The Electoral Cost of War: Iraq Casualties and the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election

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Many contend that President Bush's reelection and increased vote share in 2004 prove that the Iraq War was either electorally irrelevant or aided him. We present contrary evidence. Focusing on the change in Bush's 2004 showing compared to 2000, we discover that Iraq casualties from a state significantly depressed the President's vote share there. We infer that were it not for the approximately 10,000 U.S. dead and wounded by Election Day, Bush would have won nearly 2% more of the national popular vote, carrying several additional states and winning decisively. Such a result would have been close to forecasts based on models that did not include war impacts. Casualty effects are largest in "blue" states. In contrast, National Guard/Reservist call-ups had no impact beyond the main casualty effect. We discuss implications for both the election modeling enterprise and the debate over the "casualty sensitivity" of the U.S. public.

When Americans become casualties of war does the Commander-in-Chief suffer collateral damage at the polls? No official plays a greater role in the initiation and conduct of war than the President. Thus one might expect that there would be many investigations of the electoral consequences of casualties. This is especially so because this question is important both for students of elections and international relations scholars. Progress toward understanding in this area would inform long-standing debates about both the extent to which the American public exhibits "casualty sensitivity" and the determinants of electoral outcomes.

Yet, at least until recently, the extensive research on the political consequences of casualties has focused largely on their effect on public support for the war in question or presidential approval. One reason may be that history has not cooperated with scholars. For more than a century no President ran for reelection during a controversial war begun on his watch. To find cases at all comparable to that of President Bush's 2004 reelection bid during the Iraq War we must look back to William McKinley's campaign during the Philippine Insurrection or James Madison's run during the War of 1812. Thus the current conflict offers a most unusual opportunity to assess the electoral costs of casualties for a U.S. President.[1]

In this paper we focus on estimating the *localized* electoral effects of Iraq War casualties in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election. Localized casualty effects are only a part of war's political consequences, but an important and understudied one. While presidential elections and wars may seem like inescapably national events, an examination of the localized electoral effects of casualties is of interest for multiple reasons. First, a U.S. presidential election is actually 51 distinct local contests. Moreover, even if we are chiefly interested in the electoral consequences of the war as a whole or casualties generally, a focus on the localized reaction to them has merit because, as we discuss below, it enables us to detect effects in ways that other approaches do not.

The Political Consequences of Casualties

For students of elections, it is important to assess the relative importance of real world events which may

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[1]The rarity of such cases is perhaps not surprising. Marra, Ostrom, and Simon (1990) show that presidential approval is more sensitive to casualties when the President begins a war as opposed to when he inherits it, while Gaubatz (1991) finds that democracies are significantly less likely to initiate conflict in election years.

prompt retrospective voting—as contrasted with relatively stable factors like party identification, along with any campaign effects—in determining election results. International relations scholars are also interested in the domestic political consequences of war. For example, one explanation for the "democratic peace" is that elected leaders are wary of wars, especially risky ones, since they are more apt than authoritarians to suffer politically if things go badly (Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995).

One salient and quantifiable result of wars that may cause electoral problems for leaders is casualties. Yet scholars differ greatly over the extent to which casualties affect public approval of military actions (Eichenberg 2005; Kull and Destler 1999; Larson 1996; Luttwak 1994) and of the President himself (Brody 1991; Brody and Page 1975; Hibbs, Rivers and Vasilotis 1982; Kernell 1978; Marra, Ostrom, and Simon 1990; Mueller 1973; Newman 2002; Ostrom and Simon 1985).

These explorations of casualties' effect on public support for wars and presidential approval are valuable. Yet for electorally minded politicians, a policy's popularity and even its immediate effect on poll ratings matter far less than how many votes it will win or lose them on Election Day. Unfortunately, this statistic, which Key (1961) and Zaller (2003) term "latent opinion," is difficult to estimate before or even after an election. The many factors that influence elections typically make it difficult for observers to isolate the effect of any single one.

Recently scholars have begun to assess the electoral consequences of the Iraq War. Studies are generally focused on the effect of the war as a whole and not merely casualties. They also reveal no consensus. While the view that the War *became* a liability for Bush and the GOP more generally is nearly universal in the aftermath of the 2006 Congressional elections, the assessment that this was already the case by November 2004 is less common than one might suppose in retrospect. Campbell argues that the War "made the election closer than it might have been otherwise" (2005, 234), causing Bush to underperform the election-year economy. Abramson et al. (2006), Norpoth and Sidman (2006), Pomper (2005), and Weisberg and Christenson (2006) make similar claims. Yet Shanks et al. find that "views concerning the war in Iraq and other policy-related conflicts concerning the military- . . . did not appear to make any overall (positive or negative) contribution to Bush's victory" (2005, 34). More strikingly, Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver contend "on balance the war in Iraq helped the President rather than hurt him" (2005, 22). Brinkley (2004) and

Skocpol (2004) also argue the War, while no longer broadly popular by Election Day 2004, still aided the President indirectly by priming voters to think about terrorism, an issue on which he enjoyed an advantage. Our study provides new evidence that bears directly on this ongoing debate and has broader implications as well.

Estimating the Localized Electoral Effect of Casualties

Our focus is the localized effect of casualties. We know that local as well as national economic conditions affect voters' choices in presidential races (Abrams and Butkiewicz 1995; Holbrook 1991). Achen and Bartels (2004a) also show that local variation in developments beyond human control, e.g. excessive or inadequate rainfall and even shark attacks, measurably reduce the incumbent party's vote in presidential elections. If this is true of events often termed "acts of God," we should not be surprised if casualties of war, which are more plausibly linked to presidential decisions, would have localized electoral consequences for Chief Executives.

Yet to date there is limited direct empirical support for that claim. Evidence of localized casualty effects stems from studies of public opinion about the Vietnam War (Gartner, Segura, and Wilkening 1997) and of Congressional elections during the Civil War (Carson et al. 2001) and Vietnam (Gartner, Segura, and Barrett 2004). Not only is the dependent variable in these studies something other than presidential vote, but the conflicts in question were far bloodier than the current Iraq War and fought by draftees as well. Thus it is not clear if we should expect to find a similar effect in 2004. Yet it seems probable that voters hold Presidents at least as accountable as Members of Congress for casualties. So it is worth investigating whether Iraq War casualties had a measurable impact on voters in the 2004 Presidential Election.

We estimate the localized effect of U.S. casualties in the Iraq War on the change in President Bush's vote share between 2000 and 2004 at the state, media-market, and county levels. At the state level, the main ordinary least squares (OLS) regression we estimate is:

$$\text{(Bush Vote 2004)}_i - \text{(Bush Vote 2000)}_i = \alpha + X_i'\beta + \gamma \text{(Irap War Casualties)}_i + \varepsilon_i \qquad (1)$$

where i denotes a state, X_i is a vector of state political, economic, and demographic factors, and ε_i is the error term.

The main methodological concern raised by our approach is the possibility of unobserved time-varying state political factors that are correlated with the war casualty rate. These could bias estimated casualty impacts. Although we cannot entirely rule out this possibility, as we discuss below the robustness of our main result across a variety of regression specifications, using different variable definitions, samples, and a wide range of political, economic, and demographic controls provides some reassurance that the estimated effects are not spurious.

The estimates we present are also subject to an important caveat regarding interpretation. Although our methodology allows us to gauge the impact of additional Iraq War deaths and wounded on voting outcomes across states, it cannot capture nation-wide trends in support for Bush related to the Iraq War. In equation (1) above, national time trends in support for President Bush are effectively captured in the constant term α, but the effect of the Iraq War cannot easily be separated out from other national trends. Thus our main Iraq War estimate (the γ term in the above regression) should be interpreted as the local impact of additional war casualties *given* the state of the ongoing conflict in Iraq as a whole. The national trend in support for Bush due to the war might theoretically be either positive due to a national "rally effect" (Mueller 1973) and/or because the President's Iraq policy won him new supporters, or negative if national casualties and voter disapproval of the war led to an erosion in his support, as local deaths appear to do.

Thus the true national effect of the Iraq War on support for Bush might have been larger or smaller than the average local effect we estimate. To be clear, we cannot categorically exclude the possibility that the cumulative effect of the War was beneficial to President Bush's campaign. Yet to the extent that we find a negative localized effect of casualties, those holding that the war aided Bush on balance would have to posit an even larger positive nationwide effect canceling out the negative local one we estimate. Presumably the larger the claimed positive national effect is, the less credible it becomes (especially given the existence of a sizeable localized effect going in the opposite direction), but our estimation strategy takes no stand on this issue.

This study is distinctive in at least three ways. We are the first to investigate the localized effect of casualties on a U.S. President's electoral fortunes. Second, we are the first to assess the localized electoral effect of National Guard and Reserve call-ups as well as casualties. During the Vietnam War, Presidents Johnson and Nixon largely avoided using the Guard and Reserve, seemingly fearing the political repercussions, yet many National Guard and Reservists have been sent to Iraq, and they have suffered one-quarter of all U.S. fatalities there.

A third distinctive aspect of this study is that we examine not only state-level election results, but also returns at the county level and in Designated Market Areas (DMAs), popularly termed "media markets."[2] There are reasons to expect localized effects in elections even when the issue is one of national concern like a war. Voters acquire information about issues of public concern in different ways. To the extent that their personal experiences and social networks are important, local casualties and call-ups could affect voting among many households and communities. To get a sense of scale, note that the average U.S. county had a population of roughly 92,000, and over 37,000 voters in the last Presidential Election. On average there had been 3.39 Iraq War deaths or wounded per 100,000 population by Election Day. Even if each casualty affected voting behavior among dozens of the soldier's close friends, relatives, or neighbors—as well as more weakly impacting the behavior of friends of friends, and so on—this would still only constitute a small fraction of the total county vote, and any resulting effects would probably be undetectable at traditional statistical confidence levels. It thus appears more promising to examine impacts working through mechanisms other than personal contact.

Another possible channel through which local casualties may affect voters is media exposure. Unlike their equivalents abroad, leading U.S. national dailies do not dominate total newspaper circulation. Similarly, despite the spread of cable and satellite television, local news broadcasts, which emphasize the hometown connection to even the most global stories, remain the chief source of information for most Americans (Gilliam and Iyengar 2000).

Media exposure to local casualty reports may in turn affect voters in several ways. One possibility is that voters care more about local casualties than those from other states (or counties). Second (and more likely in our view), their estimate of total U.S. casualties may be affected by local coverage. Thus voters in areas where casualties are higher may be more likely to believe that total national losses are high and react negatively to President Bush even if they care only about the national casualty total. In a related point,

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[2]DMAs are constructed by Nielsen Media Research (Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook 2004).

media exposure—whether or not it affected voters' estimates of total U.S. casualties—might simply raise the salience of the issue in their minds to Bush's detriment. These three possibilities are not mutually exclusive, of course.

A brief discussion may help clarify why estimated effects could differ by the level of data aggregation, for instance, at the state level versus the more disaggregated media market one. The effect of local casualties on voting patterns at different levels of aggregation may depend on two factors: (1) reporting patterns, in particular how widely they are reported beyond the deceased soldier's own home media market, and (2) how much importance voters from one region of a state place on the loss of soldiers whose hometowns lie in another part of the state. If local casualties are reported throughout a state, and voters weigh all such losses equally, then the estimated effect of total state victims would be larger than media market level casualty effects.[3]

However, if either of these two conditions does not hold—i.e., reporting of casualties is largely localized within the soldier's home media market, or if voters care more about deceased soldiers originally from their own region—then media market level casualty effects would be more pronounced than state level ones in a model that simultaneously estimates both. As we discuss below, we constructed a new database of newspaper reporting on Iraq War casualties, and find that coverage of in-state casualties outside soldiers' own home media market is common, the first indication that statewide casualty effects are likely.

While we believe that multiple methods have merit, our analytical approach has some advantages compared with two prominent alternatives. One method is to use election year national popular vote totals as cases and then examine the effect of war or casualties on the vote of the incumbent party (Cotton 1986; Hibbs 2000). This approach is valuable, but hampered by the fact that the economic data generally used as control variables are not available for much of U.S. history. As a result many studies analyze only post-World War II presidential elections, i.e., at most 15 cases. In such studies degrees of freedom are necessarily limited and scholars also must assume, heroically, that independent variables have the same effect over many decades. Another difficulty for those employing this approach is the likely presence of confounding nation-wide trends that make it difficult to

attribute changes in the national vote total to any single cause.

A second, more common approach is to use individual-level data from surveys to estimate how attitudes about the war and casualties relate to stated support for the President. Here, with each respondent constituting a case, statistical power is generally not an issue. Yet another methodological difficulty emerges. In cross-sectional studies attitudes toward a war and resulting casualties are entangled with respondents' overall assessment of the President. This endogeneity problem means that causality is again not easily assigned. In principle, panel studies could be a partial answer to this problem. Unfortunately, for the case at hand data limitations remain severe. While the National Election Study includes panel data with observations in 2000, 2002, and 2004, respondents were not queried about war in Iraq until 2002. By that time, the idea of going to war was clearly identified with President Bush, again raising serious endogeneity concerns. Moreover, this was a hypothetical question in 2002 and respondents' answers might not necessarily predict how they would react to an actual war and casualties in an election year. A further complication of survey-based studies is the challenge of obtaining a representative sample of voters, given shifting turnout patterns across elections, attrition among panel participants, and respondents' tendency to falsely report to have voted.

All methods have limitations, and there is clearly room for both aggregate and survey-based analyses in the study of elections. By presenting a different approach, we hope to complement existing work and advance understanding in this area. We believe that our method, which has its own limitations as we noted above (in particular our inability to estimate common nation-wide trends), has more statistical power than aggregate-level studies and is not biased by the endogeneity and sample selection problems that survey-based analyses typically face.

Data

The state level data are for the 50 U.S. states plus Washington, D.C. The county-level data are for the 3112 counties with complete voting data. There are 210 media markets (DMAs) in our data, for an average of roughly four per state. The county level data exclude Alaska, since electoral wards and counties do not match up there. The voting outcomes from 1996 and 2000 were obtained from the "America Votes"

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[3]The common practice (from the authors' casual observation) of local news reports tallying up statewide Iraq casualty totals would similarly reinforce the political salience of state casualties.

database. The 2004 voting data was compiled from official state sources.[4]

The main Iraq War impacts we examine are casualties, which include both dead and wounded. The Pentagon releases detailed information about war deaths, including the name, unit, and self-described hometown of the soldier. We use casualty data as compiled online by the icasualties.org website from Pentagon sources. We include data on preelection war deaths through October 31, 2004, two days before the election. (Deaths after that date were unlikely to be reported in the United States in time to affect the election.) In one regression we also examine data on postelection war deaths, as described below. We matched soldiers' hometowns to states, media markets (DMAs), and counties using a variety of atlases and online sources (sources available from the authors upon request), and use this matched information in the analysis.[5]

We obtained a list of deaths among U.S. military contractors in Iraq using the same online source. In the 53 cases where we found information on the contractors' hometowns, they are also included in our measure of Iraq War dead, together with U.S. armed forces casualties. The inclusion of contractor casualties is an innovation of our study; previous analyses (Brody 1991; Mueller 1973) focus on battle deaths among U.S. military personnel alone, most likely because contractor deaths did not exist in previous conflicts nearly to the extent observed in Iraq. Our main results are robust to excluding the contractor deaths and focusing only on armed forces casualties, analogous to existing studies (regressions not shown).

We found a total of 1,101 Iraq War dead through the election for soldiers and contractors taken together. This sample excludes soldiers from U.S. possessions and territories (e.g., Puerto Rico) that do not vote in Presidential elections. We also classify the Iraq War dead by regular armed forces versus National Guard and Reserve units and find that nearly one-quarter of all Iraq deaths were soldiers in the Guard or

Reserve (.114 per 100,000 population in the Guard Reserve versus .474 per 100,000 population overall).

Data on the war wounded are far less precise, unfortunately. The Defense Department publishes tallies of the Iraq War wounded by U.S. state, but does not release their names, making matching at the more disaggregated media market and county levels impossible. U.S. forces suffered approximately 8,500 Iraq War wounded through September 30, 2004.[6] The main state-level casualty measure is the sum of all Iraq War dead and wounded in action per 100,000 state population. The average war dead and wounded is 3.39 per 100,000 residents (this figure is unweighted by state population, but the average is similar if weights are used). At the media market and county levels, the main measure of war impacts is the number of Iraq War dead per 100,000 population due to the limited wounded data. The main empirical results are robust to using the numbers of casualties rather than per capita figures (as we report below), but we feel that the latter are conceptually preferable since a given number of casualties might plausibly have a greater local political impact in a small state than in a large one.

We also obtained information on Army and Air Force reservist call-ups and select reserve call-ups at the state level from a public affairs site for the armed forces (defenselink.mil), and consider the effect of these call-ups on 2004 state voting outcomes.

We used the Nexis and America's Newspapers databases to quantify how Iraq War casualties were reported in the print media from the start of the war in March 2003 through November 1, 2004. In particular, we recorded the total number of newspaper articles reported about each war death in her/his home state and also divide these articles between those reported by papers based in the soldier's own hometown media market (DMA) versus in newspapers based in other media markets within her/his home state. On average, 15.3 newspaper articles were written during this period about each deceased soldier in his/her home state (standard deviation 16.3) in the two databases together. (Due to the considerable time and cost of constructing this original dataset, we did not record the number of articles written about each deceased soldier outside his/her home state.)

Turning to political controls, the number of major party presidential and vice-presidential candidate

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[4]We downloaded these data online from http://www. uselectionatlas.org/.

[5]Not all deaths could be assigned to a unique county, for instance when hometowns are split among multiple counties (e.g., Houston TX, Columbus OH, and Portland OR). Only 108 of the 1,101 deaths in the sample are split across countries in this way. In those cases, a fraction of the death was assigned to each county the hometown lies in. For counties that fall within multiple DMAs (e.g., Riverside CA), we counted each death fully in both media markets, since there would possibly be local media reporting in both markets. However, this only applies to eight of the 3,112 sample counties, so this DMA assumption does not affect the main results.

[6]Due to the timing of Pentagon data releases on Iraq War wounded, this is the closest date to Election Day on which we have wounded data, and thus the wounded data includes information for 18.5 of the 19.5 months between the start of the War in 3/2003 and the Presidential election.

campaign visits after the GOP convention is a measure of how "in play" a state was during the home stretch of the 2004 campaign. We obtained the campaign visit data from daily candidate schedules reported by the Associated Press and available in Nexis. An additional political control included in some specifications is an indicator ("dummy") variable for whether an anti-same-sex marriage amendment was on the state ballot in November 2004.[7]

Finally, we include economic and demographic controls. The proportions of active duty armed forces personnel and veterans, population growth, and change in racial balance (in particular, change in the proportions of blacks and white Non-Hispanics) are from the U.S. Census database. The recent unemployment rate data are from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Given the importance of race in U.S. politics, and the role of economic conditions in driving retrospective voting, it is important to include these controls to ensure that our findings are not spurious. Summary statistics are presented in the online appendix at http://journalofpolitics.org/articles.html.

Results

Before presenting the main results, we first estimated the relationship between the hometown location of U.S. Iraq War casualties and various local political, economic, and demographic factors (not shown).[8] We find that President Bush's vote share in 2000 at the state level is not significantly correlated with the home of Iraq War casualties, and the same holds using county-level data. This finding is important for the validity of the empirical strategy: it is suggestive evidence that war deaths are not strongly correlated with underlying political characteristics that could generate spurious associations with casualties. Some economic and demographic variables, most notably the increase in state population between 2000 and 2003, are correlated with casualties per capita in all specifications, as is the proportion of active duty armed forces (at the county level), but most other factors appear unrelated to local casualties. We show below that the main results are robust to including these variables as controls.

Table 1 presents the main empirical finding. Whether the dependent variable is President Bush's vote share in 2004 (column 1) or the change in his share between 2000 and 2004 (column 2), the estimated impact of Iraq War dead and wounded per capita remains negative and significant at 99% confidence. The use of changes in Bush's vote share is slightly preferable since this approach controls for any fixed state characteristics correlated with support for him, and thus we focus on this more parsimonious first difference specification, although since the coefficient estimate on Bush's 2000 vote share is almost exactly one (column 1), the two results are nearly identical. To appreciate the magnitude of the estimated effect, recall that the average number of casualties per 100,000 population is 3.39, so the estimated average impact of casualties on President Bush's vote share is $(3.39) \times (-.0060) = -.020$, or -2.0 percentage points overall, not a small effect. This result is nearly unchanged in a first difference specification that also includes Bush's 2000 vote share as an explanatory variable (column 3). In a separate regression, casualties are not statistically significantly correlated with changes in voter turnout between 2000 and 2004 (regressions not shown), so this is unlikely to be the key channel explaining the estimated effects on Bush's vote share.

The main result is presented graphically in Figure 1. There is a visible negative relationship between the change in President Bush's vote share between 2000 and 2004 (on the vertical axis) and the number of Iraq War deaths and wounded in action per 100,000 residents (the horizontal axis). The downward sloping line is the linear regression (OLS) fit analogous to column 2 in Table 1 The five states (represented by their usual abbreviations) with the highest casualties per capita are Vermont, Arkansas, Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota, states with a range of partisan leanings: Vermont is strongly Democratic, Arkansas has become GOP-leaning, while Montana and especially Wyoming and South Dakota are strongly Republican in Presidential elections. This political and geographic variety further strengthens the case for our estimation strategy, since casualties do not occur solely in states with particular political characteristics or in certain regions, an underlying correlation which might bias estimated effects.

The main result is robust to the inclusion of state economic and demographic controls (in Table 1, column 4), none of which is robustly associated with the change in President Bush's vote share between 2000 and 2004 except for the change in the proportion of the black population, which is associated with more support for Bush. While perhaps surprising since

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[7]For the source of this data, see "Conservatives, Gay-Rights Groups Gird for Next Round after Sweeping Setback for Gay Marriage," *Associated Press State & Local Wire* (via Nexis) 11/3/2004.

[8]These results are available from the authors upon request.

TABLE 1 **The Impact of Iraq War Deaths and Wounded on the 2004 Bush Vote Share, State Level**

	Dependent variable				
	Bush vote share, 2004	Change Bush vote share, 2000 to 2004			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Bush vote share, 2000	1.01**		.015		
	(.03)		(.034)		
Total Iraq deaths and wounded per	−.0065**	−.0060**	−.0065**	−.0055*	
100,000 pop.	(.0022)	(.0021)	(.0022)	(.0023)	
Total Iraq deaths per 100,000 pop.					−.025*
					(.011)
Total Iraq wounded in action per					−.0045†
100,000 pop.					(.0024)
Army, Air Force reserve call-up per					−.00005
100,000 pop.					(.00003)
Select reserve per 100,000 pop., 8/2002					.00004†
					(.00002)
Proportion active armed forces (aged				.43	.25
18–64), 2000				(.26)	(.36)
Proportion veterans (aged 18+), 2000				−.29	−.20
				(.20)	(.18)
Change in unemployment, 9/2003 to				−.05	−.17
8/2004				(.65)	(.63)
Change Black pop. proportion,				2.15**	3.05**
2000–2003				(.66)	(.99)
Change White (non-Hispanic) pop.				−.35	−.87
proportion, 2000–2003				(.60)	(.62)
Proportional change in total pop.,				−.12	−.15
2000–2003				(.16)	(.16)
Observations	51	51	51	51	51
R^2	.97	.18	.19	.41	.48

Notes: OLS regressions. Robust Huber-White standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance $^\dagger p \leq .10$, $^* p \leq .05$, $^{**} p \leq .01$. In Regression 5, the terms Total Iraq deaths per 100,000 pop., Total Iraq wounded in action per 100,000 pop., and Army and Air Force reserve call up per 100,000 pop. are jointly significant at over 99% confidence. The correlation between Total Iraq deaths per 100,000 pop. and Total Iraq wounded in action per 100,000 pop. is .43.

Blacks voted overwhelmingly against Bush, this likely results from changes in the voting patterns of other ethnic groups in states experiencing rapid changes in the African-American population, or other factors correlated with increases in the percentage of black residents. The change in the state unemployment rate in the year preceding the election is negatively but not significantly correlated with support for Bush (point estimate −.05, standard error .65). The relationship between local economic conditions and changes in support for the President is also surprisingly weak and not statistically significant for two other measures, the state unemployment rate level and change in per capita state disposable income, but in both cases the

main coefficient on casualties remains negative and significant (regressions not shown).[9]

The main result is robust to the inclusion of region fixed effects, with regions defined by the Census Bureau (point estimate −.0086, standard error .0022, regression not shown in table). The result is also significant and large (point estimate −.00077, standard error .00032, significant at 95% confidence) if the total number of casualties, not in per capita terms, is the

[9]While state-level economic conditions are not significantly associated with the change in President Bush's vote share, there is some evidence that even more localized county-level economic conditions do matter, as we discuss below.

FIGURE 1   **Change in Bush Vote Share from 2000 to 2004 versus Total Iraq Deaths and Wounded in Action per 100,000 Population, State Level**

main explanatory variable, and state population in 2003 is included as an additional explanatory variable (regression not shown in the table), so use of the per capita measure is not driving the empirical result. Similarly, the main result remains significant at over 95% confidence if the natural logarithm of per capita Iraq War deaths and wounded is the measure of state casualties (point estimate −.0216, standard error .0079, regression not shown in the table).

Surprisingly given the attention they received, National Guard/Reservist call-ups do not have a statistically significant effect on President Bush's vote share, although the point estimate is negative as expected (in Table 1, column 6). One might have expected the political effect of call-ups to exceed that of casualties since the former affected so many more families and communities. When Iraq War deaths, wounded and call-ups are simultaneously included as explanatory variables in column 6, all three coefficient estimates are negative, and they are jointly statistically significant at over 99% confidence (F-test p-value = .002). The coefficient estimate on the deaths per 100,000 population term is statistically significant at 95% confidence (−.025, standard error .011), and the point estimate on the wounded in action per 100,000 term is significant at over 90% confidence (−.0045, standard error .0024).

A variety of other robustness checks and extensions to the basic model are presented in Table 2, as

well as in the online appendix. The main result is robust to dropping any one or two states at a time from the regression. The most statistically influential state is Vermont, but even when it is dropped the estimated impact remains significant at over 95% confidence, and this also holds for dropping each other state (regressions not shown). The most statistically influential pair of states is Vermont and Hawaii, but even when they are excluded the main coefficient estimate on the Iraq War casualty term remains significant at over 95% confidence (coefficient estimate −.0042, standard error .0021, regression not shown in table). The result is also robust to weighting states by their total 2003 population (Table 2, column 1) and using the two-party vote share rather than the all-party vote (this actually strengthens the result, column 2).

A novel specification check provides further evidence of the main result's robustness. We compiled the number of postelection casualties in the Iraq War (from the same sources as the main preelection data) and estimate their association with changes in Bush's vote share.[10] Recall that a central econometric concern

[10]These are Iraq War deaths from 11/1/2004 through 8/11/2005 and war wounded from 10/1/2004 through 8/6/2005. The correlation coefficient between (preelection) Total Iraq deaths and wounded in action per 100,000 pop. and Postelection Iraq deaths and wounded in action per 100,000 pop. is moderate, at .49. We have been unable to find wounded figures by state for October

TABLE 2   **The Impact of Iraq War Deaths and Wounded on the 2004 Bush Vote Share, Robustness Checks**

	Dependent variable: Change Bush vote share, 2000 to 2004			
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**
Total Iraq deaths and wounded per 100,000 pop.	−.0060*	−.0087**	−.0058*	−.0072**
	(.0024)	(.0027)	(.0026)	(.0026)
Post-election Iraq deaths and wounded in action per 100,000 pop.			.0008	
			(.0014)	
Bush vote share, 2000				−.039
				(.042)
Change Republican Presidential vote share, 1996 to 2000				.059
				(.117)
Same-Sex marriage ban ballot initiative in 2004				.0038
				(.0066)
(Indicator Democratic President or VP candidate home state 2004)– (Indicator Democratic President or VP candidate home state 2000)				−.019**
				(.005)
Total Presidential or VP nominee visits to the state after the GOP convention				−.00035**
				(.00011)
Weight by state population	Yes	No	No	No
Two party vote share	No	Yes	No	No
State economic, demographic controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	51	51	51	51
R^2	.14	.26	.41	.55

Notes: OLS regressions. Robust Huber-White standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance $^\dagger p \leq .10$, $^* p \leq .05$, $^{**} p \leq .01$. The correlation coefficient between (pre-election) Total Iraq deaths and wounded in action per 100,000 pop. and Post-election Iraq deaths and wounded in action per 100,000 pop. is .49. The hypothesis that pre- and postelection casualties have the same effect in regression 3 is rejected at 90% confidence (F-test p-value .07). States with Same-Sex marriage ban ballot initiatives in 2004 are AZ, GA, KY, MI, MS, MT, ND, OH, OK, OR, and UT. The (Indicator for Democratic President or VP candidate home state 2004)—(Indicator for Democratic President or VP candidate home state 2000) term takes on a value of 1 for Massachusetts and North Carolina, and −1 for Tennessee and Connecticut, and zero elsewhere (since the Republican candidates were the same in 2000 and 2004, we do not control for Texas or Wyoming effects). The mean (s.d.) of Total President or VP candidate campaign visits term is 8.5 (16.9); Democrat and Republican visits are highly correlated (correlation coefficient .95). State economic, demographic controls include: Proportion active armed forces (aged 18–64), 2000; Proportion veterans (aged 18+), 2000; Change in unemployment, 9/2003–8/2004; Change Black pop. proportion, 2000–2003; Change White (Non-Hispanic) pop. proportion, 2000–2003; Proportional change in total population, 2000–2003.

is omitted variable bias, namely the possibility that underlying political trends are generating a spurious noncausal statistical association between casualties and changes in state electoral support for the President. In this case, state *postelection* casualties would also be negatively correlated with changes in Bush's vote share even though they could not possibly have affected the election. We find evidence to the contrary: while the coefficient estimate on the main preelection casualties term remains negative and significantly related to Bush's vote share (point estimate −.0058, standard error .0026, Table 2, column 3), the coefficient on postelection casualties is near zero and not significant (estimate .0008, standard error .0014).

Moreover, the hypothesis that these two terms have the same effect on changes in support for Bush is rejected at over 90% confidence (F-test p-value .072). This weak relationship between postelection casualties and changes in support for Bush strengthens the case for a causal interpretation of the main preelection casualties estimate.

The timing of preelection casualties does not appear to be politically salient, however: when we divide up preelection war deaths into three-month periods from the start of the war in March 2003, there are no statistically significantly different effects of deaths that occurred closer to the election relative to earlier losses (regression not shown).[11] This is noteworthy in light of both Mueller's (1973) claim that

2004 alone, and hence the wounded data are not dated as precisely as the deaths data in relation to the election date. The Defense Department releases state-level wounded figures only intermittently, and the 10/1/2004 is the closest we could find to Election Day.

[11]We use war deaths alone in these regressions since deaths are more precisely dated than the data on wounded soldiers.

citizens react less to later waves of casualties and conversely the research showing that voters are extremely myopic and short-term economic performance in the months prior to the election matters most (Achen and Bartels 2004b; Hibbs 2000).

We next explore several political factors that could have affected support for President Bush in 2004. To start, the two terms measuring support for GOP candidates in the two previous Presidential elections are not significant. One topic that received extensive postelection attention was the issue of "moral values," which was linked to opposition to same-sex marriage. In particular, 11 states—Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah—had anti-same-sex marriage ballot initiatives in November 2004. All of these initiatives won majority support. Yet we find no evidence that they produced any noticeable increase in support for Bush relative to other states: the point estimate on an indicator variable for these 11 states is near zero at .0038 and is not significant at conventional levels (in Table 2, column 4). Nor is the presence of an anti-same-sex marriage initiative associated with a significant change in voter turnout between 2000 and 2004 (in a regression analogous to Table 2, column 4, not shown).

Two other political factors have more explanatory power. The home states of the 2004 Democratic presidential and vice presidential candidates (Massachusetts and North Carolina, respectively) showed 1.9 percentage points less support for President Bush (Table 2, column 4, or analogously, states showed more support for Bush in 2004 if they were represented on the Democratic ticket in 2000 but not 2004, i.e., Tennessee and Connecticut) and this effect is significant at 99% confidence; we do not include the terms for Republican candidate home states since the GOP ticket was the same in both elections (and thus drops out of the first difference specification). The number of visits the major party presidential and vice presidential candidates made to a state after the August Republican convention is strongly associated with less support for President Bush in that same regression, although the effect is quite small (and there is no significant different effect of Democratic versus GOP candidate visits—regression not shown).

Nonetheless, the main Iraq War casualties effect is if anything strengthened by the inclusion of these additional political variables as controls: the coefficient estimate on total casualties per 100,000 population becomes −.0072 (standard error .0026, statistically significant at over 99% confidence, Table 2 regression 4) in this regression with our most complete set of political, economic, and demographic controls.

Table 3 indicates that different groups of states show varying sensitivity to casualties in terms of their support for President Bush. We find little political cost for the President in "red" states but very large impacts in "blue" ones. In columns 1 and 2, we use two different definitions of "red" states: in column 1, we interact total state casualties per capita with an indicator variable for states in the South (using the *Congressional Quarterly* definition of same, i.e., the 11 former Confederate states plus Kentucky and Oklahoma), and in column 2 we interact the casualties term with a dummy variable that takes a value of one for states that President Bush won in 2000. In column 1, the estimated impact of casualties in the non-South region was −.0086 (significant at 99% confidence), substantially larger than the average national effect. In contrast, the effect in the South is the sum of the main term and interaction term coefficient estimates, $(−.0086) + (.0100) = .0014$, which is positive but near zero and not significant. Similarly, the coefficient estimate on the interaction between casualties and a 2000 Bush victory is significant in the predicted direction at 95% confidence (estimate .0074, standard error .0028, column 2).

We next examine whether casualty effects were larger in "battleground states." These states experience the most intense campaigning in terms of candidate visits and media spending. Thus comparing the effect of casualties in these highly contested states versus the rest of the country is a test of the extent to which voters are affected by campaign messages, rather than by real-world conditions alone (Bartels 2006; Johnston et al. 1992; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). It is possible that campaigning either reduces or amplifies the effect of casualties, as voters are "primed" via more intensive exposure to the campaigns' arguments to take casualties into account when voting.

There is no evidence that casualty effects are any different in battleground states than elsewhere, whether battleground states are defined by the number of campaign visits by Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates (Table 3, column 3) or by campaign media spending in the state (column 4), where this second regression uses data from Shaw (2006). The coefficient estimates in both cases are near zero with small t-statistics. This finding suggests that intensive state-level campaigning did not have a major impact on how voters reacted to Iraq casualties in the 2004 election. To be clear, Iraq casualties do have a large effect on Bush's vote share in battleground states, but effects are not significantly larger there than elsewhere.

TABLE 3 **The Impact of Iraq War Deaths and Wounded on the 2004 Bush Vote Share, Interaction Effects**

	Dependent variable: Change Bush vote share, 2000 to 2004			
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**
Total Iraq deaths and wounded per 100,000 pop.	−.0086** (.0018)	−.0099** (.0020)	−.0073** (.0025)	−.0068** (.0024)
South region	−.033* (.014)			
South region * Total Iraq deaths and wounded per 100,000 pop.	.0100** (.0030)			
Bush won state, 2000		−.022† (.012)		
Bush won state, 2000 * Total Iraq deaths and wounded per 100,000 pop.		.0074* (.0028)		
Total Presidential or VP nominee visits to the state after the GOP convention			−.00061 (.00055)	
Total nominee visits * Total Iraq deaths and wounded per 100,000 pop.			.00010 (.00017)	
Total campaign media spending in the state (in US$ millions)				.00067 (.00162)
Total campaign media spending * Total Iraq deaths and wounded per 100,000 pop.				−.00053 (.00057)
State economic, demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	51	51	51	51
R^2	.49	.46	.47	.46

Notes: OLS regressions. Robust Huber-White standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance $^{†}p \leq .10, ^*p \leq .05, ^{**}p \leq .01$. "South" states use the *Congressional Quarterly* definition (the 11 states of the former Confederacy plus Kentucky and Oklahoma). State economic, demographic controls are the same as in Table 2.

There is no significant interaction effect of casualties with several other theoretically plausible explanatory variables, including the state unemployment rate, proportion of active duty armed forces personnel, or various measures of state population growth and racial composition (regressions not shown—refer to online appendix).[12]

We next estimate the impact of local Iraq War casualties on the 2004 Presidential election according to the statistical models in Tables 1 and 3. These results should be understood subject to the caveat discussed above, namely they ignore all common nation-wide effects of the war on support for Bush, and thus might arguably either understate or overstate the true overall national casualty effect. The actual election outcome was a vote share of 50.8% for President Bush, who won 32 states and 286 Electoral College votes. The first election "simulation" estimates how many additional votes President Bush would have won in each state had

there been no Iraq War dead or wounded there, employing the estimated war casualty impacts from Table 1, column 2 under the assumption that the nation-wide war effect was zero. In this case, we estimate President Bush would have won 52.6% of the national vote and four additional states—New Hampshire, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—for 328 Electoral College votes in all.

The estimated impact of casualties is even larger using the regional breakdown in Table 3, column 1, in which estimated war casualty impacts were much smaller in the South (where there were also few "battleground states") relative to the rest of the country. In that case, we estimate President Bush's overall national vote share would have been 52.3% and that he would have won seven more states for a total of 39 (in addition to the four named above, he would have won Michigan, Minnesota, and Washington State), for a total of 366 Electoral College votes.

The simulations indicate that absent the negative local electoral impacts of Iraq War casualties (and assuming no national war "rally effect") President Bush would have swept to a decisive victory in 2004, as

[12]The online data appendix presents suggestive evidence on differential effects by soldier race.

TABLE 4   **The Impact of Iraq War Deaths on the 2004 Bush Vote Share**

	Dependent variable: Change Bush vote share, 2000 to 2004				
	(1) State-level	**(2)** State-level	**(3)** County-level	**(4)** County-level	**(5)** County-level
Total Iraq deaths per 100,000 pop., state level	−.027* (.011)	−.033 (.024)			−.029* (.011)
Iraq deaths per 100,000 pop., National Guard/Reserves		.012 (.037)			
Total Iraq deaths per 100,000 pop., media market level					.0005 (.0044)
Total Iraq deaths per 100,000 pop., county level			−.0003 (.0009)	.0006 (.0005)	.0008 (.0005)
Proportion active armed forces (aged 18–64), 2000			.15 (.11)	.03 (.05)	.13 (.10)
Proportion veterans (aged 18+), 2000			−.02 (.07)	.22** (.04)	.01 (.07)
Change in unemployment, 9/2003–8/2004			−.206 (.247)	−.236* (.095)	−.184 (.225)
Change Black pop. proportion, 2000–2003			.03 (.36)	−.68** (.21)	.03 (.35)
Change White (non-Hispanic) pop. proportion, 2000–2003			.29 (.22)	.22 (.14)	.35† (.20)
Proportional change in total pop., 2000–2003			.07 (.04)	.09** (.03)	.05 (.04)
State fixed effects	No	No	No	Yes	No
Observations	51	51	3112	3112	3078
R^2	.10	.11	.03	.48	.08

Notes: OLS regressions. Robust Huber-White standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance $†p \le .10$, $*p \le .05$, $**p \le .01$. In models 3–5, observations are weighted by the ratio of (county population)/(state population) such that each state is weighted equally, and disturbance terms are clustered at the state level. All economic and demographic controls are measured at the county level.

predicted by most models that excluded war effects. Seven scholars' forecasting models—which largely focused on economic variables and ignored the war—predicted a larger victory for the President than he actually achieved, with a median difference of 2.5 percentage points between their prediction and his actual national vote share (Campbell 2004), close to our estimate above of a 1.8 point gain for Bush in the absence of casualties.

In a final set of state-level results, we examine the local impacts of Iraq War deaths alone, not considering the wounded. At the state level, war deaths generally have a large, negative, and statistically significant effect on President Bush's vote share, as in Table 4, column 1. The estimated effect is a drop of .027 (standard error .011, significant at 95% confidence) in support for President Bush for each additional war death per 100,000 population. There is no statistically significant additional effect of National Guard/ Reserve deaths relative to other soldier deaths (point

estimate .012, standard error .037, in column 2), perhaps confirming the political logic behind the White House's decision to deploy large numbers of Guard/Reserve troops in Iraq. In other words, we cannot reject the hypothesis that each Iraq War death—whether regular Armed Forces or National Guard/Reserve—had the same political cost.

Recall that there is no information on the war wounded down to the media market or county levels, and at those levels we are thus forced to estimate the impact of war deaths alone. Columns 3–5 in Table 4 indicate that localized effects at the more disaggregated county and media market levels are not as large as state-level effects. While some estimated effects at the county level are negative, none are significant at conventional confidence levels across a variety of specifications, including those with total deaths per 100,000 population as dependent variable and including county economic and demographic controls (column 3), with an indicator for any soldier death in

a county as dependent variable (regression not shown, refer to online appendix), or with state fixed effects (column 4).

One noteworthy finding in Table 4 is the negative impact of an increase in the county level unemployment rate on support for President Bush in the specification with state fixed effects (column 4). The estimated impact of an increase in county unemployment during the previous year is −.236 and is significant at over 95% confidence. Thus a 5 percentage point increase in the county unemployment rate leads to a drop of approximately 1.2 percentage points in support for the incumbent president, conditional on other factors. This finding of localized economic effects is consistent with earlier research (Abrams and Butkiewicz 1995; Holbrook 1991).Yet while the point estimate on local unemployment changes remains negative across all specifications in Table 4 (as was also the case for the state-level unemployment term in Table 1), it is not robustly significant across different sets of controls.

When county, DMA (media market) and state Iraq War deaths per 100,000 population are all included as explanatory variables in Table 4 column 5, the coefficient estimates on DMA and county deaths are not statistically significant but the effect of total state deaths per capita remains large, negative, and statistically significant (point estimate −.029, standard error .011), with estimated effects similar to those in the state level regression in column 1.

The weakness of the DMA-level impact is somewhat puzzling at first glance, since effects could be stronger in the soldier's home media market due to extra news coverage there. One possible explanation for the strength of the state effect relative to county and media market ones is that local media may report state casualties as local news even if the soldier is from a different part of the state. This could generate patterns like those we observe in Table 4—namely, large negative effects of statewide deaths, and weaker effects at more disaggregated levels—as long as citizens place roughly equal "weight" on all state deaths that are reported in the media when making their voting choices, as discussed above.

For evidence on statewide reporting patterns, we compiled all newspaper reports in a deceased soldier's home state mentioning the death and determined whether the publication was based in the deceased soldier's home media market. We find that 51.9% of all newspaper articles in our sample were reported in the soldier's own DMA, while an almost equal 48.1% of articles were reported in other media markets within the same state. This is strong evidence of state-wide reporting of casualties beyond the victim's own DMA, and as such provides a rationale for why total statewide casualties are the politically salient variable.

The articles reported outside the soldier's home DMA are also divided among relatively few other media markets: there are only 210 DMA's in total and thus roughly four per state on average. Moreover, the median percentage of residents in a state's two largest DMA's is approximately 76%. The fact that roughly half of all casualty articles are reported outside of the home DMA and that there are few DMAs per state on average, taken together help make sense of the unexpectedly weak estimated DMA-level impacts. (Unfortunately, we lack comparable data on local television or radio reports, but presumably print and broadcast reporting patterns are correlated.) These reporting patterns are not significantly different in small states (defined as those below median state population) versus large ones (results not shown).

The average number of articles reported on regular armed forces soldiers (14.9) is very similar to the number of reports on National Guard/Reserves soldiers (17.3). Although this difference is significant (*p*-value .06), the small mean difference is consistent with the finding (in Table 4, column 2) of no meaningful additional electoral cost for President Bush due to Guard/Reserve deaths.[13]

We did not assemble newspaper reports on Iraq War deaths outside of soldiers' home states, due to the prohibitive cost of doing so. However, to the extent that there is also some local media reporting of soldier deaths from other—perhaps neighboring—states, this could lead to additional negative cross-state effects that are missed by our estimation strategy. In that case, the voting effects we estimate would once again be lower bounds on the overall negative war impact for President Bush, although this of course remains speculative.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that—contrary to the general postelection impression—Iraq War casualties had substantial local political costs for President Bush in the November 2004 election, especially outside of his own

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[13]There is less reporting of Iraq War deaths in the South (13.3. articles per fatality on average) than the non-South (16.4 articles). While this pattern might partially explain the different regional impacts we document in Table 4, it is difficult to interpret since news reporting both reflects local demand as well as possibly shaping views. We thus do not emphasize this result.

home region. In light of the fact that Bush's victory was narrower than most scholars predicted, our findings strengthen the conclusion that casualties were an important contributing factor. While hardly surprising from the current vantage point, this finding contradicts the claims of many observers and much of the subsequent scholarly research.

We also found that state National Guard and Reservist call-ups are not associated with loss of support for the President, and fatalities among them are not more damaging electorally than other armed forces deaths. This result is counterintuitive and fills a gap in the literature. Second, despite the postelection focus on "moral values," there was no detectable gain for President Bush in states that had anti-same-sex marriage ballot initiatives, nor was there a statistically significant change in voter turnout in those states.

Beyond offering evidence in support of a particular understanding of the last U.S. Presidential election, our results also speak to broader debates. On the interpretation of elections, our findings support the view that substance matters. Real-world events like casualties help account for the year-to-year shifts that relatively stable factors like party identification do not explain. While the economy is the most consistently important factor affecting retrospective voting, war and peace matter as well. In the last two elections prior to 2004 when the United States was fully engaged in a controversial war (1952 and 1968), the incumbent party lost the White House. The number of U.S. casualties in Iraq pales before those taken in Korea or Vietnam, so it should not be surprising that the electoral cost of Iraq War casualties was not so high as to bar President Bush from reelection. Nonetheless, the local political costs of these casualties were real. We suggest that this is a better explanation of Bush's underperformance relative to the election-year economy (Campbell 2005) than claims that Kerry's campaigning was more effective than the President's (Holbrook 2005).

Our findings also can inform scholars' assessments of the American public's "casualty sensitivity," a topic that has long interested students of foreign policy. The claim that post-Vietnam War U.S. society is radically intolerant of casualties (Luttwak 1994) was already widely recognized by scholars to be overstated (Feaver and Gelpi 2003; Kull and Destler 1999; Larson 1996). The danger now is that the pendulum will swing too far in the other direction and that the 2004 election will be counted as further evidence that even casualties stretching into the thousands, as in Iraq, have a negligible electoral impact in the United States.

Our results suggest that this would be a mistake. Certainly, Iraq War casualties did not prevent President Bush from winning and even improving on his 2000 showing. Yet, as we have attempted to show, it does not follow that these losses were without any political cost for Bush in 2004. Counterfactually, the election-year economic recovery and the fact that there was no successful terrorist attack on U.S. soil after 9/11/2001 might have been expected to produce an even wider winning margin for President Bush, in line with retrospective theories of voting (Fiorina 1981; Key 1966). The fact that President Bush's 2004 victory margin was smaller than that predicted by many forecasting models may instead be seen as a result of the electoral drag caused by Iraq War casualties. In a polity with closely balanced parties, the moderate localized electoral effect of casualties that we estimate was substantively significant. Moreover, this evidence of electoral casualty sensitivity emerges from a conflict in which American losses have been quite modest compared to those suffered in conflicts for which electoral effects have been shown (Vietnam and the Civil War), whether the yardstick is in absolute or per capita casualties.

Yet while our findings are relevant to several debates, we are mindful of their limitations. As noted above, we examine only the localized effect of casualties. Nonlocalized effects—such as the possibility that the President benefited because the war primed voters to weigh terror-related concerns more heavily, or because voters nation-wide were won over by his policy or simply reluctant to change leaders in wartime—are beyond the scope of this study. Of course in the counterfactual scenario that the War did not occur the world would also have been different in unpredictable ways. Thus it is conceivable that on balance the War aided President Bush's 2004 campaign, although our findings make this possibility appear less likely.

Some other questions remain to be answered. First, since our research centers on a single conflict, it cannot by itself conclusively resolve disputes over the extent to which the public's casualty sensitivity is mediated by factors such as voters' belief in the justification for a war or the prospect of its success (Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver 2005; Ostrom and Simon 1985). Had stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction or evidence of an "operational connection" between the Ba'athist regime and Al Qaeda been found in Iraq before Election Day, the casualties suffered by U.S. forces (or even a greater number of losses) might not have generated an electoral cost. To speculate further, had signs in November 2004 pointed unambiguously

to the emergence of a stable, democratic and pro-American Iraq, the political damage of U.S. casualties might have been smaller. However, since both sets of theories—those stressing casualties per se and others that see their effect as conditional on public attitudes toward the war—would predict political damage to President Bush from the circumstances in Iraq on election day, our results are consistent with each perspective. Nonetheless, our finding that the effect of casualties was greater in states where Bush was already unpopular lends some credence to the view that casualties do not exact a fixed cost upon a President, but rather are mediated by political factors.

Finally, the question of the effect of Iraq War casualties on future U.S. elections remains open. U.S. forces have suffered many more fatalities since the 2004 elections than they did between the beginning of the War and the Presidential vote. It is now widely believed that the Iraq War was a major liability for GOP Congressional candidates in 2006. The validity of this view, and the extent to which a localized casualty effect was present, merits further study.

Looking forward more speculatively, two factors seem likely to influence the degree to which Iraq War casualties affect future elections. The first is the nature of American involvement in Iraq at the time of the next election. Both the number of casualties and the extent to which the war seems unsuccessful and open-ended may condition voter response to further losses.

The other contextual factor is the presence of new candidates. It seems doubtful that any conceivable Republican Presidential nominee in 2008, regardless of his voting record or prior statements, will be as closely associated with the Iraq War as President Bush has been. This may mitigate the electoral effect of casualties incurred between now and the 2008 Presidential election. However, this is not to say that a continuing conflict will not be a GOP electoral liability in 2008. The best historical analogy may be the case of Adlai Stevenson in 1952. As Governor of Illinois Stevenson played no role in shaping U.S. policy in the Korean War, yet most scholars agree that as the Democratic Presidential nominee he was greatly hindered by public dissatisfaction with the unpopular war policies of the Truman Administration.

The data needed to replace such informed speculation with empirically grounded conclusions will emerge soon enough. In the meantime, it is not too soon to say that this paper's findings revise the conventional wisdom about the impact of the Iraq War on the 2004 Presidential election and affect debates both about the casualty sensitivity of American voters and the determinants of electoral outcomes.

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