Don't mention the war vs stick to your guns: political party responses to military interventions

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Abstract

How do political parties respond to increases in the number of body bags returning home from military interventions? Several studies demonstrate that once a conflict's death toll increases, support for the military presence in that conflict declines. In that situation, do political parties (1) maintain that intervention was the 'right thing' to do and escalate commitment to the conflict or (2) do they try to avoid the blame for the casualties and ignore the conflict, i.e. "not mentioning the war"? To evaluate this we measure the attention to and position on military issues in parties' election manifestos. Our dataset comprises 11 OECD countries (Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States) and focuses on post-Cold War military interventions. By using pooled time-series cross-sectional analysis, we find that pre-9/11 opposition parties talk more often and less positive about military issues, however: opposition parties became more positive after 9/11. Both before and after 9/11, governing parties avoid blame by talking less about the military and less positive about the military.

Key words

Military intervention, framing, political party strategy, decision-making

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How do political parties respond to increases in the number of their soldiers dying in military interventions? In particular, does the number of soldiers killed in a conflict affect parties' attention to military issues and their position on military issues? Empirical studies demonstrate that foreign interventions affect incumbent support (Mueller, 2005; Norpoth & Sidman, 2007; Tir & Singh, 2013). In particular, higher (own) casualty levels in a military intervention abroad decreases public support for the mission (Eichenberg, 2005; Gelpi, Feaver, & Reifler, 2006). For example, as the American body count in Iraq rose, Americans became increasingly divided over the intervention (Gelpi, Feaver, & Reifler, 2006). Given the potential for a backlash of public opinion, government parties thus face a dilemma regarding their communication about the military: do they defend the intervention and stick to their guns or do they (re-)focus their attention on other issues, i.e. do they not mention the war? Foreign policy analysts have claimed that if the death toll rises, governments escalate their commitment to a conflict and should thus in public defend the intervention (Fearon, 1994; Larson, 1996; Staw, 1976). We label this the *stick to your guns* hypothesis. Alternatively, public policy analysts claim that if governments carry out unpopular policies they engage in blame avoidance strategies to evade electoral punishment (Vis & Van Kersbergen, 2007; Weaver, 1987; Wenzelburger, 2014). According to this line of reasoning government parties try to defuse the issue by focusing attention on other issues. We label this the *don't mention the war hypothesis*. Opposition parties also face a dilemma: do they ride the wave of public dissatisfaction with an unpopular military intervention and attack the government on the military issue? Or would such a move be deemed unpatriotic, and will they instead support the troops in the field or propose an alternative approach? We label the latter claim the *rally-around-the-flag hypothesis* and the previous one *the blame the government hypothesis*.

Another consideration we explore in this paper is that the strategic choices of government parties and opposition ones depend crucially on the context of the specific intervention and the larger international context. In particular, we expect and report

differences in party responses before 9/11 – when most missions were humanitarian interventions in ongoing conflict – and after 9/11 – when Western democracies themselves started the war.

We approach these questions by analyzing the strategic communication of parties in their election manifestos. In election manifestos parties pay attention to issues (or ignore them), and take a position on issues. Because election manifestos are an important part of the communication of the party to the electorate, changes in the issue position and issue attention of a party are motivated by strategic considerations (see Adams, 2012 for an overview of causes of party shifts). In particular, we analyze changes in the attention of parties to the military in their election manifesto, and changes in the position of the party (positive or negative) on the military. Changes in attention to and position on the military in parties' manifestos reveal changes in parties' underlying policy preferences. These preferences could underlie eventual policy decisions and several studies have demonstrated the effect of positions expressed in election manifestos on government policy (McDonald & Budge, 2006; Benoit & Laver, 2006; Schumacher, 2011). For instance, the German Green party only shows two instances of increased attention to the military: in their 1990 manifesto (short after the Fall of the Berlin War, by 6.5 increase) and in 2002 (after the internally extensively debated Kosovo intervention, by 1.2). We analyze election manifestos here instead of actual policy decisions about interventions, because the latter depend much more on short term decision-making. Parliamentary speeches, for instance, depend on the parliamentary agenda which is set by the government. This gives coalition parties who do not wish to debate the intervention ample opportunity to avoid discussion. Thus, to study party responses to increasing loss of soldiers' lives during a military intervention it is better to analyze a less restrained dependent variable, such as changes in election manifestos.

Our paper analyzes 363 changes in issue attention and issue position of 75 parties in 11 advanced democracies (Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States), with

similar electoral arenas. Since the Cold War these democracies have fought in several large-scale wars (Bosnia, Afghanistan, First and Second Gulf War) and engaged in post-conflict and state-building missions (both in earlier mentioned conflict areas, as well through participation in UN-missions), so there are sufficient interventions to study. We use election manifesto data from the Manifesto Project (Volkens et al., 2014) and combine that with various datasets measuring the number of soldiers killed in a conflict,[3] the number of troops committed to an area of conflict (Military Balance data) and the total number of battle deaths in conflict areas around the world (UCDP dataset).

Strategic options of government parties

Most advanced democracies have troops committed to war zones. The missions for which these troops are deployed are very different: some missions are only observatory, others supply relief aid to distressed areas. Some missions sought to prevent genocide (e.g. Kosovo), while the aim of other missions was to bring about regime change (e.g. Iraq and Afghanistan). Some missions carry almost no life-threatening risks for soldiers; the UN mission United Nations Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG) saw only 1 fatality in 3 years. The Second Battle of Fallujah in Iraq, where US soldiers were confronted with the fiercest urban combat since Vietnam, resulted in 54 fatalities between 7 and 16 November 2004. Also, some countries – most obviously the US – have permanent overseas military presence, whereas others are much more reluctant to commit any troops abroad (such as Germany). Still, our dataset shows that it is very rare for these 11 countries *not* to be involved in a mission abroad between 1990 and 2014. Even small countries like the Netherlands and Sweden commit on average a 1,000 troops per electoral term to missions all over the world. Larger countries like Canada or Italy commit on average about 4,000 troops, and the US "wins" this game with committing on average almost 400,000 troops per electoral term. With different numbers of troops committed, it is unsurprising that the number of soldiers killed in action also differs markedly. Many countries are confronted with either a few dozen dead soldiers per electoral term, or with no dead soldiers per electoral term. The US is again an outlier

3 Data gathered through open sources (databases of national departments of Defense, rolls of honor, veteran-websites etc.), for more information see: codebook.

with almost 1,000 dead soldiers per electoral term. Of course absolute differences in military casualties between-countries matter. Still, the within-country variation in military casualties also influences both public opinion and the tone of the national debate and therewith the strategic options that government parties and opposition ones have when they are forced to response to increases in military casualties.

We first consider the strategic options of government parties. Having been responsible for decisions regarding a military mission, they will be seen by the electorate as responsible for military casualties. How can they respond to this? First, we posit the *stick to your guns* hypothesis, that is that parties escalate their commitment to a cause. This mechanism describes the tendency of decision-makers to invest additional resources in a failing course of action (Brockner, 1992, Staw, 1981) in an attempt to justify the costs made thus far (Levy; 1997, McDermott, 2004). These (so-called sunk) costs are being perceived as operating costs and it is unlikely that similar costs would be incurred for new initiatives. Decision-makers are even more inclined to escalate their commitment to a failing course of action if they need to justify their decisions to others (Karlsson, Juliusson & Garling, 2005). One of the most frequently mentioned examples hereof is the US commitment to the Vietnam War (Rubin & Brockner, 1975; Staw, 1981; Teger, 1980; Whyte, 1989). Despite the warning by the undersecretary of state George Ball, that it was unlikely that the US would meet its objectives in Vietnam (Gettleman, 1995: 283)., president Johnson escalated the number of troops from 65.000 to 537.000 from 1965-1968.

Groups and individuals (Bazerman et al., 1984; Brockner, 1992; Whyte, 1993) display this tendency of investing more time and money to an earlier made decision despite increasing costs, and basically "throw good money after bad" (Garland, 1990;728). In the context of military interventions, increasing costs are mainly operationalized by tracking the increase in military casualties over the course of a military mission (Staw, 1976; Boettcher & Cobb, 2009; Nincic, 1997). Two studies demonstrate that in experiments participants become more tolerant towards military casualties – and thus become willing to escalate commitment - if the casualties framed

as “necessary sacrifices” (Tomz, 2007; Boettcher & Cobb, 2009). Observational studies of public support for interventions demonstrate that it is not the amount of military casualties that matters. It is the public’s perception of the chances of success of mission that drives public support (Eichenberg, 2005; Gelpi et al., 2006, Mueller, 2005). Recent studies that take the decision-makers as the vocal point, are well-described Several case studies of decision-making in the US government leading up to and during the 2003 intervention in Iraq, highlight how psychological processes such as groupthink (Mintz & DeRouen, 2009) and loss aversion (Dyson, 2006) led to an escalation of commitment to the intervention in Iraq.

With the *stick to your guns* hypothesis, we aim to test whether governments indeed increase their commitment to the military cause, despite obvious losses in terms of casualties.

H1 The more soldiers die in a conflict, the more parties in government increase their commitment to the military

Second, we posit an alternative hypothesis, the *don’t mention the war hypothesis*. For this hypothesis we take inspiration from the literature that analyzes welfare reforms. This literature analyzes how governments implement painful retrenchment of popular welfare programs. By cutting back on these programs governments risk electoral punishment and to counter this they employ so-called blame avoidance strategies (Pierson, 1996; Vis & Van Kersbergen, 2007; Weaver, 1987; Wenzelburger, 2014). To give an (rare) example from the IR literature, when new information on the absence of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) in Iraq came out, the Bush Administration tried shifting the blame of their decision to intervene to the intelligence community (Bell, 2007; Preston, 2011). Because increasing deaths tolls in a conflict are similarly associated with increased dissatisfaction with the government and the mission (Bueno de Mesquita & Downs, 2006; Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, & Morrow, 2003), it is likely that governments also consider blame avoidance strategies in relation to military interventions to deal with the potential for electoral punishment. There are several

strategies governments may use. One is to obfuscate painful aspects of a policy (such as an intervention) and thus limit the information supply opponents may use to mobilize against the government. For instance, the Obama administration have been careful in the provision of public information on civilian casualties during the deployment of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs, or : drones) that have been used for so-called targeted killings of suspected leaders of terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda. Another way is to allow embedded journalists, in order to provide a more favorable frame in which killed soldiers are reported by the media. Empirical research on embedded journalism during operation Iraqi Freedom has shown that this led to a more favorable tone "toward the military and in depiction of individual troops" (Pfau et al., 2004:74). Of course this strategy holds the risk of public back-lash when additional, less favorable, facts on the mission and behavior of soldiers are exposed to the public and thus you can question whether full exposure of the facts is not a better strategy (Elmelund-Praestekaer, Klitgaard, & Schumacher, 2014). The goal of limiting information is to reduce the salience of the particular issue for voters. This way, the blame avoidance literature also touches the party competition literature. According to Budge and Farlie (1983) parties in electoral campaigns emphasize those issues that work for them and ignore those issues that work against them. The strategy of obfuscation or limiting information is exactly this; parties try to ignore issues that expose the party's incompetence and focus instead on issues that put the party in a more favorable light.

Following this reasoning, and contra H1, one can expect government parties to reduce attention to the military, the more the nation's soldiers are dying in fields far from home.

H2 The more soldiers die in a conflict, the less parties in government wish to be associated with the military

Strategic options of opposition parties

What about the options of opposition parties? Opposition parties are often considered as the losers of the electoral game (Riker, 1982). Their lack of access to office, and thus the rents, prestige and policy access associated with office, should motivate them to change strategy, and indeed these parties – in particular parties systematically out of office – have been identified as issue entrepreneurs (De Vries & Hobolt, 2012; Hobolt & De Vries, n.d.). If public opinion moves against the government, there is an opportunity for the opposition to blame the government for the mess and reap the electoral rewards (Bueno de Mesquita & Downs, 2006; Smith, 1998). Political parties that agreed with the initial invasion of a country (e.g. Afghanistan and Iraq) may have less opportunity to blame the government, still there are plenty of examples of this. The US Democrats, for example, initially supported the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, but later objected to them. Hypothesis 3, labelled the *blame the government hypothesis* formalizes this expectation.

H3 The more soldiers die in a conflict, the more attention opposition parties pay to the military and the more negative they are about the military

The previous hypothesis is premised on the assumption that public opinion eventually moves against a military intervention if more and more soldiers are dying. However, shortly after the start of a military intervention, public support generally rises *in favor* of the intervention. Mueller (1970) was the first to analyze the effect of foreign policy events on (US) presidential approval rates over time, such as the effects of the Korean and Vietnam war. He found that support for military interventions in the US peaks in the beginning of a war but steadily declines over time. This is the so-called rally-around-the-flag-effect (Mueller, 1971, 2005). Unless the government calls for an election on the eve of the intervention, the rally-around-the-flag effect has generally receded during an electoral campaign. But this does not mean that it is politically advantageous to criticize the mission. For instance, when John Kerry stepped up his criticism of president Bush' handling of the Iraq War during the electoral campaign of 2004, Republican Senator Zen

Miller, a keynote speaker during the Republican convention, stated that "while young Americans are dying in the sands of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan, our nation is being torn apart and made weaker because of the Democrats' manic obsession to bring down our Commander-in-Chief" (Slate, 2004:1). In addition, even outside campaign-time it is often seen as unpatriotic to criticize an intervention, or deemed unethical to oppose government policies over dead soldiers. Content analyses of newspaper editorials during the Iraq War (Navi, 2005), identified a post 9/11 rally effect (Der Derian, 2009; Dimitrova & Stromback) in Western media. This effect has even been identified as one of the significant determinants of presidential (and wartime) vote in 2004 (Norpoth & Sidman, 2007). Even though the rally effect is short lived in general (30 days, Stoll, 1987) or 1-2 months, Lian & Oneal, 1993), the post 9/11 period marked a relatively long-term increased public support for governments as an exception (over 13 months, Hetherington & Nelson, 2003; Schubert, Stewart, & Curran, 2002). In other words, post 9/11 criticism towards the mission may actually cause a backlash and therefore, opposition parties motivated to recapture office, must show their patriotic credentials and support the mission especially if soldiers are getting killed. We label this the r*ally-round-the-flag hypothesis.*

H4 The more soldiers die in a conflict, the more attention opposition parties pay to the military and the more positive they are about the military

A final theoretical note should be made regarding the context of military intervention. We consider 9/11 to be an exogenous event which marked a change in foreign policies noticeable by the different type of missions and a shift in prevailing military doctrines. Since 9/11 US foreign policy has changed (Dalby, 2003; Mearsheimer, 2011; Mueller, 2008) and marked a period of large scale ground operations with a higher death toll for participating countries in the Afghanistan and Iraq War. We expect these different interventions, military doctrines and policies to lead to a different way of opposing government.

During the 1990s and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the necessity of restructuring the post-Soviet Eastern European security sectors, concepts such as Security Sector Reform (SSR, United Nations, 2008), defense diplomacy (or: Diplomacy, Defense and Development , the so-called 3D-approach, Winger, 2015) and the idea of an international obligation to protect (which later became a Responsibility to Protect, or R2P, Annan, 2000) came about. These concepts entail the use of both civil and military actors before, during and after a humanitarian intervention. These concept gained momentum with the atrocities that took place in Kuwait, Rwanda and Bosnia. The type of opposition pre 9/11 can be characterized as one of criticizing the government for not doing enough to prevent humanitarian disasters. For instance, Dutch opposition parties requested military intervention in Bosnia in the early 1990s and were critical of the government standing idly by.

With the large scale ground interventions against non-state actors such as Al Qaeda that characterized the post 9/11 world, the prevailing military doctrine and policies changed as well. In dealing with counterinsurgency (or COIN, Eikenberg,2011), and other consequences of Western engagement in asymmetric conflicts, the military concept of "clear, hold, build and transfer" become predominant in Western strategies (Cordesman, 2010). Opposition over the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq focused on questions surrounding the legal basis for the interventions, civilian casualties and the length (prolonging of mandates) of the interventions and policies towards civilian population. In addition, Afghanistan and Iraq marked the most bloody interventions for European nations in the post – Cold War area. We therefor expect post 9/11-opposition to be one of criticizing the government for doing too much, and doing it the wrong way.

Public opinion about a military intervention should differ depending on the type of mission and thus we should also find differences regarding how political parties respond to these missions. For example, one might expect a stronger public backlash against a mission if soldiers are being killed in missions of which the objective and the national interest are unclear (e.g. the intervention in Iraq of Bush Jr.). Also, one would expect differences between missions with a specific humanitarian goal – protecting a civilian population or preventing genocide, e.g. missions in Bosnia and Somalia – and

missions that seek to bring about regime change, e.g. missions in Iraq and Libya. We expect that involvement in humanitarian missions will create more opportunities for governing parties to avoid blame. After all, they are intervening in an already existing conflict between striving parties. At the same time, political parties that decide to invade a country (e.g. Afghanistan and Iraq) will have less opportunity to avoid blame since it was their conscious choice to start a military conflict with another country. In addition, these post 9/11 conflicts were mainly dealing with counterinsurgency during asymmetric conflicts against non-state actors with thus a higher risk of civilian casualties. Therefore we expect a stronger need for blame avoidance by the government in the post 9/11 world, since this period marked the beginning of controversial interventions with relatively high death tolls. In addition, we expect to see a change in how opposition parties mobilize against the government as well. To account for these expected differences we analyze our hypotheses before and after 9/11.

Design and methods

We analyze changes in the attention of parties to the military in their election manifesto, and changes in the position of the party (positive or negative) on the military. Changes in attention to and position on the military in parties' manifestos reveal changes in parties' underlying policy preferences. Our sample comprises political parties elected to parliament (or in the US: to Congress) from 11 OECD countries (Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States) from 1990-2014. The sample thus comprises mature Western democracies where we would expect the same incentives in order to secure political survival, while at the same time differentiating on the national institutional level (e.g. presidential and non-presidential systems) and international institutional level (e.g. mixed membership EU and NATO). We focus on the period since the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union (i.e. 1990), because since then, democracies have fought in several large-scale wars (Bosnia, Afghanistan, First and Second Gulf War) and engaged in post-conflict and state-building missions (such as long-term UN-missions), so there are sufficient interventions to study.

Description of the dependent variables

We will analyze parties' attention to and position on military issues using data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). Looking at party manifestoes allows us to track changes in political strategic investment by both primary investors (governing parties) and opposition parties over a longer period of time (1990-2014) in- and outside US-context.

This dataset contains quantitative content analyses of election programs and indicates the percentage of positive or negative references in election manifestos to a wide range of policy issues, including positive or negative references to the military. A negative reference consists of statements relating to the 'evils of war' such as disarmament, decreasing military expenditures or abolishing conscription (Manifesto Project, 2014). Positive references are those statements relating to the need of maintaining or increasing military expenditure, modernizing armed forces or the need to keep military treaty obligations (Manifesto Project, 2014).

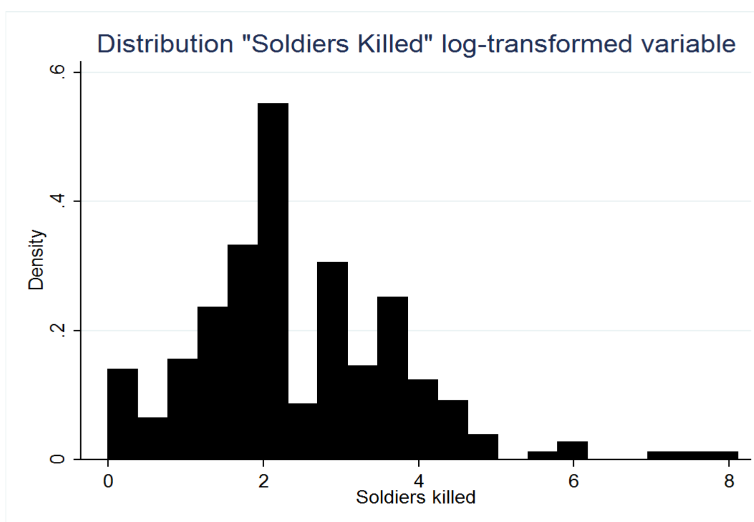
We expect party responses not only to include specific references to interventions, but also to include more general positive or negative references to military. For instance, party manifestoes might mention the "need for strengthening ties with NATO" by means of speaking in favor of close cooperation with the United States in Afghanistan or Iraq. We propose two different operationalizations. First, we will look at the relative *amount of attention* (Y1) given to military related issues in the election manifestos. We created a dependent variable, attention to military, which comprises the total percentage of references (both negative and positive) to the military in manifestoes. Since manifestoes strongly differ in size, changes in the absolute number of references could reflect other developments. Because we are interested in change our dependent variable expresses the difference in percentage of references to the military between the current election manifesto (t) and the previous election manifesto (t-1).

Second, we will analyze the *party position on the military* (Y2) as expressed in its election manifesto. We measure this position by subtracting the number of negative references from the number of positive references.

Description of the independent variables

The cost of war will be operationalized by the number of soldiers of a country killed during missions abroad between elections. This variable adds up the number of soldiers killed by month up until the month before the elections and is based on the number of soldiers killed on a monthly basis. These data have been collected through open data sources, such as army archives, rolls of honor and veteran websites.[4] Since the number of soldiers killed is not normally distributed due to the large differences between countries such as the United States and Norway in terms of the number of soldiers deployed, we use a log-transformation. For the same reasons, we have transformed the total number of war-related deaths (the sum of battle related deaths and genocide victims) into a log-variant.

Figure 1. Distribution of soldiers killed variable



4 Even though different countries measure the number of soldiers killed differently (e.g. whether soldiers who die of a heart attack are considered 'killed during a mission' or not), the number of soldiers killed in the dataset are based on the numbers reported by the national governments as such.

Table 1. Operationalization of Main (In)dependent Variables

Dependent variables	Indicator	Data source	Mean	St.Dev.	Min.	Max.
Attention	Y1 Δattention = $attention_t - attention_{(t-1)}$	CMP dataset	-.57	1.9	-9.49	11.38
Positive attention	Y2 Δposattention = $posattention_t - posattention_{(t-1)}$	CMP dataset	.057	1.811	-11.38	8
Independent variables	**Indicator**	**Data source**	**Mean**	**St.Dev.**	**Min.**	**Max.**
Soldiers killed	Cumulative number of soldiers killed between elections (log transformed)	See codebook	2.44	1.32	0	8.11
ΔSeatshare	Δseatshare = $seatshare_t - seatshare_{(t-1)}$	CMP dataset / Parlov.gov	.000	.126	-.566	.590
Number of troops per conflict	Number of soldiers assigned to that conflict on a yearly basis (log transformed)	Military Balance 1989-2013	7.72	1.90	2.83	13.78
War deaths	Sum of battle deaths (both civilian as military casualties of conflict) + genocide (log transformed)	UCDP dataset	12.01	1.22	9.40	13.85
			Total observations		**Observation per category**	
In office	1 = in office, 0 = not in office	CMP dataset	483		1 = 134 0 = 349	
Post 9/11	Post 9/11 party manifestoes 1 = post ; 0 = ante	CMP dataset	482		1= 105 0 = 377	

Our second independent variable, difference in seat share, measures the change in seat share between the previous election (t-1) and the election before that (t-2). By doing so, we will be able to tell whether having won or lost the previous election makes a difference.

Our third independent variable *number of troops per conflict* indicates how many soldiers from a country were involved in the conflict on a yearly basis. We largely base these numbers on the yearly reports of the Military Balance (1989-2013). The Military Balance only accounts for stationed troops and does not include those involved in air operations and maritime ones (for instance the NATO air operations in Kosovo and Libya). Therefore, we have added the number of soldiers involved in these operations based on publicly available documents of the departments of defense and international organizations (see: codebook, Kuijpers, 2014).

Battle-related deaths, our fourth independent variable, account for the number of civilians and soldiers killed during regular warfare in all conflicts except involvement in Southeast Asia and South America. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), battle-related deaths occur in "what can be described as "normal" warfare involving the armed forces of the warring parties. This includes traditional battlefield fighting, guerrilla activities (e.g. hit-and-run attacks / ambushes) and all kinds of bombardments of military units, cities and villages etc. The targets are usually the military itself and its installations, or state institutions and state representatives, but there is often substantial collateral damage in the form of civilians killed in crossfire, indiscriminate bombings etc. All deaths - military as well as civilian - incurred in such situations, are counted as battle-related deaths." (UCDP, 2008:1). In order to account for additional atrocities that have taken place during several conflicts, we have created our fifth variable, genocide. We have included the Rwanda Genocide (1994), Srebrenica massacre (1995) and Darfur (2007) and have chosen the average of the low and high estimates indicated by international organizations and NGOs (see: codebook).

Our sixth independent variables, *in office* come from the Parlgov dataset (Döring & Manow, 2015). *In office* codes whether a political party was in office before the election (1) or not (0). Finally, we also created a dummy variable differentiating between elections before 9/11/2001 and after 9/11/2001.

We conduct cross sectional time series analyses since this model will allow us to account for the dynamics between our dependent variables, the difference in the amount of attention and positive attention, and our independent variables. Since our

design is time dominant (T>N) with dynamic explanatory variables, the issue of autocorrelation becomes more pressing (Beck & Katz, 1995). Even though lagged variables incorporate feedback over time in our model, it will introduce the issue of heteroskedastic error terms at the same time (Stimson, 1985). In addition, the biases of lagged variables associated with trends within our independent variables and error term can annul the effect of the theoretical model (Plümper, Troeger, & Manow, 2005; Schumacher, de Vries, & Vis, 2013). We want to avoid the lagged variable taking up part of the explanatory variance within the theoretical model since $y_{i,t-1}$ is correlated with the error term. Since every country in our sample does not hold their election simultaneously, our panel is unbalanced. We correct for this in two ways (1) by estimating autocorrelation within panels as well as heteroskedasticity across panels by applying Feasible Generalized Least Squares (FGLS) regression corrected for auto-correlated errors and (2) by constructing confidence intervals around relative changes and specify the type of standard error reported robust to misspecification. Therefore (FGLS) will be our estimation technique since it can estimate autocorrelation (AR(1)) within panels, as well heteroskedasticity across panels.

When do parties (not) mention the war?

Do political parties talk more or less about the military in their election manifestos as military casualties rise? Model 1 (table 2) demonstrates that the number of soldiers killed between two elections has a positive and significant effect on how often the military is mentioned in election manifestos. The number of battle-related deaths between two elections, however, has a significant and negative impact on how often the military is mentioned. We find no significant effects of the "in office", "post 9/11" and change in seat share variables. In models 2, 3 and 4 we subsequently add the interaction terms that operationalize our hypotheses, thus whether it matters if a party is in office (or not), the difference between pre- and post 9/11 and whether war deaths make a difference. For the latter, opposition over war deaths but lack of opposition over own soldiers killed can confirm whether there is indeed a taboo when it comes to opposing the government over the number of soldiers killed during a conflict.

Table 2. Regression analysis of the number of soldiers killed and change in attention to the military

	Model 1: Cross-sectional time-series FGLS regression		Model 2: Soldiers killed x In Office		Model 3: Soldiers killed x 9/11		Model 4: Threeway interaction	
Y1 Δattention	B	SE	B	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Soldiers killed	.108*	.027	.208*	.032	.127*	.032	.156*	.040
In office	-.104	.056	.188	.096	-.086	.061	.131	.157
Post 9/11	-.009	.067	-.012	.037	.142	.167	.311	.300
Soldiers killed x in office			-.146*	.047			-.107	.067
Soldiers killed x post 9/11					-.068	.068	-.118	.116
In office x post 9/11							-.265	.391
Soldiers killed x in office x post 9/11							.100	.166
War deaths	-.112*	.019	-.128*	.013	-.114	.019*	-.088*	.022
ΔSeatshare	.355	.326	.258	.251	.424	.343	.411	.414
Constant	.838*	.202	.758	.170	.821	.198*	.479	.246
N (obs)	365		365		365		365	
N (groups)	75		75		75		75	
Wald	54.82*		234.50*		53.76*		34.44*	

* p<.05

In model 2 we add an interaction term between soldiers killed and a variable indicating whether the party was in government or in opposition. The marginal effects of this interaction term are displayed in figure 2 (left panel). This figure demonstrates that the effect of the number of soldiers killed is positive and significant for opposition parties, but insignificant for government parties. Thus, opposition parties respond to the number of their soldiers killed in conflict, whereas government parties do not do this systematically. Measuring by sheer attention, we do not find support for our first hypothesis (H1) since parties in government do not increase their commitment to the military by increasing their intention.

In model 3 we add an interaction term between soldiers killed and the 9/11 dummy. Figure 2 (right panel) shows the marginal effect of the soldiers killed variable before and after 9/11. We find a positive and significant effect of the number of soldiers killed variable prior to 9/11, but an insignificant effect post 9/11. Our three-way interaction term introduced in model 4 explains these findings better. In model 4 we interacted the number of soldiers killed with the 9/11 dummy and the in office dummy. Figure 3 displays the marginal effects of the number of soldiers killed for opposition and government parties before and after 9/11. Only before 9/11 opposition parties pay more attention to the military the more soldiers are killed in conflicts between elections. After 9/11 we find no significant relationship between the number of soldiers killed and changes in the attention to the military for both government and opposition parties. In short: the more soldiers die, the more opposition parties (as we expected and formulated in H3 and H4) increase their attention to the military. We found this, however, only to be true for the pre 9/11 period. As for the two control variables we find a systematic negative relation between battle deaths and attention to the military and no relation between changes in seat share and attention to the military.

Figure 2. Average marginal effect of soldiers killed under different conditions

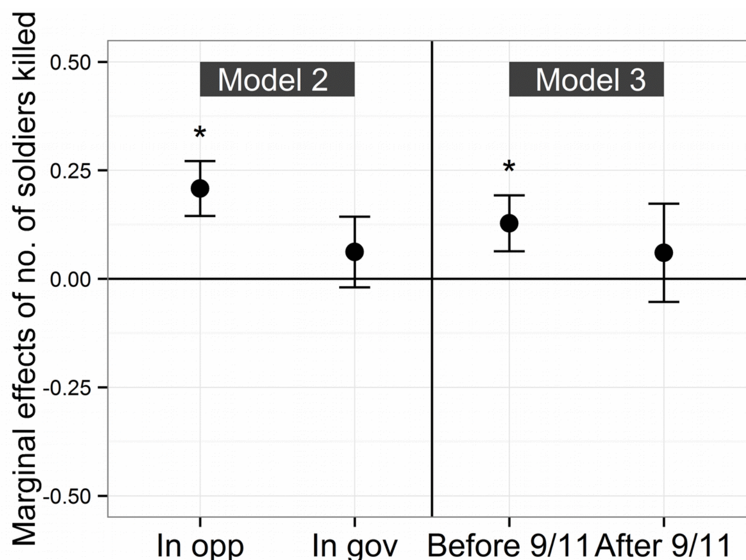
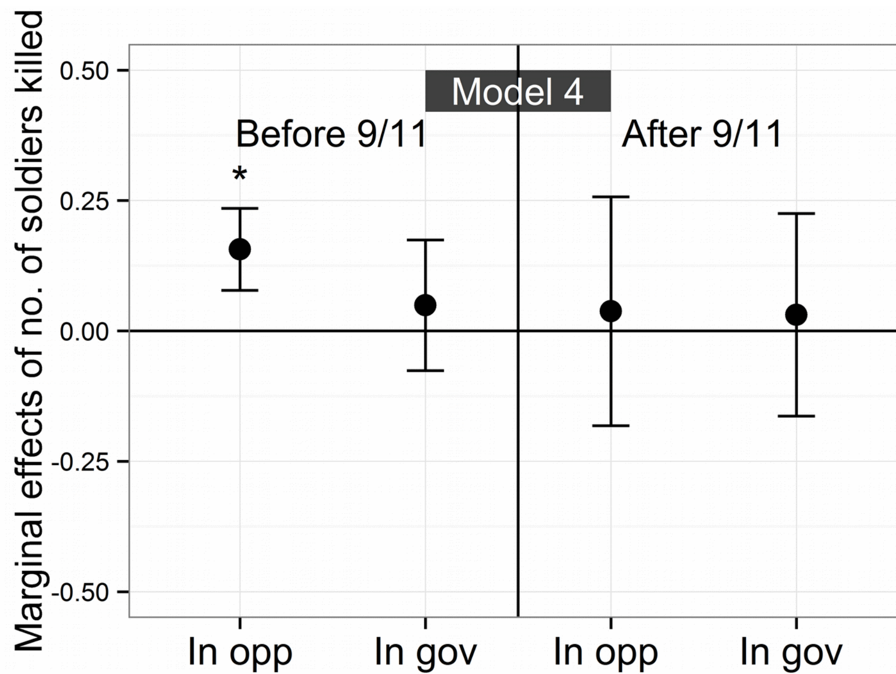


Figure 3. Average marginal effect of soldiers killed under different conditions



Do parties become more positive or more negative about the military?

Do parties change position on the military, that is do they become more positive or negative as more soldiers are being killed? Model 5 includes only the main effects of our analyses. We find that the number of soldiers killed is negatively and significantly related to the position of parties on military issues. The negative sign means that the more soldiers are being killed, the more negative political parties become about the military. The 'in office' variable is also significant and negative, suggesting opposition become more negative about the military. The 'post 9/11' variable is positive, suggesting that after 9/11 parties on average have become more positive about the military. The war deaths variable is positive, thus the more battle-related deaths in conflicts over the world, the more positive parties become about the military. Parties that have increased their seat share at the previous election also become more positive about the military at the next election. These last two effects are constant across model specifications.

Table 3. Regression analysis of the number of soldiers killed and change in position on the military

	Model 5 Cross-sectional time-series FGLS regression		Model 6 Soldiers killed x In Office		Model 7 Soldiers killed x post 9/11		Model 8 Three way interaction	
Y1 Δposition	B	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Soldiers killed	-.017	.016	.094*	.019	-.027	.019	.021	.015
In office	-.271*	.051	.270*	.116	-.218*	.055	-.144	.085
Post 9/11	.450*	.074	.517*	.071	.497*	.145	-.128	.179
Soldiers killed x in office			-.234*	.044			-.060	.052
Soldiers killed x post 9/11					-.036	.058	.245*	.076
In office x post 9/11							.926*	.299
Soldiers killed x in office x post 9/11							-.374*	.135
War deaths	.064*	.013	.073*	.015	.061*	.014	.059*	.009
ΔSeatshare	.839*	.283	.793*	.339	1.21*	.308	.784*	.355
Constant	-.764*	.149	-1.11*	.157	-.703*	.140	-.797*	.085
N (obs)	365		365		365		365	
N (groups)	75		75		75		75	
Wald	134.09*		188.03*		173.64*		441.82*	

* p <.05

In models 6, 7 and 8 we add interaction terms between the soldiers killed, the in office and the post 9/11 variables. Figure 4 (left panel) displays the interaction term between the number of soldiers killed and the in office variable (model 6). Here we find a positive effect for opposition parties, and a negative effect for government parties. Thus, the more soldiers are killed the more negative government parties and the more positive

opposition parties become. Figure 4 – showing the interaction between the number of soldiers killed and the 9/11 dummy variable – demonstrates no significant effect. In model 8, introducing the three-way interaction term displayed in figure 5, we find that the positive effect for opposition and the negative effect for government parties stem from behavior after 9/11. Before 9/11 there is no significant effect of changes in the number of soldiers killed for opposition and for government parties.

Figure 4. Average marginal effects of Soldiers Killed for (non)governing parties

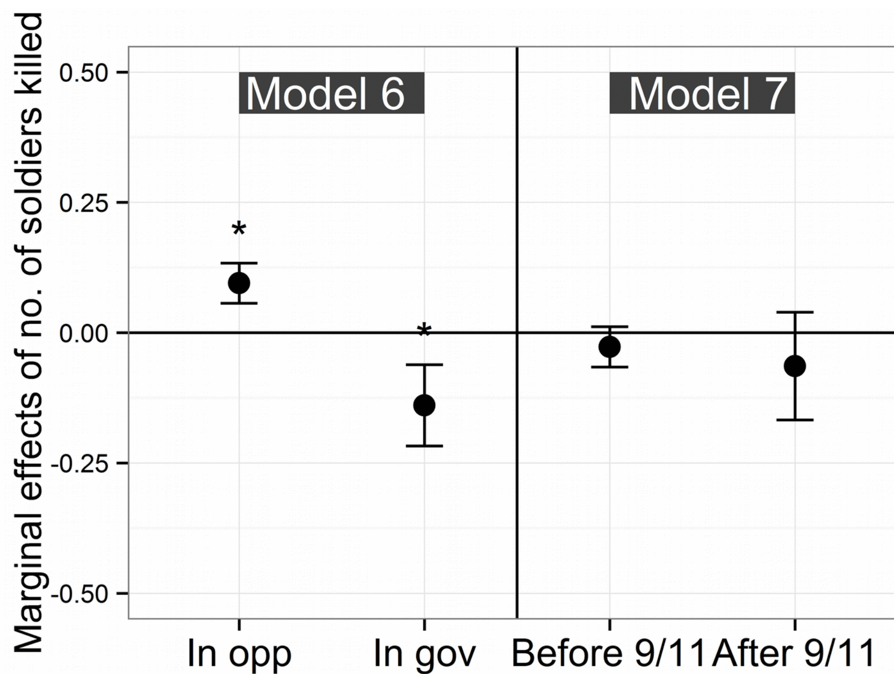


Figure 5. Average marginal effects of Soldiers Killed before and after 9/11

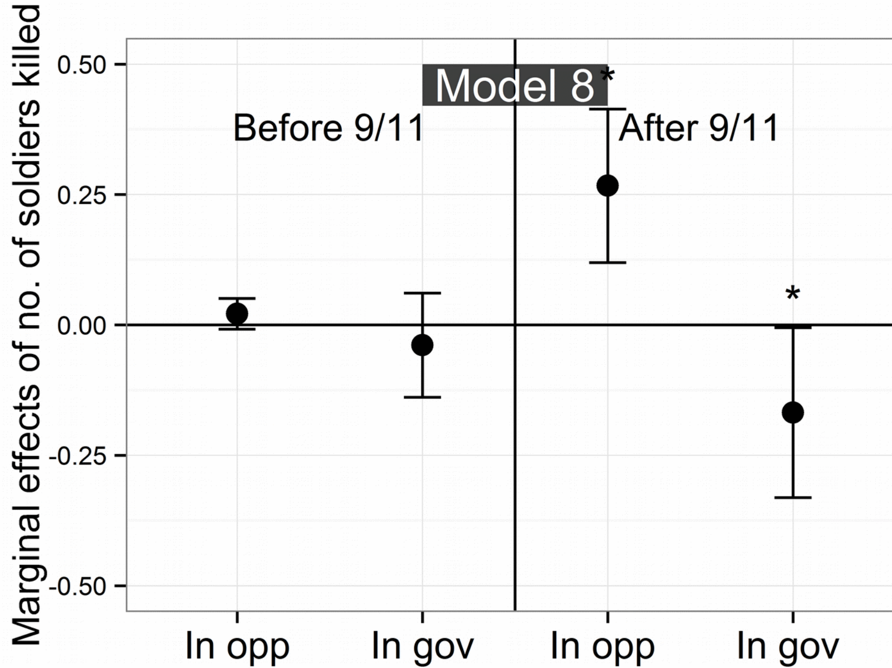


Table 4 summarizes our findings. Pre 9/11 opposition parties pay more attention to the military, the more soldiers have been killed in the years since the last election (partial evidence for H3). After 9/11 this increase in attention denoted a more positive attitude vis-à-vis the military. This is in line with H4.

For government parties we see no changes in attention. We, do, however observe in the post 9/11 period that government parties become more critical of the military the more soldiers are killed. This suggests that government parties certainly not escalate their commitment, rather, they seek to avoid the blame of the war.

Table 4. Summary of effects of the number of soldiers killed

	Before 9/11		After 9/11	
	Attention	Position	Attention	Position
Opposition	+	0	0	+
Government	0	0	0	-

We have conducted several robustness checks by controlling (1) our analysis including and excluding the United States, (2) for party family, (3) for a third dependent

variable which incorporates both intensity (attention) and tone (position) and (4) for absolute numbers rather than the log-variants of our independent variables of soldiers killed. In all robustness checks we find a positive effect (the increase in amount of attention) for opposition parties in the pre-9/11 period. When controlling for non-linearity, our final robustness check, we identified a non-linear effect which causes the negative effect of the number of soldiers killed to decrease when these numbers increase, and even turns into a positive effect. While writing this paper, it is not yet clear whether this effect is exclusive to the higher values of the number of soldiers killed which are only to be found in the United States and the post 9/11 period.

Conclusion & discussion

How do political parties respond to increasing human costs, operationalized by soldiers killed, of military interventions? Several studies demonstrate that once a conflict's death toll increases, political and public support for the military presence in that conflict declines. Our four hypotheses tested whether increasing death tolls have an effect on political party manifestoes: do they mention the military more, or less? Or do they change their tone by talking more positively, or negatively about the military?

We found clear differences in the period before 9/11 for opposition parties. Before 9/11, as military death toll rose, opposition parties increased their attention to the military. Governing parties neither increased nor decreased their amount of attention. Also their tone towards the military with increasing numbers of soldiers getting killed remain unchanged.

We thus found no support for governments escalating their commitment: they did not start talking more about the military, nor did they mention the military in a more positive way in an attempt to maintain that the intervention was "the right thing" to do. On the contrary, the striking differences between opposition and governing parties suggest that governing parties try to avoid blame for the casualties by ignoring the conflict and in the post 9/11 period even becoming slightly more critical about the military.

Opposition parties changing their tone after 9/11 could be explained by the fact that the nature of military operations changed after 9/11. Before 9/11 large part of the military interventions undertaken by Western democracies were third party, humanitarian interventions and consisted of a mandate to intervene between two (or more) already existing striving parties. After 9/11 Western democracies themselves became one of the striving parties by initiating conventional military conflict, by invading Afghanistan and Iraq.

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