



THE CASUALTY GAP

The Causes and Consequences of American Wartime Inequalities

DOUGLAS L. KRINER • FRANCIS X. SHEN



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Francis X. Shen

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To all those who have given their lives in defense of our nation.

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Preface

This book argues that when we calculate the human costs of war, we must think about both the number of soldiers killed *and* the distribution of American combat deaths. We should acknowledge the possibility of a “casualty gap”—a disparity in the concentration of wartime casualties among communities at different points on the socioeconomic ladder.

Introducing the casualty gap into our discussions of U.S. military policy will serve to reinvigorate debate over the nation’s long-held norm of equal sacrifice in war. Moreover, the potential policy implications of open recognition and honest discussion of the casualty gap are both significant and widespread. As seen in original survey experiments, which are discussed in the book, when Americans are explicitly made aware of the potential inequality implications of military policy, they drastically change their military policy preferences. The results suggest that if Americans know that soldiers who die come disproportionately from poorer parts of the country, they are much less willing to accept large numbers of casualties in future military endeavors.

While knowledge of the casualty gap is one way in which the gap affects public opinion, we show in this book that there is also an alternative pathway. When a soldier dies, it is not only the soldier’s family but also the soldier’s community that suffers. Because of the casualty gap, some Americans see clearly the full human toll of combat, while others

from communities that suffer fewer casualties are relatively insulated from battle deaths. Such disparities in local casualty rates can significantly influence citizens' military policy preferences and political behaviors. Moreover, the concentration of war casualties in poor communities has significant consequences for politics, policy, and the vibrancy of the American democratic system.

Over the course of nine chapters, we support our claims with extensive empirical analysis. In chapters 2 and 3 we probe whether a casualty gap actually exists and, if so, why. We analyze the home of record for virtually every soldier killed in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq. Using this database and integrating it with demographic data from multiple years of the U.S. census, we conduct empirical analysis at the county and place levels to uncover inequalities in the geographic distribution of combat casualties across America. While modest casualty gaps emerged in World War II, beginning with the Korean War we find strong evidence of substantial casualty gaps emerging along socioeconomic lines.

We then identify and discuss two mechanisms most likely to have produced the casualty gaps observed in each of the four wars. First, the process through which some young men and women enter military service while others do not is clearly an important factor that could produce casualty gaps. Military and independent analysts alike have long recognized that among the many factors that influence an individual's decision to enlist, economic incentives are particularly important. Once enlisted, a second process to note is that of occupational assignment within the military itself. If, on average, individuals from counties that are worse off socioeconomically bring to the military fewer *ex ante* educational and occupational skills, then it is more likely that these soldiers may find themselves in roles that increase their proximity to combat. These mechanisms suggest that an individual-level casualty gap underlies those observed between socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged communities. Although data limitations prevent us from testing this claim directly, through a series of original analyses using newly integrated data sets we amass considerable indirect empirical evidence that the most plausible explanation for differences in community casualty rates—and the one most consistent with the data—is that a parallel gap exists between rich and poor individuals.

The argument that America's wars are fought disproportionately by those from communities at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum is, of course, not a new one. In 1862 Confederate soldier Stephen W. Rutledge lamented, "What is gained anyway? It is a rich man's war and a poor man's fight."¹ Protesters in 1863 popularized Rutledge's phrase, "Rich man's war, poor man's fight," as they objected to the commutation

clause in the Enrollment Act of 1863, which allowed drafted men to buy their way out of service for \$300.² Similar rhetoric is still seen in the popular press. In August of 2005 *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert, reflecting on a new round of U.S. military deaths in Iraq, wrote: “For the most part, the only people sacrificing for this war are the troops and their families, and very few of them are coming from the privileged economic classes.”³

What is new in our book is not the *claim* that inequality is tied to wartime death but the *evidence* we present to support it. As empirically grounded political scientists, we were surprised to note that Herbert, writing in 2005, had only a handful more studies available to cite on inequalities in combat casualties than did Rutledge, when he wrote his war diaries more than a century earlier. Despite a proliferation of literature on inequality, political scientists have largely failed to address this fundamental question about the distribution of casualties across socioeconomic classes, racial divides, and other social cleavages.

After documenting the casualty gap and exploring its causes, we next investigate its immediate ramifications for American politics. The existence of a casualty gap concentrates the costs of war in some communities while insulating many others from direct local experience of the consequences of the nation’s military policies. We thus explore how the opinions, policy preferences, and electoral behaviors of residents of high-casualty communities diverge significantly from those of their fellow citizens from low-casualty communities.

We also show for the first time that wartime deaths may have lasting consequences for civic engagement and political participation. It is striking that, despite the large amount of scholarship on civic engagement in the United States—even on war and civic engagement—specific links between battle casualties and levels of political and civic participation have not been established. Our book covers new ground as it provides strong empirical evidence from multiple sources that, years after the last gun falls silent, the casualty gap continues to affect the richness of democracy in America by depressing political engagement and participation in communities that sacrificed disproportionately in service to the nation on foreign battlefields.

When we started this project as graduate students in 2004, we thought we were setting out to spend a summer writing a short article. We expected to find much written on the topic of inequalities and war casualties. As we soon learned, however, the issue of casualties and inequality has only rarely been studied quantitatively. A small collection of studies focusing primarily on Vietnam casualties comprises most of the empirical scholarship. These

studies generally failed to compare across wars, and the empirical methods they employed were not consistent. A parallel lacuna in the extant literature that we encountered was a dearth of theoretical research into the forces that cause casualty inequalities to emerge and that produce changes in them over time.

As political scientists, we were also concerned that inequalities in the distribution of wartime casualties might have both immediate and lingering consequences for American political and civic life. Again, we found serious limitations in existing theory and empirical scholarship. Too often, analysts and scholars alike have conceptualized wartime “casualties” as a monolithic event that affects all Americans in the same way. As the second half of our book shows, this approach to casualties is severely misleading. Treating casualties as such misses the significant variance in citizens’ exposure to the costs of war from community to community. Indeed, this variance is critical to understanding the more nuanced ways in which wartime casualties affect the public’s evaluation of its leaders, military policy preferences, and electoral decisions. Moreover, we show that the parts of America that bore the greatest war casualty burdens in Korea and Vietnam have experienced depressed political engagement and participation in both the short and long term. The effects of wartime casualties are much greater and more varied than previously thought.

Our hope is that this book will provide an objective, empirical basis for engaging in new discussion and debate about inequality and casualties. Our goal is to provide readers with the most comprehensive empirical analysis of the casualty gap to date—its scope, causes, and consequences. To implement our research plan, we draw on a large number of data sets, statistical analyses, and illustrative examples. For readers who wish to examine the details of the statistical models, we include a series of technical appendices. For the general readership, we have attempted to translate the statistical results into easily understood figures and summary tables.

We recognize that the ensuing debate will necessarily intersect with partisan and political positions. We hope, however, that these debates will be grounded in fact, not rhetoric. Regardless of the controversy that a frank recognition and discussion of the casualty gap will inevitably engender, it is time for America to enter the casualty gap debate. We hope that our analysis is a starting point for further discussion among citizens, scholars, and politicians alike. At our website, www.casualtygap.com, we invite readers to join in this dialogue and debate. In order to have an informed debate about specific policy responses, however, we must first come to a consensus about the contours of the casualty gap and its consequences. We hope the empirical analysis in this book moves us closer to that consensus.

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Contents

Chapter 1	The Casualty Gap	3
	The Politics of Casualties	7
	Plan of the Book	10
Chapter 2	Inequality and U.S. Casualties from WWII to Iraq	14
	Studying Casualties and Inequality	16
	Defining and Measuring the Casualty Gap	17
	Geographic Variance in Local Casualty Rates	18
	Explaining the Casualty Gap	22
	Income and Education	22
	Unemployment	22
	Race	23
	Rural Farm Population	24
	Partisanship	25
	Geographic Region and Age	26
	Assessing the Casualty Gap across Four Wars	26

	The Individual-Level Casualty Gap and the Problem of Ecological Inference	40
	Examining Socioeconomic Variation within the Community	43
	Explaining the Casualty Gap	47
	Technical Appendix to Chapter 2	48
Chapter 3	Selection, Occupational Assignment, and the Emergence of the Casualty Gap	56
	Mechanism #1: Selection in the Modern Wars	58
	The War in Iraq and the AVF	63
	Mechanism #2: Occupational Assignment within the Military	67
	The Selection Mechanism Revisited: The Role of the Draft	73
	Changes in the Draft and in the Casualty Gap over Time	74
	The Draft Lottery and Its Ramifications for the Casualty Gap	76
	The Absence of a Draft and the Iraq Casualty Gap	78
	Casualty Gaps at the Individual Level	80
	Technical Appendix to Chapter 3	83
Chapter 4	Do Casualty Gaps Matter?	92
	The Casualty Gap and Public Support for War	94
	The Casualty Gap's Influence in 2009	100
	Bringing the Casualty Gap into the Public Sphere	103
	Technical Appendix to Chapter 4	104
Chapter 5	How Local Casualties Shape Politics	109
	Local Casualties and Political Behavior	111
	A New Theory of Local Casualty Influence	113
	Mechanism #1: Personal Contact with Local Casualties	113
	Mechanism #2: Elite Cues	117
	Mechanism #3: The Local Media	120
	Conclusion	123
	Technical Appendix to Chapter 5	124

Chapter 6	Political Ramifications of the Vietnam Casualty Gap	131
	Casualties, Public Opinion, and the Vietnam War	133
	Local Casualty Rates and Support for the Vietnam War	136
	Casualties	136
	Demographic Control Variables	137
	Results and Discussion	138
	Should the United States Have Stayed Out of Vietnam?	138
	Should the United States Withdraw from Vietnam?	143
	The Electoral Consequences of Local Casualties	146
	Modeling Vote Choice	147
	Results and Discussion	148
	The Casualty Gap and the Democratic Brake on Military Adventurism	153
	Technical Appendix to Chapter 6	155
 Chapter 7	 Political Ramifications of the Iraq Casualty Gap	 161
	Iraq, Casualties, and Public Opinion	163
	Knowing a Casualty and Feeling Negatively Affected Personally by the War	165
	Support for Withdrawal	167
	Iraq, Casualties, and Electoral Dynamics	170
	Varying Experience with Casualties and Electoral Choice in 2006	171
	State and Local Casualty Rates and Change in Republican Vote Share	172
	State-Level Results	175
	County-Level Results	178
	Republican Incumbent Races at the County Level	179
	Conclusion	181
	Technical Appendix to Chapter 7	183
 Chapter 8	 The Casualty Gap and Civic Engagement	 191
	War and American Political and Civic Engagement	193
	Theoretical Expectations	195

The Immediate Effects of Vietnam on Political Participation	197
Results	198
The Lingering Effects of Vietnam on Civic Engagement	203
Results	204
Korea, World War II, and Patterns of Political Engagement	206
Results	207
Conclusion	211
Technical Appendix to Chapter 8	213
 Chapter 9 The Future of the Casualty Gap	 226
Responding to the Casualty Gap	231
Facing up to the Casualty Gap	234
 Notes	 235
References	277
Index	295

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The Casualty Gap

When we contemplate the costs of war, we instinctively focus on the human element. In the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln famously described the sacrifice of fallen soldiers as “the last full measure of devotion” as he sought to reassure a war-ravaged nation that the principles for which its men fought and died justified their sacrifice. Other politicians before and since have similarly kept the human toll of war foremost in their minds when guiding the ship of state in wartime.¹ This emphasis on war’s human costs by political elites is further reinforced by the mass media. Contemporary coverage of the war in Iraq continues to report the names of the fallen, just as newspapers did during the Civil War almost 150 years ago. Recognizing this critical importance of wartime casualties, scholars in various disciplines have long endeavored to understand how combat deaths shape public opinion, political outcomes, and policymaking. However, when attempting to measure these costs of war, academics, politicians, and the media alike all too often do so in the same way: by simply adding up the numbers. The analysis in this book challenges the conventional view that the human costs of war can be understood as a single, aggregate total.²

To account fully for the costs of war we must consider not only the overall number of casualties but also how this sacrifice has been shared.³ Consider South Carolina’s experience with the war in Iraq. As of

December 2008 the Palmetto State had lost sixty-five of its citizens in Iraq. Three of these sixty-five were from Orangeburg, a small town of 13,000, in which almost a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line, more than double the state average. By contrast, the resort town of Hilton Head, which has a population almost triple that of Orangeburg and a median family income more than double, had suffered no casualties. Charleston, South Carolina's second largest city, with a population of just under 100,000, had suffered only one casualty.⁴ Certainly, South Carolina's war experience is suggestive of significant inequalities in sacrifice among rich and poor communities.

Yet, simple examples such as this are incomplete. In this book we move beyond anecdotes and engage in rigorous empirical investigation of the casualty gap—the unequal distribution of wartime casualties across America's communities—in four wars: World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq. Drawing on publicly available military records for almost every fallen soldier, we document empirically that, when Americans fight and die for our nation, a casualty gap of some sort has always emerged. Although the contours of this gap have changed significantly over time, beginning with the Korean War casualty gaps have consistently emerged along socioeconomic lines. Communities with lower levels of income, educational attainment, and economic opportunities have paid a disproportionate share of the human costs of war.⁵

The existence of a casualty gap stands in direct contradiction to long-standing democratic norms of equality in military sacrifice. Reaching back to antiquity, there was a presumption that in a democracy military sacrifice should be shared by all of the citizenry. For example, in his funeral oration during the Peloponnesian War, the great Athenian Pericles exhorted his fellow citizens to have more children, in part because he believed that only those with a direct stake in the outcome of military affairs can craft the wisest policy course: "Never can a fair or just policy be expected of the citizen who does not, like his fellows, bring to the decision the interests and apprehensions of a father."⁶ This principle of shared sacrifice was openly embraced by George Washington, who proclaimed the ideal that every citizen who enjoys the rights and privileges of citizenship "owes not only a portion of his property, but even of his personal service to the defense of it."⁷ More generally, Alexis de Tocqueville, in the classic 1840 treatise, *Democracy in America*, warned that the U.S. government must appeal "to the whole community at once: it is the unequal distribution of the weight, not the weight itself, which commonly occasions resistance."⁸ Whether America's experience in recent wars has matched this ideal is intrinsically of great importance.

It is also important to examine the often overlooked ramifications of the casualty gap for politics and policymaking. Since the Vietnam War, a burgeoning literature at the nexus of American politics and international relations has examined the influence of combat casualties on a diverse range of political phenomena. Political scientists typically view war casualties, or the anticipation of them, as an independent variable to explain outcomes such as: presidential approval; popular assessments of military campaigns more generally; electoral results; and even the propensity of democracies to go to war.⁹ However, most of these analyses focus only on the raw *number* of casualties and pay little attention to their *distribution*.¹⁰ This is problematic because inequality in sacrifice also has the potential to influence dramatically politics, policymaking, and the fabric of American democracy itself.

After documenting the casualty gap and investigating the forces that create it, in chapters 4 through 8 we explore two pathways through which the casualty gap has important political ramifications. First, because inequality in combat deaths conflicts with the dominant national norm of shared sacrifice, knowledge of a casualty gap can affect all Americans' support for military endeavors. Whether the nation's wartime sacrifices meet this norm of equality can critically shape Americans' opinions and political behaviors. In this way, the casualty gap is a cost of war every bit as concrete as the actual number of casualties in a given conflict. As a result, we argue that existing scholarship presents an incomplete picture of how combat casualties may influence American politics.

The second pathway explores the political consequences that follow from some Americans experiencing death more directly and acutely in their communities than others. Most prior analyses implicitly assume that war and combat casualties are monolithic events that affect all segments of society equally. However, as our analysis in chapter 2 unambiguously demonstrates, war casualties are neither uniformly nor randomly distributed across society. This uneven exposure of citizens to the costs of war through the lens of their local communities raises the distinct possibility that battle deaths affect some Americans differently than others. As a result, the relationships between war deaths and various political phenomena are considerably more complex and contingent than acknowledged by most prior research.¹¹ Once inequalities are acknowledged, the dominant paradigm linking casualties, domestic political pressures, and democratic constraints on military policymakers requires some amendment. To understand fully the nexus between casualties and political outcomes and democratic constraints on military policymakers, we must explicitly recognize the fact that not all segments of society experience casualties equally.

Toward this end, we must explore the fault lines along which these inequalities routinely emerge.

To assess the first pathway—the effects of learning about the casualty gap on Americans’ beliefs and policy preferences—we conducted two experiments, as detailed in chapter 4. In fall 2007 we asked a nationally representative sample of more than 1,000 Americans to evaluate a possible future American invasion of Iran. We randomly assigned individuals to one of three groups. Each group was first told the number of American casualties to date suffered in Iraq. But at this point we varied the interpretive frame for understanding this number. The first group was not given any additional information. The second was told that this wartime sacrifice has been shared by rich and poor communities alike. Finally, the third group was told that America’s poor communities have suffered significantly higher casualty rates than the nation’s rich communities. The subjects were then asked how many casualties they would be willing to accept in a future military mission to halt Iran’s nuclear program and stop the infiltration of Iranian-backed forces into Iraq.¹²

The results of this experiment, confirmed by a similar follow-up experiment in spring 2009, were clear and resounding: when Americans learn about the casualty gap, they are much more cautious in supporting costly conflicts. In our fall 2007 experiment, the average reported number of acceptable casualties in the Iran scenario was *40 percent* lower among individuals who were told about inequality in the Iraq War than among their peers who were merely informed of the number of casualties suffered thus far in Iraq. Conversely, individuals who were assured that the ideal of equality was being met were actually willing to accept a higher number of deaths than respondents in the control group. The evidence is clear: Americans cherish the norm of shared sacrifice, and they factor the casualty gap into their support for war efforts.

To assess the second pathway—the effects of differential exposure to the costs of war through local community lenses on Americans’ opinions and political behaviors—we conducted multiple empirical analyses with data from the Korean, Vietnam, and Iraq wars. Across analyses we find that those who live in communities with higher casualty rates hold systematically different opinions and exhibit different political behaviors than their peers from communities more shielded from the human costs of war. The emergence of such cleavages has significant implications for public opinion formation and for the political pressures brought to bear on military policymakers. Finally, we find strong evidence that the casualty gap may have lingering negative consequences for the vibrancy of American democracy. Extensive empirical evidence shows that citizens from high-casualty communities are disproportionately likely to sour on

their government and withdraw from political life. As a result, levels of civic and political engagement are depressed, and a feedback loop emerges: the populations with the most to lose in war become those communities with the least to say to their elected officials.

THE POLITICS OF CASUALTIES

Given the casualty gap's normative and political importance, the dearth of attention it has received from scholars is perhaps surprising. A small number of prior studies have sought to analyze whether American war deaths are disproportionately borne by socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.¹³ However, existing studies on casualty inequalities have been limited in scope with mixed results.

The media, too, has largely avoided engaging in detailed and sustained discussion of the casualty gap. In some cases, isolated journalists and news outlets have tackled the question of casualty inequality. For example, in October of 2003 the *Austin American-Statesman* conducted an independent analysis of 300 casualties from the war in Iraq. These soldiers, the article reported, disproportionately came from small, rural communities with below-average levels of income and educational attainment.¹⁴ However, *Lexis Nexis* searches of hundreds of major U.S. newspapers and television news transcripts reveal that such stories are the exception to the rule of Iraq War coverage by both the print and the broadcast media.¹⁵

Moreover, even when the popular press does engage the inequality issue, the conventional wisdom it offers is often mistaken. For example, when the *American-Statesman* asked whether similar disparities in combat deaths existed in the Vietnam War the associate director of the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University, Steven Maxner, replied, "I don't think so. During the war in Southeast Asia, you had the draft."¹⁶ As we show in the empirical analyses in the next chapter, this speculation is not correct. A significant socioeconomic casualty gap emerged in both the Korean and the Vietnam wars. Others argue that changes in military manpower policies in the 1960s made Vietnam the first "working-class war."¹⁷ For example, in their book *AWOL: The Unexcused Absence of America's Upper Classes from Military Service and How It Hurts Our Country*, Kathy Roth-Douquet and Frank Schaeffer argue that the change in service patterns "has everything to do with the Vietnam war."¹⁸ Our analysis shows that this claim, too, is mistaken, as significant casualty gaps also emerged in the Korean War. In short, the dearth of scholarly research on the casualty gap has led to misperceptions about the nature of inequality and military sacrifice.

Finally, with but a few exceptions—such as Representative Charles Rangel’s (D-NY) repeated calls for the reinstatement of a draft—politicians have also been reluctant to raise the specter of a casualty gap, directly or indirectly. Even hinting at a casualty gap in public discourse remains taboo. Anecdotal evidence of this taboo comes from a botched joke told by Senator John Kerry (D-MA). Speaking to students at Pasadena City College in October 2006, Kerry said, “You know, education—if you make the most of it, you study hard, and you do your homework, and you make an effort to be smart, you can do well. If you don’t, you get stuck in Iraq.”¹⁹ The ensuing chorus of criticism of Kerry’s comments came from both Democrats and Republicans. Fellow Democrat Harold Ford, who was running for the U.S. Senate in Tennessee, commented that “Whatever the intent, Senator Kerry was wrong to say what he said.”²⁰ White House spokesman Tony Snow called Kerry’s statement “an absolute insult” and said that “Senator Kerry not only owes an apology to those who are serving but also to the families of those who’ve given their lives in this.”²¹ Lost amid the verbal firestorm was the empirical question, is there a real, not just rhetorical, relationship between socioeconomics and casualty rates? Was Senator Kerry’s joke simply a tasteless faux pas with no grounding in reality, or did the reaction to his comments reveal a more fundamental hesitance to face up to inequality in military sacrifice? Rather than engage in a public debate grounded in data, most policymakers and media pundits alike were happy to let the story slide.

Why are questions of the casualty gap so often relegated to the periphery of public, political, and academic discourse? Part of the answer is that casualties and information concerning them are inherently political. The politics of casualties has a long history that extends back to the world’s earliest conflicts. Since ancient times, governments have seen benefits in withholding casualty data from the public. For the Spartans in ancient Greece, information about force sizes and casualties sustained were tightly-held state secrets.²² A similar politics of casualties has characterized more recent conflicts with the result that even official histories have sometimes consciously blotted casualties out of the story.²³

An important consideration in the politics of casualties is that the release, or withholding, of casualty data involves strategic calculations about what message the data may send to both one’s own nation and to the enemy. As historian Alfred Vagts states, “While a war is on, publication of one’s own casualties, with indications about time and place, which *per se* would be at the disposal of the ministries of war or similar statistical agencies, might be of considerable aid and comfort to the enemy and might help him to judge the other side’s remaining and available strength.”²⁴ Casualties may also influence domestic political debates, which in turn

can send important signals to foreign actors about the government's willingness to stay the course.²⁵ This has further encouraged politicians to mask casualty data; for example, when losses started to mount for the Germans after 1942 in World War II, the Nazi government simply stopped releasing its casualty figures.

The United States has long been a leader in the timely dissemination of casualty data to the public.²⁶ For example, in World War I, the Senate Committee on Military Affairs called to task the Secretary of War and urged him to release full casualty information to the public as expeditiously as possible.²⁷ This dedication to providing accurate, timely casualty information continued throughout World War II and later conflicts, and technological developments over the course of the twentieth century have made possible rapid and accurate dissemination of such data.

However, recent history makes clear that a revised politics of casualties continues to exist. Confronted with a widespread belief that the American public will not tolerate large numbers of American casualties, contemporary policymakers have gone to considerable lengths to manage carefully the way in which casualty information is presented to the public.²⁸ Government reporting about the extent of non-fatal casualties, as well as mental illness resulting from combat service, has not been wholly transparent. Members of Congress, recognizing the need for a more complete accounting of the human costs of war, challenged the George W. Bush administration to release more information. On December 7, 2005, seven members of Congress wrote to President Bush to request that his administration "provide the American people with a full accounting of the American casualties in Iraq since the March 19, 2003, invasion, including a full accounting of the fatalities, the wounded, those who have contracted illnesses during their time overseas, and those suffering from mental afflictions as a result of their service in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom." The Congressmen were concerned that existing data, which was incomplete with regards to the breadth of the human costs, did "not accurately represent the true toll that this war has taken on the American people."²⁹

Government control of the visibility of U.S. casualties in the mass media has also sparked political debate. The George W. Bush administration enforced a policy that prohibited media coverage of deceased military personnel returning to the Ramstein, Germany, or Dover, Delaware, bases.³⁰ Reaction to the decision was mixed, but public opinion favored media coverage of the coffins. When a national poll asked, "Should the public be allowed to see pictures of the coffins arriving in the United States?" it found that 62 percent responded "yes," whereas only 27 percent responded "no."³¹ The administration argued that this change in policy was not a strategic

choice but a recognition of the intensely personal and private dimension of a soldier's death. White House spokesman Trent Duffy stated that "We must pay attention to the privacy and to the sensitivity of the families of the fallen, and that's what the policy is based on and that has to be the utmost concern." However, in response, Navy veteran and U.S. Representative Jim McDermott (D-WA) argued, "This is not about privacy. This is about trying to keep the country from facing the reality of war."³²

In February 2009, the Obama administration announced a change in this policy. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates explained that "media coverage of the dignified transfer process at Dover should be made by those most directly affected: on an individual basis by the families of the fallen. We ought not presume to make that decision in their place."³³ When asked about the political motivations of the original ban, Secretary Gates declined to speculate.

The multifaceted politics of casualties thus goes a long way toward explaining the relative lack of public, political, and academic discourse on the casualty gap. Many in government have a keen interest in reducing the visibility of casualties for fear that greater public exposure will minimize their freedom of action. And any who wade into the debate run the risk of a swift and strong political backlash. Nevertheless, only by examining the casualty gap can we truly assess the full costs of war.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

In the following eight chapters we explore the causes and consequences of the casualty gap from World War II through Iraq.³⁴ The statistical analyses in these chapters provide convincing proof that casualty inequalities are real and persistent and that these gaps have significant effects on public support for war and political behavior. While the statistical reality we uncover does not lead directly to neatly packaged policy responses, we should recognize that communities with less are sacrificing more.

In chapter 2 we marshal an extensive array of quantitative data to document the existence of casualty gaps in each of the four wars. However, the contours of these gaps have changed dramatically over time. Although we do find evidence of several modest casualty gaps in World War II, it is in Korea that the data show a dramatic change: strong, significant, socio-economic casualty gaps begin to emerge. The data continue to show strong evidence of casualty gaps between high- and low-income and education communities in Vietnam and Iraq, and, on some metrics, these gaps appear to have widened over time.

Why do these casualty gaps exist? In chapter 3 we explore the capacity of two mechanisms to explain the casualty gaps that emerged in each of

the four wars: selection into the armed forces and occupational assignment within the military. Selection mechanisms capture the complex mix of volunteering, active military recruitment, and conscription policies that shape the composition of the military. Occupational assignment mechanisms capture the process through which the military assigns some recruits to positions with high risks of combat exposure and others to occupations with considerably lower combat risks. Changes in these selection and assignment policies over time help explain both variance in the nature of the casualty gaps observed across wars and even, in the case of Vietnam, temporal changes in the casualty gap within a single conflict.

Our emphasis on selection and assignment mechanisms and their critical role in casualty gap formation stands in marked contrast to polemics contending that the casualty gap is the result of generational differences in patriotism, Vietnam, or the rise of individualism. Rather, changes in the operation of these policy mechanisms, not in individual citizens' willingness to serve, best explain the variance in casualty gaps we observe.

The prominence of the socioeconomic casualty gaps observed in chapters 2 and 3 raises questions about the ways in which a casualty gap might influence public opinion and policymaking. In chapters 4 and 5 we identify two pathways by which the casualty gap affects opinion and political behavior. The first pathway posits that mere awareness of the casualty gap may cause Americans to reevaluate and adjust their military policy preferences. The second recognizes the ability of Americans' uneven exposure to the human costs of war through the lenses of their local communities—a direct result of the casualty gap—to create significant cleavages in political opinions and behaviors.

A priori it is not theoretically clear that the first pathway should produce significant effects. If Americans expect and accept that the burden of military sacrifice is not shared equally across the country when the nation goes to war, then their judgments about war efforts should not be affected by information that confirms their expectations. If, however, Americans embrace the norm of shared sacrifice, then information about the empirical reality of casualty inequality should significantly affect their military policy preferences and judgments. In chapter 4 we find that, when confronted with evidence of the casualty gap, Americans are more unlikely to support the war in Iraq and less willing to tolerate casualties in future martial endeavors.

While these experimental results are telling, they leave open questions about what happens outside of an experimental setting. Moreover, the experiments offer little insight into the ramifications of another real-world consequence of the casualty gap—that some communities experience the

costs of war more acutely than others. Accordingly, in chapters 5 through 8 we investigate the second pathway: the effects of variance in local casualty rates across the country on citizens' real-life social and political behaviors.

We begin in chapter 5 with the recognition that a soldier's death marks the beginning of family and community grieving, remembrance, and response. Politicians and community leaders also take notice when one of their own falls on the battlefield. Through social networks and media coverage, the death of even a single soldier can be "experienced" by many citizens beyond just the soldier's immediate family. Accordingly, we propose and investigate three mechanisms through which local casualties may influence public opinion and political behaviors: (1) personal contact, (2) elite cues, and (3) local media. Through each of these mechanisms, Americans from high-casualty communities may form very different judgments about a war and accordingly exhibit political behaviors that differ from those of their fellow citizens from low-casualty communities.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 test this theory by exploring both the short-term and long-term consequences of higher local casualty rates. In chapter 6 we examine variance in support for Vietnam between residents of high- and low-casualty communities. In chapter 7 we perform similar analyses in the context of Iraq. Consistent with expectations, we find that Americans who experienced the human costs of war most intensely through the lens of their local community were more likely to oppose the war, favor the withdrawal of U.S. forces, and vote against the party in power than were their peers from low-casualty communities. As a result, our empirical models suggest that if all Americans experienced the Vietnam and Iraq conflicts in the same way that residents of the hardest hit communities did, both past and recent politics could have unfolded quite differently.

In chapter 8 we extend the time horizon of our analysis to examine the lingering consequences of the casualty gap for civic engagement and political participation in the United States. Using multiple data sources at both the individual and aggregate levels, we find that citizens from communities that suffered high casualty rates in Vietnam were significantly less likely to engage in politics for years and even decades after the war than were their peers from low-casualty communities.

We conclude in chapter 9 by speculating about the future of the casualty gap. We argue that, due to advances in medical technology and the likely small scale of future conflicts, a "wounded gap" will become an increasingly important dimension of inequality that policymakers must consider. Given existing disparities in health care for veterans, a wounded gap may pose a particularly vexing challenge. Finally, whether it is deaths

or wounds, we argue that raising awareness of the gap is critically important. Because Americans factor in the inequality consequences of conflicts when they evaluate the costs of war and forge their military policy preferences, fostering public recognition and discussion of the casualty gap should have significant consequences for the formulation of military policy.

It is imperative that scholars, politicians, and the media alike demystify and acknowledge the empirical reality that not all parts of the country share the burdens of war equally. The words of President John F. Kennedy ring true when we think about the casualty gap:

We must move on from the reassuring repetition of stale phrases to a new, difficult, but essential confrontation with reality. For the great enemy of truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived, and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.³⁵

Our fundamental goal in this book is to challenge the myth of shared sacrifice by looking carefully at the facts of the casualty gap and its effects on our polity.

Inequality and U.S. Casualties from WWII to Iraq

On September 21, 2006, Sgt. Allan Bevington, a twenty-two-year-old combat engineer, made the ultimate sacrifice for his country when an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated in Ar Ramadi, Iraq. Sgt. Bevington hailed from Beaver Falls, a small town in western Pennsylvania. Years ago Beaver Falls was “known for its cold-drawn steel.” But in recent years, “like much of the Steel Belt, it’s had a decline in population and jobs.”¹ The 2000 census reported that the percentage of Beaver Falls residents with a college degree was a little less than 10 percent, less than half of the national average of 25 percent. The local unemployment rate, which soared into double digits, far exceeded the average in other parts of the country, and the median household income was more than \$20,000 a year less than the national average.² In an article published by the *Beaver County Times*, U.S. Army recruiter Sgt. 1st Class Edward G. Landry, who had recruited Bevington in high school, reflected on the reason the young soldier had enlisted. Landry recalled that for Bevington, “It was something to do with his life . . . There were not a lot of options there . . . It was a way out of Beaver Falls.”³

How typical is Sgt. Bevington’s story? How many other soldiers who have died in Iraq came from economically depressed parts of the country? Are the patterns that link community demographics and local casualty rates the same as those that emerged in previous wars? Or is the

contemporary conflict in Iraq different from previous American armed conflicts?

Clearly, such questions are politically explosive. They are of obvious normative importance, and they threaten a key tenet of what the great American political sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset termed the “American Creed”: equality of opportunity for all citizens.⁴ If citizens from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities are systematically paying a disproportionate share of the nation’s wartime costs, the norm of equality of opportunity would appear illusory. As a result, when such questions rise to the fore of the national debate, they often provoke polarizing claims that are not well grounded in empirical evidence.⁵

Questions about equality in military sacrifice are almost as difficult to answer definitively as they are intrinsically important. However, by drawing on a number of databases maintained by the National Archives and the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), we can obtain information on almost every soldier who died in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the current hostilities in Iraq. For each casualty, the military provides information on the soldier’s home of record before entering the Armed Services. By merging this casualty information with population and other demographic data from the U.S. census, we can systematically investigate what types of communities have suffered the highest casualty rates in each of America’s last four major wars. Utilizing these data, we explore the question of whether communities like Beaver Falls, which lag behind the rest of the country in terms of socioeconomic opportunity, bear a disproportionate share of the nation’s sacrifice on foreign battlefields. Equally importantly, we also investigate alternate possibilities, including whether more rural communities or communities with greater percentages of racial minorities bear a disproportionate share of combat casualties. Finally, we test all of these hypotheses against the null hypothesis that there is no systematic casualty gap.

The data we present in this chapter provide strong evidence that U.S. combat casualties are not distributed uniformly across society. Beginning with the Korean War, we find that some communities, particularly those like Beaver Falls, have borne a disproportionate share of America’s wartime sacrifice. The size of the differences in casualty rates between rich and poor communities may not be as great as some of the rhetoric from the Left suggests. While socioeconomically disadvantaged communities do bear disproportionately large shares of the casualty burden, some wealthy and highly educated communities have also suffered significant numbers of casualties. However, contra the protestations of some on the Right, the casualty gap is real, and, perhaps equally significantly, the data suggest that this gap may have widened over time.