

How Citizens Respond to Combat Casualties:
The Differential Impact of Local Casualties on Support for the War in Afghanistan

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Online Appendix

Summary Statistics for Survey Sample

Between August 15 and October 4, 2010, 864 respondents were recruited to take an online survey via Amazon's Mechanical Turk service. Four subjects who began the survey dropped out before answering the first question (gender), and another 11 subjects were thanked for their willingness to participate, but excused from the survey because they did not reside in one of the 50 U.S. states. All 849 of the remaining subjects answered the war support question and subsequent demographics; the only exception is that 4 subjects refused to answer the question on income.

Summary statistics for the demographic characteristics of the experimental sample are presented in Appendix Table 1. Democrats are somewhat overrepresented in the sample, as are women. However, the sample did have substantial racial and geographic diversity. Only 81% of the sample was white and 46 states were represented. Moreover, given the importance of geographical representation to our study emphasizing the importance of home state casualties, we compared the percentages of our sample hailing from each state with that state's share of the U.S. population as a whole. The two series are almost perfectly correlated, $r = .96$.

Finally, to ensure that our random assignment of subjects to treatments was successful, we compared the background characteristics of subjects assigned to the four treatment conditions.¹ We find no evidence of systematic demographic differences across the four treatments.

Question, Treatment, and Debriefing Wordings

¹ Toward this end, we constructed four separate logistic regressions with the dependent variable being assignment to one of the four experimental treatments. In each model, the regressors were the nine demographic variables in Appendix Table 1. Only 1 of the resulting 36 coefficients in the four models was statistically significant ($p < .05$), which is what we would expect by random chance alone.

The full text of the national and local news stories are presented in the appendices below. In the case of the national news story, the only deviation from the presented text in the non-home state treatment is that the reference to Corporal Smith's home state was removed in the second sentence of the article body. In the case of the local news story, the only deviation from the presented text in the non-home state treatment is that respondents received an identical version with another home state listed for Corporal Smith that was assigned at random. The casualty and wounded figures also, of course, varied according to the state mentioned in the story.

All subjects were asked the same question: "Do you support or oppose the U.S. war in Afghanistan?" Respondents were asked to select from the following choices: "Strongly support"; "Support"; "Neither support nor oppose"; "Oppose"; "Strongly oppose."

Following the survey's conclusion, all subjects received the following debriefing language: "Please note that the hypothetical news story that you read about a U.S. service member dying in Afghanistan is not a real news story, however its form and substance are based on typical national/local news stories covering the war in Afghanistan. The study was designed to determine how different types of news coverage of war deaths affect support for war."

Robustness Check – Multivariate Analysis

As a robustness check, we also estimated an ordered logit model that used the dependent variable's full five point scale and controlled for respondents' demographic characteristics including their partisanship, gender, age, race, income, and educational attainment. The main independent variables of interest are three dummy variables: the first indicating whether the subject received a local or a national news story; the second indicating whether or not the casualty was identified as from the subject's home state; and the third capturing the interaction of

the two. The omitted category baseline thus comprises those subjects assigned to the national story in which no home state information was provided. Appendix Table 2 presents the results.

Consistent with the simple differences in means presented in Table 1 in the text, the coefficient for the home state treatment variable is positive and statistically significant. Reading a story about a casualty from one's home state significantly increased the probability of that respondent opposing the war in Afghanistan, regardless of whether the mock news article mirrored local or national casualty coverage. The coefficients on both the local news treatment and the interaction of local news and home state casualty, however, were statistically insignificant. Thus, the multivariate analysis confirms the conclusion drawn from Table 1: the local ties evoked by reading about a fallen soldier from the respondent's home state were the only experimentally-manipulated factor that significantly affected the respondent's probability of opposing the war.

The control variables also largely shaped attitudes toward the war in predictable ways. For example, the model reveals a sharp partisan divide over the war. While Democrats were no more or less likely to oppose the war than independents (the omitted category), Republicans were significantly more supportive of the conflict than either Democrats or independents. Although education was not a strong, independent predictor of opinion toward the war in Afghanistan war, as income levels increased the probability of opposing the war decreased significantly. Older respondents were more supportive of the war, on average than younger respondents. We also observe some differences along racial lines with Latino respondents being significantly more likely to oppose the war than others, all else being equal.

To illustrate the estimated effects of each variable on the probability of a respondent opposing or strongly opposing the war in Afghanistan, Appendix Figure 1 presents the results of

a series of first differences obtained from simulations. The solid line at .59 represents the predicted probability of the median independent respondent in the national non-home state story group opposing the war in Afghanistan. For the three treatment variables, Figure 1 plots the predicted probability of the median respondent in that group opposing the war; comparisons between each of these predicted probabilities and the .59 baseline constitute the estimated effect of each treatment. For the demographic variables, each dot represents the predicted value generated from simulations by increasing that variable from 0 to 1 or from its mean to one standard deviation above it while holding all other variables constant for median independent respondents in the baseline group. Error bars present 95% confidence intervals around each point estimate.

As demonstrated in Appendix Figure 1, reading a news story about a casualty from the respondent's home state significantly increased his or her predicted probability of opposing the war in Afghanistan from 59% to 69%. The estimated effects of the other experimental treatments, however, are statistically indistinguishable from zero. Finally, the variable with the largest influence on attitudes toward Afghanistan is whether or not a respondent identifies with the Republican Party. Being a Republican decreased the predicted probability of opposing of the war in Afghanistan by almost 30%.

Robustness Check – Attention Filter

To insure that respondents were actually reading the news stories that constituted our experimental treatments, shortly after our Afghanistan war support question we administered an attention filter validated by previous research (Oppenheimer et. al. 2009). The precise wording of this filter is provided in the Appendix below. Embedded in a paragraph of text was an

instruction for respondents to ignore the question itself and to check the “Other” box and enter the numeric sequence “123” instead. 82% of subjects answered the attention filter correctly.

Limiting the analysis to only those respondents who correctly answered the attention filter correctly yields results virtually identical to those presented in the text. These results are presented in Appendix Table 3.

Appendix Table 1: Summary Statistics for Experimental Sample

% Democrats (including leaners)	.51	(.50)
% Republicans (including leaners)	.27	(.44)
% White	.81	(.39)
% Black	.06	(.23)
% Latino	.06	(.24)
% Male	.33	(.47)
% College graduate	.52	(.50)
Median income	\$20k-\$40k	
Median Age	29	

Note: Standard deviations for averages in parentheses.

Appendix Table 2: Ordered Logit Model of Factors Driving Opposition to War in Afghanistan

Local news treatment	-0.07 (0.18)
Home state casualty treatment	0.37* (0.18)
Local news * home state casualty treatment	-0.03 (0.25)
Democrat	0.24 (0.19)
Republican	-1.10** (0.21)
Education	-0.06 (0.05)
Income	-0.14** (0.04)
Male	-0.21 (0.13)
Age	-0.01 (0.01)
Black	0.45 (0.28)
Latino	0.49 (0.25)
Log-likelihood	-1142.77
Observations	845

Robust standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

* $p < 0.05$

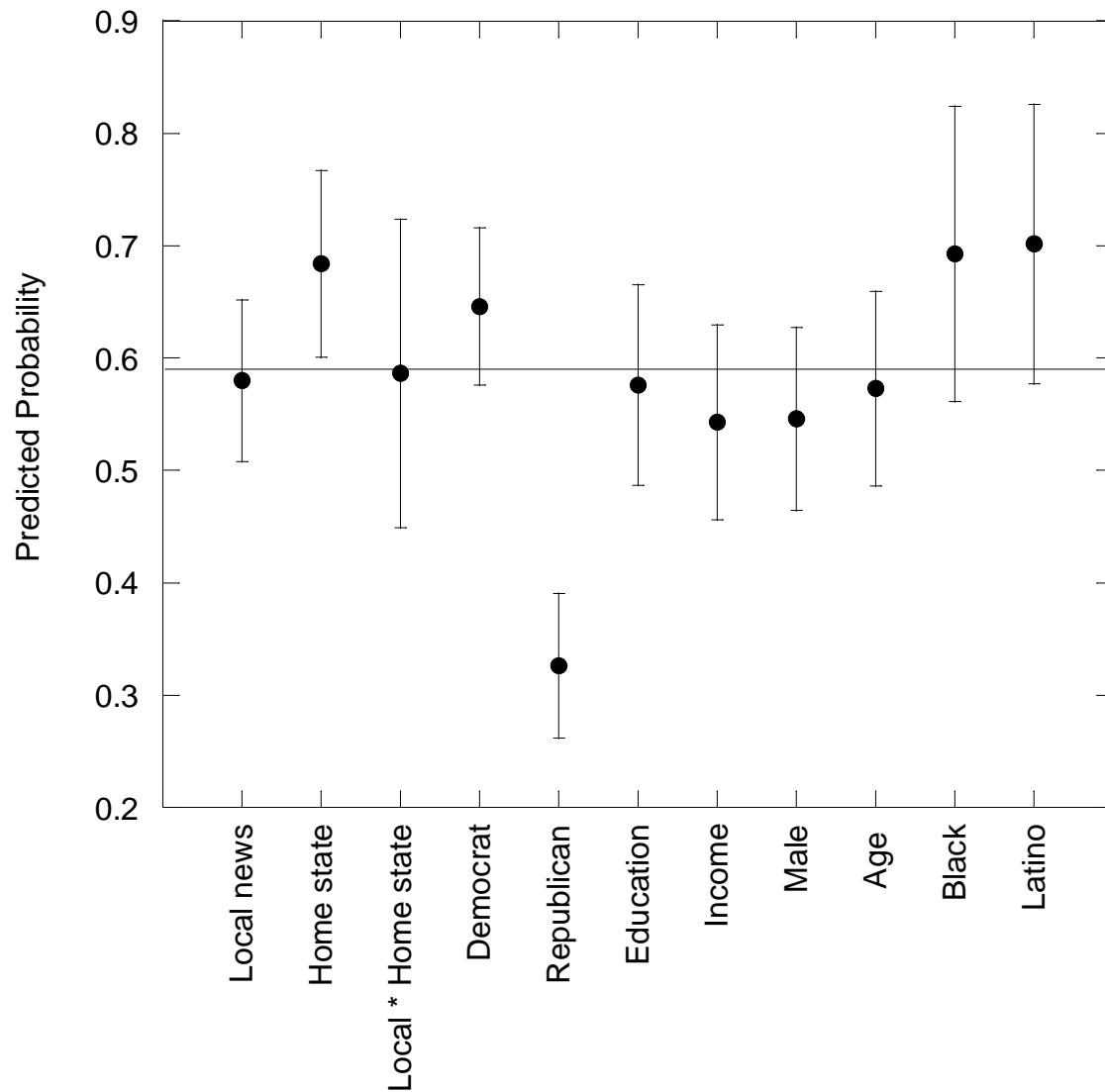
** $p < 0.01$

Appendix Table 3: Influence of Home State Connection vs. Local Media Coverage on Opposition to the War in Afghanistan – Only Subjects Who Passed Attention Filter

	National Story	Local Story
Home State	62%	61%
Non-Home State	51%	49%

Note: The differences between the home state and non-home state treatments in both the national story and local story categories are statistically significant, $p < .05$. Neither of the differences across rows (home state national vs. local; non-home state national vs. local) is statistically significant.

Appendix Figure 1: Factors Influencing the Probability of Opposing the War in Afghanistan



Note: The figure illustrates the effect of each variable on the predicted probability of a median independent opposing the war in Afghanistan. The solid line at .59 indicates the predicted probability of opposing the war for the median independent in the national/non-home state casualty baseline. The three treatment variables illustrate the effect of receiving each experimental treatment versus this baseline. For the demographic variables, the figure plots predicted probabilities for the median independent in the baseline group (a white female of median age who attended some college) with the exception of the variable in question. Dummy variables are increased from zero to one, and education is increased from its median value to one standard deviation above the median. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals around the point estimates.

Appendix – National News Story Wording

Please read the following brief news story, and then answer the question that follows.

American Soldier killed in Kandahar Firefight

An American soldier was killed yesterday when NATO forces were attacked by Taliban militants outside of Kandahar.

A military spokesman confirmed that twenty-five year old Corporal Jeremy Smith of HOME STATE was killed in the firefight.

The attack occurred just after dawn when the combat foot patrol moved into a troubled neighborhood on the outskirts of Kandahar. Kandahar is the second largest city in Afghanistan, with a population of about 450,000. It is the capital of Kandahar province, located in the south of the country.

The neighborhood where the attack occurred had suffered several car bombings over the preceding weeks. The attack began with the blast of a rocket-propelled grenade near a local police station. Rocket-propelled grenades are a commonly used explosive projectile weapon, and have been employed frequently by insurgent and terrorist groups. After the grenade, the coalition platoon then came under small arms fire, and the ensuing firefight lasted for over 30 minutes. It was during this time that Corporal Smith was wounded, and he died a short time later after military doctors were unable to stop his internal bleeding.

The latest fight occurred as thousands of additional coalition troops are being deployed in and around Kandahar in an effort to regain control of the region from the Taliban and to start building the civilian infrastructure that is essential to bolstering confidence in President Hamid Karazi's national government. Stabilizing Kandahar province is a key part of the United States' new counter-insurgency strategy.

In addition to building and manning new checkpoints to gain greater control over the main roads into and out of the region, coalition forces have increased the number of patrols in the immediate vicinity of Kandahar itself.

With the poppy harvest concluded, Taliban forces have launched a summer offensive against coalition and Afghan troops in the region. The result has been a steady increase in the number of car bombings, rocket firings, and other skirmishes.

Appendix – Local News Story Wording

Please read the following brief news story, and then answer the question that follows.

American Soldier killed in Kandahar Firefight

Jeremy Smith, a twenty-five year old Corporal from HOME STATE, was killed yesterday by a roadside bomb while on a combat foot patrol in Afghanistan. The death occurred amidst fighting north of Kandahar, a strategic location for the military's counter-insurgency strategy in the area.

Smith's family has strong ties to HOME STATE, having lived in most corners of the state.

Smith leaves behind a wife, Shelley, and a daughter, Katie, who just celebrated her second birthday. Shelley said that the last time Jeremy was home, he had Katie's name tattooed on his arm.

Smith's family, friends, and neighbors gathered yesterday at his parents' home to remember and celebrate his life. A star wide receiver on the football field in high school, close friend and high school teammate Richard King said that he'll always remember Jeremy's fiery half-time speeches during games. "He was always the team leader, we listened to what he said," said King.

Jeremy was also remembered as a fun-loving friend who had a soft spot for glazed donuts, and would lend his pick-up truck to anyone who needed it. "I remember when I moved, he was there at 6:00 am with that big old truck and a box of donuts" said his sister Roseanne.

Jeremy always knew he wanted to join the Army, having heard his father and uncle talk of their service. Especially after September 11th, recalled his mother, "Jeremy always wanted to defend our country. He wanted to be on the front lines. He loved America."

HOME STATE has been hard hit by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Jeremy's death is the 19th fatal Afghanistan casualty with ties to HOME STATE. In addition, XX have been killed in Iraq, and XXX have been wounded in both wars.

Funeral services will be private, and are still being arranged. Jeremy's family has asked that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to a special family fund.

Appendix – Attention Filter

Background Questions on Sources for News

In this experiment, you have been asked to make decisions about scenarios involving a subject named "John". Most modern theories of decision making recognize the fact that decisions do not take place in a vacuum. Individual preferences and knowledge, along with situational variables can greatly impact the decision process. In order to facilitate our research on decision making we are interested in knowing certain factors about you, the decision maker. Specifically, we are interested in whether you actually take the time to read the directions; if not, then some of our manipulations that rely on changes in the instructions will be ineffective. So, in order to demonstrate that you have read the instructions, please ignore the question below. Instead, please type 123 into the Other field at the bottom of the screen, and then click on the next button below to proceed to the next screen.

From which of these sources have you received information in the past month? (Click all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Magazines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> National newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking with family / friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local TV news | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio newscast |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nightly network news | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet web sites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cable TV news | <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="text"/> |