
Original Article

(Ac)Counting (for) their dead: Responsiveness to Iraqi civilian casualties in the US House of Representatives

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Abstract While the subject of wartime civilian casualties has been recognized as an important issue in International Relations (IR), foreign policy and IR scholars have not systematically examined why and how US politicians respond to civilian deaths. This article explores the ethics of and reasons for responsiveness to Iraqi civilian deaths among politicians in the US House of Representatives from 2003 to 2008. The article argues that legislative deliberative responsiveness to civilian deaths is integral to a just debate about war. It finds evidence that partisanship, ideology and sex are associated with responsiveness to civilian deaths, and reveals stark differences in the purposes and tone of Democratic and Republican rhetoric about civilian casualties. The article provides researchers with a more thorough understanding of how and why civilian costs of war emerge within debates among US politicians, and has implications for studies on discourse ethics, congressional war politics and US foreign policy.

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Introduction

American wars have had a devastating impact on civilian populations (Kahl, 2007; Tirman, 2011). With regard to war in Iraq, a Brookings Institution study estimates that approximately 118 861 civilians died between the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003 and June 2013 (O’Hanlon and Livingston, 2013), while a recent study published in *PLoS Medicine* estimates that approximately 405 000 civilian deaths can be attributed to the war (Hagopian *et al*, 2013). These dire statistics raise important questions about US foreign policy discourse: During times of war, how responsive are elected officials to civilian deaths? Which politicians speak about

these deaths, and for what purposes? If, as Booth and Dunne (2002, p. 12) argue, ‘the question of the extent of civilian casualties will play a prominent role when assessments are made about the rightness of the US [military] strategy’, perhaps the justness of US foreign policy debates might be understood by the prominence of civilian casualties in these deliberations.

While International Relations (IR) scholars have provided important insights into the ethics of responsibility for civilian casualties, the devastation caused by US military interventions, and rhetorical indifference to civilian populations among US officials, there has been little effort to quantitatively assess the range of responsiveness to civilian casualties within US foreign policy debates (Wheeler, 2002; Zehfuss, 2007; Gregory, 2012).¹ Consequently, there is no systematic understanding of the extent to which civilian deaths are a feature of elite political discourse in the United States. In order to provide a more complete picture of how and why civilian deaths legitimately matter in US war debates, this article explores statistical patterns in civilian casualty responsiveness as well as variation in the tone of responsiveness in these debates.

This article proceeds as follows. It begins by focusing on the ‘ethics of responsive discourse’ about civilian deaths by briefly engaging Emmanuel Lévinas’s philosophy of attention to the suffering of Others as well as democratic theorists’ prioritization of inclusiveness in democratic decision-making processes. The article then shifts to examine the ‘politics of responsive discourse’ by exploring incentives to speak about civilian deaths during legislative debates. Using an original data set of speeches from the *Congressional Record* between 2003 and 2008 – a time period that was critical to US conduct in Iraq and marked by congressional divisiveness over Iraq – the study reveals a partisan gap in responsiveness, with Democrats much more likely to speak about civilian deaths than Republicans. Further analyses show that as Democrats became increasingly liberal, they became much more responsive to civilian deaths in Iraq. The results also indicate that female Democrats were slightly more responsive to these deaths than male Democrats. For Republicans, as members became increasingly conservative, they became slightly more responsive to civilian deaths. Next, I examine the tone of each civilian casualty speech and find that Democratic speeches were overwhelmingly critical and Republican speeches were mostly supportive of the Iraq War. The article then explores more precisely how politicians debated the meaning of civilian deaths in Iraq, showing detailed differences between Democratic and Republican rhetoric and revealing how Democratic rhetoric possibly cultivated affective responses to Iraqi suffering. I conclude with a brief discussion of limitations of the study and suggestions for future avenues of research.

Civilian Deaths and the Ethics of Responsive Discourse

Philosophers and democracy theorists have written extensively about the ethics of attention to the suffering of Others. For example, Lévinas (1998, p. 147) argues that



ethics is rooted in exposure and openness to Others, which is related to a sense of responsibility to Others. He focuses particularly on the anguish of Others, likening the consciousness of Others' suffering and deaths to justice: 'What is signified by the advent of conscience ... if not the discovery of corpses beside me and my horror of existing by assassination? Attention to others and, consequently, the possibility of counting myself among them, of judging myself – conscience is justice' (Lévinas, 1997, p. 100). If consciousness and consideration of Others' suffering is central to ethical relations between people and states, it is likewise integral to an equitable debate about the use of force abroad. Interrupting inward-focused concerns about US national security, US troops and the financial costs of war with acknowledgment of Iraqi civilian deaths provides for a more inclusive account of the impact of US foreign policy.

Contemporary democracy theorists relatedly contend that the inclusion of arguments of all who are affected by policy decisions is central to deliberation and decision-making processes (Nanz and Steffek, 2005; Linklater, 2007; Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008; Dryzek, 2010). Inclusionary practices enrich collective reasoning by admitting a wider assortment of arguments pertaining to those impacted by deliberations (Bohman, 2000; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Schneiderhan and Khan, 2008). The exchange of ideas and arguments with the aim of providing the best justification about the conduct of war becomes more just by the consideration of war's impact on innocent civilians. One might also see the inclusion of civilian deaths in these debates as obligatory, as members of Congress were partially responsible for Iraqi deaths when they delegated broad authority to President George W. Bush to use military force in Iraq, helping to set in motion the potential for large numbers of civilians to be killed. Rhetorical responsiveness to civilian deaths therefore not only improves the ethics of war deliberations because of the value of including all of those affected by congressional decisions, but also through providing for possibilities of responsibility for and accountability to Iraqis.

Responding to civilian deaths, of course, does not mean that responsiveness will impact foreign policy debates or the conduct of war, though reticence effectively assures that these losses will have no bearing on such outcomes. While focusing on civilian deaths is normatively significant, it is unlikely to be strategically advantageous for politicians as the effect of civilian deaths on public support for war is very modest (Eichenberg, 2005; Gelpi *et al*, 2009). Larson and Savych (2007) find only a small effect of civilian casualties on support for war since most Americans believe these deaths are either the result of enemies' efforts to create casualties by positioning themselves near civilians or the unavoidable consequence of inevitable mishaps. Politicians therefore likely have little to gain by focusing on these deaths even while their inclusion provides for a more extensive debate about the significance and consequences of war.

Civilian Casualties and the Politics of Responsive Discourse

While speaking of civilian deaths may be normatively significant, the politics of partisanship and winning elections and legislative debates likely govern responsiveness to these deaths. Indeed, Dryzek (2001, pp. 653–654) notes that, ‘Deliberation often has to be subordinated to strategy in the interests of winning’. This section moves us away from a normative argument for casualty responsiveness and toward an empirical understanding of this practice.

The empirical focus of this article is on members of the US House of Representatives (House). Owing to prohibitive time costs, I excluded the US Senate from the analysis. Focusing on the much larger US House (435 members versus 100 members) exploits the potential for greater variance in civilian casualty responsiveness and optimizes statistical estimates on the average effect of independent variables in the latter half of this section.

Focusing on the House is also valuable in gauging members’ prioritization of civilian casualties. Legislative debates in the House are confined to the question under consideration, and the majority party in the House is able to block consideration of bills. Because of the differential access to speaking in the House, speechmaking is considered an important measure of members’ priorities. Schickler *et al* (2010, pp. 678–679) note that, ‘Members’ opportunities to speak on the House floor are constrained by the demands on their schedule and competition for time on the floor. Floor speeches therefore provide some insight into members’ top priorities’. Assessing casualty responsiveness in the House therefore provides insight into the importance of civilian casualties to House members.

The dependent variable is the number of Iraqi civilian casualty speeches by individual members of the House in the 108th (2003–2004), 109th (2005–2006) and 110th (2007–2008) Congresses.² A civilian casualty speech was defined as orally delivered remarks about Iraqi civilian death(s) in a legislative speech, a 1-min speech, or a special-order speech.³ As customary, extensions of remarks, which are speeches not delivered on the House floor, were excluded (Schickler *et al*, 2010). Multiple remarks about Iraqi civilian death in a single speech were counted as one speech. If a member made remarks about Iraqi civilian death during a legislative speech and, for example, a 1-min speech in the same day, I counted each speech separately. I located these speeches in the *Daily Congressional Record* in *ProQuest Congressional*. I searched for variants of *Iraq* or *Iraqi* or *War* and *civilian* or *citizen* or *people* combined with variants of the following words: *blood*, *body count*, *buried*, *coffin*, *innocent*, *casualty*, *cost*, *dead*, *death*, *died*, *dying*, *fatality*, *human*, *kill*, *life*, *lives*, *loss*, *lost*, *perish*, *toll*, *ultimate price*, *ultimate sacrifice*. Each result was closely examined to determine if it fits the definition of an Iraqi civilian casualty speech. I included every member in the House who was present for the entirety of each Congress. For example, a member who served in only part of the 109th Congress would be excluded from the analysis of the 109th Congress.



Expectations about Partisanship and Civilian Casualty Responsiveness

The central expectation for this section is that Democrats will be more responsive to Iraqi civilian deaths than Republicans. Additional expectations concerning sex, ideology and military service will be considered in the following section. The logic of this expectation stems from previous research demonstrating that strategic incentives often generate partisan variation in the volume of responsiveness to different issues (Simon, 2002; Damore, 2004; Druckman *et al.*, 2010). Riker's (1996) 'Dominance Principle' of political rhetoric postulates that politicians will speak about an issue if they perceive possible benefits to addressing it. Conversely, politicians who perceive either no benefit or a disadvantage from engaging an issue will avoid it. While politicians may need to engage the same issues, they will diverge to discuss orthogonal issues when it is strategically sensible (Sides, 2006).

There are two related logics – 'issue ownership' and 'attack politics' – that should provide Democrats more incentives and opportunities to respond to civilian casualties than Republicans. Issue ownership scholars show that politicians speak more about issues they 'own', which often means issues they or their party are credibly known for (Petrocik *et al.*, 2003). Druckman *et al.* (2010), for example, find that politicians strategically limit the issues they discuss, focusing on issues that are highly salient to the public or issues that they or their party own. Since the issue of civilian casualties is not highly relevant to the public, I expect minimal Republican responsiveness to this issue. Civilian deaths are likely attributed more to the Republican Party, since a Republican president initiated the war and the vast majority of Republicans in Congress supported the invasion of Iraq. Two hundred and fifteen House Republicans voted to authorize the Iraq War while only two voted against authorization (*H.J. Resolution 114*). Even though many Democrats voted to authorize the invasion of Iraq, Democrats should be less associated with negative costs of the war. One hundred and twenty-six Democrats in the House voted against authorization, while 81 voted in favor of authorization (*H.J. Resolution 114*). Consequently, Democrats might perceive 'ownership' of civilian casualties.

The logic of negative campaigning, or 'attack politics', suggests that Democrats may be more likely than Republicans to speak about Iraqi civilian deaths. Politicians commonly attack each other – often effectively – as a means to demonstrate the weaknesses of their opponent (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; Sonner, 1998; Lau and Pomper, 2002). While not highly relevant to the public, politicians might speak of civilian deaths to attack their opponents. Kriner and Shen (2014) find that US combat casualties offer openings to publicly attack the president's conduct of war; civilian casualties might be similarly used by Democrats to criticize the war and their Republican opponents.

Combined, these logics lead to the expectation that Democrats will be more responsive to civilian deaths than Republicans. Note that this expectation is not deterministic but probabilistic. Republicans may also respond for strategic reasons.

Table 1: Summary statistics for party responsiveness to civilian casualties

	<i>108th Congress (2003–2004)</i>		<i>109th Congress (2005–2006)</i>		<i>110th Congress (2007–2008)</i>	
	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>
Mean	0.093	0.429	0.305	0.935	0.386	1.000
Standard deviation	0.360	1.369	1.139	4.416	0.933	3.179
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum	3	13	11	57	5	29
Total	21	88	69	188	76	228

For example, Republicans could contextualize civilian deaths with arguments for democratization in Iraq or the removal of Saddam Hussein in order to tilt the discussion of civilian deaths in their favor.

Partisanship and Civilian Casualty Responsiveness Results

Table 1 provides summary statistics of the dependent variable for Democrats and Republicans. Consistent with expectations, Democrats spoke about civilian deaths more frequently than Republicans in every Congress, speaking the most during 2007–2008. Additional results assessing the bivariate relationship between partisanship and the number of civilian casualty speeches using negative binomial analysis revealed that the difference between Democrats and Republicans was statistically significant in each Congress. The coefficient for Democratic Party affiliation was positive in each Congress: 1.526 ($P=0.000$) in 2003–2004, 1.120 ($P=0.007$) in 2005–2006 and 0.953 ($P=0.000$) in 2007–2008. Table 1 also shows that the mean number of speeches is quite low for both parties, suggesting that it was somewhat rare for politicians of both parties to speak about civilian deaths. The standard deviation for both parties in each Congress exceeded the mean number of speeches, which indicates that the data were very dispersed (some politicians spoke frequently about civilian deaths, while many never or rarely spoke of them). These initial results indicate that while Democrats spoke more than Republicans, congressional deliberations were rather inattentive to the issue of civilian deaths.

Expectations about Intra-Party Variation

While the previous section revealed differences between Democrats and Republicans, this section employs multivariate regression analysis to examine *intra-party* variation in civilian casualty responsiveness. This analysis will show how ideological differences and personal characteristics might be related to variation in civilian



casualty responsiveness within parties. I therefore estimate regressions for Democrats and Republicans separately in order to compare the influence of these factors on members of both parties (see, for example, Lebo and Cassino, 2007).

I first expect increased liberalism to be related to increased responsiveness among Democrats. Cronin and Fordham (1999, p. 985) argue that liberals in the United States have been more opposed to increasing military strength and enlarging American influence abroad since the mid-1960s, suggesting that ‘disturbing images of US power that emerged from the Vietnam War’ made opposition to US military adventurism central to the meaning of ‘liberal’. Civilian deaths are frequently part of this troubling image of US military force abroad. Very liberal Democrats are likely to be more anti-war and sensitive to the human costs of war than moderate Democrats, and thus should be more likely to speak about civilian casualties as a means to oppose the war and to criticize pro-war opponents. Even after controlling for how members voted on *H.J. Resolution 114*, I expect increased liberalism among Democrats to be related to greater casualty responsiveness.

I also expect increased conservatism among Republicans to be positively associated with civilian casualty responsiveness. Conservatism has been correlated with a moral predisposition to desire punishing wrongdoers – such as Saddam Hussein or terrorists – along with a willingness to accept innocent deaths (Lieberman, 2006). Specifically, Lieberman (2006, p. 695) finds that, ‘those with a strong urge to punish will tend to overlook dissonant information about the costs and risks of war. Moreover, outrage at the guilty should carry over into punitiveness against others, such as civilians vulnerable to “collateral damage”’. Increased conservatism should also be associated with stronger support for the war in Iraq, and thus a greater likelihood of accepting civilian costs and a higher likelihood of debating the meaning of these costs.

A politician’s sex might impact his or her level of civilian casualty responsiveness. Public opinion scholars have identified a relationship between sex and support for the use of force, finding that American women are less supportive of war than men (Eichenberg, 2003; Brooks and Valentino, 2011). Conover and Sapiro (1993) find that women and feminists are also more opposed to the bombing of civilians than men. Feminists in particular may see war as disproportionately impacting innocent civilians (Nincic and Nincic, 2002, p. 552). Since women and children suffer disproportionately from war, women may be more concerned with civilian casualties (Hynes, 2004; Plümper and Neumayer, 2006). If these findings from public opinion are applicable to politicians, I expect female legislators to give more civilian casualty speeches than male lawmakers in both parties. Furthermore, among Democratic legislators, women vote more liberal than men, and among Republican legislators, women vote more conservative than men (Hogan, 2008). Democratic women may therefore be more likely to be against the war, and might speak about civilian deaths more than male Democrats. Similarly, Republican women might be more supportive of the war and therefore more likely to discuss civilian deaths than Republican men.

Military service should also be positively related to casualty responsiveness. Pivar (2003) finds that many combat veterans suffer from traumatic grief because of concerns about culpability for having caused death or harm to civilians. Even if not exposed to civilian death or harm, I expect that veterans are more likely to be aware of these deaths than non-veterans. Gelpi and Feaver (2002, pp. 791–792), for example, argue that the socialization of military instruction imparts lessons about the use of American military force abroad and how this force should be employed. I therefore expect veterans and combat veterans to be more responsive to civilian deaths in Iraq.

Variables were measured as follows. *Liberalism* and *conservatism* were measured using DW-NOMINATE scores, which range from –1 to 1, with –1 indicating the highest level of liberalism and 1 indicating the highest level of conservatism (Carroll *et al.*, 2013). Since I model each party separately, I used the absolute value of DW-NOMINATE scores for each member's ideology score. *Veteran* indicates that a politician was a non-combat veteran and *combat veteran* indicates that a politician served in combat. *Female* indicates that a member is a woman. *War vote (Against)* indicates that a member voted against *H.J. Resolution 114* – the resolution authorizing President Bush to use force in Iraq. *War Vote (Did not vote)* indicates that a member did not vote on *H.J. Resolution 114*. *African American* indicates that a politician is African American and *Latino* indicates that a politician is Latino. *Committee* indicates that a member served on at least one of the following committees: Armed Services, Foreign Affairs (IR), Homeland Security, Select Intelligence or Veteran Affairs. *Leadership* indicates that a politician was the Speaker of the House, Majority Leader, Majority Whip, Minority Leader, Minority Whip or a head of the party caucus or party conference. *Seniority* was measured as the number of years served in the House.

Analysis and Results

I used negative binomial regression because the dependent variable is a count, and the data were overdispersed (Hilbe, 2011). Table 2 presents results for the negative binomial analysis of civilian casualty responsiveness for Democrats. These results provide support for the expectations that ideology and sex were positively associated with Democratic responsiveness to civilian deaths.⁴

As negative binomial regression results are difficult to interpret, each statistically significant coefficient was transformed to a marginal effect (ME) and included in Table 2. MEs enable us to understand how independent variables affect the expected mean counts of civilian casualty speeches while holding all other independent variables at their mean values.⁵ The ME for ideology is the approximate effect of a two-standard deviation increase in liberalism (for Democrats) from the mean ideology score for the Democratic Party. A two-standard deviation increase in

Table 2: Negative binomial analysis of Democratic civilian casualty responsiveness

Variables	108th Congress (2003–2004)			109th Congress (2005–2006)			110th Congress (2007–2008)		
	Coefficient	P-value	Marginal effect	Coefficient	P-value	Marginal effect	Coefficient	P-value	Marginal effect
<i>Liberalism</i>	8.108 (1.493)	0.000	2.211	9.813 (1.617)	0.000	6.685	8.300 (1.158)	0.000	6.001
<i>Female</i>	1.173 (0.396)	0.003	0.192	0.915 (0.398)	0.021	0.599	0.791 (0.294)	0.007	0.784
<i>War vote (Against)</i>	0.142 (0.480)	0.768	—	-0.064 (0.426)	0.892	—	-0.043 (1.158)	0.903	—
<i>War Vote (Did not vote)</i>	0.653 (0.724)	0.367	—	0.667 (0.555)	0.229	—	0.508 (0.382)	0.184	—
<i>Combat veteran</i>	-17.273 (0.689)	0.000	0.000	1.608 (0.954)	0.092	—	0.052 (0.606)	0.932	—
<i>Veteran</i>	0.351 (0.485)	0.469	—	0.011 (0.426)	0.979	—	-0.469 (0.337)	0.164	—
<i>African American</i>	-0.197 (0.393)	0.617	—	-0.831 (0.418)	0.047	0.203	-0.359 (0.365)	0.325	—
<i>Latino</i>	-2.105 (0.658)	0.001	0.011	-3.450 (1.005)	0.000	0.014	-2.340 (0.753)	0.002	0.050
<i>Committee</i>	-0.081 (0.353)	0.818	—	-0.496 (0.322)	0.123	—	0.103 (0.264)	0.696	—
<i>Seniority</i>	-0.020 (0.029)	0.485	—	-0.038 (0.020)	0.076	—	-0.005 (0.014)	0.711	—
<i>Leadership</i>	0.940 (1.833)	0.608	—	0.341 (0.341)	0.822	—	1.004 (0.836)	0.229	—
Constant	-4.824 (0.732)	0.000	—	-4.451 (0.709)	0.000	—	-4.039 (0.496)	0.000	—
Wald X^2	1049.560	—	—	74.930	—	—	114.290	—	—
$P > X^2$	0.000	—	—	0.000	—	—	0.000	—	—
Pseudo R^2	0.172	—	—	0.164	—	—	0.169	—	—
Log pseudo-likelihood	-132.06	—	—	-175.82	—	—	-233.05	—	—
Observations	205	—	—	201	—	—	228	—	—

Notes: Coefficients are negative binomial regression results with robust standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients in bold indicate significance at $P < 0.05$ or below.



liberalism is associated with 6.685 statements about Iraqi civilian deaths in the 109th Congress (2005–2006), and 6.001 statements in the 110th Congress (2007–2008). Table 2 also shows that female legislators gave 0.599 and 0.784 more speeches than their male counterparts.

Table 2 thus shows how civilian casualty responsiveness among Democrats was highly related to ideology and, to a lesser extent, sex. Even controlling for members' votes on the Iraq War Resolution and other factors, increased liberal ideology was the most important predictor of civilian casualty responsiveness. Surprisingly, military service had no discernable impact. These results thus reveal how moderate Democrats were less responsive to civilian costs of war than their more liberal colleagues.

Table 3 presents the negative binomial regression results for Republicans. The coefficient for conservatism is statistically significant and positive in each Congress. Not voting on *H.J. Resolution 114* is also significant and positive in the 109th and 110th Congress. Voting against *H.J. Resolution 114* is significant and positive but only in the 109th Congress. Again, for conservatism, I include a two-standard deviation increase ME, which is the approximate effect of a two-standard deviation increase in conservatism from the mean ideology score for members of the Republican Party.

Surprisingly, sex had no impact on civilian casualty responsiveness among Republicans. Not voting on *H.J. Res 114* had a moderately strong effect on the number of statements in both the 109th and 110th Congresses (2005–2006 and 2007–2008). Except for the 109th Congress, Latino lawmakers were less likely to speak about civilian deaths in Iraq than other lawmakers. Seniority had a strong and positive association with speeches, though only in the 110th Congress.⁶

Though ideology mattered for members of both parties, increased liberalism among Democrats had a much stronger impact on speaking about civilian deaths than increased conservatism among Republicans. Unexpectedly, sex did not have an impact on Republicans, but had a significant influence on Democrats. Female legislators in the Democratic Party were therefore either much more sensitive to Iraqi civilian deaths, or were more likely to speak about these deaths for strategic purposes, than Republican female lawmakers.

The Tone of Civilian Casualty Responsiveness

In order to better understand the purpose of civilian casualty responsiveness, each speech was coded as either critical, supportive or ambiguous with regard to how the speech related civilian deaths to a position on the Iraq War or the President's conduct in the war.⁷ A second coder with a PhD in Political Science analyzed a random sample of speeches evaluated by the author. An intercoder reliability test produced a Cohen's Kappa value of 0.941, signifying a high level of intercoder reliability. While

Table 3: Negative binomial analysis of Republican civilian casualty responsiveness

Variables	108th Congress (2003–2004)			109th Congress (2005–2006)			110th Congress (2007–2008)		
	Coefficient	P-value	Marginal effect	Coefficient	P-value	Marginal effect	Coefficient	P-value	Marginal effect
<i>Conservatism</i>	3.389 (1.198)	0.005	0.198	3.069 (1.186)	0.010	0.651	3.142 (1.326)	0.018	0.900
<i>Female</i>	-0.503 (1.133)	0.657	—	0.586 (0.509)	0.249	—	0.214 (0.474)	0.652	—
<i>War vote (Against)</i>	2.347 (2.159)	0.277	—	2.377 (0.870)	0.006	0.778	-0.744 (1.039)	0.474	—
<i>War Vote (Did not vote)</i>	1.047 (0.909)	0.249	—	1.580 (0.584)	0.007	0.350	1.047 (0.476)	0.028	0.410
<i>Combat veteran</i>	-0.389 (1.078)	0.718	—	1.419 (0.663)	0.032	0.348	0.387 (0.450)	0.390	—
<i>Veteran</i>	-0.725 (2.571)	0.778	—	0.808 (0.430)	0.060	—	0.033 (0.457)	0.942	—
<i>African American</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Latino</i>	-22.155 0.681	0.000	0.000	2.757 (0.677)	0.000	1.693	-17.638 (0.809)	0.000	0.000
<i>Committee</i>	0.489 (0.613)	0.425	—	-0.085 (0.387)	0.827	—	0.679 (0.342)	0.047	0.316
<i>Seniority</i>	0.007 (0.059)	0.909	—	-0.003 (0.039)	0.948	—	0.061 (0.030)	0.045	1.087
<i>Leadership</i>	-22.495 (0.718)	0.000	0.000	-18.813 (0.638)	0.000	0.000	-17.764 (0.836)	0.000	0.000
Constant	-4.893 (1.147)	0.000	—	-4.365 (0.927)	0.000	—	-4.208 (0.946)	0.000	—
Wald X^2	3 332.470	—	—	1195.550	—	—	1380.370	—	—
$P > X^2$	0.000	—	—	0.000	—	—	0.000	—	—
Pseudo R ²	0.187	—	—	0.141	—	—	0.054	—	—
Log pseudo-likelihood	-57.31	—	—	-122.36	—	—	-145.92	—	—
Observations	225	—	—	226	—	—	197	—	—

Notes: Coefficients are negative binomial regression results with robust standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients in bold indicate significance at $P < 0.05$ or below.



Table 4: Partisanship and tone of civilian casualty responsiveness

	<i>108th Congress (2003–2004)</i>		<i>109th Congress (2005–2006)</i>		<i>110th Congress (2007–2008)</i>	
	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republican</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republican</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republican</i>
Critical	78(89%)	3(14%)	186(99%)	11(16%)	213(93%)	2(3%)
Supportive	0(0%)	17(81%)	0(0%)	51(74%)	0(0%)	68(90%)
Ambiguous	10(11%)	1(5%)	2(1%)	7(10%)	15(7%)	6(8%)
<i>N</i>	88	21	188	69	228	76

Notes: Numbers are number of civilian casualty speeches. Percentages in parentheses are rounded to the nearest whole digit.

this study does not examine the effects the partisan tone of civilian casualty rhetoric on the public, an emerging body of literature suggests that congressional rhetoric, particularly congressional criticism and support, shapes public attitudes about war (Berinsky, 2007; Groeling and Baum, 2008; Kriner and Shen, 2014). Questions about effects, however, are not altogether significant without an understanding of how rhetoric unfolds among politicians. Carefully coding the tone of civilian casualty speeches may help us better understand why politicians speak about the deaths of innocent civilians and provides for a more comprehensive understanding of US war debates.

Table 4 shows that Democratic statements about civilian deaths in Iraq were consistently critical of the President and the Iraq War, while Republican statements were mostly supportive of the President and the war. The table demonstrates that Republicans in the 109th Congress (2005–2006) slightly increased contextualization of civilian casualty responsiveness with criticism of the President and the war, but criticism was rare in the 108th and 110th Congresses. It was therefore exceptionally rare for Democrats to support the Iraq War, and unusual for Republicans to criticize the war.

This partisan uniformity in casualty responsiveness has implications for the finding that cross-party criticism and support influences public opinion on war. Groeling and Baum (2008) find that not all congressional rhetoric is uniformly convincing to different individuals; opposition party support for or presidential party criticism of the president should be particularly convincing to audiences because they are uncharacteristic. If the partisan public is influenced by congressional elites in this way, then the public was unlikely to be heavily influenced by congressional debates about civilian deaths.

Debating the Meaning of Civilian Deaths in Iraq

While the previous sections statistically modeled civilian casualty rhetoric and assessed the tone of this rhetoric in the US House, this section provides representative



illustrations of how lawmakers precisely debated Iraqi civilian deaths as a means to more fully understand how the meaning of these deaths emerged within US foreign policy debates.

Illustrations of Republican rhetoric

A close reading of House speeches reveals that many Republicans downplayed the significance of Iraqi civilian deaths. For example, during debates over an estimate of 27 000 Iraqi civilian casualties, Representative Steve King (R-IA) proposed ‘a different viewpoint on a number of the statistics’. Representative King did not ‘take issue with the specificity of that number of 27 000 civilians killed’ but contextualized that number with violent death rates from other countries around the world and cities in the United States. King transformed the 27 000 estimated Iraqi civilian deaths into a rate of 27.51 innocent deaths per 100 000 per year, and argued that Venezuela, Jamaica, South Africa and Colombia were more dangerous than Iraq: ‘It is more than twice as dangerous to be a civilian living supposedly in peace and harmony in Colombia than it is to be a civilian living in the middle of this chaos in Iraq that I hear is intolerable’. King then compared this rate of violence with US cities, and contended that, ‘it is far more dangerous for my wife to live here in Washington, D.C.’ and ultimately concluded that, ‘this [Iraq War civilian casualty rate] is a manageable violence rate’ (King, 2006, pp. H2089–H2090).

Republicans frequently construed civilian deaths positively as part of a shared sacrifice for a Democratic future in Iraq. For example, Representative Mike Pence (R-IN) argued that the United States should increase combat operations in Basra in order to protect civilians who are dying and to ‘deliver [freedom]’ to the ‘good people of Basra [who are] freedom-loving and decent people’ (Pence, 2004, p. H2205). Upon news of elections in Iraq, Representative Phil Gingrey (R-GA) maintained that Iraqi civilians did not die in vain but were part of the path to Iraqi democratization:

It is the dawn of a new day in Iraq ... and I ... salute the 10.5 million people who went to the polls ... This is also a great day for those ... 30 000 or more innocent Iraqi people, many of them women and children, who have given their lives for this cause. This is a great day. (Gingrey, 2005, p. H11875)

Similar speeches intertwined rhetoric about democratization with criticism of Democrats. Representative Tom Tancredo (R-CO) postulated that the political left in the United States ‘cannot really get over the fact that the seeds of democracy were planted in Iraq. They were even nourished by the blood of many wonderful American servicemen and women and certainly by the blood of thousands and thousands of Iraqi citizens. They were hopeful that, in fact, we would fail, that the whole experiment would fail’ (Tancredo, 2005, p. H276). Likewise, Representative Marsha

Blackburn (R-TN) argued that ‘Liberals like to say that Iraq was out of control and that the terrorists would destroy the election, and America was losing and that we should postpone the elections ... They wanted us to tell the world that the United States did not have the strength and the determination to defeat terrorism, and they were wrong’ (Blackburn, 2005, p. H273). Blackburn further constructed the meaning of Iraqi deaths as central to democratization by quoting Iraqi women who thanked her for the United States’ perseverance in Iraq: ‘Congratulations for us and for you on Iraqi Elections Day. Today we are not only free but we have stood united in democracy ... Thank you on behalf of all Iraqi innocents who have given their lives for the freedom price’ (CR, Blackburn, 2005, p. H274).

As shown here, Republican rhetoric about Iraqi civilian casualties attempted to establish the meaning of these deaths in the following ways: (i) downplaying the significance of civilian deaths, (ii) linking civilian deaths to Iraqi freedom and democratization and (iii) criticizing Democrats for failing to support democratization in Iraq.

Illustrations of Democratic rhetoric

Democrats often spoke of killed Iraqi civilians within a framework of concern about these deaths, or, alternatively, the Bush administration’s lack of concern with them. For example, Representative Elijah Cummings (D-MD) argued that, ‘There has been a tragic loss of life – both among our American troops and among Iraq’s civilian population. I knew the human losses would be too great and I did not want our families – or the Iraqi people – to experience the overwhelming grief and remorse that accompanies waging war unnecessarily’ (Cummings, 2004, p. H3499).

Many Democrats commented on the estimated number of Iraqi deaths, and claimed that the Bush administration lacked concern for the dead and dying Iraqis. Representative Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) claimed, ‘Iraqi civilian casualties number well over 100 000. Iraqi civilian injuries could be over 1 million, but who is keeping track? Some act as though the Iraqis are not real people with real families, real hopes and real dreams and loves of their own’ (Kucinich, 2006, p. H3769). Similarly, Representative Jim McDermott (D-WA) argued that the United States has ‘killed I do not know how many thousand because no one will count the number of Iraqis. It is as though they do not matter. Nor do we talk about the number of them that are injured ... how much longer can we persist in staying there [Iraq]?’ (McDermott, 2005, p. H8332). Representative Jane Harman (D-CA) argued that the Bush administration was constructing an overly optimistic image of Iraq by refusing to announce civilian casualty numbers or by manipulating these figures. She argued that they were painting ‘a rosy picture of the situation in Iraq’ by inaccurately counting civilian deaths, and contended that the only reason the administration could claim progress was by excluding ‘people killed by bombs, mortars, rockets, and other mass



attacks' in recent reports. She then chastised the administration by noting that 'I do not think policymakers should engage in creative accounting when it comes to the lives of our sons and daughters or the lives of innocent Iraqis' (Harman, 2006, p. H6475).

Other Democrats spoke of civilian casualties as evidence that the United States was destabilizing Iraq. Representative Marty Meehan (D-MA) posited:

Every time Iraqi bystanders are killed in coalition actions, it further erodes the goodwill we earned by ridding them of Saddam Hussein. And even when innocent Iraqis are murdered by insurgents, the United States is blamed for failing to provide security. If the world's most potent Army cannot make the streets safe, Iraqis are asking, what is it that they are really here for? So the first step in achieving stability in Iraq is recognizing that the United States presence there has become inherently destabilizing. (Meehan, 2005, p. H182)

Similarly, Representative James McGovern (D-MA) ultimately constructed the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as a failure because the United States *produced* the environment in which al-Zarqawi could materialize, slay Iraqis and destabilize Iraq: 'Certainly the death of terrorist Abu Musab al Zarqawi is welcome news. We did not create Zarqawi, but it was the war in Iraq that offered him the opportunity to kill American soldiers and innocent Iraqi civilians and to inflame sectarian hatreds' (McGovern, 2006, p. H4016). While many Democrats were also quick to applaud the death of al-Zarqawi, numerous Democrats used al-Zarqawi's death to bring light to civilian death and Iraqi destabilization.

Democratic rhetoric constructed sympathy for Iraqis while also correlating Iraqi civilian deaths with the creation of terrorism. Representative Charlie Rangel (D-NY) stated that, 'a life is a life, whether it is an American, whether it is an Iraqi, in the tens of thousands and sometimes the hundreds of thousands', and lambasted Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld for not knowing 'whether we were creating more terrorists than we were killing'. He implored Americans to:

Imagine how many terrorists we create when these cowardly people go to a school, go to a hospital, go to a mosque and fire at our troops? And those who have served would know, you have no option except to destroy where that fire is coming from. And if you destroy innocent people, we no longer call that human life. You know what we call it? Collateral damage. (Rangel, 2005, p. H4886)

Other Democrats argued that civilian casualties motivated resistance to the US occupation and claimed that civilian deaths tarnished the United States' reputation in the world. Representative Cynthia McKinney (D-GA) argued that, 'The forces attacking our troops are able to recruit suicide attackers because suicide attacks are largely motivated by revenge for the loss of loved ones. And Iraqis have lost so many

loved ones as a result of America's two wars against Iraq' (McKinney, 2005, p. H11005). She then asked:

What kind of an occupier have we been? ... US forces used white phosphorous against civilian neighborhoods in the US attack on Fallujah. Civilians and insurgents were burned alive by these weapons ... With ... the images of Iraqi civilians burned alive by US incendiary weapons now circulating the globe, our reputation on the world stage has been severely damaged. (McKinney, 2005, p. H11005)

During debates over *H. Con. Resolution 63* – a non-binding resolution opposing the 'surge' – Representative Carol Shea-Porter (D-NH) implicated the United States in the production of vulnerability and death in Iraq. Exposing Iraqis to death and creating global insecurity, she argued, necessitated the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq:

The Iraqis had no weapons of mass destruction. And they never asked us to come to their country. They do ask us to leave, though. And yet we will not leave. What is this talk I have heard tonight about freedom and liberty? ... The Iraqis have lost their lives. They have lost their society. They have lost their infrastructure ... We are wary, they are wary, the world is now more dangerous. (Shea-Porter, 2007, p. H1556)

To summarize, Democratic rhetoric about Iraqi civilian casualties generally constituted: (i) the Bush administration as unconcerned with these deaths, (ii) Iraqis as sympathetic victims of US military force and (iii) US intervention as increasing terrorism, creating instability in Iraq and producing US and global insecurity.

Partisan Rhetoric, Emotion and Distant Suffering

One way we might compare partisan responses with civilian deaths is by focusing on what Linklater (2007) refers to as the cosmopolitan value of emotional response to distant suffering.⁸ Linklater (2007, p. 33), in pondering the issue of whether greater visibility of suffering provokes compassion, argues that socialization processes that promote guilt, shame and moral unease with distant suffering may be cultivated because these are extensions of moral dispositions in most societies. Accordingly, it would be normatively valuable and empirically feasible for politicians to encourage affective responses to distant suffering, particularly in societies in which politicians are somewhat responsible for the suffering.

The illustrations in the previous sections revealed that grief, guilt and sympathy were largely absent in Republican rhetoric. Iraqi deaths were often limited to terminologies of progress in Iraq or controllable problems. Such rhetoric not only minimized Iraqi civilian deaths, but also constrained the interpretation of these deaths



to American progress and generally lacked sympathy for Iraqi suffering. For example, arguing that civilian deaths were essential to democratization in Iraq, or that these deaths should be celebrated as an unfortunate though essential part of the establishment of Iraq's new Democratic future, undercut calls for Iraqi sympathy. Such rhetoric neither directed attention to the vulnerability of Iraqis nor called for US responsibility. Republican rhetorical techniques discouraged concern for Iraqi exposure to violence and US responsibility for this violence by promoting satisfaction with elections and the prospect of Middle East democracy.

Unsurprisingly, Democratic rhetoric was more attentive to Iraqi vulnerability and US responsibility for their exposure to violence. While Democratic rhetoric was structured by strategic incentives to respond to civilian deaths, Democrats facilitated concern, guilt and sympathy for distant suffering of Iraqis. It could be argued, however, that the Democrats' audience was already inclined to embrace these feelings, though many democrats in the general public continued to support the war in Iraq years after the initial invasion.

Conclusions

This article has demonstrated how and why US politicians responded to Iraqi civilian deaths during debates in the US House of Representatives. Statistically modeling responsiveness with an original data set of all speeches in the House from 2003–2008, this study confirms that politicians were rather unresponsive to civilian deaths – a discouraging finding for advocates of ethical discourse and responsiveness to the suffering of Others but not entirely unexpected given prior studies about coverage of civilian casualties (Tirman, 2011; Gregory, 2012).

This article adds to previous studies by showing precisely how partisanship, ideology and sex influenced civilian casualty responsiveness, demonstrating that more liberal and female Democrats, and, to some extent, more conservative Republicans, cultivated a more inclusive debate about the costs of the Iraq War. Partisan arguments about civilian deaths, however, were communicated very differently, and were used to support the effort in Iraq or to undermine it. In this way, it is unlikely that responding to civilian deaths uniformly contributed to a more robust and conscientious conversation about war in Iraq. Insofar as rhetoric inclusive of civilian casualties is capable of communicating the importance of life and humanity, partisanship and the norms of attack politics likely diminish this capacity. Just deliberation requires more than inclusive rhetoric; it also requires contemplative reflection on Others' lives and deaths. While Democrats tended to promote sensitivity to the deaths of Iraqis, partisan uniformity in the tone of civilian casualty statements likely reduced the impact that these statements had on viewers.

While this article represents an important step in understanding the politics of civilian casualties, there are many other avenues to be explored. For example,

while the illustrations of how Iraqi deaths emerged within Democratic and Republican rhetoric provides an improved grasp of the justness of statements about Iraqi civilian casualties, future studies could more precisely assess the normative value of these statements. Future studies could also conduct experimental tests to understand the possible effects of congressional responsiveness to civilian casualties on public views of war. Future work might also assess civilian casualty responsiveness in other time periods, allowing researchers to gauge how the dynamics of civilian casualty responsiveness emerged under different conditions.

About the Author

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Notes

- 1 See Kriner and Shen (2014) for a recent analysis of congressional responsiveness to US combat casualties.
- 2 For the 108th Congress, coding of speeches began on the first day of the war (19 March 2003), rather than the first day of the Congress. Members who did not serve a full term in a Congress were excluded from the data set in that Congress.
- 3 US House of Representatives members give legislative and non-legislative speeches, with the former being more restrictive. Legislative speeches refer to remarks given during pending legislative business about bills, resolutions and amendments. Non-legislative speeches are opportunities for unrestricted discussion of whatever issues members may wish to speak on. Non-legislative speeches occur at the beginning and end of legislative business days, where politicians may give 1-min speeches, 5-min speeches or special-order speeches.
- 4 I also created a dichotomous dependent variable (0=No Speeches, 1=At Least One Speech) and employed logistic regression as an added robustness check to ensure that outliers did not compromise the results. This test produced substantively similar results, which are available from the author upon request.
- 5 For categorical variables, the marginal effect is an approximation of how the number of speeches is expected to change given a change in the category. For example, the marginal effect for Female is the expected change in the number of casualty speeches when moving from the category of Male to Female, while holding all other variables in the model at their mean values. For continuous variables, the marginal effect is an approximation of how the number of speeches is expected to change given a particular change in the independent continuous variable, holding other variables at their mean values.
- 6 I also created a dichotomous dependent variable for Republican speeches and employed logistic regression as a robustness check. The substantively similar results are available from the author upon request.
- 7 A speech was coded 'supportive' if it included statements either for the war in Iraq or for the president's policies in Iraq. A speech was also coded 'supportive' if it included statements that were primarily optimistic about the war in Iraq. A speech was coded 'critical' if it included statements either against the



war in Iraq or against the president's policies in Iraq. Speeches were also coded 'critical' if they included statements that were primarily pessimistic about the war. Speeches that argued for withdrawing troops or otherwise ending involvement in Iraq were coded 'critical' even if the statement included remarks about initially supporting the war or remarks about progress. A speech was coded 'ambiguous' if it did not include statements for or against the war in Iraq or for or against the president's policies in Iraq. A speech was also coded 'ambiguous' if the speech included remarks about support for the war but also included remarks criticizing the president's policies in Iraq.

8 See Chouliaraki (2013) for another account of cosmopolitanism, discourse and the cultivation of emotion.

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