Citizens to Soldiers: Mobilization, Cost Perceptions, and Support for Military Action

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Abstract

Policymakers have long assumed, and scholars have long argued, that how a government raises military manpower affects public support for military action through two obvious mechanisms: the likelihood any given individual will be personally affected by the conflict, and the expected aggregate cost of the conflict. Increased costs are thought to cause the public to be more critical of the use of military force. But do they? We gain leverage on this question in the US context by employing a survey experiment that allows us both to compare reactions to a range of manpower policies—an all-volunteer standing force, conscription, and mobilization of the reserves - and to explicitly test multiple mechanisms-expectations of bearing personal cost, expectations of aggregate cost, and effects not explained by these cost expectations. Our results strongly suggest that manpower policies' effects are not straightforward. Consistent with previous studies, we find that an expectation of conscription lowers public support for military action. Mobilization of the reserves, however, fails to diminish support, despite the fact that it should also affect more people and signal a larger conflict. While casualty estimates (proxy for scale) are negatively correlated with mission support, personal cost expectations are not. Furthermore, much of the variation between manpower treatments is not explained by either tested cost mechanism, suggesting a role for norms and values. These findings have implications for whether military manpower policies designed to impose political costs on policymakers are likely to work and for wider discussions of public support for military operations.

Résumé

Les décideur-euses politiques et chercheur-euses considèrent, depuis longtemps, que la manière dont un gouvernement mobilise ses effectifs militaires a un impact sur la vision citoyenne de l'action armée. Deux facteurs interviennent de manière flagrante : la probabilité que les individus soient affectés ou non par le conflit, et le coût total attendu dudit conflit. Il est généralement admis que l'augmentation des coûts donne lieu à une opinion publique défavorable à l'usage de la force militaire. Mais estce vraiment le cas? Une étude réalisée auprès d'un échantillon de population aux États-Unis nous permet d'approfondir cette question, à la fois en comparant les réactions des individus à diverses politiques en matière de mobilisation des effectifs militaires (forces armées basées uniquement sur le volontariat, conscription et mobilisation des réservistes) et en testant explicitement plusieurs mécanismes (anticipation du coût individuel, coût total du conflit attendu et impacts décorrélés de ces prévisions) auprès des personnes interrogées. Nos conclusions montrent que les conséquences d'une politique de mobilisation ne sont pas aussi prévisibles que l'on pourrait le croire. À l'instar de précédents travaux, notre étude révèle que la possibilité d'une conscription a un impact négatif sur le soutien citoyen de l'action militaire. En revanche, la mobilisation des réservistes n'a guère d'effet sur l'opinion publique, bien qu'elle puisse également affecter davantage de personnes et être le signal

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d'un conflit de plus grande envergure. Si le nombre estimé de morts (évaluation de l'échelle) a un impact négatif sur la perception de la mission, ce n'est pas le cas du coût personnel anticipé. Par ailleurs, une grande partie des variations observées dans le traitement des effectifs ne s'expliquant pas par les mécanismes de coût testés, l'importance des normes et valeurs serait à prendre en compte. Ces conclusions permettent de mieux comprendre les chances de succès de stratégies de mobilisation militaire entraînant un risque politique pour les décideur·euses, ainsi que d'élargir le débat quant au soutien citoyen des opérations militaires.

Resumen

Los responsables políticos han asumido durante mucho tiempo, y los investigadores han argumentado durante igual tiempo, que la forma en que un gobierno aumenta los efectivos militares afecta al apoyo público a la acción militar a través de dos mecanismos obvios: la probabilidad de que un determinado individuo se vea personalmente afectado por el conflicto, así como el coste total previsto del conflicto. Se cree que el aumento de los costes hace que el público sea más crítico en lo que se refiere al uso de la fuerza militar. ¿Pero es realmente así? En el contexto de los EE.UU., hemos conseguido avanzar en esta cuestión mediante un experimento de encuesta que nos permite tanto comparar las reacciones a una serie de políticas en materia de efectivos militares (una fuerza permanente totalmente voluntaria, el reclutamiento obligatorio y la movilización de las reservas) como también poner a prueba múltiples mecanismos de manera explícita: las expectativas de soportar costes personales, las expectativas de coste total y los efectos no explicados por estas expectativas de coste. Nuestros resultados sugieren claramente que los efectos de las políticas en materia de efectivos militares no son sencillos. En consonancia con estudios anteriores, constatamos que la expectativa de reclutamiento obligatorio disminuye el apoyo público a la acción militar. La movilización de las reservas, sin embargo, no disminuye el apoyo, a pesar de que también debería afectar a más personas y señalar un conflicto mayor. Mientras que las estimaciones de bajas (como indicador de escala), están correlacionadas negativamente con el apoyo a la misión, las expectativas de costes personales no lo están. Además, ninguno de los mecanismos de costes probados explica gran parte de la variación registrada en las formas como se tratan los efectivos militares, lo que sugiere que las normas y los valores también desempeñan un papel. Estos resultados tienen implicaciones tanto respecto a la probabilidad de que funcionen las políticas en materia de efectivos militares diseñadas para imponer costes políticos a los responsables políticos, así como en los debates más amplios sobre el apoyo público a las operaciones militares.

Keywords: civil-military relations, military manpower, costs of war, public opinion Palabras clave: relaciones cívico-militares, personal militar, costes de la guerra, opinión pública mots-clés: relations société civile-armée, effectifs militaires, coût de la guerre, opinion publique

Introduction

A core tenet of Kantian theory holds that in a democracy where the people bear the costs of war, public opinion will resist all but the most vital conflicts. In practice, the public's experience of the costs of war depends partly upon the mobilization policies used to recruit the fighting force. This theorized connection between manpower policy and public support for military action, through the mechanism of cost perception, has spurred a growing literature on conscription and public opinion, most of which indicates that an expectation of conscription tends to lower anticipated support for military action. However, most of these studies simply assume that the individual's anticipation of experiencing the human cost of war is what leads to lower support for conflict; the mechanism itself has rarely been directly tested. These studies also tend to focus on the effects of conscription versus full-time volunteer forces and leave out a critical third option: mobilization of volunteer parttime reserve forces. In this paper, we expand upon previous studies in two ways. First, we compare reactions to a range of manpower policies relevant to the US context—reliance on a full-time professional force, instituting conscription, and mobilizing reserve forces rather than focusing exclusively on the draft. Second, we directly test multiple mechanisms by which manpower policies may affect public support for military action: expectations of bearing personal cost, expectations of aggregate cost, and direct effects not explained by these cost expectations.

For most of its history, the United States preferred to maintain a small professional standing army, which, in moments of crisis, could be expanded (sometimes at considerable political cost) through a range of policy instruments. Following World War II (WWII), the United States broke with past precedent and maintained a large standing army to contain communist expansion. However, wars from Korea and Vietnam to the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan consistently forced policymakers to supplement the active-duty force. Debates over how best to do so have explicitly considered how the need to convert citizens into soldiers might constrain the commander in chief by imposing significant political costs.

A long-standing academic literature models the wartime opinion formation process as a cost-benefit calculation in which Americans weigh the benefits of military actions with different objectives, legitimacy, and chances of success (Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2006), against their anticipated costs, particularly combat casualties (Mueller 1973; Gartner 2008). An emerging literature has amended classic accounts to consider the costs imposed by different manpower policies. However, this literature has overlooked two key aspects of the connection between mobilization and public opinion.

First, past research has focused exclusively on how conscription as a manpower policy might influence public support for war. Studies employing a range of historical, empirical, and experimental methods have all found evidence that conscription decreases support for war in the United States (Vasquez 2005; Bergan 2009; Erikson and Stoker 2011; Horowitz and Levendusky 2011; Levy 2013; Kriner and Shen 2016). However, from Korea until the first Gulf War, policymakers appeared to believe that mobilizing the National Guard and Reserves would be even more politically costly than using conscription to supplement the active-duty force when needed.¹ Despite

1 We recognize the distinction between "mobilization" of the Guard and Reserves—calling them to active duty and "deployment" outside of the continental United States—actually sending them to a theater of conflict. We refer to "mobilization" throughout this paper, first because that is the relevant political hurdle and second the intense political debate on the question in the 1960s and 1970s, existing scholarship has all but ignored the issue of how mobilizing the Reserves and National Guard might compare to the prospect of conscription.

Second, past research has paid only passing attention to the precise mechanisms through which manpower policies shape Americans' support for war. Most studies of conscription have argued that the prospect of a draft reduces war support primarily by causing Americans to feel greater risk of being personally affected by the fighting and dying of war—often referred to as having "skin in the game." However, this personal cost perception mechanism is generally assumed rather than demonstrated; what evidence there is for it is mixed; and prior work fails to acknowledge other potential pathways through which manpower policies might shape wartime opinion formation.²

To address these gaps, we conduct a survey experiment examining the relationships between mobilization systems, perceptions of both personal and aggregate mission costs, and public support for military action. Specifically, we explore public responses to the prospect of different combinations of manpower policy—an allvolunteer standing force, conscription, and mobilization of the reserve component—to determine how manpower policy affects public perception of the costs of military action, and in turn support for that action.

Consistent with previous studies, we find that an expectation of conscription lowers public support for military action. Mobilization of the Guard and Reserves, however, fails to diminish support for military action. The prospect of conscription increases both personal and aggregate cost perceptions versus the all-volunteer activeduty force baseline; mobilizing the Guard and Reserves which should both increase the number of Americans at risk of personally experiencing the costs of war and signal a potentially more costly conflict—has no effect on

because it is the mobilization of these forces that creates community disturbance, whether or not they are deployed. We recognize the possibility that survey respondents may not understand the distinction and may read "deployed" where we have used the term "mobilized," but we do not believe this will skew our results. One important exception is Lau, Brown, and Sears (1978), who specifically examined the rational costbenefit mechanism against the "symbolic politics" approach which Sears and co-authors had found in sev-

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proach, which Sears and co-authors had found in several other areas of US public opinion; Lau et al. found no evidence of a rational self-interest mechanism on attitudes toward the Vietnam War but support for a symbolic politics mechanism. either cost perception. Cost perceptions, however, play only a partial role in mediating the influence of conscription on war support—we also find a strong, negative direct effect. The surprising direct effect of conscription on public opinion, unmediated by expectations of cost, suggests that the prospect of conscription may erode public support for some other, possibly normative or psychological, reason. Most surprisingly, we find no relationship between respondents' expectations of bearing personal costs and their support for military action—directly contradicting long-standing theory. Our findings have both theoretical implications for understanding the American public's relationship with its military and practical implications for the nature and strength of the political costs constraining presidential decisions to use military force.

The article proceeds as follows. We first briefly review the existing literature on the determinants of public support for war and public perceptions of cost. We then derive hypotheses about the ways manpower policies specifically, continued exclusive reliance on the regular all-volunteer force, the mobilization of the Guard and Reserves, or the reinstitution of conscription—might affect some of these perceptions of cost and thus support for war. Next, we describe our experimental design for testing our hypothesized connections between manpower policies and public perceptions of cost and support for war, followed by a discussion of our results. We conclude with policy implications and areas for further research.

Determinants of Public Support for War

An important strand of academic literature models the process by which the public forms opinions about whether to support the initiation or continuation of military action as a more or less rational cost-benefit calculation in which Americans weigh the benefits of military actions with different objectives, legitimacy, and chances of success against their anticipated costs, both human and financial (for a contrasting perspective emphasizing the role of elites in driving wartime opinion formation, see, inter alia, Zaller 1992 and Berinsky 2007). The public is in general more supportive of low-cost actions (Mueller 1973; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2006; Gartner 2008; Caverley 2014; Cappella Zielinski 2016; Kreps 2018) but also demonstrates a clear willingness to bear higher costs for actions with high enough benefit: those actions they consider more legitimate and/or likely to succeed (Larson 1996; Larson and Savych 2005; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2006; Horowitz, Simpson, and Stam 2011). Moreover, decades of scholarship have shown that support for war generally falls as the costs of war mount (Mueller 1973; Mueller and Mueller 1994;

Voeten and Brewer 2006). Discussion of the public's cost-benefit analysis generally acknowledges two types of costs: human life and financial. Bruce Russett argues that "of the two, blood (American) seems to be the more important" (Russett 1990, 46; see also Luttwak 1996). What the public believes about foreign policy is further affected by partisanship (Campbell et al. 1960; Zaller 1992; Bartels 2002; Baum 2002; Gaines et al. 2007), elite and media framing (Dauber 2001; Baum and Potter 2008; Berinsky 2009), elite consensus or dissensus (Zaller 1992; Brody 1994; Larson 1996; Berinsky 2007), and cues from one's own party elite (Berinsky 2009). These additional factors highlight that public perceptions of the benefits and costs associated with an operation are malleable, particularly before the conflict is initiated (Baum and Groeling 2010).

One commonly assumed way the public may perceive costs is through individuals' perception of their own likelihood of being affected by war. These perceived effects are generally assumed to include not only the possibility that one might actually be mobilized in some military capacity, but also the possibility that one's family members might be so affected. A popular refrain is that if only members of Congress had to worry that their children would be put in harm's way, they might do more to limit military adventurism. Others have made similar arguments about financing wars through taxation-where the immediate impact on household finances is clearerrather than through debt (Kreps 2018), or through progressive versus regressive taxation (Caverley 2014). This skin-in-the-game effect, in which people most affected by a conflict are also most likely to critically evaluate the conflict, is often asserted and indirectly supported, but rarely directly tested.

A second way the public may perceive costs of conflict is in aggregate, based on the overall scale of the conflict. Here, we see significantly clearer empirical support for a link between expectations about the scale, or aggregate cost, of a conflict and public support for that conflict (Mueller 1973; Gartner 2008; Geys 2010). There is also some evidence that proximity (in both time and space) of casualties (Gartner and Segura 1998; Gartner 2008; Kriner and Shen 2010; Althaus, Bramlett, and Gimpel 2012) affects public support, an effect somewhat more localized than purely aggregate costs but not as direct as personal skin in the game.

Finally, just as the public considers the legitimacy of a conflict's aims, in addition to its likelihood of success, the public may also consider the legitimacy of the conflict's costs, including their distribution among the populace. For example, Kriner and Shen (2014) find that the public is significantly more sensitive to war casualties when

inequalities in the distribution of those casualties are highlighted.

How do manpower policies affect public support for war, and through what pathways do they do so? While it is possible that different approaches to raising manpower may provide signals to the public about the benefits of a conflict-for example, depending on historical context, imposition of a draft might signal that grave national interests are at stake (Moskos 2001)-most policymakers and scholars presume that manpower policies affect public support for war through their effects on the cost side of the public's calculation. Moreover, it is also possible that Americans have preferences about different manpower policies themselves, allowing them to directly affect war support independent of any influence they have on cost perceptions. The following section describes three pathways through which manpower policies might affect public support for war.

Manpower Mobilization and Public Support for War in the United States

The United States has, at times, used varying combinations of a volunteer professional force, conscription, and mobilization of a militia or reserve system to provide military manpower. For its first century, the United States relied primarily on volunteers mobilized through the state-based militia system, with a small federal force acting primarily on the frontier (Coffman 1986, 2007). The first federal draft was used during the Civil War, with conscription reintroduced during World War I (WWI) and, on a significantly larger scale, in World War II. Conscription was revived in the early Cold War period, and for the first time was maintained even when no large-scale combat was taking place (Segal 1989, 17-44). The reserve component-federal service reserves and the National Guard, which had been created from the state militias in the early 1900s-was also used significantly during WWI, WWII, and the Korean War.

In the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson broke the pattern of previous conflicts by relying heavily on the draft to bolster the fighting force in Vietnam, but balking at mobilizing the Guard and Reserves in part for fear that it would undermine public support for the war. After the end of US involvement in Vietnam, the structure of the American military—and the Army in particular—was fundamentally altered. For the first time, a very large standing army would be maintained, based on professionals and term volunteers rather than draftees or conflict-specific volunteers.³ Military planners under

3 Although selective service registration remained in case of a need for large-scale mobilization.

Army Chief of Staff General Creighton Abrams and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird crafted the Total Force Policy, which moved certain capabilities into the reserve components such that major operations were all but impossible without reserve mobilization.

The Total Force faced a significant test in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, when the US military engaged in major combat operations without a draft, but with the support of the reserve component (Duncan 1997, 3–131). Through the rest of the 1990s, members of the reserve component were mobilized and deployed around the world in support of peacekeeping missions. Miranda Summers Lowe argues that "[c]onsistent use of the Guard and Reserve [in the 1990s] created a sense of comfort that reserve component mobilizations would meet the needs of the Army without reimplementing the draft, reducing worldwide commitments, or forward basing additional active component troops" (Summers Lowe 2019, 120). Reserve component mobilization increased after September 11, 2001, with ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. By the mid-2000s, reservists averaged more than 70 days per year on active duty, up from 14 days per year in the late 1990s, and 1 day per year before Desert Storm (The All-Volunteer Military: Issues and Performance 2007, 1; see also Blankshain 2021, 99-100).

Throughout these shifts, policymakers have assumed that the ways in which a government constitutes its military affect public support for military action (Aldrich et al. 2006), but there has been significantly less consensus about how manpower and mobilization choices affect that support. Policymakers' assumptions have not always been consistent-at various times, they have argued that a draft makes costs more salient than does reserve component mobilization, but also vice versa. Scholars, meanwhile, have focused primarily on conscription, paying little attention to the effects of reserve component mobilization, and assuming rather than directly testing possible mechanisms. Combining real-world policy changes with the existing academic literature, we develop seven hypotheses about the connections linking manpower policy, perceived costs, and support for war.

First, and most simply, we expect that policies that mobilize personnel beyond the standing active-duty force will decrease support for initiating involvement in a conflict.

H1: Conscription and reserve component mobilization (compared to reliance on the active-duty force) will both decrease support for the deployment of US servicemembers.

We next turn to hypotheses about the mechanisms that might explain this expected effect.



Figure 1. Pathways through which manpower policies affect support for war.

Personal Cost: Skin in the Game and Self-Interest

Most past research examining the effect of manpower policies (primarily the draft) on support for war has assumed that these policies affect war support by shaping expectations of personal costs, sometimes called selfinterest, or skin in the game. Some policies-such as using only an all-volunteer, capital- and technology-intensive professional force to carry out military operationssignificantly reduce the share of Americans who are exposed to the risk of fighting and dying overseas, and also make it easy to predict who will be affected. In contrast, manpower-intensive mobilization policies-such as conscription and reserve mobilization-that expand the fighting force beyond a narrow segment of professional servicemembers spread the risk of combat service and sacrifice across a wider and less predictable swath of American families (Moskos 1970; Kester 1986) and should therefore erode popular support for war (Vasquez III 2005; Fordham 2016). This self-interest or skin-in-the game pathway is illustrated at the top of figure 1.

Politicians and other public figures have expressed similar beliefs. As President George W. Bush neared a decision to send American troops to Iraq in December 2002, Representative Charles Rangel argued in a *New York Times* op-ed for a return to conscription as a check on military adventurism: "I believe that if those calling for war knew that their children were likely to be required to serve—and to be placed in harm's way—there would be more caution . . . A renewed draft will help bring a greater appreciation of the consequences of decisions to go to war" (Rangel 2002). Other voices arguing that conscription may be crucial to restoring a connection between "the people" and the human costs of military action include retired Ambassador Karl Eikenberry (Kitfield 2014) and retired General Stanley McChrystal (Rogin 2012).

Academic research on conscription has found some evidence consistent with the self-interest mechanism. For example, several studies have shown that the introduction of the draft lottery significantly lowered support for war among directly affected young men during the Vietnam War (Bergan 2009; Erikson and Stoker 2011). In an experimental setting, Horowitz and Levendusky (2011) found that the effect of conscription was strongest among younger subjects (eighteen to forty years old), with modest evidence that the effect may also have been stronger among parents with children in this age range. Other studies of survey data, however, found no significant association between civilians having a directly affected family member or friend and lower support for the war, either in WWII (Rugg and Cantril 1940) or in Vietnam (Lau, Brown, and Sears 1978).

While mobilizing the reserve component would not spread risk to the same extent as a draft lottery, it would still substantially increase the number of American families directly affected by war.⁴ During the Vietnam War, President Johnson feared the public outcry that would result from the disruption of communities across

4 The selected reserves account for just under 40 percent of the total Department of Defense military force. In 2020, there were approximately 1.35 million activeduty servicemembers and 0.84 million selected reserve members, according to the Department of Defense. America as older, established, politically active, and connected Guardsmen and Reservists were called up (Stuckey and Pistorius 1985, 27ff; Gelb 1971, 464–65). While a primary motivation for the new role of the reserve component under the Total Force Policy was allowing the country to maintain desired force levels with a shrinking budget, some have asserted that a secondary motive was to ensure that, should political leaders take the country to war, they would have to mobilize the reserve component, theoretically creating more Americans with skin in the game and potentially preventing the extended commitment of troops without broad and explicit support from the American public (Sorley 1991; see also Blankshain 2021, 103).⁵

While critics such as McChrystal argue that a return to conscription is the only way to ensure that "everybody has skin in the game," other analysts argue that the Total Force Policy and the mobilization of the Guard and Reserves have succeeded considerably in spreading the costs of war and ensuring shared sacrifice across the country (Blankshain 2021, 103). Retired Army Brigadier General Kevin Ryan wrote, "This in fact happened in both Desert Storm (1991) and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, because of the 1970s decision to shift forces into the Reserves ... A visit to any small town in America today will almost certainly reveal a monument or memorial to those from that area who served in the current and recent wars" (Ryan 2018, 1). Similarly, Wendy Anderson (who previously served as Deputy Secretary of Defense Ash Carter's Chief of Staff and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel's Deputy Chief of Staff) argues that "the National Guard is more than simply a critical component of our nation's fighting force-it is also the connective tissue bridging the civil-military divide . . . The sacrifices paid by the reserve component echo throughout America's communities" (Anderson 2016).

This suggests two hypotheses:

- H2: Conscription and reserve component mobilization (compared to reliance on the active-duty force) will both increase perceptions of risk that an individual will be personally affected by the conflict.
- H3: Increased perception of personal costs will decrease support for the deployment of US servicemembers.
- 5 Lewis Sorley (1991) cites Gen John Vessey claiming that limiting executive freedom to deploy troops without asking for and obtaining public approval was a main motivator behind the Total Force Policy. Conrad Crane and Gian Gentile (2015) dispute that this was General Abrams's intent, but it was clearly something that many contemporary military leaders saw as reasonable and desirable.

Signals of Scale and Casualty Aversion

Information about manpower policies may also affect another element of Americans' cost–benefit calculations: their estimates of how costly, large, or difficult a conflict is likely to be in the aggregate.⁶ This second mechanism is illustrated in the bottom pathway of figure 1. If policymakers choose to supplement the all-volunteer activeduty force through alternate mobilization strategies, the public may logically conclude that this signals a largescale and potentially costly military mission. Johnson, for instance, feared that a full mobilization of the reserve component in addition to the draft would signal, both to the US public and to adversaries, that Vietnam was a major war rather than a more limited conflict, which is how he desired domestic and international audiences to perceive it (Stuckey and Pistorius 1985).

For purposes of this study, we focus on how manpower policies affect popular perceptions of likely aggregate casualties, as they are a particularly salient cost and casualty aversion has been widely studied. Of course, signaling a larger, more difficult conflict may also affect the public's estimates of the financial costs of war, or the likelihood the war will be won. We assume that an individual's estimates of these various correlates to a "larger more difficult war" would be linked and thus the omission of alternative measures of aggregate cost should not bias our results.⁷

This suggests two additional hypotheses:

- H4: Conscription and reserve component mobilization (compared to reliance on the active-duty force) will both increase perceptions of the likely scale of the conflict, as measured by expected casualties.
- H5: Increased casualty expectations will decrease support for the deployment of US servicemembers.

Direct Effects: Manpower System Legitimacy

Finally, manpower policies may affect public support directly, rather than through the self-interest (personal cost) or conflict scale signal (aggregate cost) pathways. Americans may have distinct beliefs and preferences about manpower policies themselves, and the mix of policies used may in turn affect support for war, independent of

- 6 For an analogous argument that the introduction of a war tax may lead the public to anticipate a more costly war, see Flores-Macias and Kreps (2017).
- 7 We also recognize that the effects of actual financial costs such as a war tax may function separately from the effects of casualties or other less material cost perceptions. Further research could disaggregate these.

any intermediate effect on the number of Americans directly affected by the conflict, or the overall scale of the conflict. This final pathway is illustrated by the middle arrow of figure 1. Given the parallel literature about the importance of legitimacy on the benefits side of the costbenefit equation, it is plausible that these effects may be related to perceptions of the legitimacy of how these costs are being imposed and distributed.

Some Americans may oppose war that would involve the reintroduction of conscription because they oppose conscription itself on principle. Conscription has never been popular in the United States (Coffman 1986; Flynn 2002). Having moved away from a draft in the 1970s, the voluntary aspect of contemporary military service has been repeatedly emphasized by politicians and practitioners alike. For example, when Representative Rangel introduced a bill to create a draft in the lead-up to the Iraq War, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld argued that it was as unwise as it was unnecessary. In contrast to Vietnam, when many were inducted into the service without any choice or against their will, Rumsfeld argued that "We have people serving today-God bless 'embecause they volunteered. They want to do what it is they're doing" (Mazur 2010, 128). Such a norm is consistent with broader American ideals of individualism and liberty (Cohen 1990).

Government coercion on a matter of life and death is in tension with core liberal democratic values. Segal notes that the long-running debate in the United States "focused on the right of the federal government to call people for military service versus the right of individual citizens to decide for themselves whether or not to serve" (Segal 1989, 1). The Marshall Commission, which was charged with developing alternatives to the draft system in the 1960s, repeatedly cited public concerns about equity and fairness when formulating the proposal for the draft lottery (Flynn 1993). In the contemporary polity, experimental research indicates that the draft's impact on public support for war may be partially conditional on whether or not it accords with democratic norms of shared sacrifice, and may also be moderated by partisanship, suggesting a possible role for norms and ideology (Kriner and Shen 2016). Research on support for the draft itself indicates that, contrary to the expectations of self-interest-based arguments, support for a draft is actually higher during wartime (when being drafted carries considerably higher costs) than during times of peace (Fordham 2016; see also Lau, Brown, and Sears 1978). This again suggests a possible role for the importance of legitimacy or other symbolic politics beliefs, for example, a belief that if the government compels service, it must be for a good reason.

Policies that violate norms of voluntarism or of fairness—such as conscription—may decrease support for the use of force independent of perceptions of personal or aggregate costs of the conflict. This could be because the public views the violation of the norm as something to be avoided in and of itself, or because the government's need to violate the norm—its inability to procure volunteer manpower—signals that that conflict is illegitimate, unnecessary, or unlikely to succeed, and thus lowers support. In contrast, policies such as the mobilization of the Guard/Reserves, which involve mobilizing a wider swath of volunteers, do not violate norms of voluntarism. As BG (ret) Ryan notes:

The All Volunteer Force is consistent with American values, in which the government should exercise restraint in circumscribing individual liberty. When there is a good reason to do so, without viable alternatives, such intervention into the lives of citizens is permissible. But if there are alternatives to infringing on personal liberty, both American society and its citizens benefit by allowing individuals to pursue their chosen talents. (Ryan 2018, 2)

This mobilization of the reserve component for Desert Storm was debated in Congress but did not generate significant public pushback. By some accounts, members of the reserve component were eager to deploy and prove that they were truly part of the total force (Duncan 1997, 12, 59). The post-9/11 conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (and later Syria) have stretched on for nearly two decades with limited public support, but also little to no real public pushback on reserve component mobilization. In fact, as noted above, several politicians and commentators have suggested that a return to conscription is needed to increase public awareness of these conflicts, implying that the implementation of the Total Force Policy has not done so.

This suggests two final hypotheses:

- H6: Conscription will have a direct, negative effect (i.e., one not mediated by cost perceptions) on support for the deployment of US servicemembers.
- H7: Mobilization of the reserve component will not have a direct effect (i.e., one not mediated by cost perceptions) on support for the deployment of US servicemembers.

Experimental Design

To test these hypothesized effects of different mobilization systems on public support for the use of force, we embedded an experiment on a nationally representative online survey of 1,000 adult Americans conducted by YouGov from March 22 to 25,2017. The experiment employs a 2×2 between-subjects design varying the presence or absence of both conscription and mobilization of the Reserves/Guard.

All respondents first learned of the following hypothetical scenario,⁸ which was based on that used by Horowitz and Levendusky (2011) in their experimental study of the influence of conscription on support for war: "A country has attacked its neighbor, an ally of the United States. Our ally has asked the U.S. to send troops to help their military repel the attack. The President is considering sending the U.S. military to defend our ally." To limit variation in respondents' perceptions of the benefits of the conflict, the hypothetical operation in our scenario was held constant across all groups and was designed to be the type of operation generally considered most legitimate by the American public (Jentleson and Britton 1998; Aldrich et al. 2006). All subjects were randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups in which we varied the combination of manpower policies that the United States would employ to raise the requisite fighting force.

In the control group, subjects were told that, to provide the necessary troops, the US military would rely only on the active-duty all-volunteer force. The military would neither use a draft nor call up the Reserves or National Guard. In the draft treatment group, subjects were instead told that the military would rely both on the current all-volunteer active-duty force and on a draft. The treatment specified that all men and women between eighteen and twenty-five years would be eligible for conscription on a random basis with very limited possibilities of deferments. The treatment concluded by informing subjects in this group that the military would not call up the Reserves/Guard.9 Subjects assigned to the Reserves/Guard treatment group were told that the military would rely on the current all-volunteer force and "will also mobilize the National Guard and reserve forces, which are comprised of Americans who volunteer for part-time service in the armed forces." Subjects in this group were also informed that the military would not use a draft to meet manpower needs. Finally, in the combined treatment group subjects were told that the military would rely on all three manpower mechanisms-the standing all-volunteer force

- 8 The complete wording of the experimental module is provided in the online Supplementary Information.
- 9 This scenario may appear unlikely, but it is precisely what happened in the Vietnam conflict.

(AVF), a draft, and mobilizing the Reserves/Guard—to raise the requisite troops.

Importantly, we did not stipulate that these manpower policy changes would be imposed regardless of the nature of the conflict, as, for example, Horowitz and Levendusky (2011) do. To fully capture the effect these policies have on individuals' estimates of both their likelihood of being personally affected and the aggregate scale of the conflict, it is important that respondents not believe that the manpower policy was set separately from the anticipated conflict. The policy's value as a signal about the conflict is part of the effect we are testing.

After being exposed to one possible manpower configuration, all subjects were then asked the same question: "Should the President send American troops to defend our ally and fight the invading country?" Answers were recorded on a four-point scale ranging from "definitely should not send troops" to "definitely should send troops." To directly explore the mechanisms through which manpower policies influence support for war, we also asked all subjects two questions to measure their perceptions of the likely costs of military action in this scenario. The first question, designed to measure subjects' expectations of the costs they would personally experience, asked subjects: "How likely is it that you, a close friend, or relative would be personally affected if the President sent troops to defend our ally?" Answers were recorded on a four-point scale ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely." The second question measured each subject's estimate of the aggregate scale of the conflict. Because casualties are the most salient war cost for most Americans (Gartner 2008; Caverley 2014), we asked each subject: "How many casualties do you think the U.S. military would suffer if the President sends troops to defend our ally?" Subjects chose casualty ranges on a seven-point scale ranging from "0 to 50 casualties" to "more than 50,000 casualties."¹⁰

This design allows us to compare the magnitudes of any effects a range of mobilization polices have on support for initiating a combat operation, ranging from using the active-duty force only to supplementing the active-duty force with both conscripts and the reserve component. The inclusion of the personal effect and conflict scale questions allows us to determine the extent to

10 Individuals may also consider financial costs when considering support for military action. The literature on the effects of financial costs for public support is ambiguous, while the literature on human costs (casualties) is more definitive (Berinsky 2007; Geys 2010). Therefore, we chose to use casualties as the clearest stand-in for aggregate cost perceptions.



Figure 2. Effects of manpower treatments on support for use of force. *Note*: Difference in support for war across control group and each treatment group. I-bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals around each point estimate.

which each manpower policy's effect on public support is mediated through its effects on personal and aggregate cost perceptions.

H1 will be supported if we find that the conscription and reserve component mobilization treatments (including the combined treatment) decrease public support for sending troops. H2 will be supported if we find that the conscription and reserve component mobilization treatments both increase individuals' perceptions that they will be affected by conflict. H3 will be supported if we find an inverse relationship between individuals' expectations that they will be personally affected and their support for war. H4 will be supported if we find that the conscription and reserve component mobilization treatments increase individuals' expectations of casualties. H5 will be supported if we find an inverse relationship between individuals' expectations of casualties and their support for war. H6 and H7 will be supported if mediation analysis shows that the draft treatment significantly decreases support for sending troops even after controlling for perceptions of personal and aggregate costs, while the reserve mobilization treatment does not.

Experimental Results

To test H1, we directly compare the effects of the various manpower treatments on public support for our hypothetical conflict. Figure 2 plots the difference in support for war between each treatment group and the activeduty-only control group. To calculate the percentage of subjects supporting the use of force in this scenario, we coded subjects replying that the United States "definitely" and "should send troops" as supporting the use of force. Because subjects were randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups, the resulting differences in means are unbiased.¹¹

Consistent with prior research, support for the use of force was significantly lower in the draft treatment than in the active-duty-only control group. Whereas 70 percent of subjects supported the deployment of troops when told that the United States would continue to rely only on the all-volunteer active-duty force to defend our ally, only 59 percent of subjects did so when told that doing so would require the use of conscription. In contrast, and consistent with observed experience in the post-9/11 era, the Reserves/Guard Treatment had no significant effect on support for combat operations. Just over 67 percent of subjects supported the use of force when told that doing so would require the mobilization of the Reserves and National Guard. This is just 3 percent lower than the level of support observed in the active-duty control

11 To ensure that this randomization was successful, we examined the demographic balance of our sample across the four experimental groups and found no evidence of any statistically significant imbalances. See SI table 1 in the online Supplementary Information. Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/jogss/article/7/4/ogac017/6649339 by Albert R. Mann Library user on 30 August 2022

group, and this small difference is not statistically significant. Finally, the combined treatment informing subjects that defending our ally would require both a draft and the mobilization of the Reserves/Guard generated the lowest level of support for the use of force: just 57 percent. This figure is only marginally lower than that observed in the draft treatment and the difference between the two is not statistically significant.¹² The results of a logistic regression with support as the dependent variable, reported in table 2 as part of our mediation analysis, further confirm these results. The coefficients on the draft and combined treatments are negative and statistically significant, while the coefficient on the reserve component treatment is not statistically significant. This mixed support for H1-that only conscription decreases support for sending troops-reduces confidence in a straightforward personal cost mechanism.

Mobilization and Self-Interest

To examine how the manpower policy treatments affected subjects' assessments of the likelihood that they or their family would be affected should the United States use force to defend its ally, we constructed a pair of ordered logit regression models. The independent variables are dummies for our treatment conditions, with the active-duty-only condition serving as the omitted baseline. We also include a range of standard control variables. Rather than support for sending troops, the dependent variable now measures each subject's perceived probability of being personally affected by the use of force, measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely." The results are presented in the first column of table 1.

As indicated in H2, we expect the draft treatment to increase the number of people who believe they will be affected by conflict. The coefficient on the draft treatment indicator variable is positive and statistically significant, supporting this hypothesis. Subjects in the draft treatment were significantly more likely to believe that they or a member of their family were likely to be personally affected by the military action than were otherwise identical subjects in the active-duty-only control group. First differences derived from simulations suggest that the draft treatment increased the predicted probability of the median respondent believing that they were

12 The estimated negative effect of both the draft (-11 percent) and combined (-13 percent) treatments is also statistically significantly greater than the estimated effect of the reserve treatment (-3 percent), p < 0.05, two-tailed test.
 Table 1. Effect of treatments on skin in the game and scale of conflict estimates

	Personally affected	Casualties
Draft treatment	0.50***	0.30*
	(0.16)	(0.16)
Reserves/Guard treatment	0.02	-0.04
	(0.16)	(0.16)
Draft + Reserves/Guard treatment	0.50***	0.47***
	(0.17)	(0.16)
Republican	0.24	-0.56^{***}
	(0.17)	(0.17)
Democrat	0.15	0.21
	(0.16)	(0.15)
Male	0.05	-0.10
	(0.12)	(0.12)
Age	-0.01^{***}	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	0.13***	0.06
	(0.04)	(0.04)
White	-0.00	0.19
	(0.14)	(0.14)
No military service	-0.49^{***}	0.08
	(0.13)	(0.12)
Observations	946	946

Note: Ordered logit models. Standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed. ${}^{*}p < 0.10$, ${}^{**}p < 0.05$, ${}^{***}p < 0.01$.

somewhat or very likely to be personally affected by the conflict from 0.48 to 0.60.

With over 800,000 Americans serving in the Reserves or Guard, their mobilization should also raise the probability of being personally affected for a significant number of American families. Counter to H2, however, in our experiment the Reserves/Guard treatment had virtually no effect on subjects' assessments of the likelihood they or a loved one would be affected. The relevant coefficient is positive, but substantively small and statistically insignificant. The combined treatment also had a positive effect on personal cost perceptions. However, it is almost identical in magnitude to that observed in the draft treatment. This also suggests that mobilizing the reserve component of the armed forces does not affect Americans' perceptions of the likelihood that they or friends and family will be directly affected by conflict. Overall, H2 is partially supported-again, the draft increases perceptions that individuals will be personally affected by conflict, while mobilizing the reserve component does not.

Of note, we specifically test respondents' *expectation* of being personally affected, as this is what is most likely to affect their support for initiating the war, whether or

not they are correct in their anticipation. Table 1 does indicate that as we might expect, older respondents are less likely to expect to be personally affected, as are respondents with no connection to the military. More educated respondents are more likely to anticipate being affected, although the reason for this is not obvious.

Mobilization and Scale of Conflict

To assess whether subjects view manpower policies as a signal about the scale of the conflict, we again estimate an ordered logit regression. The dependent variable measured on a seven-point scale the number of US casualties that each subject estimated the use of force would entail. The independent variables of interest are the same indicator variables identifying assignment to the draft, Reserves/Guard, and combined treatments, with the activeduty-only control group serving as the omitted baseline category. The models include the same demographic controls used in the preceding analysis. The second column of table 1 presents the results. As hypothesized in H4, the coefficient for the draft treatment is positive and statistically significant. Informing subjects that the military would use a draft to defend our ally from attack did more than just increase subjects' perceptions of the chance that they would be personally affected by conflict. It also significantly increased subjects' estimates of how many casualties the use of force would involve.

Contrary to our hypothesis, however, the Reserves/Guard treatment did not increase subjects' anticipated casualty estimates. The coefficient for this treatment is negative, substantively very small, and statistically insignificant. Thus, mobilizing the Reserve and the Guard-at least in the contemporary polity-has no effect on Americans' assessments either of their personal risk of being affected by conflict or the aggregate scale of the conflict. Finally, the combined treatment also increased subjects' aggregate cost assessments. The coefficient for this treatment is larger than the coefficient for the draft treatment; however, Wald tests show that the difference in magnitude is not statistically significant. Again, we find little evidence that mobilizing the reserve component affects most Americans' assessments of the likely costs of military action. Thus, H4 is partially supported-the draft increases perceptions of the scale of the conflict, as measured by expected casualties, but mobilization of the reserve component does not.

Direct Effects of Mobilization on Support for War We have seen that the draft and combined draft/Guard and Reserves treatments significantly eroded support for Table 2. Manpower policies, cost estimates, and war support

	(1)	(2)
Draft treatment	-0.55***	-0.52**
	(0.20)	(0.21)
Reserves/Guard treatment	-0.15	-0.13
	(0.21)	(0.22)
Draft + Reserves/Guard treatment	-0.58^{***}	-0.51^{**}
	(0.20)	(0.21)
Personally affected estimate		0.20***
		(0.07)
Casualty estimate		-0.36***
		(0.04)
Republican	1.13***	0.97***
	(0.20)	(0.21)
Democrat	0.04	0.09
	(0.18)	(0.19)
Male	0.49***	0.50***
	(0.14)	(0.15)
Age	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	0.09*	0.10^{*}
	(0.05)	(0.05)
White	0.27*	0.34*
	(0.16)	(0.17)
No military service	-0.26^{*}	-0.19
	(0.15)	(0.16)
Constant	-0.14	0.44
	(0.35)	(0.42)
Observations	946	946

Note: Logit models. Standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed. ${}^{*}p < 0.10$, ${}^{**}p < 0.05$, ${}^{***}p < 0.01$.

war, while the Guard and Reserves mobilization alone treatment did not. Similarly, the draft and combined treatments both increased personal and aggregate cost perceptions, while the Guard/Reserve treatment did not. These findings raise significant questions about the generally assumed cost mechanism. To explore the causal pathways outlined in figure 1, we first estimated a pair of logistic regressions presented in table 2. The first model includes just the manpower treatment variables and demographic controls, while the second includes the variables hypothesized to mediate the effects of the manpower treatments on war support, namely respondents' personal and aggregate cost perceptions.

In both model specifications, the coefficients for both the draft and the combined manpower treatments are negative and statistically significant. By contrast, the mobilizing the Guard/Reserve treatment did not have a statistically significant effect on war support. In model 2, consistent with H5, greater casualty estimates were

Table 3. Direct and indirect effects of treatments on war support

	Coefficient	Standard error
Draft		
Total effect	-0.580	0.214
Direct effect	-0.524	0.215
Indirect effect	-0.056	0.109
Reserves		
Total effect	-0.137	0.216
Direct effect	-0.126	0.216
Indirect effect	-0.010	0.106
Combined		
Total effect	-0.622	0.211
Direct effect	-0.508	0.212
Indirect effect	-0.114	0.110

significantly negatively associated with war support. However, inconsistent with H3, the coefficient for personal cost perceptions was positive and statistically significant.¹³ We return to this surprising finding shortly.

Finally, we look for evidence of a direct effect of the manpower treatments on war support (i.e., the middle pathway in figure 1). In linear models, the coefficient on the independent variable of interest in the expanded model (i.e., model 2) captures the direct effect of x on y, and the difference in coefficients for the independent variable across the two models captures the effect of x on y that occurs indirectly through the mediating variables included in the second model. However, the simple decomposition principles used to estimate direct and indirect effects in linear models are inappropriate for binary probability models such as logit (Imai, Keele, and Tingley 2010; Breen, Karlson, and Holm 2013). Instead, we use the method developed by Karlson, Holm, and Breen (2012) to decompose the effects in model 2 of table 2 and estimate how much of the influence of each manpower treatment on war support is direct versus how much is mediated through each treatment's influence on subjects' personal and aggregate cost estimates. Table 3 presents the direct and indirect effect estimates for each experimental treatment.

13 Past research has argued that the draft treatment should have the largest negative effect on war support among those who are most likely to be affected if the conscription were reinstated. We explore this using three different measures of susceptibility to conscription in the online Supplementary Information (SI table 8). We find no evidence that likelihood of exposure to conscription moderates the influence of the draft treatment. The KHB decomposition method finds evidence of a strong direct effect of both the draft and combined treatments on support for the use of force, consistent with H6. In contrast, we see no evidence that the Reserves/Guard Treatment had any direct (or indirect) influence on support for war, consistent with H7.¹⁴ Our analysis suggests that conscription does not decrease support for war primarily by affecting Americans' perceptions that they will be personally affected, or that the war will be particularly costly, as much of the literature assumes. Even controlling for both personal cost perceptions and estimated casualties, we continue to find evidence of a direct negative effect of conscription on support for war.

Further Analysis of Association between Personal Cost Perceptions and War Support

Surprisingly, contrary to H3, the coefficient for the personal cost perception variable in model 2 of table 2 is positive and statistically significant-in other words, subjects who were more likely to believe that they will be personally affected by conflict were actually more likely to support the conflict, all else being equal. This result stands in stark contrast to the common assumption in the literature that increasing subjects' assessments of the likelihood that they will personally bear the costs of war will decrease support for the use of force. However, it is consistent with the findings in Fordham (2016) that support for the draft is more complicated than simple self-interest motives would predict. It is also consistent with several Vietnam-era studies including Lau, Brown, and Sears (1978, 473-74), who also found a surprising positive (although not clearly statistically significant) relationship between a self-interest measure and support

14 We recognize the possibility that unmeasured mediators correlated with both our measured mediators and dependent variable can bias mediation analysis. Randomization of the treatment alone is insufficient to ensure unbiased estimates (Bullock and Ha 2011). In our experiment, there may be omitted variables that are correlated both with subjects' cost perceptions and with war support that might cause our estimates of the relative strength of the two indirect pathways to be biased. The regression models control for several possible factors that could correlate with both perceived costs and war support, including subjects' degree of personal contact with the military. We acknowledge that concerns about bias remain, and we discuss the issue further in the online Supplementary Information. However, with these important caveats, our study finds little evidence that personal cost estimates drive support for war, as much of the literature assumes.

for the Vietnam War, and Lunch and Sperlich (1979, 33) who show young Americans, who were most exposed to suffering the costs of war personally, were consistently more pro-war than were older Americans, who were more shielded from these costs.¹⁵

To further unpack the surprising positive relationship between the personally affected variable and support for the conflict, we examined whether it held to the same degree for subjects with and without any direct personal connection to the military (Lau, Brown, and Sears 1978). Subjects who lacked any personal connection with the military (i.e., respondents who reported no personal or family military service, past or present-approximately 47 percent of our sample) were both less likely to support the use of force than were their peers with such a personal connection (model 1 of table 2) and less likely to perceive that they stood to pay a personal cost should the United States send troops to defend its allies (table 1). Model 1 of table 4 reestimates the baseline specification (model 2 of table 2) but adds an additional variable: the interaction of the personally affected estimate and the indicator variable identifying subjects with no personal connection to the military.

The coefficient for the personally affected estimate variable remains positive and significant. However, the coefficient on the interaction variable is negative, of almost the same magnitude, and statistically significant.¹⁶ This indicates that the positive relationship between expecting to be personally affected and support for military operations holds only among those who report a personal connection to the military, which is again consistent with Fordham (2016). Figure 3 illustrates the results. A two standard deviation increase in a subject's estimated likelihood of personally paying the costs of combat operations is associated with an increase in support for military for military is a support of the military.

- 15 This unexpected positive relationship holds in the bivariate case as well. In SI table 4, we estimate a series of robustness checks to ensure that the positive relationship between estimated personal costs and war support is not limited to a single treatment group.
- 16 A Wald test confirms that for subjects who lack a personal connection to the military, the net effect of the personally affected variable is statistically indistinguishable from zero. Because coefficients on interaction variables are difficult to interpret in nonlinear models, we also estimated a linear probability model. This produces similar results—the positive effect of increasing personal cost estimates on war support is strong and statistically significant for those with some military contact, but much smaller for those with none. See SI table 6 and SI figure 1.

Table 4. The effects of cost perceptions by military service

	(1)	(2)
Draft treatment	-0.52**	-0.52**
	(0.22)	(0.22)
Reserves/Guard treatment	-0.14	-0.14
	(0.22)	(0.22)
Draft + Reserves/Guard treatment	-0.51^{**}	-0.50**
	(0.21)	(0.21)
Personally affected estimate	0.32***	0.33***
	(0.10)	(0.10)
Casualty estimate	-0.36***	-0.38***
	(0.04)	(0.06)
Republican	0.97***	0.97***
	(0.21)	(0.21)
Democrat	0.10	0.10
	(0.19)	(0.19)
Male	0.50***	0.49***
	(0.15)	(0.15)
Age	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	0.10^{*}	0.10*
	(0.05)	(0.05)
White	0.36**	0.35
	(0.17)	(0.17)
No military service	0.40	0.28
	(0.38)	(0.47)
Personally affected estimate × No	-0.24^{*}	-0.25*
military service	(0.14)	(0.14)
Casualty estimate $ imes$ No military		0.04
service		(0.08)
Constant	0.13	0.19
	(0.46)	(0.48)
Observations	946	946

Note: Logit models. Standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are twotailed. ${}^{*}p < 0.10$, ${}^{**}p < 0.05$, ${}^{***}p < 0.01$.

itary action among subjects with a personal connection to the military. Among those who lack such a personal connection, the estimated change in support is small and statistically insignificant.

Given the surprising findings surrounding the skin-inthe-game mechanism, we also tested for a possible interaction effect with respect to connection to the military and casualty estimates (model 2 of Table 4). In contrast to personal costs, we find no evidence that personal connection to the military moderates the influence of casualty estimates on support. As seen in figure 3, the effect of casualty estimates on support for war is not moderated by a subject's military connection status. Just under a two standard deviation increase in the median subject's casualty estimate was associated with a significant drop in her likelihood of supporting the use of force, regardless



Figure 3. Cost estimates and support for war by military contact.

Note: The two personal costs point estimates illustrate the estimated effect of increasing this variable from its median value, "somewhat unlikely," to "very likely." The two casualty point estimates illustrate the estimated effect of increasing this variable from its median value, 501–1,000 casualties, to 10,001–50,000 casualties. I-bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals around each point estimate.

of whether or not she had personal family connections to the military services.

Conclusion

Our results suggest that public support for military action is indeed responsive to manpower policies and cost perceptions, but perhaps not in the way that most people assume. While the prospect of conscription reduced public support for our hypothetical military action—helping an ally repel an invasion-from 70 to 59 percent, mobilization of the reserve component did not. This explicit test of the effects of mobilizing the reserve componentbelieved by many policymakers to be a vital source of connection between the military and the public-adds an important dimension to previous studies focused on conscription. Additionally, our results find little support for the conventional wisdom that manpower policies primarily affect public support through their effect on respondents' expectation of personally bearing the human costs of the conflict.

Both the draft and the mobilization of the Guard and Reserves should significantly expand the number of Americans directly exposed to the human costs of war. However, in our experiment, only the draft increased subjects' anticipation of being personally affected. Furthermore, in sharp contrast to common assumptions, we found no evidence that expectations of being personally affected lowered support for the use of force in this case. Rather, expectations of personal costs were uncorrelated with war support among subjects with no direct personal contact with the military and positively correlated with war support among those with a military connection. This is an important null result, as this mechanism is widely assumed to be operative.

We do find evidence that conscription erodes support for war by raising subjects' estimates of the scale of the conflict, as measured by how many casualties the mission would likely entail.¹⁷ The treatments involving conscription raised subjects' estimates of expected casualties, while mobilization of the reserve component alone did not. Consistent with a long literature, we do find that higher casualty estimates depress support for war. One possible explanation for the partial support of both H2 and H4, consistent with prospect theory, is that people perceive costs relative to the baseline of the current status quo. Subjects may know that the Guard and Reserves have been mobilized and deployed frequently in recent years in support of limited conflicts, and thus do not perceive this mobilization as signaling a large-scale war or additional costs. In contrast, the United States has not used a draft in more than forty years, so a resumption of conscription might be perceived as both a strong signal about the conflict and affecting a broader segment of

17 SI table 3 decomposes the indirect effects of the manpower treatments on support for war through the two mediating variables, personal and aggregate cost assessments. This shows that the indirect effect of the two draft treatments on war support through subjects' aggregate cost assessments, although significantly smaller than the direct effects, was negative and statistically significant. society. We are not able to test this explanation directly in this experiment, but it should be a focus of future research.¹⁸

Finally, our results show that both draft treatments had a strong effect on support for war, independent of their mediated influence through subjects' personal and aggregate cost perceptions. One compelling explanation for these strong direct effects in the draft and combined treatments—and the absence of any direct effect in the Reserves/Guard Treatment—is that the perceived legitimacy of manpower policies may matter significantly to the public. The mechanism is not a rational self-interest calculation, but people may care whether those with "skin in the game" consented or not (cf. Krebs, Ralston, and Rapport 2020).

These findings have important policy implications. Those who advocate for the use of a draft or the mobilization of the reserve component often do so in the hopes that the public will both pay more attention to and act to constrain foreign policy if they recognize a direct effect on their own lives. If the public must bear the costs of war, the argument goes, they will demand that the executive have strong justification for action. The correlate to this idea is that if the executive is able to avoid asking the public to pay the costs of the war, for example, by using a small professional force or financing through credit rather than taxation, he or she will be less restrained (Caverley 2014; Kreps 2018). Our results suggest that reality is more complicatedwhile we do find that conscription would decrease support for initiating US involvement in a conflict, we do not find support for a strong relationship between expectations of personal costs and reluctance to support

18 This explanation is consistent with a Mechanical Turk survey conducted in November 2015. Responding to a similar hypothetical military action to the one presented in this paper, subjects primed to believe that the reserve component would be mobilized supported the conflict at the same rate as those not primed to think about the reserve component. Those told that the reserve component would not be mobilized-a change from the status quo policy-were significantly more likely to support the conflict. In this experiment, subjects appear to have implicitly factored reserve mobilization into their calculations even when not mentioned in the prompt. It is also consistent with Fordham's (2016) speculations about why public support for a draft declined precipitously in the 1980s, and analogous to Kreps's (2018) argument that public resistance to war taxes is due at least in part to the fact that war taxes have not been used in so long that the public finds them abnormal.

military action. We also cannot rule out the possibility that the depressive effect of conscription on support is due mainly to its disruptiveness. It is possible that, were conscription a standing policy, its effects might be reduced, just as the anticipated effects of Guard and Reserves mobilization appear to have dissipated since the 1960s.

Our study suggests several productive avenues for future research. First, while conscription significantly decreased support for the use of force in our experiment, the actual size of the effect of manpower policies on opinion in real-world settings may vary significantly depending on political context. For example, whether political elites from one or both parties rally behind a reinstitution of conscription could blunt its corrosive effect on supportor fervent opposition could exacerbate it further (Brody 1994; Berinsky 2009). Other factors, such as whether manpower policies are discussed in terms of redressing inequalities (Kriner and Shen 2010), may also moderate their effects on opinion. Future research could explore the moderating influence of these and other contextual factors to better approximate how manpower policies might affect public support for war across a range of political conditions. Further testing is necessary to determine the roles played by norms about voluntarism and views of what is normal, as well as how manpower policy might affect people's views of the legitimacy of a military operation. Investigation of the surprising positive relationship between personal cost perception and support for military operations among those with personal military connections would also be helpful. Further survey experiments could vary not only mobilization systems but also the type of military mission and/or the partisan identity of the president to determine how the "benefit" and "cost" sides of the equation interact. It would also be useful to use survey data to discover what the public knows and thinks about members of the National Guard and Reserves. While we cannot know what the results of this study would have been had we conducted it fifty years ago, studies of shifts in the demographic composition of the active and reserve components could illuminate why policymakers and the public view the National Guard and Reserves very differently today than they did during the Vietnam era.

The public clearly makes cost-benefit calculations when it comes to supporting military action abroad, but their calculations appear to be far more complex than has been commonly assumed. Simply putting more "skin in the game" through mobilization policies is not likely to transform US foreign policy. Indeed, if the experience of the Guard and Reserves is anything to go by, the US public's support for military deployment seems to expand to cover the manpower available, rather than the other way around.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *Journal of Global Security Studies* data archive.

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