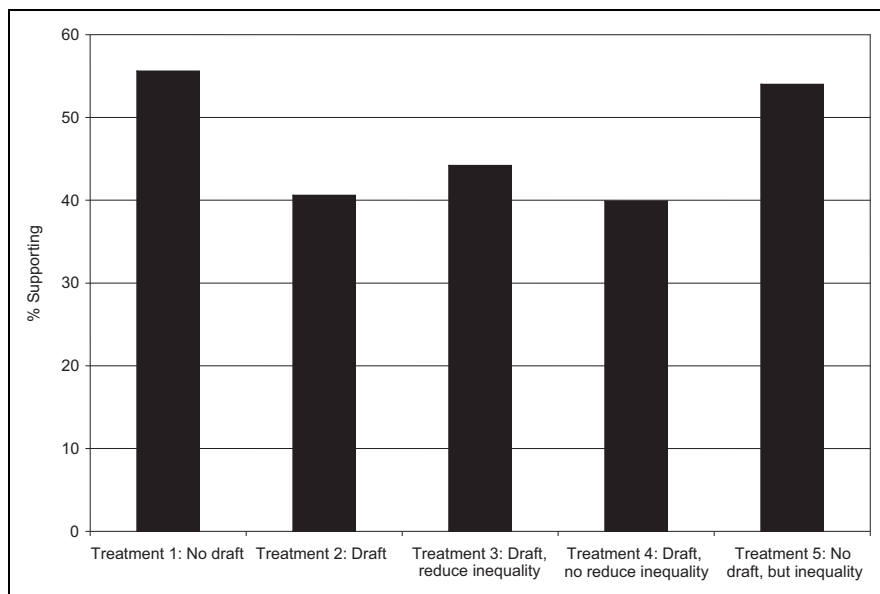
residents enjoyed limited opportunities to get ahead. Finally, subjects in treatment group 5, like those in treatment group 1, were told that the United States has enough troops and will continue to rely on the AVF. However, these subjects were told that, without a draft in place, socioeconomic inequalities in sacrifice would arise.

After reading this information, subjects in all treatment groups were asked to indicate on a five-point scale their level of support for sending troops to defend South Korea. Comparisons of subject responses across the five treatment groups afford insight into multiple aspects of the complex relationship between military manpower policies, their consequences for inequality in sacrifice, and public support for military action. First and most directly, comparing war support in treatments 1 and 2 provides a baseline estimate of the effect of conscription on public support for war akin to that in Horowitz and Levendusky (2011). Second, comparisons across treatments 1 (AVF, no inequality mention) and 5 (AVF, results in inequality), and treatments 3 (draft, will reduce inequality) and 4 (draft, will *not* reduce inequality) allow us to investigate whether Americans also adjust their support for war in response to the broader social consequences of the military manpower policies that will be used to wage a conflict. It may be that public opposition to the draft (or, by extension, support for the AVF) is so widespread that information about the inequality ramifications of these policies has little effect on public support for war. Alternatively, Americans may care not only about the type of recruitment mechanism employed but also about whether or not it will accord with a norm of shared sacrifice.

### *Experimental Results and the Critical Importance of Partisanship*

To examine the baseline effect of the experimental manipulations—the reintroduction of conscription versus continued reliance on the AVF and the inequality ramifications of each—Figure 2 presents the percentage of subjects in each group supporting or strongly supporting the president's decision to dispatch American troops to defend South Korea from the threatened invasion from the North. The most unambiguous finding is the significant difference in support for the use of force between treatments 1 and 2. Whereas 56 percent of Americans supported military action when told that the United States would continue to rely on the AVF that figure plummeted to 41 percent among respondents told that Congress and the president had decided to reinstitute the draft to meet the demand for manpower. Consistent with Horowitz and Levendusky (2011), the experiment confirms that Americans' willingness to support a war is significantly influenced by the presence of a draft.

But do Americans also care about the inequality ramifications of these policies? The simple analysis in Figure 2 yields mixed results. Respondents in treatment 3 were told that the United States would reinstitute the draft to meet the manpower needs of the mission in Korea and that doing so would reduce socioeconomic inequality in military sacrifice. Among this group, war support was slightly higher than in the simple draft treatment, 44 percent versus 41 percent. However, this

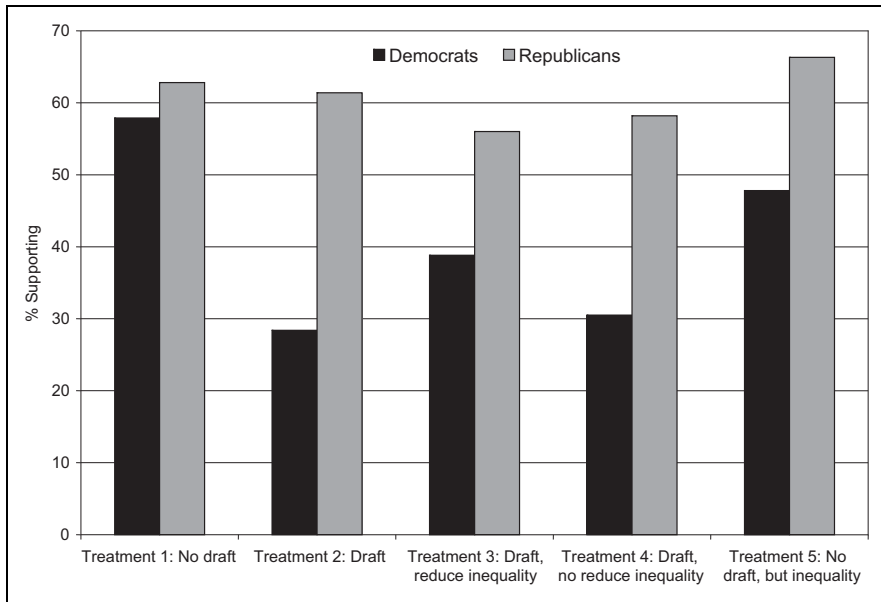


**Figure 2.** Support for military action by draft and inequality cues, all respondents.

difference in means fails to meet conventional levels of statistical significance. Support for the use of force was at its lowest ebb among respondents told that the draft would be used and that it would fail to reduce inequality in sacrifice; however, this figure, 40 percent, is not significantly different from the other draft treatments. And finally, war support was also lower among respondents in treatment 5, who learned that continued reliance on the AVF would result in inequality, than among respondents in the simple AVF baseline. Yet this difference, too, is not statistically significant.

The foregoing analysis clearly shows that the draft significantly dampens war support. Americans are much more willing to support the use of force when a war will be waged by volunteers than by a conscript army. In the aggregate, the inequality ramifications of these policies appear to have little effect. However, beneath this aggregate result, we uncover a significant partisan divide. To illustrate how partisanship moderates the influence of the draft and inequality treatments on war support visually, Figure 3 disaggregates the sample into Democrats and Republicans and presents the percentages of each partisan group supporting the use of force in each treatment.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, in the baseline treatment (no draft and no inequality cue), there is not a significant difference in war support between Republicans and Democrats. Support for defending South Korea is strong among both partisan groups. However, as we examine the draft and inequality treatments, the partisan divergence is



**Figure 3.** Support for military action by draft, inequality cues, and partisanship.

unmistakable. Strongly consistent with expectations, Democratic subjects responded in significant ways both to whether a draft would be used and to information about the inequality ramifications of the policy choice. Fifty-eight percent of Democrats supported the use of force in the AVF baseline treatment, when told only that the United States would continue to rely on the AVF. However, informing Democrats that a draft would be required to meet the manpower needs of the mission more than halved support for the president's decision to send troops to protect South Korea. Only 28 percent of Democrats supported the use of force in treatment 2.

Yet, support for the use of force among Democratic respondents rebounded significantly among those Democrats who were told that reinstituting the draft would mean that casualties would no longer come disproportionately from low-income communities whose residents possessed limited opportunities to get ahead. The resulting figure, 39 percent, is still significantly lower than in the AVF baseline treatment, but it is significantly higher than among Democrats only told about the reinstitution of the draft. By contrast, the percentage supporting the use of force in treatment 4—those informed that the draft would be reinstated but that even with the draft in place casualties would continue to come disproportionately from socioeconomically disadvantaged ranks of society—was almost identical to that in the baseline draft treatment.

These results support our hypothesis that Democratic respondents would significantly respond both to the presence or absence of conscription and to the inequality

ramifications of manpower policies. Importantly, the results also suggest that when Americans learn of conscription, they do not instinctively assume that the draft will distribute the costs of war more equally. Rather, the data suggest that Democrats implicitly assume the opposite. We observe no significant difference in war support between treatments 2 (baseline draft) and 4 (draft will not reduce inequality). However, when explicitly told that a draft would assure a more equal distribution of sacrifice and reduce socioeconomic inequality, Democratic support for war increases.

Finally, Democrats in our sample also responded to information about the inequality ramifications of military manpower policies when told that the United States would continue to rely on the AVF. Whereas 58 percent of Democrats supported the use of force in the AVF baseline that figure decreased significantly to 48 percent among Democrats told that continuing to rely on the AVF would result in socioeconomic inequalities in military sacrifice. Thus, at least among some Democrats, the experiment suggests that norms of equality trump more narrow self-interest calculations. However, it is important to acknowledge that, even among Democrats, war support was higher when the AVF produced inequality than when a return to the draft would reduce inequality. This sheds light on the contentious manpower politics that emerged at the height of the Iraq War. While some liberal activists, such as Michael Moore and Congressman Charlie Rangel, called for a return to the draft to combat inequality in sacrifice, the movement failed to gain traction among most Democrats both in Congress and among the mass public.

Among Republican respondents, by contrast, we found little evidence of significant differences across any of the experimental treatments. Virtually the same percentage of Republicans supported the use of force in the baseline draft treatment (61 percent) as in the baseline AVF treatment (62 percent), and there are no significant differences in war support among the other three treatments. These null results for Republicans accord with theoretical expectations. Because of the Republican Party's more hawkish foreign policy stance since 9/11 and its greater acceptance of socioeconomic inequality, we hypothesized that the willingness of Republicans in the mass public to support the use of force in this context would be relatively unaffected by the presence of conscription or the inequality ramifications of military manpower policies.

As an additional test of the influence of each experimental manipulation on support for war, we estimated a series of ordered logit regressions. These models allow us both to take into account the full variation in the five-point scale of the dependent variable and to estimate the effects of each experimental treatment controlling for a subject's demographic characteristics, including age, race, gender, and educational attainment.<sup>11</sup>

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 1. The first column presents the results for all subjects, and the AVF baseline treatment is the omitted category. Consistent with Figure 2, the coefficients on all three draft treatment variables are negative and statistically significant. Informing subjects that reinstituting the draft would be required to meet the manpower needs of defending South Korea

**Table 1.** Manpower Policies, Casualty Inequality, and Support for War.

	All	Dem	GOP
Draft	-0.65*** (0.16)	-1.19*** (0.25)	-0.04 (0.28)
Draft will reduce inequality	-0.52*** (0.17)	-0.84*** (0.25)	-0.21 (0.29)
Draft will not reduce inequality	-0.78*** (0.17)	-1.30*** (0.27)	-0.23 (0.31)
No draft will lead to inequality	-0.13 (0.18)	-0.44* (0.25)	0.26 (0.30)
Democrat	0.14 (0.14)		
Republican	0.70*** (0.15)		
Education	0.06* (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)	0.18*** (0.06)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)
White	0.09 (0.12)	0.07 (0.16)	0.41 (0.27)
Male	0.77*** (0.11)	0.72*** (0.17)	0.96*** (0.18)
Observations	1,196	531	443

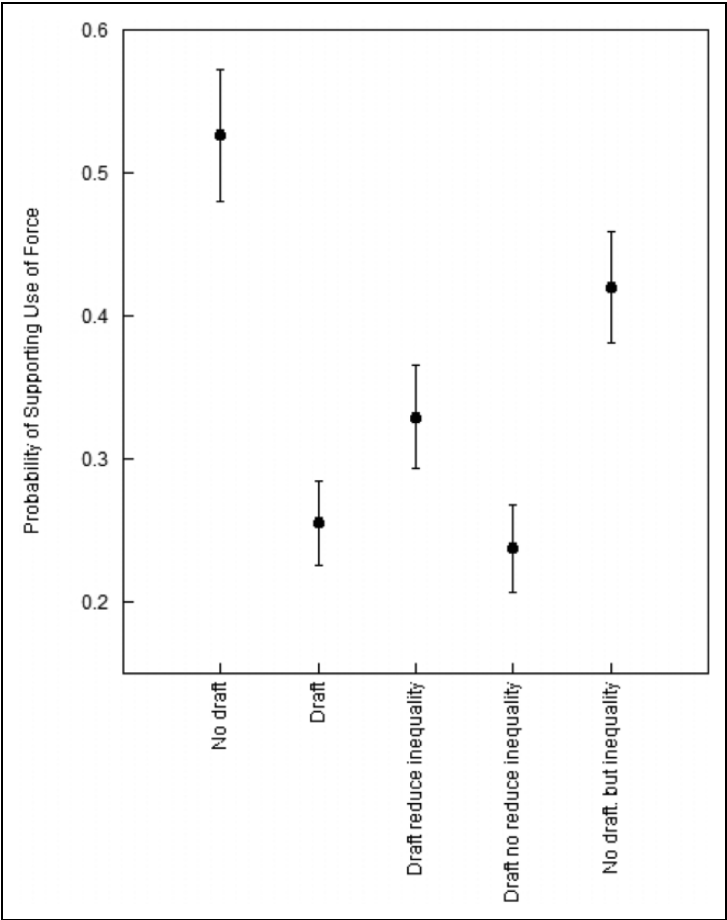
Note: Ordered logit model of war support measured on a five-point scale. Treatment 1 (no draft; no information about inequality) is the omitted baseline. Robust standard errors are represented in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed. Dem = Democrats; GOP = Republicans.

\*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \* $p < .10$ .

from invasion significantly decreased support for war versus the AVF baseline treatment, regardless of the draft's implications for inequality in sacrifice. The model offers some evidence that the inequality ramifications of manpower policies do shape opinion in the aggregate. The sharpest decrease in war support is produced when respondents are informed that the draft will not reduce inequality. When informed instead that the draft will reduce inequality, war support is still lower than in the no draft baseline, but it is significantly higher than among respondents told the draft will not reduce inequality.<sup>12</sup>

The control variables show that a respondent's demographic characteristics also influenced the strength of his or her support for the use of force in this scenario. Republicans were significantly more likely than either Democrats or independents to support the use of force to defend South Korea. Consistent with prior research (Brandes 1994; Conover and Sapiro 1993; Eichenberg 2003), we also observe evidence of a substantial gender gap in war support, as men are considerably more likely to support the use of force than women. Finally, war support increased with educational levels and age.

Columns 2 and 3 disaggregate the sample by partisanship and estimate separate models for Republicans and Democrats.<sup>13</sup> As in Figure 3, the partisan divide is unambiguous. For Republican respondents, none of the experimental treatments had a statistically significant effect on their level of support for sending troops to South Korea. Republicans in our survey were not sensitive to information about the reinstitution of the draft or to information about the inequality ramifications of manpower policies when deciding whether or not to support military action to defend South Korea.



**Figure 4.** Predicted probabilities from ordered logit models.  
*Note:* For each of the five experimental treatment variables, the figure plots the predicted probability of supporting the use of force for the median Democratic respondent in that treatment group. All demographic variables are held constant at their mean or median. The dot represents the point estimate for each predicted probability. Error bars show the range covered by plus or minus one standard error from this point estimate.

Democrats’ willingness to support the use of force, by contrast, was significantly influenced by the experimental cues concerning the manpower policies to be used and their wider social consequences. To illustrate the effects of the various treatments on Democratic war support, Figure 4 plots a series of predicted probabilities obtained from simulations. For each of the five treatment variables, the figure plots the predicted probability of the median Democratic respondent in that group strongly

supporting or supporting the use of force. The dot represents the point estimate for each predicted probability, and error bars show the range covered by plus or minus one standard error from this point estimate.

For the median Democrat in the AVF baseline treatment, the model generates a .53 predicted probability of supporting or strongly supporting the military action in South Korea. For the median Democrat in the draft baseline treatment, this predicted probability falls by more than half to .26. Yet, the influence of the draft on Democratic support for war is also conditional on whether subjects were told that the draft would reduce, or would fail to reduce, socioeconomic inequality in military sacrifice. For Democrats told that the draft would reduce inequality, the predicted probability of supporting the war increased to .33. To be sure, informing Democrats that the draft will reduce inequality does not eliminate the downward effect on war support that the draft cue has versus the AVF baseline. However, the results do show that Democrats become significantly more likely to support a war waged through conscription if assured that this manpower policy will reduce socioeconomic inequality.<sup>14</sup>

The results also make plain that Democrats care about the ramifications of the AVF for inequality. Learning that the AVF would result in casualties being concentrated in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities significantly reduced the median Democrat's probability of supporting the use of force in this treatment group to .42 from .53 in the baseline AVF treatment. Politically, this is a significant shift, as it would mean the difference between majority and minority support for war among a major partisan group.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Robustness Check: Partisanship or Self-interest?***

Our results strongly suggest that partisanship is a key lens through which Americans assess policy-relevant information and form their military policy preferences. However, before arguing that partisanship is preeminent, we must investigate an alternative moderating factor emphasized in the literature: self-interest. Both Erikson and Stoker (2011) and Horowitz and Levendusky (2011) argue that those with direct exposure to the risk of being drafted are most influenced by conscription. In their analysis, Horowitz and Levendusky measure self-interest using a dummy variable identifying men and women forty years of age and under.<sup>16</sup>

In the Online Appendix, we reestimate the model from column 1 of Table 1 adding this self-interest variable to the model as well as its interactions with each experimental treatment. Consistent with Horowitz and Levendusky, the coefficient for the draft-young respondent interaction variable is negative as expected. However, it fails to meet conventional levels of statistical significance. Using alternative measures of self-interest, such as men of age forty and under, men and women of age thirty-five and under, men of age thirty-five and under, and so on, yield similar null results. Self-interest may well shape how Americans view conscription, and better data examining multiple conflict scenarios and with a larger sample of those with



a genuine chance of being drafted should conscription be reinstituted is necessary to more firmly answer this question. However, in our scenario, partisanship trumped self-interest as the main factor moderating the influence of conscription on public support for war.

## **The Draft, Inequality, and Support for Retaliation: A Follow-up Experiment**

A lingering question concerns whether the draft and its inequality ramifications would have similar effects on public support for a different type of war. For example, would the public support military retaliation if the United States was attacked, even if doing so would require the reinstitution of the draft? Some extant polling offers at least modest evidence that the public might be willing to tolerate a draft in such conditions. A Fox News poll conducted in November 2001 showed 74 percent of Americans willing to approve reinstituting the draft if it was necessary to prosecute the war on terror.<sup>17</sup> Yet, other polling data suggest that this willingness to support a return to conscription quickly waned. Less than a year later, as the Iraq War vote loomed in Congress in October 2002, a Christian Science Monitor poll showed only 26 percent of Americans supporting the reinstitution of the draft “if the United States finds itself at war and needing many more active-duty personnel in the armed forces.”<sup>18</sup>

To gain leverage on this question, we conducted a simplified follow-up experiment on a new hypothetical scenario. All subjects learned of the following scenario. “Terrorists have attacked a major US military installation overseas, killing dozens of American service members. Intelligence officials have determined that the funding for the group and the weapons used in the attack came from a rogue state in Central Asia. The President, backed by leaders of both parties in Congress, has decided to launch a military operation to overthrow the regime of the rogue state that sponsored terrorism against American forces abroad.” Past research suggests that this scenario should generate robust and resilient levels of public support for the use of force. The scenario involved a direct attack against the United States, not a threatened one against a major ally; the proposed use of force is a retaliatory strike against those responsible for a significant number of American casualties; and a consensus of elites from both partisan ends of the political spectrum back the president’s proposed military action. Feaver and Gelpi (2004), for example, argue that in military mission, missions intimately tied to the national interest even a supposedly casualty-phobic public is willing to suffer significant numbers of casualties to achieve the policy goals. Similarly, Berinsky (2009) argues that a strong, bipartisan elite consensus can sustain robust public support for war, even in the face of massive casualties. As a result, this experiment offers something akin to a critical test for the influence of conscription and its consequences for inequality in sacrifice on public support for war. In the emotionally charged context of a retaliatory strike against those who

killed American soldiers overseas, Americans may be willing to bear any burden, including a restoration of conscription.

Subjects were then randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups. As in the preceding experiment, those in the first treatment group were informed that the United States had enough manpower to meet its needs and would not reinstate the draft. Those in the second treatment condition were told that the United States did not have enough manpower, and consequently the president, backed by bipartisan leaders in Congress, was calling for reinstitution of the draft. Those in the final treatment condition were also told that the draft must be reinstituted; however, these subjects were additionally informed that the draft would ameliorate socioeconomic inequality in military sacrifice. All subjects were then asked whether they supported or opposed the decision to use force on a four-point Likert-type scale (strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, and strongly oppose).

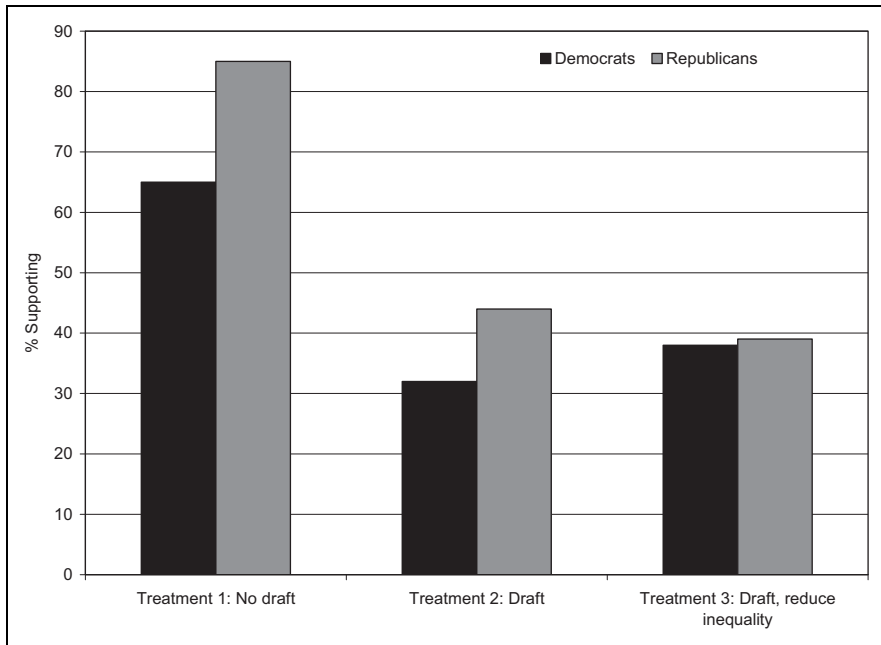
The experiment was embedded in an online survey administered in July 2014 to a convenience sample of 566 adult Americans recruited through Mechanical Turk. Although the sample is not nationally representative and is younger and more educated than the nation as a whole, it does exhibit considerable demographic and geographic variation. Moreover, recent research shows that experiments conducted on samples recruited in this way yield treatment effects similar to those observed in experiments using nationally representative samples (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012). As a result, we are confident that our results represent how a large segment of the American public would respond to the experimental treatments.

### ***Experimental Results***

Consistent with expectations, more than two-thirds of our sample supported the use of force in the baseline AVF treatment group. After more than a decade of inconclusive foreign wars, the American public is extremely reticent to use force, as plainly documented by repeated polls showing Americans wary of using force to meet a range of foreign policy crises from Russian machinations in Ukraine to the use of chemical weapons and mass slaughter in Syria. However, 67 percent of respondents backed the use of force to topple a regime responsible for a terrorist attack that killed American service personnel in the control group, which was informed that the nation would continue to rely on the AVF to meet its manpower needs.

Nevertheless, even in this retaliatory scenario, reinstituting the draft significantly decreased public support for the use of force. Only 33 percent of respondents in the draft treatment backed the use of force against the regime of the rogue state that aided and abetted the attack. Finally, in the aggregate, we again see some evidence that inequality considerations may moderate the influence of the draft on public opinion. Support for the use of force was slightly higher, 37 percent, among those told that reinstituting the draft would lessen socioeconomic inequality in military sacrifice.

Figure 5 presents the results disaggregated by respondents' political partisan affiliations. In contrast to the preceding experiment, in the retaliatory strike



**Figure 5.** Support for retaliatory strike by partisanship.

experiment, reinstituting the draft significantly lowered support for the draft among Democrats and Republicans alike. Democratic support falls from 65 percent in the control to 32 percent in the draft treatment. Republicans were more supportive of the use of force than Democrats in both treatments. However, the draft also seriously eroded Republican support for a retaliatory strike, decreasing it from 85 percent in the control to 44 percent in the draft treatment.

While partisanship did not moderate the influence of the draft treatment in this experiment, it did significantly moderate the influence of the draft's ramifications for inequality in sacrifice on war support. Learning that the draft would ameliorate inequality in sacrifice raised Democratic levels of support from 32 percent in the draft treatment to 38 percent in the draft will reduce inequality treatment. Among Republicans, however, the reduce inequality treatment had no effect. If anything, fewer Republicans supported the use of force in the draft will reduce inequality treatment (39 percent) than in the draft treatment that provided no information about inequality (44 percent). This is the same pattern observed in the previous experiment.

As a final test of each treatment's influence on support for war, we estimate a series of ordered logit models. This approach allows us to consider the full variation in the four-point scale of the dependent variable and to estimate the effects of each experimental treatment controlling for a subject's demographic characteristics, including age, race, gender, and educational attainment. Table 2 presents the results.

**Table 2.** Draft, Inequality, and Public Support in Retaliation Experiment.

	All	Dem	GOP
Draft	-1.50*** (0.20)	-1.48*** (0.26)	-1.87*** (0.50)
Draft will reduce inequality	-1.10*** (0.19)	-1.06*** (0.25)	-1.90*** (0.46)
Democrat	0.54** (0.23)		
Republican	0.95*** (0.28)		
Education	-0.14 (0.10)	-0.11 (0.13)	-0.16 (0.19)
Age	0.03*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.04** (0.02)
White	-0.18 (0.18)	-0.06 (0.22)	0.31 (0.53)
Male	0.16 (0.16)	0.09 (0.21)	0.66* (0.36)
Observations	566	335	116

Note: Ordered logit model of war support measured on a four-point scale. Treatment 1 (no draft; no information about inequality) is the omitted baseline. Wald tests show that draft treatment effect is statistically more negative than the draft will reduce inequality treatment in all respondents and Democratic respondent models. Robust standard errors are represented in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed. Dem = Democrats; GOP = Republicans.

\*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \* $p < .10$ .

The first column presents the results for all subjects, and the AVF baseline treatment is the omitted category. Consistent with the differences in means presented in Figure 5, the coefficient for the draft treatment is negative and statistically significant. The draft substantially decreased public support for war even in this context of a retaliatory strike on a state that sponsored terrorism against Americans. The coefficient for the draft will reduce inequality treatment is also negative. However, it is significantly larger (i.e., less negative) than the draft coefficient.<sup>19</sup>

Columns 2 and 3 disaggregate the sample by partisanship and estimate separate models for Republicans and Democrats. Consistent with Figure 5, for both Democratic and Republican respondents, the coefficient for the draft treatment is strongly negative and statistically significant. Partisanship did not moderate the effect of the draft treatment on support for war in this experimental scenario. However, partisanship does critically moderate the influence of the inequality treatment on support for war. Among Democrats, learning that the draft would reduce inequality significantly tempered the erosive effect of the draft on war support.<sup>20</sup> Among Republicans, by contrast, learning that the draft would reduce inequality did nothing to diminish the negative effect of conscription on support for war. The coefficients for the draft and draft will reduce inequality treatment variables are virtually identical.

## Conclusion

Recent scholarship has explored how military manpower recruitment policies can influence the cost-benefit calculations of democratic citizens when deciding

whether or not to support a foreign military venture. However, our experimental analyses strongly suggest that these cost–benefit calculations are more complex than previously supposed. All else being equal, a return to conscription would likely diminish Americans’ willingness to wage war. The hypothetical experimental scenarios were designed to generate strong and resilient levels of public support. Both scenarios fit Jentleson’s (1992) foreign policy restraint policy objective. One involved a threat to a long-standing ally, the other a retaliatory strike against those responsible for a lethal attack on American soldiers. In both scenarios, the president enjoyed bipartisan support for his actions, a factor held to drive public support for war by elite opinion leadership theories (e.g., Zaller 1992; Brody 1991; Berinsky 2009). The first scenario produced a fairly evenly divided public in the AVF baseline group (55 percent supporting the use of force), and the latter produced supermajority support for war in the AVF baseline (67 percent). In both scenarios, a switch to conscription significantly decreased war support, suggesting that the draft is likely to decrease support for a range of hypothetical military engagements.<sup>21</sup>

However, the effects of conscription on war support are conditional both on the draft’s consequences for inequality in sacrifice and on political partisanship. In the North Korea experiment, partisanship surpassed self-interest as the most important moderating lens through which Americans assess possible changes in manpower policy mechanisms. In the retaliation experiment, partisanship continued to moderate the influence of the draft’s inequality ramifications on war support.

In addition to providing a better understanding of how conscription affects war support among a democratic public, our results have broader implications for scholarship on wartime public opinion by emphasizing the degree to which contemporary Americans evaluate foreign policy information through distinctly partisan lenses. Wartime opinion scholarship should pay even greater attention to the possibility that the same information may differentially affect citizens based on those citizens’ partisan predispositions. The divergence may at times be stark, with the same information causing one partisan group to increase its war support and the other to lower it. For example, United Nations criticism of the Iraq War might erode support for the conflict among Democrats but stiffen resolve to stay the course among Republicans. In such cases, the net effect on aggregate opinion change may be minimal. However, failing to account for differential partisan processing could lead scholars to assume falsely that Americans simply ignore such cues when deciding whether or not to support the use of force.

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## Supplemental Material

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## Notes

1. Gallup Poll #1966-0729. May 19–24, 1966. Gallup's coding of the open-ended question for the 49 percent who mentioned inequality concerns reads: "No partiality is shown, everyone would be equally represented, everyone is equal and nobody should be deferred for school, that would be the fairest way, our draft is not favoring certain groups, it's fairer this way."
2. This democratic norm favoring egalitarianism in military service is not limited to the United States (e.g., Levi 1997; Flynn 2002; Geva 2013).
3. This growing attention to the moderating influence of partisanship reflects a long-standing emphasis in the American politics literature (Campbell et al. 1960) that continues to find support across a wide range of policy issues and political assessments (e.g., Gerber and Huber 2010; Goren 2002; Lebo and Cassino 2007; Hopkins 2014). Emphasizing the core nature of Americans' partisan affiliations, Bartels (2002, 120) concludes, "far from being a mere summary of more specific political opinions, partisanship is a powerful and persuasive influence on perceptions of political events."
4. Nyhan and Reifler (2010) report similar findings with respect to corrections of wartime misinformation but emphasize ideology (e.g., conservatives resisted efforts to correct common misperceptions about the Iraq War). Gartner (2011) also argues that partisanship may condition how citizens respond to war imagery from the Iraq War. Both Baum and Groeling (2009) and Howell and Kriner (2009) also show how partisanship mediates the influence of elite cues on support for war.
5. Pew Global Attitudes Project Poll, April 15 to May 5, 2010, USPSRA.061710G.R23B.
6. CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll, December 17–19, 2010, USORC.122010.R43. Republicans were more willing to back force to aid South Korea even under a Democratic president; if a Republican were in the Oval Office, the gap may have been even larger.
7. See, for example, pro-draft arguments made by Charles Hagel (R-NE) and Charlie Rangel (D-NY) during the Iraq War.
8. The survey was the result of a collaborative project, "Integrating Research on Domestic and Foreign Policy Opinions," which was sponsored by a 2009 International Studies Association Venture Grant.
9. We specifically informed subjects that both political branches of government backed the decision to try to bolster public willingness to support the policy decision (Howell and Pevehouse 2007; Kriner 2010). If the politics of reinstituting the draft were more contentious, conscription may have an even greater negative impact on support for war.
10. Eighty percent of respondents in our sample leaned toward one party or the other, and the results reported in this article include leaners. Results are virtually identical if leaners are not counted as partisans.

11. Because 125 subjects refused to answer the income question, the models presented here do not include income as a control variable. However, including income (with or without education also included in the model) yields statistically insignificant coefficients in all three models in Table 1. Moreover, to ensure that income does not moderate the influence of the manpower treatments on war support, we also estimated models interacting each treatment with income for all respondents, only Democrats, and only Republicans. In each case, we found no evidence that income mediated the effect of the manpower cue.
12. A Wald test shows that the draft will not reduce inequality coefficient ( $-.78$ ) is significantly smaller than the draft will reduce inequality coefficient ( $-.52$ ),  $p = .06$ .
13. Alternatively, we estimated a single model that interacted each treatment indicator with the Democratic dummy variable. This model specification, presented in the online appendix, yields virtually identical results.
14. Wald tests confirm that the coefficient for the draft will reduce inequality treatment is significantly larger (i.e. less negative) than for the draft baseline or draft will not reduce inequality,  $p < .10$  and  $p < .05$ , respectively.
15. An alternative possibility is that ideology, not partisanship is the key moderating factor. In the online appendix, we explore and reject this possibility by exploiting the presence of considerable ideological variation within Democratic identifiers. Democrats of all ideological stripes responded similarly to the draft and inequality treatments.
16. Horowitz and Levendusky (2011, 8) also explored whether parents are more responsive to the conscription treatment; the results were similar, but statistically insignificant.
17. Fox News Poll, November 14–15, 2001, USODFOX.111601.R29. Christian Science Monitor Poll, October 7–13, 2002, USTIPP.101602.R40.
18. Christian Science Monitor Poll, October 7–13, 2002, USTIPP.101602.R40. Similarly, a 2004 poll showed only 31 percent of Americans agreeing with the statement that “a military draft should be instituted in the U.S. to ensure we have enough troops to carry out large-scale missions such as the war in Iraq in the future.” PBS Flashpoints USA Poll, June 14–15, 2004, USIPSOSR.04IRAG.R06C. However, testifying to the power of question wording effects, a 2003 Fox News poll showed 56 percent supporting the reinstitution of the draft if “more soldiers are needed in the war against terrorism.” Fox News Poll, January 14–15, 2003, USODFOX.011603.R37.
19. In the model for all respondents, a Wald test shows that the draft coefficient ( $-1.50$ ) is significantly smaller than the draft will reduce inequality coefficient ( $-1.10$ ),  $p = .03$ .
20. In the model for Democratic respondents, a Wald test shows that the draft coefficient ( $-1.48$ ) is significantly smaller than the draft will reduce inequality coefficient ( $-1.06$ ),  $p = .06$ .
21. An important exception likely involves military engagements with very low base levels of support; in such cases, war support would have little room to decrease substantially.

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