THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE LOCAL LEGACIES OF WAR:
EVIDENCE FROM THE AMERICAN WAY OF WAR AND REMEMBRANCE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

MATTHEW JOHN CONKLIN

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2025

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DEDICATION

To Katie, who has loved and supported me in everything.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Getting a PhD was never really in the cards for me. I have always been drawn to history, politics, and especially international affairs, but pursing a doctorate was not something I envisioned or thought possible. I sort of found my way here. Four people in particular deserve special credit for making this project possible, and for being mentors in the truest sense.

Austin Carson, my committee chair, a co-author, and mentor, was the first person at this level of academia who took a chance on me. I first reached out as a prospective MA student. He responded to my cold email, took a meeting, and engaged enthusiastically with my interests. It was during his Seminar on IR Theory that I remember him emphasizing the value of creative scholarship. It is what keeps this business interesting. That always stuck with me, and I hope that spirit is reflected in this dissertation. Austin is the best person to play with an idea and intellectually visioneer with. More than anyone during my time in graduate school, he knows how I think. I am proud to have learned from him.

Paul Poast has been a reliable source of encouragement and focus. He is the person I turned to when trying to figure out what I am really trying to say and how all the moving pieces fit together. The many meetings at his whiteboard—charting out figures, talking through claims—are imprinted throughout this dissertation. His advice to us graduate students to "be one day better" truly resonated with me. Paul is a scholar's scholar, his passion for international relations shows, and he taught me to treat this as a serious vocation, while always keeping the bigger picture in mind.

Ruth Bloch Rubin brings both intellectual clarity and genuine mentorship. I left every conversation feeling she has my best interests at heart. She has an uncanny ability to get to the heart of an idea and offer ways to sharpen it. Ruth's influence is evident in this dissertation's

attention to American political development, Congress, and local politics. Although I never took a formal APD class with her because the timing never worked, she was a constant and generous interlocutor. She encouraged me to "go local," to dig into the local and rural politics literature, and is present in the Congress chapter. Ruth always saw the bigger promise in this project and consistently spoke of it as a book. That confidence was a major inspiration to keep going.

Jon Rogowski was the final addition to my committee. I first interacted with Jon in our dissertation prospectus seminar, where his detailed and encouraging feedback—on an entirely different project, no less—made it clear he would be an exceptional committee member. He was. Jon pushed me where I needed it, and his feedback was always incisive, offering multiple ways to think through an issue and encouraging longer term vision. He is a model scholar: productive, generous, kind, and intellectually affirming. I was lucky to have his combined expertise in foreign policy and American politics guiding this project.

In addition to my committee, I have grown as a scholar through conversations, workshops, and the generosity of many others in the Chicago community. In my early years, John Mearsheimer's seminars left a lasting impression. He is a formidable intellectual presence and a model of clear, plain language writing. Anton Strezhnev helped me think through methodological issues. Bobby Gulotty was always up for an impromptu chat. Rochelle Terman offered constructive feedback in the later stages. Paul Staniland and Will Howell offered clarity and constructive engagement as I worked through final-year issues.

The department's administrative staff also deserve recognition. Annette, Marcy, and others fielded many questions and helped everything run smoothly. Thank you.

I am especially grateful to my fellow graduate students who shared this experience. My cohort—Sonja Castañeda Dower, Steven Boyd, Hope Dancy, Caroline Ferguson, Gabe Foye-

Sutherland, Zachary Klamann, Lilly Massoud-Judge, Sofi Smith, Emily Tallo, Burak Tran, and Maya Van Nuys—was a strong source of motivation and camaraderie. Although the pandemic interrupted our early in-person bonding, it has been rewarding to reflect on those formative moments and to see everyone growing as scholars.

Others in the Chicago community also shaped this project. Josh Byun, Alex Chinchilla, Sabreena Croteau, Pete Cuppernull, Jenna Gibson, Minju Kim, and Diana Wueger all gave helpful feedback and paved the way. Those in cohorts below—Kevin Angell, Ólafur Björnsson, Adam Saxton, Alex Tippett, Aril Weil, and others—were great colleagues and a steady source of inspiration. I hope to return the favor for the many times they listened to early versions of this work.

I also gained immensely from participating in programs like the Summer Workshop on the Analysis of Military Operations and Strategy, the Clements Center Summer Seminar in History and Statecraft, the Cato Institute Junior Scholars Symposium, and the America in the World Consortium Young Scholars Conference. I am especially grateful to my Hans J. Morgenthau Fellowship cohort and the team at the Notre Dame International Security Center for an enriching year. These experiences not only honed my thinking but also taught me what it means to be a collegial and generous scholar.

Through these programs and conferences, I found several co-authors who came to know and comment on different parts of this project. It has been a privilege to collaborate with Maryum Alam, Samuel Gerstle, Wendy He, Jennifer Lin, and Eddy Yeung.

Parts of this research were made possible by funding from the Institute for Humane Studies, the Notre Dame International Security Center, the Bienen Summer Research Grant, and various departmental awards. All of it made a difference.

Outside academia, I owe special thanks to the many people I encountered during my fieldwork. Whenever I hit a wall with coding, data analysis, or writing, doing an interview or site visit was a sure way to reignite my energy and refocus my attention on the bigger picture. I always knew I wanted this dissertation to include field research, what I saw as the "ground truth" of where grand strategy meets its domestic foundations. This was only possible because of the trust and generosity shown to me in Central Plains and beyond. To the Honor Flight volunteers who welcomed me, and to those who agreed to be interviewed, thank you. And to the four veterans I accompanied on Honor Flight trips, I will cherish our time together. I hope I have done justice to your stories. There is still more to say.

My family has been my constant anchor. My parents, Gregg and Susan, gave me unconditional love and supported my aspirations. They have always been eager to hear about this project and never stopped believing in it. To my brothers, Tyler and Adam, I am proud to be your brother. After years of fielding questions at family gatherings about what I have actually been up to, I hope this clears things up.

Marrying Katie was the best decision of my life. She has been by my side through every phase of this project, my constant source of love and encouragement. We talked through theory, methods, and history on countless Taco Tuesday runs, weeknight walks, and nightly calls when we lived apart. Her work ethic, compassion, and strength inspire me every day. I am so proud of her. I am equally fortunate to have married into her family. Steve and Cindy have supported me every step of the way. Kellie, Caleb, and Angie (whose home cooking kept me going) deserve extra credit.

I also want to recognize mentors from my undergraduate years at Wichita State. Dr. John Dreifort, my first real academic mentor, modeled what it means to be a passionate scholar and

invested teacher. Dr. Jen-Chi Cheng also took a chance on me in my early years, without which I would not have had the confidence or momentum needed to keep striving. Their belief in me meant more than they probably know.

Returning to my opening reflection: I did not grow up thinking a PhD was in reach. Attending a school like the University of Chicago seemed like a dream. I say this to recognize how fortunate I have been, not only to receive a world class education, but even more so, to benefit from the many small kindnesses and encouragements along the way. Countless people saw something in me and gave back what I put in. This is what made the journey possible, and worthwhile.

I have often felt like I was navigating two worlds: the one I come from, a small-town kid who watched the nightly news and dreamed of studying international affairs, and the elite academic world, where that same curiosity becomes theory and fieldwork. That dissonance is part of why this feels like such an achievement. It brings the two worlds together.

I hope to return the favor, paying forward the mentorship and support extended to me, contributing in some way to greater human understanding. During difficult moments, I drew strength from those around me, especially my family, and from my faith. I believe the ideas in this dissertation can have real impact, and I hope they are used for good.

ABSTRACT

War is often viewed as a crucible for new political ideas and institutions. A growing body of scholarship emphasizes war's lasting imprint on the political attitudes and behaviors of both combatants and civilians alike. Understanding these domestic consequences is especially relevant amid renewed major power war and the strategic use of history by leaders to justify foreign policy decisions. This dissertation engages these themes by theorizing and testing how wartime experiences, and their legacies, shape support for a nation's global role after war ends.

To that end, I bring together several literatures that examine war's domestic political effects from different angles. International relations scholarship examines how wartime casualties impact support for *ongoing* wars; studies of historical persistence investigate war's long-term behavioral effects, often beyond the realm of foreign policy; and research in memory politics examines how wars are remembered and mobilized to support contemporary strategic aims. This dissertation bridges these strands by linking local wartime experiences to *postwar* support for the grand strategic purposes for which the war was fought, and by tracing how those memories are passed down and made politically meaningful years later.

I develop a theory of local war legacies, which links local war sacrifice to postwar public opinion, elite political behavior, and downstream commemorative practices. At the public level, I argue that the impact of war on support for grand strategy depends on three interconnected factors. First, more coercive wartime mobilization fosters public alienation from the state and its strategic aims. Second, unequal geographic distributions of sacrifice intensify these effects in disproportionately burdened communities. Third, rural communities amplify war's political consequences due to their distinctive social dynamics, communal solidarity, and place-based identity. At the elite level, elected officials respond to these localized experiences through the

electoral connection, translating them into national foreign policy positions. Over time, these legacies are sustained and reinterpreted through commemorative practices—enacted through what I term "patriotic scripts"—which operate through a logic of atonement aimed at making amends for society's perceived historical mistreatment of veterans. While anchored in specific historical wars, these practices evolve over time and can be mobilized to contest or reinforce prevailing strategic narratives.

I apply my theory to the canonical case of the American experience in World War II, popularly remembered as the paradigmatic "good war." This case is not only theoretically important for studies of international order but also historically contested. While conventional wisdom views WWII as a watershed moment that consolidated U.S. global leadership, a revisionist tradition emphasizes its uneven and contingent effects. To adjudicate these perspectives and evaluate my theory, I adopt a mixed methods research design that combines historical county level data on war fatalities, congressional roll call votes on key foreign policy legislation, and fieldwork with veteran organizations and sustained site visits to predominantly rural counties with high historical war exposure.

The findings affirm my theory and qualify the view of WWII as a uniform national experience. Counties with higher concentrations of coercive mobilization—measured by the share of draftees among war dead—exhibited less support for postwar global engagement, particularly in more rural areas. This relationship persisted for a decade after the war ended. Legislators reflected these local dynamics. Those from more exposed districts were more likely to support the postwar consensus, while prewar noninterventionists were not punished electorally, challenging claims that WWII eliminated "isolationism." Rather, elite behavior responded to bottom-up constituent experiences, as expected by the theory.

My fieldwork further reveals how these local legacies are remembered and made salient in the present. Through interviews and participant observation with veteran organizations, I show that American commemorative practices revolve around making amends for society's past mistreatment of veterans, particularly from the Vietnam era. These practices are embedded in rural civic life, simultaneously reinforcing local identity and claims on national memory. While often expressing a deferential mood toward the military and echoing a hawkish orientation, these patriotic scripts contain rhetorical resources for a more restrained foreign policy position, potentially redirecting focus from moral redress to commemorative vigilance.

This dissertation offers a theoretical framework that links the microfoundations of wartime experience to the national level politics of grand strategy. It contributes to scholarly understanding of war's domestic consequences, American political development, collective memory, local politics, and the domestic politics of grand strategy. It also offers a historically grounded reassessment of WWII's legacy and speaks to contemporary political concerns, where appeals to war memory remain contested and used by elites globally for rhetorical legitimization purposes. Even in today's globalized world, the theory and findings advance a simple but powerful insight: all war is local.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> "To the degree that war's consequences are themselves determinants of subsequent international conflicts, an understanding of these consequences is central to a correct specification of the simultaneous causal relationships that lead to war."
>
> —Arthur A. Stein and Bruce M. Russett (1980, 400)

1.1 MOTIVATION

Just days before Russia launched its "special military operation" against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, President Vladimir Putin delivered a televised address widely viewed in the West as a prelude to war. His argument contained a series of historical claims: Ukraine is not a legitimate nation state, its independence is an accident of history, and its government is discriminating against ethnic Russians.[1] Putin's speech blended a statement of intent for impending action with an interpretation of the past for strategic and rhetorical purposes.[2]

Putin's gesture to history was not unique. Around the world, leaders often invoke history to justify strategic actions. Tensions between mainland China and Taiwan, historical disputes in East Asia, and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East all revolve, in part, around competing historical narratives. These competing interpretations are often rooted in the outcome of prior conflicts (Lind 2011). For example, China's invocation of the "century of humiliation" has become central to its

[1] Putin elaborated these historical claims in his February 21, 2022 address. The only full text version of this speech readily available online is on the Kremlin's website: http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828. A second speech delivered February 24, 2022 in the hours before the invasion, focused more specifically on the issue of Ukraine and post-Cold War Russia-West relations. The full text is available here: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-putin-s-declaration-of-war-on-ukraine/.

[2] Scholars have observed Putin's strong interest in history, and the role of WWII in Russian political history in particular (Edele 2017; McGlynn 2023).

national identity and international posture (Wang 2014), underpinning an assertive worldview to reclaim status and influence. Together, these cases convey a consistent message: the meaning and political impact of war does not end with the fighting (Ashplant et al. 2000; Khong 1992). It is reinterpreted, mobilized, and contested, often with strategic consequences (Jo 2022).

More fundamentally, these examples raise broader questions that I take up in this dissertation: How does war shape domestic political support for grand strategy? What lessons are drawn from war, why, and by whom? How are those lessons transmitted, passed down over time, and made salient in the present?

Leaders' frequent invocation of history for strategic purposes parallels a growing scholarly effort to understand how the past is made present. One approach examines how historical memory is formed, made politically salient, and becomes contested (Jo 2022; Gustafsson 2013; Langenbacher and Shain 2010). The other uses rich historical data and empirical techniques to trace the long-term effects of historical events on present-day political behavior (Cirone and Pepinsky 2022; Jenkins and Rubin 2024; Walden and Zhukov 2020). Together, this growing body of scholarship highlights how war legacies, historical analogies, and collective memory influence contemporary political attitudes and institutions, shaping patterns of international conflict and cooperation. Across time and place, war remains a privileged site of historical memory (Mosse 1991; Winter 1998), providing the values and memories underpinning political identities and informing how leaders relate to their citizens over national security.

In the United States, memories of war are routinely invoked in national security debates (Jervis 1976; Khong 1992). The "Munich analogy"—the idea that appeasement invites aggression—has long been a mainstay of those advocating a tougher posture toward foreign adversaries (Logevall and Osgood 2010), including recent calls for greater U.S. support in the war in Ukraine

(Kempe 2024; Harman 2025; Episkopos 2024). Comparisons between the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 to the fall of Saigon in 1975 capture how past wars are used to frame present-day dynamics and assign political blame.

This dissertation combines the insight that historical memory remains politically salient with the recognition that war's effects are persistent yet uneven. Just as scholars have shown how global trade produces unequal domestic consequences (Broz et al. 2021), a growing body of evidence demonstrates that war is also experienced unevenly across a polity, with important political consequences (Kriner and Shen 2010; De Juan et al. 2024; Cremaschi and Masullo 2024; Jha and Wilkinson 2012). Military service, war deaths, and commemorative practices vary by geography and the intensity of war exposure. Like trade shocks, war's political consequences depend on where, and how, it comes home.

In this way, my argument builds on a longstanding recognition of war's capacity to reshape societies and the international system more broadly (Gilpin 1981; Organski and Kugler 1980; Tilly 1990; Kier and Krebs 2010; Gunitsky 2017). More recently, scholars studying the subnational effects of conflict have shown that the nature, intensity, and geography of exposure—and how those experiences are transmitted, remembered, and reactivated—shape their long-term political effects (Rozenas et al. 2017; Balcells 2012; Cremaschi and Masullo 2024).

This is the central concern of this dissertation: international politics reverberates unevenly through domestic political life, shaping attitudes, patterns of representation, and collective memory in contingent yet consequential ways. These reverberations influence how the public and its leaders make sense of the past and envision the nation's role in the world. This insight clarifies the deeper significance behind Putin's speeches, historical memory disputes in East Asia (Jager and Mitter 2007), and U.S. elite invocations of a "new Cold War." Historical narratives resonate not simply

because they are promoted from above, but because they tap into latent memories of sacrifice, identity, and grievance. Efforts to mobilize history occur on a political terrain already characterized by uneven conflict histories and attachment to national narratives.

This dissertation begins from the premise that to understand war's domestic political legacies, particularly as they relate to support for grand strategy, we must ask *how* war was experienced, *where* it came home, and how it is *remembered* and *commemorated*.

These theoretical stakes rest on empirical foundations. While historical narratives are always contested, they ultimately depend on claims about what war did, and to whom. In the U.S. case, arguably no conflict in contemporary history did more to shape the trajectory of national identity and foreign relations than World War II. Yet, despite the war's canonical status in public memory, policymaking, and international relations, I contend that its domestic political consequences, particularly as they relate to support for the nation's postwar grand strategy, remain underexamined. Therefore, to evaluate war's political consequences and how they are made salient in the present, this dissertation systematically revisits the domestic political legacy of WWII as a pivotal turning point in U.S. foreign relations.

I approach this task by bringing historical and theoretical sensitivity to bear on a central question in international politics: how war shapes the future trajectory of participants. Focusing on the American experience in WWII, I develop a theory of local war legacies to explain how variation in wartime experience and local context influences public opinion, elite behavior, and commemorative practices. Using a combination of historical quantitative evidence and participant observation research, I present a systematic, bottom-up account of how war shapes the domestic politics of grand strategy. In doing so, I contribute to scholarly debates on war and domestic politics, collective memory, and American political development. I also speak to pressing policy

debates over the scope and durability of U.S. international engagement, and critically, the historical foundations underpinning debates over the U.S.'s proper role in the world.

1.2 Argument in Brief

This dissertation addresses the broad question of how war shapes domestic support for a state's role in the world. To that end, I organize my inquiry around three specific questions:

> 1. How does war impact domestic political support for grand strategy in the postwar period? Specifically, how do different wartime experiences shape later support for the strategic goals associated with the war?
>
> 2. How does war shape elite political behavior? Do the public's wartime experiences aggregate upward to influence the positions of political representatives?
>
> 3. How are memories of war passed down, made politically salient, and sustained over time? How do they continue to shape the politics of grand strategy in the present?

To answer these questions, I develop a theory of local war legacies which argues that war's political effects depend on two key factors: (1) the coercive intensity and concentration of wartime experience, and (2) the local context in which these experiences occur and are remembered. I summarize each component below.

First, I argue that the political effects of war are shaped by the coercive intensity and geographic concentration of wartime experiences. By coercive intensity, I refer to the degree of state intervention required to mobilize the population for war. More coercive mobilization, I argue, is more likely to alienate the public from the state, and by extension, the grand strategic aims for which the war was fought. The logic builds on the key insight that public reactions to war depend on perceptions of whether sacrifice is equally imposed. When coercion is viewed as uneven or unfair, it can incite backlash. To measure coercive intensity, I extend existing literature linking war deaths to war support (Gartner and Segura 2021; Kriner and Shen 2010; Althaus et al. 2012; Gelpi et al. 2009) by introducing a novel distinction between draftee and non-draftee deaths. I argue that

places with a higher share of draftee deaths reflect a more coercive form of sacrifice, and therefore a more alienating wartime experience, than places with lower draftee deaths.

The distribution of wartime experience refers to geographic concentration of war sacrifice. Put simply, a place with war exposure above the national median experienced a higher concentration of war exposure than one below it. My theory expects that places where wartime experience was both more coercive and concentrated will be less supportive of an expansive grand strategic vision associated with the war's objectives. In the U.S. case of WWII, I therefore expect that counties with higher proportions of draftee deaths should express less support for an active American role in the world than places with less coercive exposure.

Second, I argue that local context moderates how wartime experience translates into postwar political attitudes. Drawing on scholarship on rural identity (Cramer 2016; Wuthnow 2013), political geography (Agnew 1987), and the rural-urban divide (Shea and Jacobs 2023; Jacobs and Munis 2022; Gimpel et al. 2020), I theorize that rural communities are especially fertile places for local war legacies to take hold.

Several features of rural life make them receptive to drawing lasting political meaning from wartime experiences. These include high levels of place-based identity (Munis 2022), dense social and civic networks (Gimpel et al. 2020), and heightened sense of place-based deprivation and resentment toward centers of power (Cramer 2016; Wuthnow 2018). Rurality, in these accounts, is not simply a demographic category but a social identity that informs how people interpret national events and incorporate them into political meaning-making (Munis 2022).

Connecting these insights to research on the local effects of trade shocks (Bisbee and Rosendorff 2024; Alkon 2017), I argue that war's impact is more durable in places with strong communal dynamics, where sacrifice is interpreted collectively and incorporated into shared

identity and meaning. In these places, war reinforces feelings of place-based solidarity and differentiation from perceived national outgroups. War becomes a source of special meaning and purpose by which the community understands its relationship to the nation and wider world.

In sum, I argue that rurality amplifies the effects of war. In places where war was coercively imposed and geographically concentrated, rural communities are more inclined to absorb these experiences into communal identity and collective memory. Importantly, these memories are not static. As I elaborate in Chapter 5, they are subject to reinterpretation and activation over time, interacting with national political dynamics.

Drawing on extensive participant observation research and over 70 interviews, I theorize what I call the logic of atonement, a commemorative orientation that revolves around redressing perceived past mistreatment of veterans. These practices are sincere and enacted through what I term "patriotic scripts," a repertoire of language and behavioral cues that guide how Americans remember, discuss, and commemorate war. An implication of these practices, I argue, is a status quo bias in national security discourse. These scripts impose social costs on critique or revision about the merits of military involvement in past wars. Therefore, I argue that the American practice of war remembrance privileges recognition over reckoning, and this is evident in how veterans are honored and war remembered in everyday life.

Why focus on postwar support for grand strategy? While I elaborate on this in Chapter 2, I distill the rationale here into three key points. First, war is widely understood as a major inflection point in how states define their interests and pursue security (Lissner 2021), aligning with Posen's (1984, 13) classic definition of grand strategy as "a state's theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself." Second, in contrast to most casualties research, which focuses on *support for ongoing wars* (Gartner and Segura 2021; Gelpi et al. 2009)—typically measured as leader approval

or public opinion about continued fighting—I examine how war implicates the strategic vision that leaders and the public negotiate *after* the war ends. That is, at stake in war is not only whether to keep fighting, but what kind of global role the state should pursue in the postwar period. Third, my focus maps onto historical narratives that often treat war, including the central focus of this dissertation, WWII, as turning points in states' strategic orientation (Stuart 2009).

I test this argument using a multi-method research design applied to the American experience in the Second World War, a canonical case in international relations and American political development. To assess war's impact on public support, what I conceptualize as the public's "cost tolerance"—or willingness to shoulder the human and financial burdens of an expansive grand strategy—I use historical public opinion polls gauging support for U.S. global engagement.[3] Using multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP), a technique pioneered in American politics (Gelman and Little 1997; Caughey and Warshaw 2019), I estimate county level opinion before and after the war, which I link to data on county level war deaths.

To assess elite responsiveness to war, I analyze congressional votes on key postwar foreign policy legislation and track ideological shifts across lawmaker cohorts. Finally, I pair these historical quantitative approaches with fieldwork conducted over 18 months in a swath of rural counties with high WWII exposure. This research includes 76 interviews, participant observation with veteran organizations—including volunteering on four Honor Flights to Washington, D.C.—and sustained engagement with local veteran organizations and memorial events. These firsthand accounts enable me to trace how local legacies of war are remembered, commemorated, and made politically salient in the present.

[3] My conception of "cost tolerance" draws on Lissner's (2021) analysis of how limited wars influence grand strategic adjustment, as well as Christensen's (1996) concept of "national political power," the idea that public support constitutes both a key human resource and constraint on leaders' ability to pursue their strategic objectives.

This dissertation offers a comprehensive account of how war shapes postwar political dynamics. Theoretically, I bring IR scholarship on war and grand strategy into conversation with APD research on how international forces influence state building and internal political dynamics, a synthesis I elaborate in the next section. Methodologically, I combine a historically grounded research design with fieldwork to go and see what rows in a dataset of historical conflict exposure look like in practice. Drawing on research in local politics, I treat war's effects as moderated by local context, a key insight recognized by scholars of open economy politics and the rural-urban divide.

1.3 War and American Political Development

My theoretical framework builds on an intellectual tradition within American political development (APD) that takes seriously the interplay between domestic and international forces (Katznelson and Shefter 2002). I take inspiration from this tradition while positioning it in conversation with other literatures that help frame my key contributions. This section lays out the intellectual scaffolding of my argument, clarifying how I synthesize and extend existing work to develop new insights into war and the democratic politics of foreign policy.

At its core, APD is concerned with explaining durable shifts in governing authority, broadly construed (Orren and Skowronek 2004). This involves attention to why certain institutional arrangements endure while other paths are not taken, the sources and timing of change, and the role of ideas, actors, and critical events in the contestation over these changes. While APD has traditionally emphasized domestic drivers and outcomes—such as ideas and ideology (Tulis and Mellow 2018; Noel 2014), race (King and Smith 2005; TerBeek 2021), citizenship (Smith 1997), political parties (Schickler 2001; Gerring 1998), bureaucratic autonomy (Carpenter 2001) and state

building (Skowronek 1982; Bensel 1990)—there has long been theoretical overlap with IR scholarship concerned with interactions between external forces and domestic political developments (Krebs 2009; Friedberg 2000; Trubowitz 1998; Fordham 1998; Gourvitch 1978).

In many ways, these parallel projects converged in the 1990s and early 2000s through a combination of neoclassical realism (Rose 1998), APD research on international influences on American politics (Sparrow 1996), and studies of linkages between the global economy and national policy (Milner and Keohane 1996). For example, Zakaria (1998) draws heavily on foundational APD scholarship on state building by Bensel (1990), Skowronek (1982), and others to explain how state capacity limits a state's power projection abilities. My aim here is not to build a new paradigm, but to demonstrate the payoff of intentionally integrating these complementary traditions to address a theoretically and historically important question.

More specifically, I situate my intervention within a strand of IR-informed APD scholarship that treats war as a catalyst to domestic political development (Katznelson and Shefter 2002). This insight is perhaps captured most succinctly in Mayhew's (2005, 473) observation that "Wars seem to be capable of generating whole new political universes." Scholars have explored this insight by studying war's impact on state building and bureaucratic power (Sparrow 1996; Kroneig), citizenship and civic engagement (Mettler 2007; Skocpol et al. 2001), social and racial policy (Skocpol 1992; Kryder 2000; White 2019) political parties (Saldin 2010), interbranch relations (Howell et al. 2013), the military industrial complex (Thorpe 2014), among other major political and institutional developments (Zegart 1999). A unifying theme across these studies is that war presents windows of opportunity to make some political transformations possible while heightening the costs of others. As Sparrow (2002) observes, "it is during crises and major wars that the categories of political identity and the bonds of social networks become subject to severe

stress. Alternative paths of political development become possible…and established collectives and everyday government-society relations become unfixed."

The appreciation of war's transformative potential in APD parallels research in IR on war's impact on liberal democracy more broadly. Just as Mayhew (2005) outlines several productive avenues for studying war's impact on American politics, Kier and Krebs (2010) highlight the multiple ways war can reshape democratic politics. Kier and Krebs (2010) specify three ways that war may affect postwar politics in liberal democracies, or "what war does," summarized in Table 1.1.[4] Although they focus primarily on war's impact on democratic participation and contestation, the theoretical framework for categorizing the "causal status of war" resonates with my focus on the relationship between war and postwar grand strategy. This dissertation can be read, in part, as an effort to adjudicate between these models in a decisive case in the history of U.S. foreign relations.

Table 1.1 What War Does

Model *War as…*	**Mechanism** *War works through…*	**Result** *War causes…*
Interruption	Path dependence	Deviation from but return to pre-war status quo
Catalyst	Acceleration	Same outcome expected absent war, although timing may change
Transformative	Critical juncture	Discontinuous shift from pre-war status quo

While some might view this intervention as overly U.S.-centric or case specific, I have two responses. First, although this dissertation focuses on the American experience, the phenomenon it addresses—how war shapes domestic support for grand strategy—extends beyond the U.S. across space and time (Rosecrance and Stein 1993). Moreover, the U.S. case is valuable as a

[4] The content of Table 1.1 is adapted from the discussion in Kier and Krebs (2010, 14-16) under the section titled "What War Does."

representative example of how war impacts the domestic politics of a hegemonic state. As a preponderant global power, the U.S. offers a crucial example of how states internalize and draw lessons from the costs of war, and in turn how its leaders negotiate its preponderant international role (Musgrave 2019). While my historical focus is squarely on a pivotal moment in U.S. foreign relations, my theory and empirics contribute to broader debates about how great powers shape, and are shaped by, their position in the international system (Ikenberry and Nexon 2019).

Second, somewhat counterintuitively, anchoring this dissertation in the APD tradition helps address concerns about its U.S. focus. A central strength of APD, rooted in its historical institutionalist orientation (Sheingate 2014), is its attentiveness to the uneven and contingent nature of political development. A key insight of APD is that democratization in the U.S. has unfolded asymmetrically (Key 1949; Valelly 2004; Caughey 2018). Nowhere is this clearer than in the Jim Crow South, which persisted as a quasi-authoritarian enclave well into the post-WWII era (Mickey 2015). I leverage this within polity variation in regime type to assess whether the effects of wartime experience I theorize operate similarly in contexts where the electoral connection is attenuated. In this way, I contend that APD's theoretical and historical sensibilities offer IR scholars with productive ways to address concerns about generalizability and scope conditions, even within the confines of a single country study.[5]

Within this "IR–APD" intellectual framework, my argument charts new terrain in a couple ways. First, I focus on a broad outcome—domestic support for grand strategy—rather than discrete policy preferences or institutional change. While much of APD and "second image reversed" IR scholarship often focuses on discrete policy areas or institutional reforms, I intentionally broaden the theoretical lens to questions of national interest and strategic orientation. Second, my theory

[5] A few other interesting and innovative examples have exploited the U.S. South to speak to questions of interest to IR and conflict studies (Dafoe and Caughey 2016; Hall et al. 2019; Fordham 2022).

begins from the premise that war is experienced locally, and that this local variation shapes how it is remembered and subsequently informs political preferences and behaviors. On this point, I build on foundational work of scholars like Trubowitz (1998) and Fordham (1998), who examine how international pressures are filtered through regional and sectional interests to influence foreign policy preferences, particularly around trade and defense spending. I extend this intuition but go one step further to the local context, adapting recent insights from scholars on trade, local politics, rural identity, and political geography.

My focus on locality, or "place" (Ternullo 2024), traces a path from Gourevitch's (1978) original "second image reversed" insight, through the IR-APD synthesis advanced by Katznelson and Shefter (2002), to more recent work on the local dimensions of war (Kriner and Shen 2010; Althaus et al. 2012) and trade (Bisbee and Rosendorff 2024; Alkon 2017; Autor et al. 2020). I also build on research on local political identity (Ternullo 2024; Cramer 2016; Shea and Jacobs 2023), which shows how place-based orientations toward national politics reflect long-term historical and structural developments tied to perceptions of state power. My claim is that war, like trade, is felt unevenly, and that these local legacies can persist, influencing elite behavior and national discourse in ways often missed in elite narratives about the values of reaffirming the "post-WWII bipartisan consensus" or calls to preserve U.S. global leadership.

This dissertation builds on and revitalizes earlier IR-APD efforts by showing how WWII—a canonical case in both fields—continues to inform American grand strategy in ways that each subfield might overlook in the other. For example, Ikenberry (2011; 2018; 2020) argues that the success and durability of the U.S.-led postwar international order rested on its domestic foundations in the New Deal order. This view, as I develop in Chapter 4, takes for granted a particular reading of the New Deal order as durable and replicable. However, as I develop in

Chapter 4, the war itself exposed cracks in the coalition and revealed geographic fault lines that never abated (Young 2013; Sinclair 1982; Caughey 2018; Patterson 1967). My findings complicate a reading of the New Deal as a sustainable, democratically grounded model for international order building.

Congressional support for what would become the "postwar consensus"—arguably the domestic legislative expression of the postwar order Ikenberry (2018) envisions to reclaim—was indeed bipartisan, but it was neither automatic or uniform. Rather, it reflected local wartime experiences and significant geographic variation. I join scholars who show that the domestic political foundations of the postwar order were more contested and imposed from the top down, brittle even, than standard accounts suggest (Young 2013; Wertheim 2020). While majority public support for global engagement and core foreign policy legislation did obtain, these top line results mask shifting political dynamics in the coalition presumed to sustain the postwar order.

By foregrounding local legacies, this dissertation advances a bottom-up reading of the postwar order. Understanding its origins and durability requires closer attention to the uneven terrain of wartime experience from which it emerged, and to how those sacrifices have been commemorated, remembered, and mobilized over time. If anything, recent history underscores the fragility of the coalition that once underpinned the postwar order, in large part because of perceptions about the unequal distribution of costs and benefits associated with global engagement. Recognizing this raises the stakes for scholars and policymakers who look to the postwar consensus as a model to be replicated. While this dissertation focuses on a particular slice of domestic support for grand strategy, the broader takeaway is that the burden lies with proponents

of a renewed liberal order to demonstrate how such a project can be reconciled with the domestic political realities that sustain or erode it.[6]

By pairing an emphasis on subnational variation in local legacies with deep fieldwork in the present, this dissertation develops an alternative view of how grand strategy, and the broader international order, is politically and socially sustained. In doing so, it engages longstanding debates in both IR and APD, while also speaking to ongoing questions about the future of U.S. foreign policy. Despite recent optimism about the "long peace" (Pinker 2011), war remains a fact of international political life (Braumoeller 2019). As Mearsheimer (2025) argues, war is a central feature of the international system, and there is no reason to think this will change anytime soon. This dissertation offers not only a deep empirical study of a critical historical moment, but also a theoretical invitation to take war seriously as both a local experience and a national political force. Like politics, all war is local.

1.4 Historical Context: Why WWII?

As previously noted, I test my theory using a canonical case in IR, APD, and the history of U.S. foreign relations: the American experience in WWII. Its relevance stems not only from its global impact, but its enduring domestic influence (Thorpe 2014; Wilson 2016; Sparrow 2011; Samet 2021; Patterson 1997). The very fact that we refer to a "U.S. led, post-WWII international order" indicates its foundational status. However, for all its prominence, I argue that WWII's domestic political effects—its impact on support for postwar grand strategy, in particular—remains underexamined. My goal is to highlight the contested nature of historical claims underpinning this

[6] On this point, Musgrave (2019) exposes a tension in hegemonic studies that presume the domestic politics of hegemonic power will necessarily align toward supporting its preponderant status.

view, in turn clarifying the need to apply a new level of empirical scrutiny to this case, which I perform in this dissertation.

Throughout this dissertation, I use WWII as a historical foil, juxtaposing two competing interpretations of its domestic political legacy. According to the "watershed thesis," WWII forced a decisive shift in both U.S. foreign policy and domestic political support for it (Legro 2000; Zelizer 2010; Ruggie 1997). In this view, the war marked the death knell of the country's historical "isolationism" (Kupchan 2020).[7] The postwar consensus that emerged, according to the conventional view, was bipartisan in character and loosely defined by the following tenets: anti-communism, the use of military force to defend national interests, and embeddedness in multilateral institutions.[8]

There are several explanations for this shift. One is socialization, whereby the war fostered identification with newfound national power, the military prosecuting it, and therefore a sense of responsibility and tolerance for its higher costs (Sparrow 2011). Another explanation is learning, the idea that war clarified the failure of interwar strategic thinking and forced a replacement by a more coherent strategic vision (Legro 2000; Stuart 2009). Another explanation emphasizes political realignment (Busby and Monten 2008), that the war spurred a coalitional shakeup

[7] I use quotation marks around "isolationism" to recognize the contested nature of this term. Although long used to describe a foreign policy orientation favoring U.S. disengagement from world affairs, recent historiography challenges its analytical value. Historians argue that it often served to marginalize critics of U.S. primacy, the grand strategy that took shape during and after WWII, rather than to accurately describe a coherent alternative (Wertheim 2020; Blower 2014). Others have questioned its accuracy as a characterization of U.S. interwar foreign policy (Braumoeller 2010), or its analytical utility generally (Dunn 2005). At the same time, the term has been treated in public opinion research as a third orientation distinct from two versions of internationalism (Kertzer 2013). It remains prevalent in contemporary foreign policy discourse, despite recurring challenges to its historical or analytical usefulness (Lind 2024; Wertheim 2022; Buck 2021; Bacevich 2017). Throughout this dissertation, I use the term in ways that reflect how it appears in the scholarly or popular source I am engaging, while remaining mindful of these important historical and conceptual corrections. I take this up again in Chapter 3.

[8] Scholars emphasize different aspects of the postwar consensus but almost all agree that each of these three principles are important aims. Wittkopf and McCormick (1990) focus on the core issues of anticommunism, use of force, and U.S.-Soviet relations. Dueck (2006) emphasizes the importance of America's liberal political culture in the consolidation of the postwar strategy of containment.

following electoral turnover, purging of prewar isolationists and election of legislators supportive of the nation's new strategic orientation. Though these accounts differ in their logics of change, the common insight is that *the war itself* catalyzed domestic political transformation.

An alternative revisionist school challenges both the scope and mechanisms of change. At the mass level, revisionist accounts argue that WWII did not fundamentally change political beliefs or culture. Instead, revisionists foreground continuity over change in fundamental beliefs and values (Jeffries 1996). In this view, narratives of WWII as the "good war" are a postwar characterization that oversimplifies public ambivalence and uneven wartime experiences (Bodnar 2012; Samet 2021). The war was not experienced equally by everyone, nor did the public draw the same strategic lessons from it that transformational accounts claim. Indeed, early postwar analyses prompted scholars to doubt the postwar era was defined by newfound national consensus on U.S. engagement (Almond 1950; Klingberg 1952). According to historian John Jeffries (1996, 197), "The nation was different after the war but not transformed; fundamental dynamics and patterns of life persisted."

At the elite level, revisionist interpretations emphasize intra-elite bargaining (Carson and Conklin 2022; Rathbun 2011; Christensen 1996), elite driven intellectual projects (Wertheim 2020), and sectional interests (Fordham 1998; Trubowitz 1998) as driving the U.S.'s postwar international role. In these accounts, what appears in hindsight as a postwar consensus was in fact the product of elite politicking and deliberately crafted compromises to minimize elite dissent. Had these machinations been publicized, they might have activated opposition from the very public that watershed accounts presumed to have warmed up to internationalism. In this way, the revisionist perspective echoes President Roosevelt's own warning that "Anyone who thinks that

isolationism is dead in this country is crazy. As soon as this war is over, it may well be stronger than ever."[9]

These accounts also build on a longer historiographical tradition that treats the postwar era not as giving rise to a newfound consensus but as solidifying an increasingly insulated and elite driven national security state. Histories of the noninterventionist movement, for example, portray the war as ushering in a new era of undemocratic foreign policy, often pointing to the negative implications of the very changes that watershed accounts celebrate (Doenecke 1972; Russett 1972; Liggio and Martin 1976).

Together, these accounts form the historical foil for this dissertation. My point is not to take sides but to clarify that what is often treated as settled history remains deeply contested, and that these differences matter. Despite the war's canonical status as marking a decisive shift in U.S. grand strategy, I argue that we still lack systematic subnational evidence linking specific wartime experiences to shifts in postwar public opinion and elite behavior. If the core claim of the watershed thesis is that *the war did the work* in discrediting "isolationism," we should test that claim directly with the best available evidence and methods. The empirical analyses in this dissertation takes up the challenge.

Furthermore, the stakes of revisiting WWII's domestic legacy extend beyond the U.S. As noted earlier in this chapter, the memory of WWII remains politically charged across Europe and Asia, fueling tensions between and within nations (Beevor 2025; Jager and Mitter 2007; He 2007). Showing that WWII's political legacy is more complex than often assumed should caution against invoking it uncritically or instrumentally to support present-day foreign policy agendas. As I

[9] Quoted by Zelizer (2010, 59), citing Arthur Schlesinger (1998) in *Time*.

elaborate in the next section, my reevaluation carries important implications for how we understand the origins and durability of public support for international engagement.

1.5 Contributions and Implications

With my argument and historical context in place, I now preview the dissertation's main findings and contributions. Across three empirical chapters, I affirm the dissertation's central theoretical claim: the political legacies of war depend on both the nature of wartime experience and the local context in which it occurs and is remembered. War's domestic impact is geographically uneven and particularly resonant in rural communities where memories of wartime sacrifice become embedded in local identity.

I present four main findings. First, Chapter 3 shows that counties with more coercive wartime experiences—those with a higher proportion of local war deaths that were draftees—exhibited less support for the U.S. taking an active role in the world in the early postwar era. Moreover, this impact is stronger in rural counties, consistent with my theory's expectation that rural places are more inclined to incorporate wartime sacrifices into communal identity.

Another important finding is that prewar opinion on U.S. involvement in WWII strongly predicts postwar views on global engagement. This result challenges the watershed view that the war transformed public beliefs about foreign affairs. Using a buffer zone analysis comparing counties just inside and outside the South, I find consistent effects, suggesting that my theory travels across regime type. Substantively, Chapter 3 extends existing casualties literature by shifting the focus from support for an *ongoing war* to postwar attitudes about grand strategy. Methodologically, it offers a proof of concept for using historical public opinion surveys

popularized in APD (Schickler 2016; Caughey 2018), and some foreign policy research (Friedman 2024; Berinsky 2009), to study subnational variation in foreign policy opinion over time.[10]

Second, in my analysis of congressional behavior in Chapter 4, I find that district level war exposure did not predict electoral punishment of prewar non-interventionists, suggesting that non-interventionist incumbents were not uniformly purged in the postwar period. However, I do find that districts with higher war exposure were more likely to be represented by lawmakers who voted for core legislative tenets of the postwar consensus. Postwar entrants, compared to those elected before or during the war, were similarly more likely to support the postwar consensus position, indicating the war's impact operated through routine electoral replacement and responsiveness to constituent preferences rather than elite ideological conversion or updating.

This finding complicates conventional accounts of the postwar consensus in Congress as arising from either a purge of isolationists or elite ideological learning. Instead, it underscores the value of reading APD scholarship on the New Deal coalition into IR theories of international order building. In particular, it complicates prevailing understandings of the "U.S.-led postwar order" by showing that its domestic foundations were more contingent and uneven than often assumed in policy discourse. Rather than envisioning a liberal order 2.0 modeled on this earlier era, the more realistic and theoretically generative question is what kind of domestic coalition would be necessary to sustain such an order today. Such an inquiry would also require attentiveness to the uneven distribution of costs and benefits that influence such a coalition's feasibility.

Third, I complement the insights of my historical analysis with fieldwork in rural counties with high WWII exposure. Drawing on evidence from interviews, site visits, and sustained

[10] I describe these historical surveys in greater detail in Chapter 3. For an initial overview, I am referring to surveys made available by the Roper Center at Cornell University, reflecting the pioneering efforts of Adam Berinsky and Eric Schickler (Berinsky et al. 2011). For background on these surveys, see: https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/berinsky-schickler-american-mass-public-study.

participant observation, I show that American commemorative practices operate according to a logic of atonement. Chapter 5 connects two literatures united in an interest in how history informs contemporary politics but often differ in methodological perspective: collective memory and historical persistence. On the one hand, my findings echo a key insight of collective memory studies, that memory often diverges from the historical record. On the other hand, the local commemorative practices I document speaks to research on the present-day echoes of past historical events.

While I do not claim my fieldwork, informed by my dataset of historical war exposure, satisfies the standards of causal identification, the patterns I observe align with what scholars describe as "distal effects": persistent but temporally nonlinear or contingent consequences of historical events. In this sense, I highlight how contemporary commemorative practices are informed by memories of wartime sacrifice and veteran mistreatment, but the political meaning attached to those memories vary and interact with national political conditions. Ultimately, I show that these literatures share a common interest in how the past is made present. My fieldwork therefore illuminates how American commemorative practices around veterans and war remembrance reproduce local war legacies in ways that both reflect local context and interaction with national political developments (Ternullo 2024).

Viewed together, these contributions yield a fourth and final upshot of this dissertation: a comprehensive, multi-level and mixed method account of how war shapes the postwar politics of grand strategy through public opinion, elite behavior, and long-term commemorative practices. For scholars of grand strategy and international security, I show that localized public cost tolerance—shaped by past wartime experiences, and later, memories of those experiences—is central to how states sustain a grand strategy. For IR theory, I emphasize the local dimension of

conflict and cooperation, combining insights from open economy politics and hegemony studies to argue that international order building and maintenance rest on subnational political foundations. For political science more broadly, I show the value of pairing historical data with fieldwork to investigate enduring questions about sacrifice, democratic representation, and the domestic distribution of the costs and benefits of foreign policy.

This dissertation speaks not only to scholarly debates but also broader conversations about public engagement in foreign policy (Allen 2023; Bessner and Wertheim 2017), particularly at a time when the international system and the U.S.'s role within it are undergoing renewed scrutiny from multiple directions. I aspire for this dissertation to serve as a modest contribution to that unfolding conversation, one that appreciates the importance of grounding strategic discourse in the lives, memories, and voices of those impacted by the nation's foreign policy.

1.6 Plan of the Dissertation

The remainder of the dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework and develops my argument that the domestic political legacies of war depends on the coercive intensity of wartime experience and the local context in which war comes home. I also introduce the concept of the logic of atonement, which I claim orients veteran commemoration of war remembrance in the U.S. around making amends for society's past mistreatment of veterans. I derive hypotheses for each step of my theory, ranging from postwar public opinion, to elite responsiveness, to the persistence and practice of war memory.

Chapter 3 tests the theory in the case of U.S. involvement in WWII, assessing how local wartime experience impacted public support for U.S. global engagement in the early postwar era. I introduce and describe the dataset of county level WWII casualties, which I pair with historical

public opinion surveys using multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP). After contextualizing the stakes of the watershed vs. revisionist interpretations—and highlighting the war's intellectual impact on the study of public opinion—I present a series of models testing each component of the theory. The findings show that more coercive and concentrated wartime sacrifice is associated with lower support for postwar engagement, especially in rural areas, while prewar interventionist attitudes remain a strong predictor of postwar views, lending credence to revisionist interpretations. These findings then set up the analysis in the following chapter.

Next, Chapter 4 shifts the focus to elite behavior, examining whether and how local wartime experiences made their way up to Congress. I situate the chapter in historical context, highlighting how the watershed and revisionist interpretations play out in Congress, and distinguishing among three lawmaker cohorts: the WWII House, wartime entrants, and postwar entrants. Using an index of key rollcall votes reflecting the postwar consensus, I test whether legislators from more exposed districts were more supportive of the consensus. The findings suggest they were, affirming my theory's expectation that local wartime experiences make their way upward to inform national level politics. More broadly, the chapter makes the case for reading the New Deal explicitly into theories of postwar international order. The implication is that any effort to revive a post-WWII liberal order must contend with the contingent and evolving nature of the domestic coalition it was predicated on, a coalition beginning to shift as the postwar order took shape.

Chapter 5 describes my fieldwork in rural counties with high historical war exposure, extending my analysis from the mid twentieth century into the present. Drawing on interviews, participant observation, and visiting local archives and surveying material infrastructure, I show how memories of WWII interact with other wars—notably Vietnam—and remain politically

salient today. I explain my process for site selection, drawing inspiration from the idea of "nested analysis" whereby scholars use a large dataset—in my case county level observations of past war exposure—to identity places to conduct in depth investigation (Lieberman 2005). Rather than making causal claims, this chapter should be understood as showing how the quantitative patterns from earlier chapters continue to inform and operate in the background of contemporary commemorative practices. This chapter demonstrates the value of a mixed methods approach to tracing the long-term legacies of war, while showing the compatibility between the collective memory and historical persistence literatures to understand how past memories inform veteran commemoration and war remembrance.

In Chapter 6, I conclude by summarizing the core findings and reflecting on the dissertation's broader implications. Situating the findings in literature on grand strategy, international security, and APD, I highlight how this dissertation contributes to our understanding of how powerful states both shape and are shaped by their international status (Ikenberry and Nexon 2019). I outline promising directions for future research and consider policy implications. Despite being anchored in history, this dissertation speaks to enduring policy debates about the distribution of costs and benefits of U.S. global engagement.

Viewed together, this dissertation offers a fresh answer to a historically and theoretically enduring question: how war shapes public support for the nation's role in the world. While WWII has long been viewed as a paradigmatic case of war-induced transformation, I show that the story is more uneven and contingent that commonly believed. By marshalling a wide array of evidence, I offer a productive model for combining historical quantitative analysis with fieldwork that captures the present-day vestiges of past conflicts. There is still much to learn from going out into

the world to trace how war legacies live on. My hope is that this dissertation deepens our understanding of the past in ways that meaningfully inform debates over U.S. foreign policy.

CHAPTER 2

All War is Local:
A Theory of War and Domestic Political Support for Grand Strategy

> "A nation's ability to sustain a defense program is not only a matter of the gross national product, per capita income, and the other objective criteria of economic strength but, just as much, a reflection of what the citizenry, its political representatives, and government officials are willing to sacrifice in terms of competing values for the sake of a particular national strategy."
> —Robert Osgood (1957, 272)[1]

> "Wars seem to be capable of generating whole new political universes."
> —David Mayhew (2005, 473)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter develops a theory of local war legacies. A key insight of my theory is that war does not have uniform political effects across a polity, but that it is experienced, interpreted, and remembered in different ways across subnational communities. These local differences matter in how they shape public support for the nation's grand strategy, the broad orientation a state uses to pursue its interests in world affairs. My central argument is that the effects of war on the domestic politics of grand strategy depends on two main factors. The nature of wartime experience—specifically the coerciveness of mobilization and geographic distribution of sacrifice—and the local context in which it occurs, specifically whether the community is rural or urban. I argue that these factors shape how the public reacts to war, how political elites respond to those reactions, and how memories of war are reproduced and politicized over time.

[1] Quoted in Sparrow (2002, 268-269).

The core outcome my theory aims to explain is postwar domestic support for grand strategy. I conceptualize this outcome as the public's cost tolerance: the willingness to politically sustain the economic and human burdens of the strategic aims for which a war was fought. For example, a high cost tolerance is when the public is willing to support a state's newfound influence achieved through war; conversely, a low cost tolerance would be if the same public decided the sacrifices necessary to sustain that newfound influence was not worth it. The public's response to war, I argue, constrains or enables elite management of the nation's role in world affairs, in both democracies and nondemocracies, as I elaborate later. A key insight from my theory is that these local legacies are not static. Rather, local memories of war are reproduced through commemorative practices that reflect political exigencies of the moment and interact with national political narratives. Therefore, the local legacy of war is not just a reflection of what happened and where, but I argue it is what communities remember and how those memories are mobilized over time, and to what end.

Much of international security research focuses on the causes or conduct of war, or treats grand strategy as driven primarily by external forces. Less attention has been paid to the domestic politics of grand strategy *in the wake of war*. I situate my theory within the "second image reversed" tradition (Gourevitch 1978), which treats international forces like war as acting upon a state's domestic politics. In particular, I build on Kier and Krebs's (2010) typology of "what war does," which distinguishes between war as an interruption, catalyst, or transformation of domestic politics. My theory builds on this framework but emphasizes how variation in wartime experience and local context conditions which of these three outcomes emerges as it relates to the politics of grand strategy.

Why treat war as the key input to postwar grand strategy? First, wars are fought over strategic aims that often hinge on competing visions of the nation's role in the world. In this way, "wars are crucibles of grand strategy" (Lissner 2021, 7). Second, war has an outsized influence on political memory (Lind 2011; Berger 1998; Ashplant et al. 2000; Evans and Lunn 1997). As Jervis (1976) and others have noted (Stein and Russett 1980; Klingberg 1952), recent wars are a powerful heuristic for citizens and political elites alike. However, I argue that the content, persistence, and effects of those war-induced lessons depends on how war was experienced across different places.

My theory brings together several literatures that are not typically in conversation: international relations research on grand strategy, American political development (APD), local politics, and the political legacies of violence. A key contribution of my theory is its systematic framework for understanding how war shapes the domestic politics of grand strategy across three levels of analysis: (1) the mass public, whose cost tolerance reflects its wartime experiences and local context; (2) lawmakers, who either respond or fail to respond to constituents' wartime experiences; (3) and local communities that sustain and reinterpret the political meaning of war through a commemorative infrastructure of practices and civic institutions.

A central move in my theory is to disaggregate "war" into its component parts. I distinguish between two dimensions of wartime experience: the *nature of mobilization*—the coerciveness and disruptiveness of state mobilization to wage war—and the *distribution of sacrifice*, or how unevenly the human costs of war are concentrated in communities. Together, these two factors comprise my main independent variable of "wartime experience." The second key move in my argument is that the effect of wartime experience is moderated by local context, specifically rurality. Rural communities, I argue, are unique in how they experience, process, and internalize war. Their sense of place-based linked fate, tighter social cohesion, and geographic isolation

intensify reactions to wartime sacrifices. My theory claims that these localized effects aggregate upward to shape legislative representation and congressional politics, and the broader national politics of grand strategy.

Finally, my theory has expectations for politics beyond the immediate postwar period. I argue that the effects of war are not static but can evolve through commemorative practices—public rituals, memorials, civic organizations, and narratives that sustain or reinterpret for political purposes the meaning and valence of past wars. These practices vary in their political salience and are often informed by contestation over which interpretation is correct. Some local memories fade and others are dominant, often as a form of making sense of the community's location in the national political conversation and a way to find communal and historical meaning.

I develop my theory in three stages. First, I define grand strategy and explain how public cost tolerance operates as a component of national political power. This sets up my theory's dependent variable. Second, I explain how variation in wartime experience and local context shapes different public reactions, especially in rural communities. Third, I explain how those public responses make their way up to national level politics through the electoral connection. Finally, I discuss how commemorative practices shape the political meanings of war and its salience over time. Together, these theoretical foundations produce a framework for understanding how war impacts public support for grand strategy in ways that vary across space and time, and sometimes departs from the war's original historical meaning.

2.2 War and the Domestic Politics of Grand Strategy

The first step in my theory is to define what I am explaining. My point of departure is research on the domestic political foundations of a state's grand strategy, which I define as "a state's theory

about how it can best 'cause' security for itself" (Posen 1984, 13). In this view, grand strategy comprises a "political-military, means-ends chain," i.e., the strategic goals a state sets for its role in the world and the policy instruments to pursue them. This definition is useful for understanding how war can influence both dimensions of grand strategy, including its ends (the scope of global engagement) and the means (which policies and resources are necessary to sustain its ends).[2]

My theory focuses on support for these ends and means. I refer to this as *domestic political support for grand strategy*, which I treat as the theory's dependent variable. Specifically, I conceptualize mass public support as *cost tolerance*, which is the political willingness to accept the economic and human costs necessary to sustain a postwar grand strategy (Lissner 2021).[3] Cost tolerance comprises beliefs not only about whether the recent war was worth fighting, but more importantly a judgment about whether the nation's postwar strategic posture is worth sustaining. Put succinctly, my theory is about the connection between war and the public's cost tolerance. I argue that war affects cost tolerance and that changes in cost tolerance constitute a key input to elite politics of grand strategy.

Why focus on grand strategy rather than narrower foreign policies like support for alliances or foreign aid? The main reason is that grand strategy is the intellectual architecture from which a state's discrete foreign policies flow. Strategic means (i.e., policy instruments) like the use of military force are only intelligible in light of higher-order strategic ends like balancing against foreign rivals. A "first-order" change or "overhaul" in grand strategy signals a more fundamental shift in global orientation than do changes in any single policy (Lissner 2021; Rosecrance and Stein 1993). Historically, war brings these foundational questions to the surface of national

[2] While other definitions of grand strategy exist (Silove 2018; Brands 2014), the advantage of Posen's is its parsimony.
[3] Caverley (2014) develops a related concept of internal cost distribution, referring to how exposed voters are to the human and fiscal costs of grand strategy. Caverley argues that a militarily aggressive foreign policy results when the internal costs are distributed away from voters.

political debate. I focus on grand strategy because it is precisely in the wake of war that political actors debate competing visions for the nation's standing in world affairs (Kier and Krebs 2010).

I argue that war is unique in its ability to crystalize, reveal, and reshape public attitudes about grand strategy. Building on intellectual traditions in international relations and American political development, I conceptualize war as an external shock that can reconfigure domestic coalitions, ideologies, and institutions (Mayhew 2005; Katznelson and Shefter 2002; Thompson 1993; Barnett 1992; Legro 2000). At the public level, wars can foster new political and national identities, rally or mute leader approval, and move voting behavior. At the elite level, wars can reconfigure political coalitions, expose ideological cleavages, and empower some actors over others. As Mayhew (2005, 473) observed, "Wars seem to be capable of generating whole new political universes." My theory builds on this insight by specifying how and under what conditions war alters domestic support for grand strategy.

My key theoretical move is my claim that war reveals credible information about the public's cost tolerance. As Lissner (2021, 11) writes, "warfare is a rich source of information for the assessments that underlie grand strategy." War functions as an "audit of battle," testing the state's power and the public's willingness to sacrifice to achieve its strategic aims.[4] Accordingly, as the most vivid and credible method of reducing uncertainty (Blainey 1988), leaders respond to war by updating assessments of both foreign threats and assessments of public support. When war reveals that the public is unwilling to support an expansive grand strategy, leaders adjust security policy accordingly in peacetime. Alternatively, if war reveals the public accepts higher costs, leaders may promote an ambitious strategy. This expectation, building on Lissner's (2021) Bayesian framework, expects grand strategy to adjust linearly to information revealed by war.

[4] The phrase "audit of battle" comes from Pollack (2019).

My theory departs from this account in two main ways. First, I argue that the effects of war on public cost tolerance are not uniform. While wars are often remembered as a national event, they are experienced locally (Villamil 2021). Some communities pay a more disproportionate burden of human sacrifice than others (Kriner and Shen 2010). This uneven distribution of wartime sacrifice, I argue, shapes the lessons drawn from war. It is this variation in local wartime experiences that I argue conditions how citizens reassess their cost tolerance for the grand strategy the war was fought for.

Second, I argue that war not only reveals credible information about the public's cost tolerance, but also generates politically contested lessons. As Jervis (1976) and others have argued, leaders and citizens often misinterpret lessons from past wars. A key insight is that leaders often overlearn some lessons and ignore others.[5] Contrary to Lissner's (2021) expectation that leaders will optimally realign grand strategy in peacetime, Jervis cautions that the "audit of battle" is subject to interpretation. "It is thus not true that an increase in knowledge necessarily increases the actor's ability to cope with his environment" (Jervis 1976, 220). I build on this insight by arguing that what matters is not simply that war occurred, but how communities experienced it, especially as they encountered the state during mobilization. In this way, my theory conceptualizes war not only as an external shock but also as a political event capable of imprinting lessons on both leaders and the mass public.

[5] The intuition that leaders regularly fail to draw accurate lessons from history has been discussed at length by historians and scholars of grand strategy (May 1973; Brands and Suri 2015; Neustadt and May 1986; Mukharji and Zeckhauser 2020). For a review of this literature, see Brands and Inboden (2018).

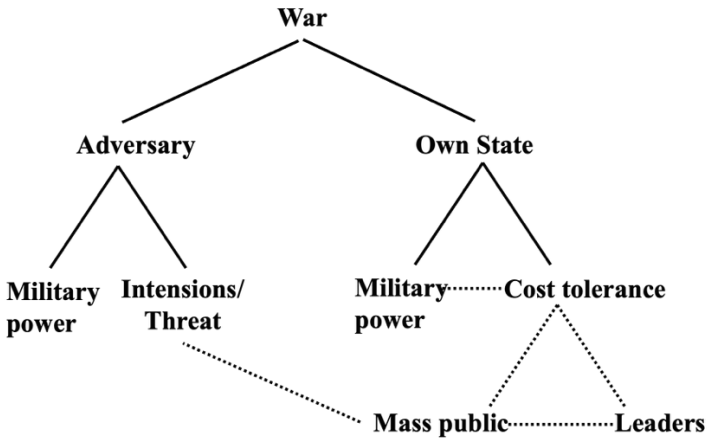


Figure 2.1 How War Shapes Support for Grand Strategy

Figure 2.1 visualizes where I situate public cost tolerance within a broader theoretical framework of how war shapes postwar grand strategy. The dashed lines represent the relationships my theory aims to explain. Notably, the figure shows how wartime experience impacts public cost tolerance, which then influences elite policymaking and public-elite relations. Cost tolerance also informs how citizens perceive national military power and what is worth fighting for. The dashed line connecting the mass public and adversary intentions captures how wartime sacrifices inform threat perceptions. The primary relationship in my theory is the triangular linkage between cost tolerance, the mass public, and leaders. My theory's central contribution is to explain how these relationships are shaped by subnational variation in wartime experiences.

This brings me to the role of the public in the domestic politics of grand strategy. I distill existing scholarship into three main perspectives. First, the public is treated as representing competing economic interests linked to distinct national security preferences (Lobell 2003; Narizny 2007; Trubowitz 1998; Fordham 2008). As Narizny (2007, 4) argues, "If different domestic groups have divergent preferences over these [economic] issues, security policy will become just as politicized as foreign economic policy." Second, the public acts as a constraint on

elite driven grand strategy. In this way, the public embodies a political culture that leaders must work within or risk suffering political consequences (Dueck 2006; Friedberg 2000). According to Dueck (2006, 36), "Strategic culture at the national level tends to act as a constraint, and a filter, rather than a determinant 'cause' of grand strategy in and of itself, but cultural factors often push or pull strategic choice in one direction or another." A third view treats the public as a resource, or a form of "national political power" that leaders must mobilize to realize their strategic preferences (Christensen 1996). Channeling classical realists like Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr, Christensen (1996, 11) observes that "Domestic political support behind national security policy constitutes a power resource as essential to national survival as others commonly weighed by realists (e.g., financial capital, industrial production, weapons, and conscripts)."

I synthesize these perspectives to argue that the public acts as a political resource vital to sustaining grand strategy, especially in the wake of war when cost tolerance is particularly salient. This political resource is uneven, however. War's effects on cost tolerance are shaped by the nature of wartime experience, local context, and how its memory is subsequently mobilized. In this way, I conceptualize public cost tolerance as both a political judgment by the public and a political resource that leaders anticipate and interpret.

This view departs from structural theories that assume grand strategy responds deterministically to shifts in the international balance of power (Waltz 1979).[6] Instead, my account builds on two-level approaches that emphasize how international forces interact with domestic political structures (Zakaria 1998). Moreover, I go one step further in arguing that this interaction is shaped at the subnational level. Building on previous scholarship that examined the role of

[6] Other scholars propose additional reasons why states may diverge from the predictions of structural accounts in optimally recalibrating their grand strategy in response to the international environment (Schweller 2006; Rose 1998; Rosecrance and Stein 1993). These accounts emphasize the importance of domestic politics in conditioning how states respond to external pressures.

regions (Trubowitz 1998), I take a similar political geographic approach. I argue that wartime experiences are processed in place-based ways, and especially in rural communities where sacrifices are more visible, collectively felt, and commemorative practices are an especially strong form of meaning and political expression.

To recap, I defined grand strategy and introduced domestic political support—and the public's cost tolerance—as my theory's dependent variable. This concept is a core component of national political power, which is necessary to sustain grand strategies over time. War is a key driver of these dynamics, and I argue that its effects are conditioned by local context. In the next section, I develop the theory's key independent variables, wartime experience and local context, and explain how they jointly shape public support and elite political behavior on grand strategy.

2.3 Wartime Experience and Local Context

In this section, I elaborate the first part of my theory's logic: war's impact on domestic political support for grand strategy depends on the nature of the wartime experience. A key insight of my theory is my disaggregation of this experience into two dimensions. First is the *coercive intensity* of war mobilization. Second is the *distribution of sacrifice*. Together these constitute the wartime experience that shapes how citizens and communities remember and attach political meaning to wartime sacrifices, and whether they view the state's postwar grand strategy as legitimate and worth sustaining. While I consider these dimensions separately in turn for analytical clarity, I argue that together they comprise the concept of wartime experience and interact with local context, particularly rurality, which I take up in the following section. My central claim is that coercive and unequal wartime experiences—particularly when concentrated in rural areas—are most likely to

generate politicized reactions and backlash against assertive grand strategies, and these effects will be durable and act as latent political resource for longer.

Wartime Experience. The first dimension of wartime experience is mobilization intensity, or the extent to which the state relies on coercion to wage war. Examples of coercive mobilization includes conscription, rationing, state propaganda, and state control of industry (Kier 2021). These activities are coercive because they impose direct costs on individuals and communities against their will. Alternatively, less coercive mobilization relies on military enlistments, patriotic appeals, material incentives, and generally afford citizens greater agency in choosing how to participate in the war effort.

I argue that coercive wartime experiences are more likely to generate postwar alienation from the state and thereby reduce public cost tolerance. Coercion fosters feelings of compulsion and unfairness, especially when communities face it to a high degree (Levi 1997). In the eyes of community members, coercion creates a link between wartime sacrifices and state power, therefore war-imposed hardships are viewed as an extension of the state. Even if citizens support the war in principle, they may come to resent the state's methods. These reactions are rooted in feelings of fairness, which research shows is central to a broad array of political attitudes (Powers et al. 2022).

Evidence in support of this mechanism is found in research on the moral and psychological roots of foreign policy attitudes. For example, Rathbun et al. (2016)—building on Schwartz (1992)—show that individuals' foreign policy orientations reflect their moral values.[7] Schwartz's framework encompasses ten value domains, grouped into four "capstone principles."[8] Militant

[7] Schwartz (1992) "conceptualizes personal values as i) abstract beliefs ii) about desirable end states or behaviors that iii) transcend specific circumstances and contexts, iv) guide evaluation and behavior, and v) can be rank-ordered in terms of relative importance" (Rathbun et al. 2016, 126).

[8] The four capstone principles are openness to change, self-transcendence, conservation, and self-enhancement. Openness to change encompasses hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction; self-transcendence encompasses universalism and benevolence; conservation encompasses security, conformity, and tradition; self-enhancement encompasses achievement and power.

internationalism, e.g., support for robust but unilateral global engagement, aligns with conservation values and benevolence (concern for own's own community); on the other hand, cooperative internationalism, a more multilateral approach to world affairs, corresponds to cosmopolitanism and multilateralism. Isolationism exhibits weaker moral foundations but is still associated with values that "create the solidarity and cohesion necessary to guard against internal and external threats" (Rathbun et al. 2016, 125). Drawing on this framework, I argue that coercive wartime experiences are most likely to activate inward-looking values like in-group solidary and security, in turn lowering postwar support for ambitious grand strategies.

Empirical research on the political legacies of violence supports this intuition. A growing body of scholarship shows that exposure to state coercion during war can erode trust in government and reduce long-term postwar support for both the leaders and ideologies associated with the perpetrating regime (Rozenas et al. 2017; Balcells 2011; Henn and Huff 2024). For example, research finds that wartime coercion fosters lasting anti-government attitudes and decreased political trust toward the perpetrator, among both direct victims but also future generations, and after the perpetrating regime is no longer in power (Balcells 2011; Villamil 2021; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017). Similar evidence obtains in cases where the perpetrating regime remained in power (Wang 2021). My theory adapts this logic to foreign policy, positing that the more coercive a state's mobilization strategy, the more likely citizens will view wartime sacrifices as imposed, and therefore express less support for the grand strategic vision associated with the war.

My argument also adapts insights from research linking war preparation to postwar state-society relations (Kier 2021). A key insight from this research is that *how* the public experiences war—through different methods of mobilization and the distribution of sacrifice—shapes both its exposure to war and interaction with the state. Instructive here is Barnett's (1992) argument that

the effect of mobilization depends on the state's goals, social resistance, and provision of public concessions. Barnett (1992, 260) challenges "the common wisdom that war and war preparation increase the state's control over society." I extend this logic beyond state capacity—specifically its ability to extract material resources—to focus on how war impacts the non-material foundations of national political power, namely public support.

My expectations for coercive sacrifice contrasts with more voluntaristic mobilization. Voluntary service can foster an identification with the war's strategic aims (Weaver 2022). Individuals who choose to fight are more likely to view their involvement as legitimate and imbued with positive meaning. This is supported by research showing that perceptions of military enlistment as driven by patriotism increases support for the use of force, whereas perceptions of less altruistic motives for joining lowers support (Krebs et al. 2021). Voluntaristic, and therefore normatively patriotic service, heightens a communal sense of investment in the war's outcome and, by extension, the war's strategic goals. Even when a war's outcome is ambiguous or costly, voluntaristic experiences are more readily rationalized as worthy contributions. Whereas coercive mobilization imposes a demand on citizens and risks alienation, voluntary participation is normatively framed as self-sacrifice and virtuous.

To be sure, war often involves a spectrum of coercion. Conscription can coexist with voluntary enlistment. Repressive propaganda can exist alongside patriotic appeals. While acknowledging this complexity, I argue that variation in the dominant mode of mobilization, and especially how it is perceived by impacted populations, still matters. In my empirical chapters, I operationalize mobilization intensity with data on the type of war deaths experienced by a community, thereby treating this intensity in a binary fashion. Although an imperfect measure, it is a close approximation given the availability of historical data. The key theoretical insight

remains. Coercive wartime experiences imbue the link between war, state mobilization, and sacrifice with negative political valence, thereby depressing the public's postwar cost tolerance. Coercive mobilization generates resentment and distrust of the state and its strategic aims.

Distribution of Sacrifice. The second dimension of wartime experience is the distribution of sacrifice. This refers to how equally the burdens of war are shared across communities within a polity. An unequal distribution results in the *concentration* of sacrifice among certain places and groups. This builds on a longstanding observation that wars rarely impact societies evenly. Research shows that certain communities are predisposed to contribute more soldiers and therefore suffer higher war deaths. Moreover, industrial concentration makes some places more susceptible to state economic intervention. These differences matter for the spatial distribution of war exposure, making some places feel the war more acutely than others. This in turn shapes how different places form distinct meanings of the war.

I argue that unequal distributions of sacrifice amplify the political responses associated with mobilization intensity. For communities experiencing heavy conscription and war deaths, this disproportionately coercive experience becomes embedded in local identity and political narratives. Unequal shares of sacrifice foster a sense of alienation, injustice, and discrimination by the state and therefore reinforces feelings that "We paid more than our fair share." It is in such places that my theory expects a lower cost tolerance.

Alternatively, disproportionate wartime sacrifice can amplify feelings of patriotic contribution, "doing our part," and political ownership of the outcome, especially when the sacrifice was less coercively imposed. Communities that experienced a more proprotional sacrifice—that is, less coercive—may express greater attachment to the leaders and strategic vision they understood the war as promoting. These cases correspond to a belief that "we fought for this

and support its continuation," and they want to see their sacrifices translate into greater influence and therefore expansive grand strategies underwritten by higher cost tolerance.

Building on these insights, I argue that the nature of wartime mobilization shapes how communities interpret unequal shares of sacrifice, both psychologically and politically. Psychologically, places experiencing both high coercion and disproportionate burden are likely to reject the values of universalism and openness, instead turning inward and prioritizing in-group solidarity and conservation. These places frame sacrifice as unfair and imposed by the state's heavy hand, which in turn predicts low-cost tolerance. Conversely, places with less coercive sacrifice will express an elevated sense of achievement and benevolence—rooted in the idea that they "did their part" and are invested in the postwar political order—and therefore will view sacrifice as noble and have a higher cost tolerance.

Politically, the combination of coercive and concentrated sacrifice produces distinct narratives of moral investment in the war and its associated strategic aims. In communities with high coercion and concentrated sacrifice, this would entail beliefs that they did not have a choice in supporting the war effort and they paid the price. In places with more evenly distributed, less coercive sacrifice, the postwar narrative might be that they invested in the war and therefore expect their voice and sacrifice to be reflected in a more expansive grand strategy. Both narratives are about what the state owes its citizens and how wartime sacrifice should translate into the nation's world role moving forward.

The key claim flowing from this section is that the more intensely and unequally a community experiences war, the more negative its postwar cost tolerance is likely to be. These judgments exist not only among individual citizens but aggregate to communities and vary spatially based on the type and concentration of sacrifice. In the next section, I explain how local

geographic context shapes how wartime experiences are interpreted, remembered, and politically mobilized over time.

		Distribution of Sacrifice	
		More equal	Less equal
Mobilization Intensity	More Coercive	**Mixed cost tolerance** Mixed identification with strategic aims; Perceived fairness but alienated by state methods	**Lower cost tolerance** Public alienation, question strategic aims of war; Increase insular mindset, in-group solidarity
	Less Coercive	**Highest cost tolerance** Strong identification with postwar strategic aims; sense that "we did our share"	**Mixed cost tolerance** Perceived need to compensate for community sacrifice; may rationalize as support or opposition to grand strategy

Figure 2.2 Wartime Experience and Cost Tolerance

Where War Comes Home: Local Context. The second key variable in my theory is local context, which I conceptualize as moderating how wartime experience translates into postwar political support for grand strategy. I focus specifically on rurality, not solely as a geographic place of residence, but as a type of place-based identity. My core claim is that rural communities are especially prone to interpret war as a shared, communal experience, amplifying the psychological and political salience of wartime sacrifice. Consequently, I argue that the effects of war on cost tolerance in rural places are amplified, more enduring, and likely to be activated in the future in ways that shape political attitudes and behavior.

Several features of rural life underscore this claim. The first is scale and social dynamics. Rural communities are smaller, socially integrated, and more homogenous in the sense of shared distinctiveness (Gimpel et al. 2020; Knoke and Henry 1977). Despite fewer people overall, these places are tightly connected through interpersonal networks that restrict anonymity and community

identity through social monitoring, gossip, and in-group solidarity. As community residents commonly refrained in my fieldwork in rural communities with high historical war exposure, "everyone knows everyone." While urban places have dense and diverse social networks, cities facilitate anonymity and more superficial (Gimpel et al. 2020), fragmented ties that blunt the transmission of a communal identity around sacrifice.

A second reason is geographic and social insularity, and most importantly, awareness of separation from urban centers and a sense of being different (Wuthnow 2013; Jacobs and Shea 2023).[9] The crucial point is that "Rural Americans are different because they see themselves as different…The challenges confronting rural areas may not be all that special, but the way rural Americans think about these challenge is" (Shea and Jacobs 2023, 12). The self-reliance and self-sufficiency attributed to rural places (Diamond 2023; Bostrom 2003) resemble the conservation values of security and tradition emphasized in political psychology approaches to foreign policy opinion (Rathbun et al. 2016).[10] This reinforces an "us versus them" mentality. When war comes home to these places, sacrifice is absorbed into communal narratives of pride or betrayal. An implication is that rural residents are likely to view their community's experience as distinct—in a way that gives them purpose and meaning—and therefore form a strong reaction.

A third factor concerns social and civic engagement. Rural social gatherings, even though they might be smaller than in urban places, are vital to socializing residents to the community's prevailing norms, identity, and beliefs. A result is that "rural areas tend to be higher in social capital – which is associated with increased political participation – compared to non-rural areas" (Lin and Lunz Trujillo 2023, 851). As Robert Putnam (2000, 205) observed, "Getting involved in

[9] In my usage, insularity refers to geographic separation, not colloquial references to an "insular mindset" as synonymous with a narrow worldview, normatively backward opinions, or "voting against one's best interests" (Frank 2004).
[10] On views of rural places as self-reliant and independent, Diamond (2023) cites Bostrom (2003).

community affairs is more inviting – or abstention less attractive – when the scale of everyday life is smaller and more intimate." These routines aggregate individual wartime experiences into community memory and identity, sustaining their relevance for cost tolerance over time.

My theory posits that these unique geographically rooted, place-based dynamics make rural communities prone to experience war as a shared identity-defining event. When wartime experience is coercive or geographically concentrated, rural communities are likely to respond to sacrifice as being imposed, therefore fostering a low cost tolerance. When sacrifice is less coercive or valorized, it may become a source of communal pride and reinforce community identification with the war's strategic aims. The bottom line is that the same wartime experience has greater weight in rural places than elsewhere.

My theory builds on but departs from existing research in international political economy, specifically the Open Economy Politics (OEP) paradigm.[11] A key insight from OEP research is how changes in local economic context—e.g., trade shocks and immigration—shapes trade related attitudes (Lake 2009; Owen and Johnston 2017; Bisbee and Rosendorff 2024).[12] In one set of "egotropic" models, local context operates as a source of information about how external events impact one's self-interest.

Taking these OEP insights as a foundation, my theory departs from the assumption that individuals respond strictly to material self-interest. For example, in the context of war, it is not clear how citizens should assess whether community sacrifice was "worth it." The same community loss could generate anti-state alienation or deepen political investment. I therefore

[11] OEP has been critiqued for privileging domestic political processes at the expense of international models of change, such as interdependence (Oatley 2011). However, the decision to employ the OEP approach or alternative models of domestic-international linkages depends on the relationship being studied (Chaudoin et al. 2015).

[12] I use the term "trade related" here because OEP oriented research considers other outcomes like attitudes toward immigration as a function of trade exposure. Similarly, a growing body of research on climate policy shares the methodological and theoretical approach familiar to OEP scholarship. Despite examining different issue areas, these studies share a common interest in the drivers of opinion formation.

align more closely with behavioral approaches to preference formation, which emphasize identity, norms, and individual dispositions as determinants of political preferences (Hafner-Burton et al. 2017; Kertzer and Tingley 2018).[13]

Like egotropic models, behavioral models treat local context as a source of information.[14] However, behavioral accounts differ in treating local context as a proxy for other politically salient attributes like identity or symbolic concerns. The key insight is that citizens do not respond to war solely as individuals, but as members of communities. In rural communities especially, the aggregation of individual wartime sacrifices into a collective experience is facilitated through social connections and in-group solidarity. This is especially the case in the immediate wake of war, as research shows that proximate casualties are most impactful, as these experiences are more recent and visible references.

This insight is supported in the casualties literature, which finds that local war deaths matter more for public opinion than aggregate national deaths (Gartner and Segura 1997; Althaus et al. 2012).[15] These findings align with what Gartner and Segura (1997, 2000, 2021) define as "modified sociotropism," whereby individuals consider proximate casualties more important because they are visible, recent, and accessible.[16] This view is "sensitive to the varying patterns of information diffusion" (Gartner and Segura 2021, 51) and maintains that individuals "weigh

[13] However, this does not mean that these beliefs and behaviors are not rational. For a recent summary of how political psychologists and behavioral theories understand rationality, see Kerzter (2025).
[14] Social peers are just as influential in determining public opinion as elite cues (Kerzter and Zeitzoff 2017).
[15] Evidence of a local connection has also been documented in support for foreign aid (Christianson et al. 2019).
[16] In the other noteworthy study that documents a local dimension, Althaus et al. (2012) find that local war deaths in the Iraq War decrease war support more than national deaths. However, there are limitations worth mentioning. For example, as the authors discuss, their unique GIS enabled research design makes the study difficult to replicate, and more importantly, raises questions about how its findings relate to other understandings of local effects. Moreover, they use death counts instead of proportional per capita measures, and due to their design, are unable to control for other local characteristics. The key takeaway is that it challenges the cost-benefit model used in other casualties studies (Eichenberg 2005; Gelpi 2010; Gelpi et al. 2005), and amends the "proximate casualties" findings in Gartner et al. (1997) and Kriner and Shen (2010) by showing the depressive effects on war support decay relatively quickly. However, it is unclear whether these findings extend to other contexts or *postwar* opinion on broader security policies.

proximate experiences more heavily, if for no other reason than this information is both salient and readily accessible" (Gartner and al. 1997, 674). They contrast their sociotropic explanation with egotropic models of war effects, which would expect individuals to care foremost about deaths of people close to them.[17]

My theory differs in how it conceptualizes the mechanism by which local context amplifies war's effects. Gartner and Segura posit an expected utility model: "If the costs are perceived to be too high, the citizen ends his or her support for the conflict. If the costs are modest and the goal is important, the citizen remains supportive of the policy" (Gartner and Segura 2021, 52). Alternatively, I argue that rural *identity* acts as an interpretive lens through which wartime experience is filtered. Wartime experiences are interpreted through this place-based consciousness, not just an input into a cost-benefit analysis. My argument is therefore consistent with the claim that local context matters as a source of information (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017) and assessments of war costs, but I differ in my explanation of *how* local context matters for opinion formation.

The idea that rural identity acts as a type of heuristic draws on social identity theory (Tajfel 1974). Rural residents often view themselves as members of a place-based in-group (Lyons and Utych 2021), one under threat culturally, politically, or economically (Wuthnow 2018; Hochschild 2016). The implication is that local context is not just a source of information relevant to one's self-interest; rather, place operates as a heuristic for how people interpret information as helping or harming fellow in-group members. As Jacobs and Munis observe (2022, 1102), "Place is powerful; it fills individuals' heads with certain memories – often feelings of nostalgia and homesickness, but other times feelings of bitterness and mistrust."

[17] Gartner and Segura (2021, 50-51) cite Lau et al. (1978), which examines a lack of personal connection on attitudes toward the Vietnam War, to support their claim that a local connection is at play.

A particularly salient expression of place identity is feelings of place-based grievance. Scholars show that rural resentment is driven by perceived unfairness in policy outcomes, status, or political representation (Munis 2022). Cramer (2016) argues that "rural consciousness"—a geographically situated sense of self—is characterized by grievance in three domains: a belief that government neglects rural places in distributing resources, rural problems are not adequately represented, and cities look down on rural places. These feelings are associated with a belief of rural places as "left behind," which is associated with distrust in government and a feeling of neglect (Hochschild 2016; Wuthrow 2018). My claim is that such grievances shape how major events like war interact with local community life. I argue that these insights expect that a similar degree of war exposure can generate different postwar cost tolerance depending on whether it occurred in a city or small town.

Importantly, these insights are not limited to the United States. Similar rural-urban divides have also been documented in European contexts, and are often linked to rising populist, anti-globalization forces (Tosun et al. 2024; Huijsmans 2023). While the content of rural identity may vary across countries, its political valence is a recurring feature historically and in contemporary politics.

In sum, I argue that rurality moderates the effects of wartime experience by amplifying how it is interpreted and politicized. Rural communities are not only sites of tight social bonds, but they are also places where the political meaning and valence of war is likely to endure, shape attitudes, and be activated in the future. As I elaborate next, I theorize that these local dynamics make their way up to national level political behavior. If rural communities experience war more acutely and its effects are stronger there, I expect legislators representing these places to have stronger and closer connections to these people and the local legacies they embody. In the next

section, I elaborate on how these localized wartime experiences are translated through the electoral connection to influence elite political support for postwar grand strategy.

2.4 War, the Electoral Connection, and Congressional Representation

How do localized war legacies shape legislative behavior on grand strategic questions? In the previous section, I argued that wartime experience impacts the public's cost tolerance. This section develops the second component of my theory: how the public's cost tolerance travels upward to inform elite behavior. I argue that this occurs through the electoral connection, but that the translation of constituents' wartime experience is uneven, shaped by legislator type and rurality.

The Electoral Connection. My core claim is that legislators are responsive to local war legacies, and this is strongest in rural districts where the electoral connection is tighter. However, legislators vary in how they respond. Some respond sincerely, representing constituent preferences in the wake of war. Other legislators are more strategic, selectively representing or diverging from district preferences to balance competing political incentives. I therefore model legislative responsiveness as a function of district war exposure, legislator orientation, and district context, specifically rurality.

This step builds on Mayhew's (1974) model of legislators as optimizing for reelection. I adopt this framework and argue that war sharpens the stakes of representation, increasing the electoral salience of foreign policy more than is traditionally believed (Stevens 2015). While foreign policy is often considered the domain of elites and therefore insulated electorally, I argue that the public is more sensitive to these issues in the wake of war, making legislators more constrained than traditionally believed (Cotton 1986). This is especially the case when the wartime experience was coercive and geographically concentrated.

I distinguish between two types of legislators. First, faithful lawmakers sincerely represent constituent preferences, either because they share the view or believe it is electorally safe. Second, lawmakers may be strategic, diverging from constituent preferences either by anticipating their reactions, acting ambiguously, or framing their decisions in ways to resonate with contrary public opinion (Harden 2013). Strategic legislators diverge from public opinion but in ways they believe is defensible for other political reasons. Reasons why a lawmaker may act strategically include intra-party factionalism, ideology, or perhaps their position in a regional-party coalition is at odds with how the war impacted opinion.

My theory does not predict legislators' orientation ex ante. Rather, high-sacrifice districts, especially those that are rural, increase the cost of low responsiveness in the wake of war. I expect legislators in more rural, high sacrifice districts to face incentives to act in line with local war legacies, being punished when they deviate too far and for too long. The general point is that I recognize lawmakers vary in their orientation, but my theory does not make claims about the conditions under which a lawmaker will be sincere or strategic.

Political Reactions to War. War accentuates the salience of foreign policy, especially where exposure is high (Gartner and Segura 2021). Existing research supports this idea. Research shows that incumbents face electoral backlash from war casualties (Karol and Miguel 2007; Cotton 1986), even when the war was victorious (Getmansky and Weiss 2023; Roberts and Burda 2018). Elected officials are responsive to local wartime experiences (Gartner et al. 2004), even voting against a co-partisan president (Kriner and Shen 2014). Anticipated public reactions to war deaths can even shape wartime decisions, such as when and how to use force (Casey 2014; Payne 2023). Furthermore, memories of local sacrifice inform how people vote (Glaurdić et al. 2022) and even loyalty to the state (Henn and Huff 2024).

This evidence joins other research arguing against the view of foreign policy as electorally irrelevant (Aldrich et al. 2006). Because it is a vivid event and the costs acute, it heightens the sense of electoral vulnerability for diverging too far from district preferences. However, building on my earlier discussion of place, I argue that these electoral risks are not geographically uniform. In more rural districts, the electoral connection and therefore war-induced pressures are tighter and politically actionable.

Rurality and Legislative Responsiveness to War. How does rurality matter? Building on Fenno's (1978) classic work on home-style—how legislators cultivate relations with their constituents—I argue that rural legislators face unique visibility and accountability pressures. Elected officials in these settings are likely more embedded in local social networks and therefore more vulnerable to reputational and political accountability. On this point, I draw on Fenno's (1978, 29fn3) observation that the "objective measure that coincides most closely with their [legislators'] subjective judgment appears to be an urban-suburban-rural measure." It follows that in rural places where "everyone knows everyone," being perceived as out of touch or unaligned with district preferences is politically costly. This tightened connection, I argue, is especially pronounced around high valence issues like war.

This intuition is supported by research on home-district legislators. Hunt (2022, 4), for example, argues that legislators with local roots—those with "a genuine place-based connection established between a member and their particular district"—tend to prioritize constituent concerns over polarizing policy debates. Importantly, local roots are not just about the legislator's orientation, but how their place-based identity prior to entering office influences their behavior once in office, reinforcing my claims about a tightened electoral connection based on geography. This view is supported in related scholarship showing that legislators representing districts where

they are from tend to be more responsive and focused on constituent relations as opposed to polarizing issues (Crosson and Kaslovsky 2025). While I do not measure or directly test local roots empirically, I interpret these findings as consistent with my broader claim that rurality intensifies legislative responsiveness due to the strong sense of place-based identity. This makes representation of war legacies more likely.

How does this work in practice? The public updates its cost tolerance based on its wartime experience. Lawmakers interpret these war-induced changes and decide how to respond. Lawmakers in high-sacrifice, rural districts face the most acute pressures. If a legislator advocated a war that was subsequently experienced as highly coercive by their district, they would likely face backlash. I refer to this in Chapter 4 as the purge hypothesis. Alternatively, lawmakers may update their preferences to reflect constituents' experiences. This is the conversion hypothesis, the idea that legislators realign their political behavior in a way consistent with local war legacies.

However, my theory emphasizes that legislators do not always mirror constituent preferences. Lawmakers often misread public opinion or intentionally work around it. For example, Kertzer (2022) finds that public-elite gaps in support for international engagement are often overstated. On domestic issues, several studies document how elected officials often misread public opinion (Broockman and Skovron 2018; Pilet et al. 2023). Another reality is that lawmakers exercise entrepreneurship and agency in framing issues and how they act.

Nonetheless, there are limitations to legislators' strategic agency. For example, lawmakers are particularly sensitive to being perceived as weak or unsupportive on defense, veteran, and war related issues. As the current Secretary of Veteran Affairs recounted in a March 2025 interview, legislators often vote based on a desire to be perceived as being on the right side of veteran issues, even if that position is not ideal policy. "I'm not a veteran," the Secretary recalled one legislator

explaining his vote against a bill they both agreed was good policy. "I can't have someone attacking me as being against veterans," the Secretary recounted the other legislator saying. "He was willing to make a bad vote because he was scared of the political fallout of being seen as against veterans."[18] The idea here is that certain war and military related issues, such as symbolic alignment with veterans, can be seen as politically non-negotiable.

This helps explain why and how legislators contribute to the reproduction of war legacies. Attending veteran events and dedicating memorials are common examples of legislators signaling alignment with memories of local sacrifice, engaging in a type of "memory work." As I observed at a county Vietnam War memorial dedication, a U.S. Senator spoke of how the community's sacrifice was "not forgotten," presenting the memorial as a place for local pride and healing. This is not just symbolic; it is doing political work. These acts are political recognition of local identity and honoring the community's war memory. In this way, legislators act as both interpreters of past war experiences and political entrepreneurs who weave together local memory with national narratives. They frame memories of local sacrifice within a broader national collective memory of the war, in effect giving political voice and ownership to residents. These practices reproduce and make salient local war legacies in a way distinct from roll call votes in the immediate wake of war.

Several theoretical expectations flow from this discussion. The first expectation is straightforward: legislators representing high sacrifice districts are more likely to represent their constituents' cost tolerance in their postwar political behavior. For example, if a district incurred high coercive sacrifice, then the lawmaker will oppose an expansive grand strategy. The second expectation is that this relationship is stronger in rural districts, where the electoral connection is sharper and the electoral costs of deviation are heightened. A third expectation is that this

[18] Sean Ryan Show. March 31, 2025. "Doug Collin – United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaf4rIqIUpU. Quote beings at 36 minutes in the interview.

relationship depends on legislator orientation. Faithful representatives are more sensitive to and reflective of voter opinion; strategic representations diverge from district opinion, exercising more conditional responsiveness. A core point, developed further in the next section, is that war legacies are not reducible to roll call votes, but is reproduced through symbolic acts that bring together representatives with those they represent.

I test these expectations in Chapter 4, where I analyze how local war exposure, rurality, and postwar cost tolerance influenced congressional voting on global engagement in the early Cold War. This discussion sets up the final component of my theory, which concerns the intertemporal transmission of local war legacies. In the following section, I theorize how these legacies evolve over time, interact with national political narratives, and continue to inform public and elite debates about the nation's world role in the present.

2.5 Commemorative Practices and the Persistence of War Legacies

The third and final stage of my theory addresses how the effects of war persist and evolve over time. While previous sections discussed how wartime experience shapes cost tolerance and legislative responsiveness, I now explain how war becomes a legacy, i.e., how its meaning is carried forward, reinterpreted, and made politically salient years later. By legacy, I mean a mutually and socially shared understanding of a past event that outlasts its original context and can acquire new political meaning, perhaps in ways diverging from historical facts.[19]

[19] I acknowledge that the growing literature on political legacies and persistence offers varying definitions of what constitutes a legacy (Cirone and Pepinsky 2022; Walden and Zhukov 2020). These often center on "the idea that historical causes can have effects that persist long into the future" (Acharya et al. 2024, 117), with some defining persistence as effects lasting at least a decade (Cirone and Pepinsky 2022, 242). My definition draws from this tradition but incorporates insights from research on collective memory to recognize that legacies may evolve over time, even as they remain anchored in the same historical reference point. While these literatures often employ different methods, they both recognize that the transmission of past events is not always linear over time. For example, the concept of "distal effects"—the idea that future effects vary over time (Acharya et al. 2024)—resonates with the view in memory politics that the meaning of past events is always subject to contestation (Jo 2022).

My core claim is that commemorative practices, particularly in rural communities, reproduce war legacies by embedding them in civic rituals, local identity, and symbolic war remembrance. These legacies persist not because of heavy handed state propaganda, but because of a deeply ingrained logic of atonement that is animated through patriotic scripts and sustained by commemorative infrastructure.

This part of the theory emerged inductively from my fieldwork and is therefore more context specific than the previous two components. While the broader claims are generalizable—e.g., the idea of veteran valorization (Mosse 1990) and commemorative infrastructure (Winter 1998)—the logic of atonement is grounded in American political culture. My aim here is not to develop a universal explanation for collective memory or memory politics, but to explain how war legacies persist and remain political resonant in contemporary American politics.

Collective Memory, Persistence, and the Logic of Atonement. To develop this aspect of my theory, I synthesize insights from two literatures. First, research in historical political economy examines how past events shape future political attitudes and behavior (Jenkins and Rubin 2024; Charnysh et al. 2023). Second, comparative and IR research on collective memory examines how societies make sense of their conflict histories, often in ways that deviate from historical fact (Jo 2022; Verovšek 2016; Zubrzycki and Woźny 2020). My contribution is to connect these two approaches to understanding how the past is made present.

By collective memory, I refer to socially shared understandings of the past that are sustained through narratives and symbols.[20] In the U.S., I argue that collective memory of war is governed by a logic of atonement, a commemorative orientation that emphasizes honoring

[20] My definition is informed by Jo's (2022, 768) parsimonious definition of collective memory as "an intersubjective understanding of the past."

sacrifice, redressing perceived mistreatment of veterans (Vietnam in particular), and avoiding critical reflection on war's causes or consequences.

The logic of atonement operates through what I call a moral economy of remembrance, which expects that those not alive during a war owe something to those who served. Living veterans—specifically those viewed as having suffered mistreatment or neglect—become symbolic objects of that obligation. As I show in Chapter 5, this sentiment was ubiquitous throughout my fieldwork. The political consequence of this logic obtains in a bias toward recognition without reckoning. That is, the American moral economy of remembrance is not based on remembering past wars for the sake of critical reflection, but through public rituals that reinforce collective unity and gratitude.

Patriotic Scripts and Commemorative Infrastructure. I argue that this logic is reproduced through what I call patriotic scripts. Patriotic scripts are a repertoire of familiar expressions and behaviors apparent in how Americans interact with veterans and remember war. They are "patriotic" in that they encode military service and war as virtuous, and "scripted" in the sense that they reflect shared norms of behavior. A familiar example is the phrase, "Thank you for your service." It is not only an expression of gratitude, but performs a civic duty, reinforcing the veteran's valorized status in the national narrative (Krebs et al. 2024).

Patriotic scripts serve a dual function. On the one hand, they regulate interpersonal conduct by providing expectations of respect and reverence in interactions with veterans. On the other hand, they reinforce collective memory by reframing war in unifying, valorizing terms, making public expressions of gratitude the socially and politically sanctioned response to perceptions of historical sacrifice and mistreatment. In the U.S., such scripts often revolve around Vietnam veterans as victims of past mistreatment and neglect (Lembcke 1998). A key element of this logic

is that this moral debt owed to veterans is never fully repaid, thereby justifying the ongoing performance of commemoration. As one interviewee put it over morning coffee at a rural American Legion post, "These guys in my eyes will never get the recognition they deserve. No veteran does. I don't think any veteran does. There's just not enough you can do for these guys for what they've done for us."[21]

Patriotic scripts are given meaning and reproduced within a broader commemorative infrastructure. Commemorative infrastructure refers to a network of civic organizations, volunteer groups, and public spaces where collective memory plays out. Organizations like Honor Flight and Quilts of Valor provide programming and respectful, patriotic settings for veteran recognition and war remembrance. This work is sincere, heart-felt, and volunteer-driven, but the practices also carry political meaning. They elevate certain ideas and narratives—e.g., honor, sacrifice, healing, and gratitude—while others are rarely surfaced, like critique, ambiguity, or political accountability.

While these organizations have national reach, their impact is most noticeable at the local level. In these settings, commemoration is a civic act of honoring sacrifice and symbolically making amends for past veteran neglect. It is through these localized acts that local legacies of war intersect with broader national narratives. In Chapter 5, I expand this insight that local legacies are not merely reflections of national war memory or veteran valorization; instead, local legacies can adapt and subtly reinterpret national narratives to imbue local sacrifice with renewed meaning and purpose.

Rurality and Local Commemorative Infrastructure. How do patriotic scripts and the logic of atonement play out at the local level? Although I did not conduct fieldwork in cities, I argue that rural communities are especially fertile ground for the cultivation and persistence of war

[21] Interview 61, December 9, 2024.

legacies. First, as Robert Putnam and sociologists of small-town American have observed (Wuthnow 2013), rural areas tend to have high social capital and well-integrated social and civic networks. These features facilitate the collective, public nature of commemoration in rural communities. Second, the smaller scale of rural life means that commemorative infrastructure occupies a larger role in civic life. In rural towns, there are simply fewer alternative venues for public meaning-making. For example, institutions like local American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts, Honor Flight "welcome home" celebration at high schools, and Quilts of Valor ceremonies function as "third spaces" (Oldenburg 1989) where local memory is reproduced and positively encoded.

Third, as argued previously, rural life is characterized by geographic insularity, a sense that "we" are removed and therefore self-reliant. These dynamics amplify the emotional and political resonance of honoring past sacrifices. Towns that hang veteran portraits along Main Street or memorialize past wars and military service in public parks or town squares fuse together their local history with national identity. These acts anchor these communities' claim to the national story.

Political Consequences. What are the consequences of this moral economy of commemoration? First, I argue that these commemorative practices make war legacies durable, preserving their political and social relevance even as the original historical content changes to reflect later political exigencies (Jo 2022). Second, these practices and commemorative infrastructure create a latent political reservoir that can be activated during future moments of political contestation, such as future wars and national crises that invoke ideas of national identity. Indeed, this speaks to the frequency with which national leaders invoke WWII as a model of national unity, as discussed in the introductory chapter.

The logic of atonement also shapes the boundaries of political discourse as it relates to grand strategy in particular. By focusing attention on symbolic recognition and moral compensation, atonement constrains how war is discussed. Expressing ambivalence or doubting the moral clarity of commemorative practices risks appearing unpatriotic or socially disruptive. This discourages public reckoning with difficult history and narrows the range of political responses to navigate future situations.

These dynamics have implications for domestic political support for grand strategy. First, cost tolerance reflects public beliefs not only in the immediate aftermath of war, but is also informed by how war is remembered and narrated in the present. If the prevailing collective memory of war is one of justified sacrifice, cost tolerance will plausibly remain high, affirming cost benefit arguments about sustaining robust engagement and discouraging recalibration. In this way, the logic of atonement aligns with research pointing to the existence of a bias toward action in U.S. foreign policy (Friedman 2023), a politically incentivized impulse to "do something"—i.e., to appear tough—rather than refrain from action in the low probability of a damaging setback. The idea is that commemorative practices deter dissent by imposing symbolic costs, rooted in being perceived as pushing against national narratives, on political choices that deviate from the status quo.

This can also provide insight into why certain wars remain politically resonant decades later, often in one-sided ways. While WWII is remembered as the "good war," the dominant narrative around the Vietnam War emphasizes both strategic failure and mistreatment of returning veterans. Moreover, recent polling indicates that public perceptions of the war in Afghanistan are following a similar trajectory: most respondents view that war through a Vietnam-like perspective (Veterans and Citizens Initiative 2022). Even as veterans criticized the Afghanistan withdrawal,

today's political discourse often conflates respect for the military with support for the military's strategic mission itself, a consequences of the precipitous increase in public confidence in the military following 9/11 (Feaver 2023). The bottom line is that opportunities for rethinking grand strategy often confronts inertia from a political culture that sacralizes memory and treats some issues as beyond the pale (Krebs 2015).

Finally, this framework makes sense of another aspect of the logic of atonement I describe in Chapter 5: the homogenization of veteran identity. The moral economy of commemoration encourages the treatment of veterans a unified moral and political category, flattening distinctions across time, service, and experience. What happens is that this insulates war and military service from serious public scrutiny, thereby narrowing certain aspects of grand strategic discourse.

Memory as Infrastructure. In sum, I argue that local legacies of war persist not only through lived experiences or intergenerational transmission, but through commemorative practices that privilege certain voices and memories. These practices are not neutral. They are defined by a logic of atonement that privileges honoring and moral compensation over historical interrogation, recognition over reckoning. Through these commemorative practices, memory becomes a form of civic infrastructure that shapes how war and grand strategy are debated.

Figure 2.3 visualizes all three main components of my full theory of local war legacies. At the top, it begins with the impact of wartime experience—defined by the coercive intensity of war mobilization and the distribution of sacrifice—on the public's postwar cost tolerance. On the lefthand side, the dotted lines indicate how this relationship is moderated by rurality. Cost tolerance subsequently informs elite political behavior through the electoral connection, influencing legislator responsiveness to war-induced shifts in public support for grand strategy. Over time, these relationships are sustained and reinterpreted through commemorative practices that I argue

are defined by a logic of atonement. A consequence of these practices is a narrowing of political discourse around foreign policy and national security related questions. These commemorative practices shape both how the public forms salient political lessons from memories of past sacrifice, and how political leaders respond to and reproduce these local legacies.

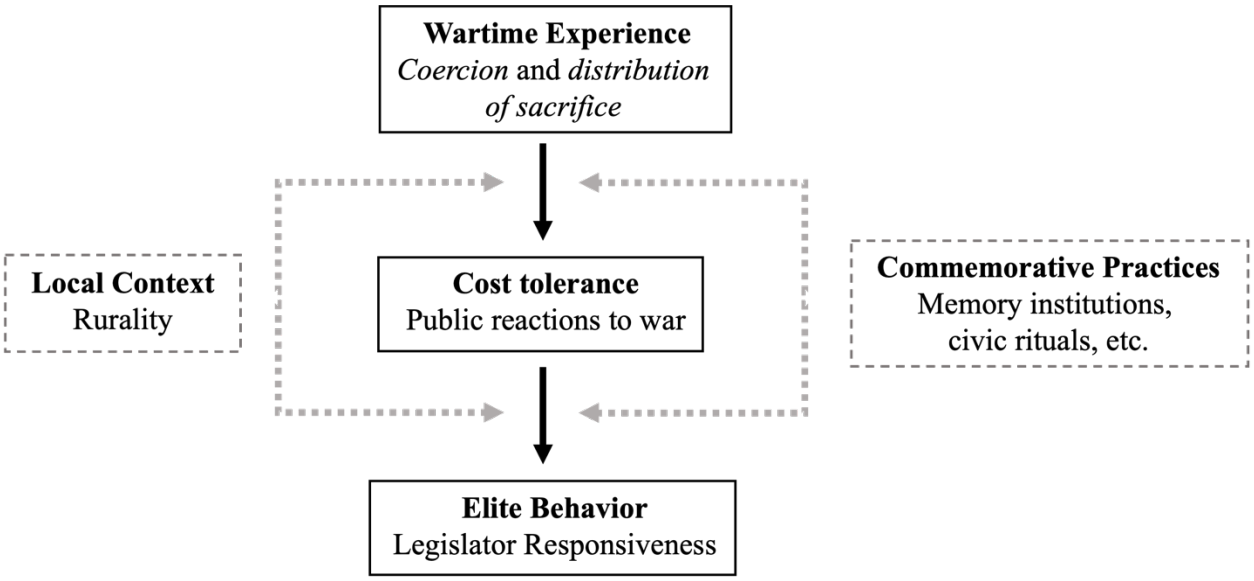


Figure 2.3 Theory of Local War Legacies: How War Shapes Postwar Cost Tolerance

Having established the three components of my theory, in the next section I summarize the empirical implications of my theory. Drawing on historical survey data, congressional behavior, and firsthand observations, I set up my expectations for how local war legacies shape political support for grand strategy across time and space.

2.6 Observable Implications

My theory generates several observable implications that I evaluate in the following empirical chapters. These expectations mirror my argument developed above: war shapes domestic support

for grand strategy not as a uniform national shock, but through locally situated wartime experiences that can be politically reinterpreted over time.

I organize the hypotheses by the three components of the theory: (1) the public's cost tolerance as a function of wartime experience and local context; (2) elite responsiveness via the electoral connection; and (3) the persistence of war memories through commemorative practices. To frame these hypotheses, I adapt the typology of war's domestic political effects from Kier and Krebs (2010) which treats war as either an interruption, catalyst, or transformation.

War as Interruption. As a baseline expectation, I begin with the null hypothesis of "war as interruption" that expects war may generate only short-term political effects. War may influence leader approval or public support for an ongoing war, but it will not generate fundamental changes in a nation's grand strategic orientation.

> Hypothesis 1. *Interruption*. There will be no significant relationship between local wartime experience and postwar cost tolerance, legislative behavior, or commemorative practices. Support for grand strategy will reflect preexisting preferences, not war-induced change.

This null hypothesis establishes the baseline comparison to the remaining hypotheses.

War as Catalyst. My theory is more consistent with the view of war as generating some form of change. As a catalyst, war amplifies or accelerates preexisting trends in public attitudes or political coalitions without fundamentally altering their direction. According to this view, wartime experience influences public cost tolerance depending on its nature and local context.

> Hypothesis 2. *Coercion as Catalyst*. Communities that experienced greater coercive wartime mobilization will have lower postwar cost tolerance.

> Hypothesis 3. *Unequal Sacrifice as Catalyst*. Communities that experienced a higher share of wartime sacrifice will have stronger postwar reactions, either higher or lower cost tolerance, depending on whether the sacrifice was coercive or more proportional.

> Hypothesis 4. *Rurality as Moderator*. Rural communities will amplify the impact of wartime sacrifice. The same wartime experience will produce stronger changes in postwar

cost tolerance in rural than urban ones, due to tighter social dynamics and stronger place-based identity.

I test these hypotheses in Chapters 3 and 4, where I analyze the relationship between subnational war exposure and variation in postwar public opinion and legislative responsiveness.

War as Transformation. War can also cause a discontinuous shift in the public's orientation toward grand strategy. My theory predicts this is most likely when wartime experience is highly coercive and unequally distributed, and when it occurs in rural communities where social aggregation and local identity are particularly strong.

Hypothesis 5. *Coercion and Transformation*. The combination of coercive mobilization and unequal sacrifice will decrease cost tolerance and foster postwar resistance to an ambitious grand strategy.

Hypothesis 6. *Representing Transformation*. Legislators will align their foreign policy positions with constituents' wartime experience, either supporting or opposing grand strategy depending on the nature and concentration of their district's sacrifice.

Hypothesis 7. *Legislator Type and Transformation*. Faithful representatives will more closely resemble constituent cost tolerance, especially in more rural districts.

War Legacies and Commemorative Practices. The final set of observable implications concerns how war legacies persist over time through commemorative practices. Although this aspect of my theory is more conceptual and developed inductively through fieldwork, I present hypotheses that capture my expectations for how practices and memory influence future attitudes and behavior.

Hypothesis 8. *Commemorative Infrastructure*. Communities with dense commemorative infrastructure—such as active civic and veteran oriented groups and events—will exhibit high salience of war memory, regardless of the original extent of war sacrifice.

Hypothesis 9. *Recognition over Reckoning*. The logic of atonement reinforces symbolic recognition—redressing perceived past wrongs—over critical reflection, thereby biasing high cost tolerance and sustaining the political incentive for an expansive grand strategy.

> Hypothesis 10. *Rural Remembrance*. Commemorative practices will be more visible and enduring in rural communities, reinforcing local claims on national identity narratives rooted in war memory.

I examine this final set of expectations in Chapter 5 through fieldwork conducted in predominantly rural communities with high historical war exposure, participant observation with veteran groups, and interviews. Next, I present the research design used to test my theory.

2.7 Research Design

I argue that the impact of war on the mass public's cost tolerance depends on the nation's mobilization strategy, distribution of sacrifice, and local context. Citizens experiencing the brunt of coercive, concentrated wartime sacrifice are less inclined to support an ambitious postwar grand strategy, especially in rural communities where sacrifice becomes embedded in local commemorative infrastructure. Moreover, fieldwork evidence indicates that these memories are reproduced through commemorative practices in politically salient ways, sometimes in ways that diverge from the historical record. In this section, I outline my theory's scope conditions, empirical strategy, and generalizability.

Scope Conditions

Regime Type. I argue that my theory applies in both democratic and nondemocratic contexts. While the nature of representation varies by regime type, research shows that autocratic regimes, despite lacking open and competitive elections, are still responsive to public opinion in ways that matter for foreign policy behavior (Weiss 2014; Quek and Johnston 2018). For example, autocratic parties exercise conditional representation because they recognize the importance of public support (Truex 2016; Ding 2020). Even in the Jim Crow South, legislators were still selected through intra-

party competition (Caughey 2018), and there is evidence of policy responsiveness in the South (Olson and Snyder 2021). In my historical empirical chapters, I exploit this within-case variation in regime type to test the idea of elite responsiveness under different democratic constraints.

Scale and Type of War. Large wars are thought to generate bigger effects than smaller wars (Gilpin 1981). Because large wars require more intensive mobilization of manpower and industry than small wars, "it is assumed that larger wars are likely to manifest more consequences and effect more long-term changes" (Stein and Russett 1980, 401). However, the empirical record is mixed (Levy 1990). Small wars can have sizeable and lasting political effects. For example, the U.S.'s reliance on military contractors for limited wars undermined military oversight in important ways (Avant 2005). Limited wars can strengthen executive powers in ways that undermine democracy (Krebs 2009), whereas larger wars may affirm existing coalitions and interests. Although larger wars result in more war dead, other factors can matter in forming lessons from war (Kier and Krebs 2010, 8-12).

Rather than the type or scale of war, I argue that a nation's wartime experience—*how* citizens interact with war (mobilization) and *where* war comes home (local context)—explains the lessons drawn from it.

War Outcome. Some argue that victory or defeat is an important determinant of postwar legacies (Stein and Russett 1980; Skocpol et al. 2002; Kriner and Shen 2010, 193-197).[22] The intuition is captured in the observation that "It makes a difference to postwar politics if the military is crowned in glory or shrouded in disgrace and if the existing regime is seen as prudent and opportunistic or vainglorious and reckless" (Kier and Krebs 2010, 12).

[22] A third outcome is stalemate. Focusing on *perceptions* of victory, Johnson and Tierney (2006, 18) characterize the effects of outcome perceptions expansively, shaping "the fate of leaders, democratic processes, support for foreign policies, and the lessons used to guide decisions in the future."

My theory builds on research showing that war outcome does not reliably predict postwar legacies. First, victory does not guarantee that the war or national leaders are viewed favorably. For example, incumbent wartime leaders and their party face electoral setbacks during and after *victorious wars* (Getmansky and Weiss 2023; Cotton 1986; Mayhew 2005, 483). While successful wars foster civic engagement and volunteerism (Skocpol et al. 2002: Kriner and Shen 2010, Ch. 8), the literature is generally mixed on whether war outcome translates into political outcomes.[23] Both victory and defeat can have positive effects on democracy.

Second, there is no clear ex ante expectation that victory should validate status quo politics (Kier and Krebs 2010, 12-14).[24] Psychological research shows perceptions of war outcome often diverge from reality (Johnson and Tierney 2006). Also relevant is the insight that outcomes can have counterintuitive effects, such as successful handling of crises facilitating policy rollbacks (Krebs 2015). Alternatively, defeat makes it harder to contest prevailing wisdoms and therefore perpetuates a status quo bias. While it is a fair assessment to treat war outcome as exercising "important, if indeterminant, effects on postwar politics" (Kier and Krebs 2010, 13), my theory is agnostic about a particular relationship between outcome and postwar lessons drawn. Rather, what matters more is how and where the war was felt by citizens.

Temporal Scope. As Thompson (1993, 126) observed more than three decades ago, quantitative scholars of conflict had "no guidelines on how far into the postwar era one should expect to find traces of consequences of a war." While the prevailing view among quantitative conflict scholars is that the effects of war fade over time (Stein and Russett 1980, 407), scholars

[23] For example, see Kage's (2010) chapter in Kier and Krebs (2010). Drawing on cross-national evidence, Kage shows that civic engagement flourished post-WWII in both victorious and defeated powers.
[24] I adapt this insight to my focus on war's impact on grand strategic preferences. This set of findings stands in contrast to Lissner's (2021) revelatory theory of war which posits a Bayesian updating process whereby the public and elites rationally update their preferences based on war-induced information.

of memory politics argue that war memories are strategically reframed for political purposes (Jo 2022; Lind 2010). Furthermore, there is extensive evidence that war can shape political behavior many years later (Walden and Zhukov 2020; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017). "Wars can thus affect entire generations of individuals, and there is quite extensive evidence that generational attitudinal changes persist long after the original stimulus is gone" (Stein and Russett 1980, 405).

Theoretical Outcome: Support for Grand Strategy. The final scope condition relates to the outcome explained by my theory. Does focusing on domestic support for *grand strategy* restrict the generalizability of my theory? Some claim that grand strategy is only feasible in powerful states. As one study suggests, "only a superpower (in practice, solely the United States), or minimally a great power (extending the list to China and Russia), has the sufficient institutional and material resources to formulate and implement a grand strategy" (Balzacq et al. 2019). Others challenge this premise with detailed examples of how middle and even smaller powers engage in grand strategic behavior (Balzacq et al. 2019; Pacheco 2023). This scholarship argues that states of different capabilities can possess coherent strategic visions that inform their specific foreign policies. I argue that what matters is whether war is understood as implicating their nation's wider strategic orientation. Therefore, while my empirical focus is a historical American case, my theory is applicable to a wider set of states.

Empirical Strategy

I test my theory using the case of the American experience in the Second World War. The key empirical tasks are to assess how the war shaped (1) postwar views about grand strategy, (2) legislative responsiveness to those views, and (3) how war legacies persist, evolve, and to what effect.

Despite its limitations, focusing on the U.S. case has several advantages. First, the American experience in WWII and the early Cold War is well studied in the historical and international relations literatures, offering a rich historical baseline to contrast my theory and findings about the war's impact. If my theory applies in the well-known case of American grand strategy, the upside is that it could apply to other contexts where scholars have made similar claims about war's impact on a nation's postwar grand strategy.

Second, there is considerable variation in the key explanatory variables. For example, the U.S. has practiced varying levels of coercive mobilization since WWII, ranging from the full-scale draft to the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) after the Vietnam War. While I do not examine post-WWII wars in this dissertation, shifts in the U.S.'s reliance on drafted personnel to wage wars indicates within-case variation that can be used to further test the theory.[25] Other variation enables the adjudication of alternative explanations. Consider regime type. In both my public opinion (Chapter 3) and congressional behavior analyses (Chapter 4), I follow work in American political development by exploiting the nondemocratic nature of Southern governance in the pre-Civil Rights era to assess whether regime type mediates the legislative representation of wartime effects. Despite focusing on a single country, the U.S.'s unique political development offers theoretically relevant sources of variation.

A third advantage is that the American experience enables two types of inferential tests common in case study research (Levy 2008). As a "most likely" case of war generating change in public views, the U.S. experience in WWII presents a clear example of where war's transformative

[25] An earlier version of this dissertation planned to examine the postwar effects of multiple U.S. wars. However, I ultimately chose to focus on WWII to provide as comprehensive account of a single war as possible, while preserving empirical leverage on the central theoretical question of how war shapes support for postwar grand strategy. The value of the WWII case is its historical significance and therefore the opportunity to revise existing assumptions about the origins and durability of the "U.S. led postwar order."

potential should obtain. If my theory explains this case, it strengthens its plausibility. WWII could also be considered a "least likely" case for my theory given the claims advanced in the watershed thesis, notably that the war consolidated support for an assertive grand strategy.

Some might object that my theory and findings may not generalize to other contexts. In particular, the U.S. fights all its wars abroad, limiting the direct war exposure of its populace. The implication is that my theory explains only the impact of indirect war exposure, compared to states involved in interstate or civil wars where their citizens are directly exposed to violence. In response, I point to the long-understood idea that war's effects can be felt by those not directly involved or exposed to fighting.[26] If my theory obtains in the U.S. experience—a relatively secure country—it likely explains postwar dynamics in other societies that may have experienced war more directly and coercively.

Data and Methods. I test my theory using a mixed methods design drawing on historical quantitative data and qualitative evidence collected from participant observation fieldwork.

To measure wartime experience, I use county level casualty data to operationalize the concepts of coercive mobilization and distribution of sacrifice. For public cost tolerance, using a technique called multilevel regression and post-stratification, I create estimates of county level support for postwar grand strategy. In Chapter 4, I use a list of key foreign policy roll call votes to construct an index of legislator support for the postwar consensus, a proxy for postwar grand strategy support. Finally, to account for local context, I use Census data on county rural population.

I complement my quantitative approach with qualitative data obtained from two tracks of fieldwork. First, I visited rural counties with high historical war exposure, conducting archival

[26] As discussed elsewhere, this insight has been made in IR studies on the individual effects of war (Jervis 1976, Ch. 6), literature on the legacies of violence (Rozenas et al. 2017; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017), and quantitative research on the effects of war (Stein and Russett 1980).

research in local historical societies, attending veteran events, memorial dedications, and conducting interviews (n = 76). Second, I served as a "Volunteer Guardian" on four Honor Flight trips, accompanying senior citizen veterans to visit war memories in Washington, D.C. These experiences provided a firsthand window into commemorative practices. Both tracks of fieldwork informed my development of the logic of atonement concept, the organizing principle around which I claim local legacies in the U.S. are made politically salient in the present. In Chapter 5, I develop this argument in greater depth.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter developed a theory explaining how war shapes postwar support for grand strategy. A core claim is that cost tolerance—the degree of public support for a given grand strategy—depends on how war is experienced and remembered. Coercive and unequal war sacrifice depresses public support, making it harder for political elites to mobilize and sustain support for expansive grand strategies. These effects are particularly salient in rural communities where wartime sacrifice forms a key part of civic identity. Over time, commemorative practices embed these experiences in social scripts that privilege symbolic recognition over critical reflection.

The theory generates ten observable implications that I test across Chapters 3-5. Two core findings emerge. First, postwar support for taking an active role in the world, and legislative responsiveness, is not uniform but varies by local wartime experience and rurality. These effects are expressed decades later through communal practices, often in ways informed by memories of other wars and political exigencies. Second, these memory practices are not neutral but determine which war lessons endure and remain politically resonant. Historically, these findings suggest important reasons to reconsider key tenets of conventional stories about the origins, durability, and

political foundations of support for an assertive U.S. grand strategy. A key takeaway is that my theory and findings show how the past can continue to inform contemporary debates, often in ways that privilege certain historical narratives over others.

CHAPTER 3

Putting War in the Postwar Consensus: Local Sacrifice and Public Support for Active Global Engagement

> "Is the psychological potential of the American people equal to the demands that will be placed upon it?"
>
> - Gabriel Almond (1950 [1960, xxi])

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As I discuss in the introductory chapter, the world is presently beset with war—with speculation about prospects for wider escalation—and public opinion is often invoked in how these wars are discussed. In Israel, for example, officials warn that growing war fatigue will erode support for continued military operations in Gaza, making a potential peace harder to sustain (Lubell 2025). In Ukraine, declining public morale has been attributed to sustained wartime mobilization, conscription, and general fatigue, causing some to speculate about the government's weakened position in postwar security negotiations (Hnidyi and Kovalenko 2025). Each case highlights a familiar logic where public support is considered a reflection of wartime sacrifices and the broader strategic aims those sacrifices are meant to serve.

This chapter puts this question in historical context by examining a canonical case: the American experience in the Second World War. While received wisdom maintains that the war ended isolationism and fundamentally altered mass public support for the nation's postwar grand strategy, this claim has not been subjected to systematic empirical scrutiny. In the previous chapter, I developed my theory of how wartime experiences shape the domestic politics of a nation's postwar grand strategy. This chapter offers the first empirical test of my theoretical claims—

particularly that the type of wartime experience and local context matter—by examining whether WWII did indeed foster a higher cost tolerance among the mass public.

This is not just a historical question, as WWII continues to influence both strategic and American political thinking. Politicians often draw on WWII as a heuristic for what a bipartisan consensus looks like, often in the context of arguing for greater U.S. action abroad. Pundits refer to the WWII moment as the historical ideal of national unity. It is also a convenient demarcating line for international relations scholarship. As I review later in the chapter, the war is also the intellectual genesis of public opinion research on foreign policy, baking in the assumption that the public should normatively support an expansive grand strategy. However, a core contention of this chapter and the broader dissertation is that it remains an open empirical question whether WWII did indeed cause a decisive and lasting shift in mass attitudes about the nation's role in world affairs.

This chapter proceeds in five sections. First, I review competing historiographical schools of thought about the impact of WWII on American political life. I synthesize what I characterize as the conventional "watershed" thesis—which informs popular understandings of WWII as transformative—and a revisionist perspective that is more circumspect. I also review the war's influence on the academic study of public opinion about foreign policy. Second, I briefly review my main theoretical expectations developed in Chapter 2, highlighting how my theory affirms parts of each historical perspective. Third, I outline my research design, historical data, and estimation techniques to test my theory. Fourth, I present and interpret my results, combining descriptive analysis and regression models using my novel county level opinion estimates of support for postwar global engagement. Fifth, I conclude by summarizing my results, discuss their

larger implications in relation to the broader dissertation, and preview how they set up the subsequent empirical chapters on legislative representation and collective memory.

Three topline findings are worth previewing. First, I find support for my theory's main expectation about the *type* of wartime experience: counties with higher proportional war deaths experienced greater shifts in support for postwar global engagement, and counties with greater coercive intensity—measured as the proportion of draftee war deaths—experienced a lower increase in support. Notably, these relationships persist a decade after the war, controlling for local Korean War deaths.

Second, the results partially affirm my second main theoretical expectation about the moderating role of rurality. In the early postwar years, more rural counties with higher proportional war deaths underwent greater shifts in opinion, supporting my argument that wartime experiences are amplified in rural communities. However, this dynamic fades in later years, and the predicted relationship reverses in some cases. To make sense of this result, I speculate that while local memories may initially be politically resonant, they may later be subsumed by national narratives, a process I explore in greater depth in Chapter 5.

Third, to address questions about generalizability to non-democratic contexts, I conduct a series of quasi-regression discontinuity tests comparing counties inside and outside the Jim Crow-era South to exploit with-in polity variation in regime type. Results indicate that my main effects hold even in Southern counties, suggesting that my theory can apply in nondemocratic contexts. However, an interesting finding from a series of buffer-zone models indicates that coercive intensity predicts *greater support* in the South a decade after WWII. To make sense of this finding, I propose that historically non-democratic or politically insular places—i.e., those with an identity distinct from national identity—may attribute meaning to past sacrifices by aligning with national

priorities, in this case postwar support for global engagement. I elaborate on this possibility in Chapter 5 by drawing on fieldwork evidence linking local and national memories and commemorative practices around war and military service.

Together with the next two empirical chapters, I demonstrate the value of revisiting a well-known historical case with novel data and a new theoretical perspective. While the WWII story has often been taken for granted, I show that testing it systematically reveals important theoretical insights that speak to debates about war, democracy, and the domestic foundations of grand strategy.

3.2 The Second World War, Public Opinion, and the Postwar Consensus

This chapter examines how the largest war in contemporary American political history—World War II—shaped the public's support for the nation's postwar grand strategy. In this section, I examine two schools of thought that offer differing interpretations of the war's impact on American political life and public opinion in particular. I also review how scholars of public opinion and international relations understood public support for foreign policy in the postwar decades. This review underscores the need for greater empirical scrutiny of the origins, depth, and breadth of the postwar consensus.

WWII stands out as a "most likely" case for examining the transformative effects of war on democratic foreign policy (Levy 2008). Deductively, it fits the criteria for "war as transformative" outlined by Kier and Krebs (2010) and reviewed in Chapter 2. Over four years of national mobilization, the war permeated nearly every aspect of American society. Government propaganda actively communicated both the war's objectives and the public's role in achieving them (Brewer 2009). As I elaborate below, a focus of debate in historiography of the war concerns

the extent to which it marks a clear discontinuity in the politics of U.S. foreign policy before and after the conflict. If any conflict in modern American history left a deep and enduring impact on public attitudes, the balance of evidence in U.S. political history points to WWII.

The historical record offers a more mixed picture of how to classify WWII's influence on postwar public opinion. It is well established that the war marked a decisive turning point in the U.S.'s global power position. According to what I label the "WWII as watershed" thesis, the war also fundamentally reshaped how Americans viewed their country's role in the world (Legro 2000; Zelizer 2010). After pursuing an "isolationist" approach for much of its history (Kupchan 2020), the U.S. is thought to have emerged from the war with a broad public commitment to internationalism and the creation of a large-scale "warfare state" to sustain that vision (Sparrow 2011).[1] This postwar consensus, as the conventional view holds, was bipartisan in nature and loosely defined by three key pillars: anti-communism, the preservation of military preponderance for deterrence and to protect national interests, and participation in multilateral institutions.[2]

A longstanding view holds that the postwar consensus collapsed during the Vietnam War. Although the Korean War exposed limits in public support for U.S. power projection, the consensus endured, and domestic backing for confronting global communism even grew stronger (Krebs 2015).[3] Vietnam, by contrast, exposed tensions in the political foundations of the consensus. Historian Christian Appy (2015) argues that the war shattered the collective sense of

[1] For critiques of the "isolationist" label—either as a characterization of the interwar period or as a meaningful analytical category—see Braumoeller (2010), Blower (2014), and Wertheim (2020).

[2] While scholars emphasize different facets of the postwar consensus, most agree that its core principles were widely shared. Wittkopf and McCormick (1990) highlight anticommunism, the use of military force, and U.S.-Soviet relations as central elements. Dueck (2006) underscores the role of America's liberal political culture in shaping and sustaining the strategy of containment. Friedman (2024) offers a more specific interpretation, describing a "Truman-Eisenhower consensus" built around four pillars: maintaining U.S. military preponderance, defending allies, promoting global trade, and working through international institutions. According to Friedman, both public opinion and elite political actors consistently supported these principles throughout the Cold War.

[3] For a similar view, see my discussion of Lissner's (2021) argument that the Korean War increased the public's cost tolerance for an expansive grand strategy.

American exceptionalism that had become central to national identity after WWII. "The war made citizens ask fundamental questions: Who are we? What defines us as a nation and a people? What is our role in the world?" According to the conventional view, the U.S. defeat in Vietnam led both the public and political elites to turn inward, sobered by the recognition of the limits of American power projection.

Scholars often point to two types of evidence to support this account of the postwar consensus's rise and fall: public polling on U.S. global engagement, and bipartisan support in Congress. In the first two decades after WWII, there were historically high levels of bipartisan backing for major foreign policy legislation (Chaudoin et al. 2010; Jeong and Quirk 2019; Friedman 2024). Moreover, national polls consistently showed majority support for the U.S. playing an "active role" in world affairs (Holsti 2009). Specific policy areas associated with the postwar consensus—such as foreign economic and military aid and taking a tough stance toward the Soviet Union—also enjoyed considerable public backing during these years. After Vietnam, however, support for key pillars of the consensus—especially military intervention—declined to historic lows (Holsti and Rosenau 1979; Wittkopf and McCormick 1990).

The significance of this historical narrative lies in the way two very different wars are seen to bookend the emergence and unraveling of support for an internationally engaged grand strategy: if WWII was the crucible of postwar internationalism, Vietnam was "the acid that dissolved the postwar foreign policy consensus" (Holsti and Rosenau 1986, 376-77).[4]

A revisionist school, however, challenges at least two aspects of this interpretation. The first critique targets the nature and logic of political change attributed to WWII. While the watershed thesis emphasizes mass socialization into new national commitments (Sparrow 2011),

[4] Quote adapted from Krebs (2015a, 812), who argues against the conventional view of Vietnam as the death knell of the Cold War consensus. Additional advocates of the conventional wisdom are listed in Krebs (2015a, fn6).

revisionists stress continuity over change in underlying beliefs and values (Jeffries 1996). Postwar portrayals of WWII as the "good war" tend to oversimplify the extent of public debate over its meaning (Bodnar 2012; Samet 2021). The war was not experienced equally across society, nor did it generate the kind of strategic consensus among the mass public that transformational accounts often assume. As historian John Jeffries (1996, 197) puts it, "The nation was different after the war but not transformed; fundamental dynamics and patterns of life persisted." Early postwar analyses of public attitudes toward foreign policy similarly cast doubt on claims that the war forged a new national consensus on global engagement (Almond 1950).

A second critique questions the claim that the postwar consensus collapsed in Vietnam. Some scholars argue that U.S. foreign policy remained relatively stable throughout and after the Vietnam War (Craig and Logevall 2009; Chaudoin et al. 2010). Others challenge the timeline itself, arguing that the Cold War consensus did not emerge until the late 1940s, was consolidated during the Korean War, and began to erode during the Cuban Missile Crisis, rather than in Vietnam (Krebs 2015). Given the influential role wars are thought to play as political turning points, these revisionist accounts carry significant implications. Drawing on Kier and Krebs's (2010) typology, this school aligns with interpretations of war as an interruption—or, at most, a catalyst—rather than a transformative force. In short, while deductive reasoning supports the idea that such a momentous event as WWII could fundamentally and durably reshape public opinion, inductive evidence reveals deeper debate over the scope and significance of that change.

This chapter intervenes in the debate in two key ways. First, building on the two competing schools of thought, I argue that both the watershed and revisionist accounts empirically underspecify and conceptually underdevelop the war's role in shaping postwar trends. While each offers a distinct interpretation of WWII's effects, neither provides sufficient empirical leverage to

connect the war directly to postwar opinion dynamics. This chapter addresses that gap. Empirically, I aim to assess the validity of either perspective if it were true.

My second intervention involves testing my own theory of how war affects postwar public opinion in this case. At first glance, my theory incorporates elements of both interpretations. Like watershed accounts, it allows for the possibility that war can foster public support for expansive strategic aims. For instance, if wartime mobilization was relatively non-coercive and a community did not bear a disproportionate share of sacrifice, it is plausible that residents would identify with the war's objectives and continue to support its broader goals in peacetime. In such cases, a less traumatic wartime experience may lead people to embrace the postwar strategy as a natural extension of the war's aims.

At the same time, my theory strongly echoes revisionist claims, suggesting that the war's effects were less transformative—and certainly not uniformly aligned with the postwar foreign policy consensus. Instead of generating enthusiasm for an expansive, extroverted world role, coercive mobilization and concentrated sacrifice are likely to alienate the public from the state and elites' desired security policies. Communities that bore the brunt of the war would be more inclined to turn inward and resist future commitments that demand similar human costs. While intuitive, this perspective clearly aligns more closely with revisionist than watershed narratives.

In short, this chapter offers the first empirical test aimed at resolving competing historical interpretations and aims to validate my theoretical expectation that the impact of war depends on wartime experience and local context.

The Intellectual Legacy of WWII: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy. Resolving these two interpretations sheds light on the intellectual history of scholarship on public opinion about foreign policy. WWII was, in many ways, the formative event for the professionalization of public opinion

research (Ryan 2013). The discipline of social psychology traces its roots to Samuel Stouffer's influential research on American soldiers in World War II, published in a four-volume study referred to as "The American Soldier," which examined soldier morale, combat motivation, and support for postwar aims (Stouffer et al. 1949).[5] The demands of wartime mobilization, combined with political leaders' interest in gauging public support for the postwar order, spurred pollsters to intensively track public sentiment throughout the war. Many political scientists who later shaped the field of international relations and political science more broadly participated in these efforts—whether through the Office of War Information or by studying opinion in adversary nations for the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency (Oren 2003).[6] Understanding this context helps explain why postwar scholars of foreign policy were so attuned to public opinion.

The dominant perspective that emerged in the early Cold War era—shaped by WWII-era polling on public support for the war—centered on two key points. First, the mass public was believed to lack stable, coherent views on foreign policy (Almond 1950; Lippmann 1955). This view, known as the Almond-Lippmann consensus, held that the public was largely uninformed about world affairs, making elite leadership essential in shaping opinion. Though not directly concerned with the war's effects on opinion, this view aligns with revisionist interpretations of the war: if the public lacked structure in its views, it suggested the war had little lasting impact on public opinion. While many acknowledged a shift from introversion to extroversion in the 1940s, the causes and durability of that shift remained underexplored (Klingberg 1952).

[5] The wartime surveys used in the report's analyses are available for download from the Roper Center and remain a rich, underutilized resource for scholars of public opinion. For recent examples, see Blair and Horowitz (2022). Individual surveys are available at: https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/american-soldier-studies-wwii.

[6] Although focused on the intellectual biography of a specific figure, Bessner (2018) offers an instructive resource for understanding the influence of WWII on postwar political science.

A second key tenet of the scholarly consensus was that information and education were positively correlated with support for internationalism (Smith 1948; Shimberg 1949). As one study of high schoolers concluded, "The well-informed group... may be characterized as more optimistic, more internationally-minded, more aware of the implications of events, and less given to emotional solutions to international problems" (Shimberg 1949, 219). This belief that knowledge fostered internationalism underpinned government efforts to promote "international mindedness" through public education (Allen 2023). More broadly, the rise of the Almond-Lippmann consensus reflected elite concerns that the public would not naturally support the internationalist vision embraced by wartime planners (Wertheim 2020). The proposed remedy was clear: better education about world affairs (Carr and Murra 1949).

I argue that revisiting this intellectual history reveals that the field of public opinion about foreign policy originated in concerns that the war had not achieved the transformative effects later attributed to it. While the field of public opinion about foreign policy has moved beyond the pessimism of the Almond-Lippman consensus (Kerzter 2023), its legacy continues to shape how we understand the war's role in the development of foreign policy opinion.[7] A fuller empirical investigation is needed to assess the extent to which postwar attitudes reflect the public's actual wartime experience.

[7] Several interrelated factors help explain the shift away from the Almond-Lippmann view in foreign policy opinion research. The rise of political psychology, particularly in the wake of the behavioral revolution (Hafner-Burton et al. 2017), produced a large body of findings that directly challenge the pessimistic view of public competence maintained in the Almond-Lippmann consensus. Central to this psychological approach is the idea that individuals rely on dispositions and stable personal traits to form coherent views about foreign policy. To be sure, these micro-level insights should be weighed against evidence that elites still shape public opinion in meaningful ways (Berinsky 2009; Guisinger and Saunders 2017). Ultimately, the coexistence of both approaches—and empirical support for each—suggests that no single framework fully dominates.

3.3 Theory and Observable Implications

In this section, I recap my theoretical expectations as they apply to the specific case of American public opinion in the wake of WWII. While I develop my theoretical framework in Chapter 2, I distill here my specific expectations for how wartime experience and local context shape postwar support for U.S. grand strategy. I also describe how these theoretical expectations relate to competing interpretations about the war's influence on American political life.

My core argument is that war's impact on public opinion depends on both the type of wartime sacrifice and where that sacrifice is experienced. An implication is that even a major war like WWII does not automatically transform opinion. Rather, to understand its legacies, scholars should consider how the geography and variation in wartime sacrifices leaves uneven effects on public support for postwar global engagement.

To recap, my theory expects that the impact of war on postwar support for grand strategy depends on the type of wartime sacrifice and local context. I distinguish two types of wartime sacrifice. Higher proportional war deaths, understood as the share of the local population that died in war, is expected to increase support for postwar global engagement. This effect stems from a sense of communal contribution. As proportional deaths increase, residents have greater contact with the war, feel as if they "did their part," and become invested in sustaining the nation's postwar world role. Conversely, higher coercive intensity, understood as the proportion of deaths that were conscripted local residents, is expected to decrease support for the same postwar aims. The logic is that involuntary sacrifice fosters alienation and resentment, therefore depressing postwar support for high cost grand strategic commitments.

These expectations map onto the two divergent historical interpretations of WWII. The "WWII as watershed" thesis maintains that the war produced a decisive and durable shift in public

beliefs in favor of greater involvement in the world, a view aligned with my expectations about proportional sacrifice. Alternatively, revisionist accounts instead insist that the war did not fundamentally alter key aspects of American politics and instead reaffirmed preexisting views. This tradition aligns more closely with my expectations about coercive wartime experiences.

Furthermore, I expect that these effects are moderated by local context, particularly more rural places. Rural communities are characterized by in group identification, place-based solidarity, and therefore facilitate the aggregation of communal experiences. I argue that these aspects make wartime experiences more politically meaningful in rural places, all else equal. While cities have dense social interactions and communal networks, rural places are unique in viewing themselves as different and removed from urban places perceived as centers of national power.

One might question whether this rural dynamic applies in the mid-20th century context. For example, scholarship on the rural-urban divide considers it to be a relatively recent phenomenon, arguably dating to the 1970s. I address this issue with two points. First, despite there being a greater share of rural residents in the 1940s and 50s compared to the present day, there still existed a recognition among scholars and political observers that rural and urban places were meaningfully different. For example, the fields of rural sociology and urban politics were dedicated to exploring the exact distinctions I draw on to support my theory. Second, a distinct place-based rural identity arguably predates its recognition by contemporary scholars as characterizing rural alienation from national political life. As I discussed in Chapter 2, cities were viewed by rural residents as representing national power and neglect of rural places, and these beliefs existed around the mid-20th century. These views reinforced rural awareness and identification, leading me to expect these rural dynamics also exist in this historical case.

I conclude here by reviewing the observable implications I would expect to detect if my theory were true in this case. Regarding the type of wartime sacrifice, I expect that counties with higher proportional deaths will express greater support for a postwar grand strategy rooted in high cost tolerance, i.e., one with expansive aims. Conversely, I expect counties experiencing higher coercive intensity—more draftees among its war dead—will express less support for the same postwar aims. These divergent expectations allow me to adjudicate both my theoretical expectations and the competing historiographical interpretations about the legacy of WWII. Regarding the role of local context, I expect that county rurality amplifies the effects of war exposure on postwar opinion. War exposure in more rural places is expected to produce bigger shifts in opinion than in less rural places. Moreover, these effects are expected to be more durable and last longer in rural areas. My theory would therefore be supported by finding that an interaction effect between rurality and war exposure exists.

3.4 Research Design

The key empirical task in this chapter is to evaluate the impact of war on the American public's postwar foreign policy preferences. In addition to measuring postwar public opinion, evaluating my theory requires evidence for each of its independent variables: (1) coercive intensity, (2) distribution of sacrifice, and (3) local context. Moreover, because a key premise in my theory is that different places are impacted by war differently, I need a method that enables me to examine subnational variation in opinion.

In this section, I first introduce the data used to test my theory about war's impact on postwar public opinion. Next, I describe my empirical strategy to examine the relationship between subnational war exposure and opinion. An empirical contribution of this chapter and the broader

dissertation is showcasing the potential to adapt a method pioneered in the study of American public opinion—multilevel-regression and poststratification (MRP) (Caughey and Warshaw 2019; Gelman and Little 1997)—to study subnational variation in opinion about foreign policy.

My empirical strategy supports three main inferences. First, it enables me to identify a shift in public support for an internationally engaged, high-cost tolerance grand strategy before and after the war. This offers a descriptive assessment of the competing narratives about whether WWII transformed public preferences toward global engagement. Second, linking local opinion estimates to county level war exposure enables me to test both my theoretical expectations and adjudicate historical debates about the war's effects. Third, this strategy contributes to my broader effort to advance research on the international influences on American political development. By showing that shifts in postwar opinion varied geographically, my empirical strategy reveals my theory's core insight: *how* and *where* a war is experienced matters for the lessons drawn from it.

Data

Dependent variable. My main dependent variable in this chapter is public opinion about the nation's role in world affairs. Pollsters have regularly fielded a question that captures this general attitude in national surveys to the American public since WWII. The question wording is:

> "Do you think it will be best for the future of this country if we take an active part in world affairs, or if we stay out of world affairs?"[8]

I refer to this outcome as the "WORLD ROLE" question.[9]

[8] The wording of this question varied slightly over the years, but it conforms generally to the same format. The response options are presented as "Take an active part", "Stay out", and variations of a "Don't know" option. The question first appeared in a January 1942 poll by Hadley Cantril's Office of Public Opinion Research (USOPOR1942-811), and shortly thereafter in a February 1942 Gallup poll (USAIPO1942-0260). It was later added to the American National Election Survey starting in 1952 and has been the longest standing foreign policy question in the ANES since, appearing in 24 of its 31 quadrennial surveys. The question is VCF0823 in the ANES Cumulative Data File. See Appendix B.2 for the longitudinal and variable coverage.

[9] I use SMALL CAPS in text when referring to the outcome variable predicted by my models.

There are several reasons for measuring the main outcome variable with the WORLD ROLE question. Theoretically, the question maps nicely onto the concept of grand strategic *ends*. The question's response options of "Take active part" or "Stay out" of world affairs captures the idea of how broadly the mass public views the national interest. These response options also map onto the broad orientations or "moods" that organize public opinion on foreign policy: introversion (isolationism) and extroversion (internationalism) (Kertzer 2013; Wittkopf 1990; Klingberg 1952). Moreover, this question approximates my theory's focus on how war impacts public support for the *grand strategic aims for which the war was fought*. For example, all the U.S.'s wars since the twentieth century have been associated with the strategic aim of preserving the U.S.'s global influence. The WORLD ROLE question's binary response options are therefore a close approximation of public willingness to pay the costs associated with sustaining the U.S.'s expansive commitments.

There are also historical reasons to use the WORLD ROLE question. The original motivation for fielding this question during WWII was to assess whether the public would turn inward after the war (Holsti 2009, 19-22). Against the backdrop of the public's disillusionment with the First World War, the question wording was understood by pollsters to proxy the broad contours of debate over the U.S.'s role in the world. To be sure, the WORLD ROLE question does have some limitations. The clearest is expressed by Holsti (2009, 45), who writes, "Because an 'active role in world affairs' can encompass a wide array of international undertakings…it is important not to read too much into these data. They certainly should not be counted as evidence of a broad consensus or sustained support for *specific* foreign policies" (emphasis added). The critique is that the question is too abstract to gauge a distinct orientation, and that its breadth obscures important differences in support for specific policies like the use of military force or foreign aid. For example, some

individuals may agree on the merits of taking an active role in world affairs but disagree on *when* to use military force (Wittkopf 1990; Jentleson 1992; Eichenberg 2005). Holsti's point is that the WORLD ROLE question correctly reflects the public's general support for an expansive international role, but it masks heterogeneity in support for grand strategic *means*, or how to sustain an engaged global posture.

I address these limitations in two ways. First, I acknowledge Holsti's caution but emphasize that my use of the question is to measure public support for the nation's *broad* orientation, not specific foreign policies. My interest is in measuring the degree of public support for "a wide array of international undertakings"—with the theoretical intuition that war presents the ultimate referendum on such support. In this way, I consider the WORLD ROLE question to be the closest historical attitudinal measure scholars have for the public's grand strategic cost tolerance. Second, recognizing that "taking an active role" in the world can assume different forms, I examine additional issue specific questions that measure various aspects of postwar cost tolerance. Representative examples of these questions include the following:

> *Marshall Plan*: "What is your opinion of the plan (the Marshall Plan)?"[10]
>
> *Containment Aid*: "Would you like to see your Congressman vote for or against a bill asking for $250 million to aid Greece?"[11]
>
> *Universal Military Training*: "If a military training bill comes up in Congress this session, would you like to have your Congressman vote for or against it?"[12]

[10] This question was first asked in July 1947 Gallup survey (USAIPO1947-0400). It appeared a total of 13 times between July 1947 and February 1948.
[11] This question was asked in a March 1947 Gallup survey (USAIPO1947-0393) and again in April 1947 (USAIPO1947-0394).
[12] This question was asked in a June 1947 Gallup survey (USAIPO1947-0399) and is referring to Universal Military Training, a proposal to require compulsory military training that was never enacted. Similar questions about the military draft were fielded in the early postwar period.

Strategic Priorities: "Do you think there is a danger that the United States will get involved in a war in Korea and other parts of Asia to the extent that we will not be able to protect ourselves and our allies in Western Europe?"[13]

A full list of these issue specific questions with their source, wording, and response options is included in Appendix B.1.2. For each of these questions, I code the response options as reflecting either a high or low-cost tolerance. For example, at the onset of the Korean War in July 1950, a Gallup survey asked respondents whether they support increasing federal income taxes immediately "to pay for the present war in Korea and to re-arm the United States."[14] Fifty-one percent of respondents agreed, and twenty-nine percent disagreed; a response supporting tax increases is coded as high cost tolerance, and disagreement is coded as low cost tolerance.

A summary of the sources and temporal coverage of the WORLD ROLE question is included in Table 3B.2. Notably, while my focus in this chapter is the near term timeframe following WWII, I include additional coverage of the survey question through the Vietnam War and end of the Cold War to indicate possibilities to expand my temporal coverage forward.[15]

Independent variable: War exposure. My theory's main expectation is that war's impact on postwar opinion depends on the type of wartime experience and the local context where it occurred. Here, I discuss the data used to operationalize each concept.

The first explanatory variable is subnational war exposure. To create my measure of local war exposure, I collected and processed U.S. military casualty data from WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.[16] While previous scholarship has linked these data to *individual* public opinion, this is the first study to incorporate data spanning multiple wars, levels of analysis, and

[13] This question was asked in an August 1950 Gallup survey (USAIPO1950-0460). It captures the idea of strategic tradeoffs, i.e., whether the U.S. should prioritize certain geographical regions or instead the belief that the U.S. can sustain an influential position in multiple regions.
[14] USAIPO1950-459.
[15] In an earlier version I planned to trace WWII's effect through the Vietnam War. However, to keep the empirical scope manageable, I focus in this chapter exclusively on its effects in the early Cold War.
[16] I discuss my method for collecting and processing these data in Appendix A.

subnational opinion estimation techniques to analyze the impact of war on *place level* public opinion.[17]

I measure WWII exposure in three ways. Figure 3.1 visualizes the distribution and formula corresponding to each of my war exposure variables. The first is *proportional war deaths*—e.g., war deaths per capita (per 10,000 county residents)—a familiar measure in research on the political effects of war in both U.S. and comparative contexts.[18] A low per capita death rate means a community had more diffuse war exposure than a community with a high per capita death rate.

The second form of war exposure is *war death intensity*. This measure captures the concentration of war exposure in a place. Unlike proportional war deaths, which is a function of population density, death intensity is a function of the number of people from a place that served in the war. Consider a county with 10,000 residents, and 10 of those residents died in the war. The distinction between proportional deaths and death intensity is the following: if *all 10 soldiers* from a community died in the war, this is qualitatively different from 10 soldiers dying from a large community where more than 10 soldiers served in the war.[19] Whereas the impact of deaths per capita is a function of a place's population size, a high death intensity emphasizes how much a community associates its wartime experience with human loss.

[17] Kriner and Shen (2010) use casualty data from WWII to GWOT. Berinksy (2009) also uses national level WWII casualties. Mueller (1971) uses national level casualties from the Korean and Vietnam Wars; Gartner and Segura (1998) use the same data. Several additional studies have used Vietnam War casualties. In all my casualty datasets, I downloaded the raw files from the National Archives, cleaned the data and aggregated casualties to the county and state levels.

[18] See, e.g., Gartner et al. (1997); Karol and Miguel (2007); Kriner and Shen (2020). Others, due to unique research designs like that featured in Althaus et al. (2012), instead use raw casualty counts. For non-U.S. contexts, see Carozzi et al. (2023); De Juan et al. (2024).

[19] This would mean that the second county had more people under arms than the first county with a one hundred percent death intensity rate.

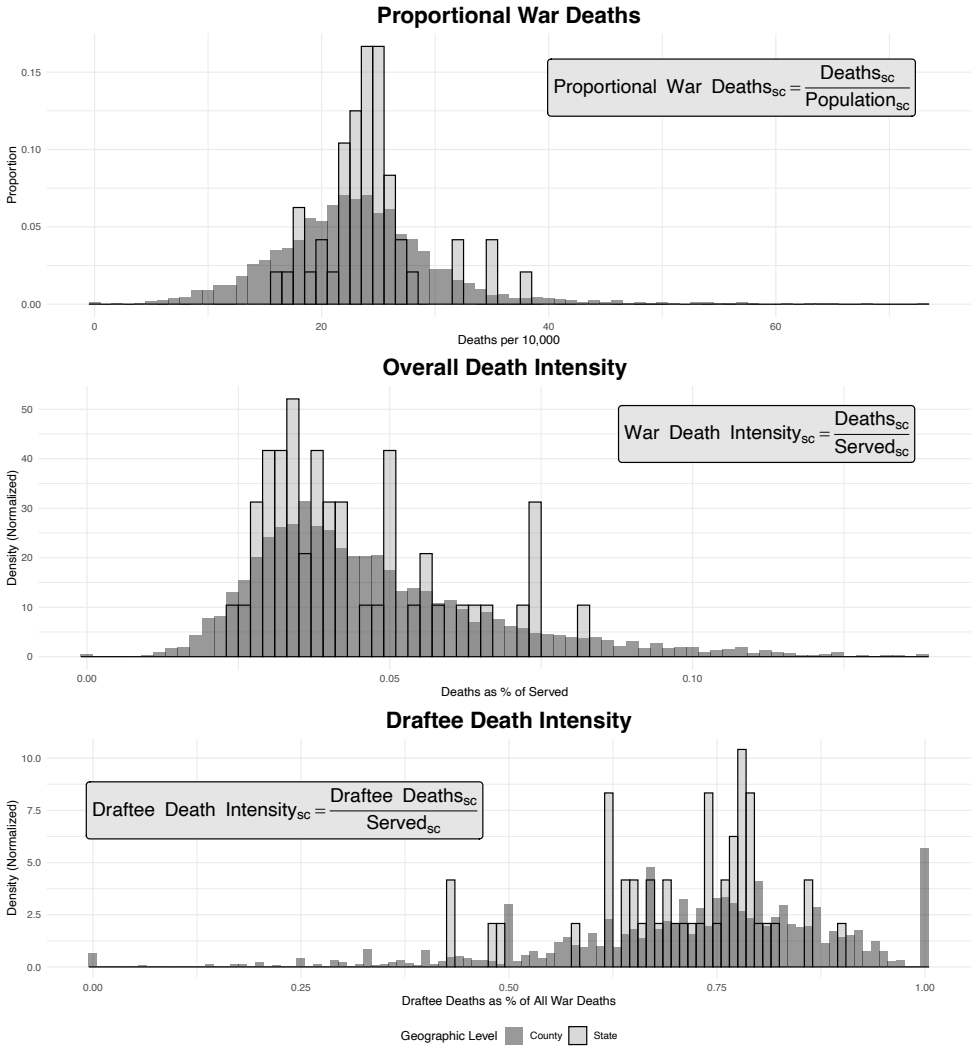


Figure 3.1 Distribution of War Exposure Variables

Note: For visualization purposes, the top panel excludes eight counties with per capita death rates above 75 per 10k residents. These are outliers. Similarly, the middle panel exclude 14 counties with death intensity rates over 14 percent.

Microlevel historical military data permit me to measure war intensity in a couple ways. The first method is reflected in the previous example, which is *death intensity*. This refers to war deaths as a proportion of those who served in the military, depicted in the middle panel of Figure 3.1. A second, theoretically informed measure is *draftee death intensity*, which refers to the proportion of all war deaths who were drafted, i.e., those who did not have a choice of fighting in the war. This operationalization most closely reflects the theoretical variable of coercive intensity. Consider again a community that sends 10 soldiers to fight in a war. Two of those soldiers

volunteered, while the remaining eight were drafted. Assume that five of the soldiers died in the war, and four of the deaths were drafted soldiers. The draftee death intensity in this community would therefore be 80 percent, meaning that the wartime sacrifice was concentrated on citizens coerced by the state into military service. While overall death intensity enables valuable theoretical insights distinct from proprotional war deaths, it is not quite the same as coercive intensity. For this reason, I use draftee death intensity as my main operationalization of the theoretical variable of coercive intensity.

Importantly, the intensity-based measures of war exposure requires knowing the number of soldiers from an area that served in the war. The WWII Army enlistments dataset from the National Archives make this possible for WWII, however, a similar measure of military enlistments by type (volunteer or drafted) is not available for subsequent wars. In the Korean War, I use another measure to approximate mobilization coerciveness—combat death intensity—described below. The intuition is that places with a more coercive wartime experience—e.g., a high proportion of conscripted soldiers among the war dead—will be impacted differently compared to another place with a comparable proportional death rate but less coercive intensity. A similar inference can be made about combat deaths as a proportion of all war deaths; this refers to the proportion of war fatalities that resulted from direct fighting compared to deaths related to disease or other non-combat factors. The intuition is that deaths resulting from coercion (conscription) or combat are experienced by the home community as more vivid or coercive, and therefore more politically resonant than overall deaths.

In addition to proportional war deaths, I use these coercive and KIA intensity measures of war exposure where data permits. Descriptive statistics of the WWII exposure data are displayed in Table 3.1, and details on the Korea and Vietnam War data are included in Table 3A.1.

Table 3.1 Summary Statistics of WWII Exposure Data

Level	Variable	N	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Counties	Deaths per capita[a]	3,076	23.34	22.75	9.388	0	238.1
	Death intensity (%)[b]	3,076	0.047	0.042	0.022	0	0.2
	Draftee death intensity (%)[c]	3,076	0.722	0.75	0.174	0	1
	KIA (% of deaths)[a]	3,076	0.576	0.583	0.109	0	1
States	Deaths per capita[a]	48	24.31	24.02	4.47	16.28	38.21
	Death intensity (%)[b]	48	0.043	0.038	0.01	0.02	0.08
	Draftee death intensity (%)[c]	48	0.709	0.737	0.104	0.425	0.9
	KIA (% of deaths)[a]	48	0.568	0.578	0.033	0.492	0.625

Note: Deaths per capita is calculated as deaths per 10,000 residents. The denominator source is 1940 Census population. Death intensity (%) is total war deaths as a proportion of all served. Draftee death intensity (%) is the proportion of total war deaths who were drafted. KIA (% of all deaths) is the proportion of total war deaths that resulted from combat.

[a] Source: WWII State Honor Lists, "WWII Army and Army Air Force Casualties" state booklets. Total war deaths are reported at the state and county level.

[b] Source: WWII Army Enlistment File, National Archives Record Group 64, Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938 – 1946. Total served were aggregated at the state and county levels and then merged with the respective war deaths dataset constructed from the NARA state booklets.

[c] Source: ICPSR 38927: DS 2: WWII Enlistment Records and Casualties Matched. Draftee deaths were aggregated at the state and county levels and then merged with the respective war deaths dataset constructed from the NARA state booklets. It is not possible to use DS 1: Army and Air Force Casualties to create a county level dataset of draftee deaths because there are many errors in the assignment of a soldier death to the correct county. Therefore, the Draftee deaths (%) relies on dead soldiers matched to their county and state of residence at enlistment; this is likely an undercount due to the matching technique used.

These war exposure data also enable me to differentiate between different levels of local sacrifice. Specifically, I am referring to the geographic concentration of wartime sacrifice. The idea is that political consequences of war depend both on *how* it was experience but also its *distributional* nature (Kriner and Shen 2010). When wartime sacrifice is unevenly distributed, we should expect places with a disproportionate share of the sacrifice to undergo changes in postwar political life distinct from those with less sacrifice.

I measure the distribution of sacrifice in three ways. The first is a continuous measure of each war exposure variable. This enables a straightforward inference of whether postwar support increases or decreases in relation to an increase in proprotional war deaths or coercive intensity. The second is by using a median split to dichotomize each of the war exposure measures into categories of high and low exposure. A median split assigns a value of 1 to geographic units above

the national median in the given measure of conflict exposure, and 0 to those below the median.[20] A third method is assigning geographic units to terciles corresponding to each measure of war exposure. For example, I assign counties categories of high, medium, or low concentration of sacrifice. This enables me to distinguish between places that experienced an unequal share (high) and those in the middle or low categories. Together, these measures of *type* and *distribution* of wartime experience enable me to assess my theoretical expectations detailed in Section 3.3. Figure 3A.3 visualizes the geographic distribution of the continuous measure of war exposure variables for WWII and the other wars.

Local context: Rurality. In addition to wartime experience, the other primary independent variable in my theory is local context, rurality in particular. I obtain county rural population measures from the Census to represent local context in two ways. First, I define rurality as the percentage of a county's population classified as rural, including both farm and non-farm populations.[21] Second, I create categorical rurality levels (low, medium, and high). While the continuous measure reflects population density, the categorical tercile approach allows for a straightforward comparison of a unit's rurality over time.

Prewar opinion. A final independent variable to discuss is prewar opinion. Could it be the case that postwar opinion on world affairs is a continuation of prewar opinion trends? Recalling my discussion of "what war does" in Chapter 2, it is theoretically plausible that war does not fundamentally alter postwar opinion about the proper WORLD ROLE. An alternative explanation is that while war may cause a temporary disruption to political life, afterwards people generally have the same political opinions as they did before the war. It is also the case that war has been thought

[20] On the rationale behind using a median split to categorize places by war exposure, see De Juan et al. (2024, fn8).
[21] Moreover, following the Census's definition of rural, I code survey respondents as rural residents if they live in a county with 2,500 or less residents.

to "be capable of generating whole new political universes." (Mayhew 2005, 473). To adjudicate between these two possibilities, we need to know mass public opinion *before* the war.

To assess prewar opinion, I compile historical surveys that asked questions related to grand strategic issues before the war.[22] Because the WORLD ROLE question was introduced during WWII, I identified questions to represent a baseline for the public's prewar cost tolerance by which to compare with postwar opinion. One of the most important subjects included in prewar polls was public support for U.S. involvement in WWII. Many prewar surveys probed public opinion on topics ranging from declaring war on Germany and Japan, providing aid to the Allies, and repealing the Neutrality Acts. Every major change in U.S. policy toward the war proposed by the Roosevelt Administration received extensive attention from the era's leading polling firms.[23] Table 3B.1 presents the complete list of prewar polls I use to assess prewar opinion. For subsequent wars, I use the WORLD ROLE question because longitudinal coverage is mostly consistent across the Cold War period from 1945 onward.

An objection to my comparison of policy specific prewar questions and the postwar WORLD ROLE question is that they are measuring substantively different attitudes. For example, some might claim that opposing a declaration of war against Germany in 1940 is not comparable to postwar support for taking an active role in the world. I have two responses to this reasonable concern. First, the prewar questions about U.S. foreign policy toward the war *do* map onto the WORLD ROLE question; the question wording and response options to the prewar questions substantively mirror

[22] As a guide for questions to identify, I relied on Cantril's (1948) report on wartime public opinion dynamics. Moreover, I consulted the collection of pre-WWII Gallup surveys made available by the Berinsky & Schickler American Mass Public Study and available for download via the Roper Center database. https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/berinsky-schickler-american-mass-public-study.

[23] One reason for this is the close relationship between these polling firms and the Roosevelt White House (Steele 1974). For example, Hadley Cantril, a pioneer in public opinion polling, worked in the White House during the war. There is substantial evidence that Roosevelt closely monitored public opinion polls, particularly during prewar debates on U.S. policy toward the war and, later, on wartime developments and postwar policy aims (Schuessler 2015; Krebs 2015).

the response options to the WORLD ROLE question. For example, while prewar questions revolve around specific policies like expanding the military draft or authorizing navy convoys in the Atlantic Ocean, they all fundamentally probe opinion about how expansively the U.S. should define its security interests. Moreover, there are good reasons to expect answers to the prewar questions would align with answers to the postwar WORLD ROLE question. The noninterventionists opposing U.S. involvement in WWII would be expected to support the "stay out" response option to the WORLD ROLE question. That the prewar questions were worded to split respondents into pro-intervention and non-intervention camps resembles how the WORLD ROLE question splits respondents into extroverted or introverted camps.

Second, wartime pollsters themselves understood the WORLD ROLE question within the context of intense political debates surrounding President Roosevelt's gradual efforts to involve the U.S. in WWII (see, e.g., Schuessler 2015; Krebs 2015). At the time, it was widely recognized that noninterventionists advocated a more limited, hemispheric approach to international affairs. Specifically, the "stay out" response option in these polls indicated opposition to involvement in the security affairs of continental Europe. Therefore, I argue that these prewar opinion polls serve as a reliable benchmark for gauging the American public's tolerance for the potential costs of global involvement.

Together, these surveys enable me to evaluate: (1) prewar public tolerance for an expansive grand strategy that would dramatically increase the U.S.'s global role and influence—namely, waging a global war and assuming responsibility for shaping a postwar international order—and (2) postwar public support for America's early Cold War grand strategy. My primary task is thus to determine how WWII influenced the relationship between these two variables. To analyze how

local war exposure shaped postwar opinion, I must create estimates of subnational opinion. I will now describe the technique employed for this purpose.

Empirical Strategy

Estimating subnational opinion. To construct estimates of subnational opinion, I use a technique pioneered in American politics called multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP). MRP has been used to study subnational opinion on a range of domestic political issues.[24] MRP is often used by scholars to study questions of democratic representation (Olson and Snyder 2021). For example, drawing on early post-WWII surveys, Caughey (2018) demonstrates that Southern lawmakers were responsive to shifting views among their electorate.[25] Moreover, Caughey et al. (2020) demonstrate that the New Deal realignment reflected shifting public preferences. MRP thus enables scholars to study whether elected officials faithfully represent the views of their constituents, and whether government policy reflects public preferences more generally. MRP also enables the study of policy feedback effects, or the idea that policy provision can change the preferences of its recipients (Sances and Clinton 2021; Campbell 2012). My focus on the relationship between war exposure and subnational opinion takes inspiration from both literatures.

MRP follows two main steps (Caughey and Warshaw 2019, 354). First, a national level opinion model is fitted to a lower geographic unit captured in the survey, controlling for relevant demographic variables. For example, if the survey includes respondent state of residence, the model would be fitted at the state level. This step constitutes the "multilevel regression"

[24] Researchers have examined topics including support for same-sex marriage (Lax and Phillips 2009; Gelman et al. 2018), abortion (Warshaw and Rodden 2012), racial attitudes (Smith et al. 2020; Schickler 2016), climate change beliefs (Marlon et al. 2022), among others (Caughey and Warshaw 2019).

[25] I draw on a subsample of the same Gallup surveys used by Caughey (2018). These are the same surveys circa 1936-1952 weighted and made available by the efforts of Berinsky et al. (2011), and featured in Berinsky (2009), Schickler (2016), among others. See information on the "Berinsky & Schickler American Mass Public Study" on the Roper website: https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/berinsky-schickler-american-mass-public-study.

component of MRP. Second, Census data are used to determine the number of residents within each geographic-demographic group specified by the model. These totals are organized in a poststratification table. For instance, if the model estimates support for WORLD ROLE among men of a specific age, education, occupation, race, and geographic area, the proportion of this demographic combination relative to others within the same geographic unit must be known. The outcomes from the national-level regression model are then poststratified using these geographic-demographic data, generating opinion estimates for lower geographic levels. Ultimately, MRP provides estimates of local support for specific policy issues, enabling analyses of opinion shifts and representation over time.

A notable challenge of MRP is its "stringent data demands" (Leemann and Wasserfallen 2017). The poststratification step requires alignment between the demographic categories used in the national opinion model and those available in Census data. If the national model includes variables like education, race, and occupation, matching Census data must contain these exact demographic groupings at the same geographic scale. These stringent data demands partly explain why MRP has been more common in American politics rather than comparative politics (Caughey and Warshaw 2019, 359). Given the historical context of my study, aligning demographic categories across national surveys and corresponding Census data presented some challenges. For example, age categories often differed between surveys. Figure 3D.1 illustrates the variable coverage between national surveys and Census data used for MRP estimation of the WORLD ROLE and issue specific questions.

Notwithstanding these data challenges, scholars regard MRP as the "gold standard" for estimating subnational opinion. A goal of this dissertation is to showcase the promise of applying this technique to study subnational opinion on foreign and security policy issues.

Estimation. I estimate a series of models to assess subnational support for my main outcome variable: public support for an active U.S. role in world affairs.

I begin with a basic linear probability model of support for WORLD ROLE—coded 1 = support the U.S. taking an active role, 0 = stay out—as a function of individual demographics and geographic-level war exposure. While my theory focuses on *place* level opinion rather than *individual* attitudes, I include the results of these individual level models in Appendix C.2.1 for a baseline comparison to the MRP results in my main analyses. I first estimate an individual level linear probability model to examine whether war exposure is associated with individual postwar opinions. Equation 1 is represented as follows:

$$\text{World Role}_i = \beta \text{War}_{iwg} + \gamma X_i + \text{FE}_g + \varepsilon, \quad (1)$$

where War_{iwg} is the measure of historical conflict exposure from war *w* in the geographic unit *g* of respondent *i*; X_i is a vector of demographic controls for respondent *i*; and FE_g denotes geographic unit fixed effects. The geographic unit *g* varies by survey: early postwar Gallup surveys include state of residence, the ANES includes county identifiers starting in 1956, and NORC surveys only include region of residence (Northeast, South, Midwest, West).

The main coefficient of interest is β, which captures the relationship between place-level exposure to past wars and respondent *i*'s support for taking an active WORLD ROLE. To evaluate my theoretical predictions, I analyze results using different measures of war exposure, distinguishing between proportional and intensity-based measures of war deaths. Additionally, to explore disproportionate sacrifice, I conduct analyses based on median splits for each war exposure type.

Furthermore, the war exposure data used to operationalize *War* depends on the survey period. For example, models using the six early postwar Gallup surveys (1945-1950) operationalize *War* based exclusively on state level WWII data. Beginning in 1956, *War* is

operationalized using both WWII and Korean War data.[26] The theoretical premise is that public opinion in a given year *t* may be influenced not only by recent war exposure at time *t*-1 but also by cumulative war exposure at *t*-x, with x representing the next most recent conflict.

The demographic controls in vector X_i include respondent place size (rural = 1, 0 otherwise), sex (female = 1, 0 otherwise), race (Black = 1, 0 otherwise), occupation (Professional = 1, 0 otherwise), age (ordinal scale, varying by survey), and education (ordinal scale, varying by survey).[27]

To generate place-level opinion estimates, I next estimate Equation 2, a multilevel logistic regression, formulated as follows:

$$\Pr(\text{World Role} = 1) = \text{logit}^{-1}\left(\gamma_0 + \alpha^{\text{rural}}_{r[i]} + \alpha^{\text{race}}_{r[i]} + \alpha^{\text{gender}}_{g[i]} + \alpha^{\text{edu}}_{e[i]} + \alpha^{\text{age}}_{a[i]} + \alpha^{\text{state,county}}_{sc[i]}\right), \quad (2)$$

where *rl* ∈ {rural (1), urban (0)}, *r* ∈ {Black (1), White (0)}, *g* ∈ {Female (1), Male (0)}, *e* ∈ {1,…,4}, *a* ∈ {1,…5}, *s* ∈ {1,…48}, and *c* ∈ {1,…maximum county number}. To account for differences across geographic units, a common technique in multilevel models is to include group-level predictors that estimate place effects (states and counties) as a function of unit specific attributes. The purpose being to control for place specific variation unaccounted for by the individual demographic attributes. Accordingly, state and county effects $\alpha^{\text{state, county}}$ are modeled as functions of their geographic region and the percentage of Democratic presidential vote share from the most recent election (Caughey and Warshaw 2019, 355). The outcome variable WORLD ROLE is binary, coded 1 if the respondent favors an active U.S. role in world affairs and 0 if they prefer that the U.S. stay out.

[26] The intuition is to capture both the impact of individual measures of war exposure and the cumulative impact of all past war exposure on respondent opinion at the time of the survey.
[27] Figures 3B.1 and 3B.2 visualize the variable coverage for the WORLD ROLE surveys.

After obtaining estimates from Equation 2, I then poststratify (weight) the estimates by the number of residents corresponding to all combinations of each demographic subgroup. This is achieved in Equation 3:

$$\theta^{MRP} = \frac{\sum N_j \theta_j}{\sum N_j}, \tag{3}$$

where θ^{MRP} is the MRP estimate of WORLD ROLE for demographic subgroup j, θ_j is the Equation 2 estimate for demographic subject j, and N_j is the number of residents in the demographic group. Substantively, Equation 3 produces a national level estimate of support for WORLD ROLE after weighting the results of Equation 2 by the number of people matching the theoretically relevant demographic attributes.

Finally, to obtain subnational opinion estimates, I poststratify the results from Equation 3 to states and counties. Given my theory's emphasis on local variation in wartime experience and postwar support, my discussion from this point forward focuses on county level estimates. This is shown in Equation 4,

$$\theta_{sc}^{MRP} = \frac{\sum_{j \in sc} N_j \theta j}{\sum_{j \in sc} N_j}, \tag{4}$$

where θ_{sc}^{MRP} is estimated support for subnational geographic units, θ_j is the estimate of each demographic subgroup, and N_j is the number of residents for each group j in geographic unit g. For surveys conducted before 1960, N_j is derived from the complete-count (100%) 1940 and 1950 Census. For surveys conducted 1960 onward, the poststratification table relies on either the one or five percent Census samples, as the 1950 Census is the last decade for which a complete-count has been released. Additionally, due to the limitations in available Census data, in some cases I estimate the number of rural residents corresponding to specific demographic-geographic

subgroups. Detailed tables specifying demographic variables and the corresponding Census samples used in constructing post-stratification tables are displayed in Table 3D.1.

War and Democracy in the American South. To more precisely isolate the relationship between war exposure and postwar opinion, I compare opinion estimates between counties within and outside the American South.[28] As I detail below, this approach leverages a quasi-regression discontinuity design to evaluate my theory's predictions regarding war's impact on postwar attitudes.

The South was a stronghold of internationalism for much of U.S. political history (Fry 2002). Economically, the region depended heavily on exports, necessitating open foreign markets and an active U.S. role in international affairs. Politically, Southern states formed a crucial part of President Roosevelt's New Deal coalition, with Southern legislators consistently supporting his foreign policy agenda throughout the 1930s and WWII.[29] However, this strong Southern internationalist orientation began declining by mid-century (Lerche 1964; Seabury 1957). Fordham (2022) attributes this rapid decline in Southern legislators' multilateralist positions to a shift in the region's economy from export-oriented (e.g., cotton) to import-competing industries (e.g., textiles).[30] Nonetheless, despite moving away from multilateralism, the South continued supporting the more militaristic aspects of the postwar consensus through the Vietnam War (Fry 2022, 262).

An additional consideration is the South's unique war experience during WWII. The region experienced significant industrial growth during the war (Jaworski 2017), with a concentration of

[28] I follow convention in labeling the South as the 11 states that seceded to form the Confederacy during the U.S. Civil War. These include: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Texas.
[29] The South strongly supported U.S. entry into WWII before Pearl Harbor (Cole 1956). Hero (1965) shows that the South overwhelmingly supported the U.S. joining the United Nations.
[30] Fordham's economic explanation is paired against accounts that instead emphasized the role of racial attitudes in undermining Southern support for multilateralism (Brucken 2013; Kaufman 1990).

military industries (Wilson 2016).[31] Surprisingly, despite the South's cultural emphasis on honor and military service (Dafoe and Caughey 2016), its residents were underrepresented in the WWII drafts and had lower per-capita death rates. This discrepancy arose primarily from high disqualification rates due to illiteracy and medical conditions among Southern draftees (Goldstein 1951). Additionally, the military policy excluding Black soldiers from combat roles further reduced the South's exposure to wartime combat casualties (Reed 2024, 101). These factors produced conflicting influences—significant industrial and economic war benefits, yet relatively low personal wartime sacrifice—potentially shaping postwar beliefs differently than in other regions.

Furthermore, it is widely accepted that the South was not a representative democracy until the mid-twentieth century (Mickey 2015). Although electoral competition existed, it was confined primarily to Democratic party primaries (Caughey 2018), leaving Southern lawmakers relatively insulated from broader electoral pressures. This attenuated electoral connection facilitates within-case variation that enables comparison to nondemocratic contexts where leaders may be less responsive to local wartime sacrifices. I return to this point in Chapter 4, but it has implications for public opinion in a couple ways.

First, if opinion in the postwar South—despite lower war exposure than other regions (Figure 3A.3)—shifted in response to WWII, it suggests an electorate responsive to national and international issues, rather than being completely isolated from the national political system. This would complement research on the New Deal realignment that finds shifts in public opinion foreshadowed electoral trends (Caughey et al. 2020). An implication of finding a shift in Southern opinion is that the public can be responsive to state policy even in less democratic contexts.

[31] It also was home to several important military bases constructed during the WWII buildup, and several large-scale military exercises were held in the South in preparation for U.S. involvement in WWII.

Second, if local context moderates the impact of war on postwar opinion in the South, it would support my theory's external validity beyond the U.S. It would also speak to other research on the legacies of war in non-democratic contexts that find places subjected to state coercion express lasting opposition to state violence (Rozenas et al. 2017; Balcells 2012). If WWII truly was a transformational experience, its impact on public views should be detectable even among communities less integrated into national political life.

Considering these unique features, I disaggregate my analysis in two ways. First, using a South-non-South binary indicator, I compare shifts in opinion in counties inside and outside the South. Second, I use a quasi-regression discontinuity design using border buffer zones at 25, 50, and 100 miles. Following Caughey's (2018) argument that political competition made Southern legislators responsive to public opinion, I anticipate that Southern opinion did shift in response to WWII. Despite an attenuated electoral connection, my theory emphasizes that nature of wartime sacrifice and local context remain primary determinants of how war influences postwar attitudes.

3.5 RESULTS

I present my results in three phases. First, I introduce my original county level opinion estimates and analyze how they shifted from before and after WWII. These estimates indicate a national post-WWII trend toward greater support for global engagement, consistent with "WWII as watershed" accounts. However, a key finding is that the shift was uneven. Notably, support was lowest—and even reversed in some places—among counties in the South, the region with least war exposure. Moreover, I present descriptive evidence that aligns with theoretical expectations: while proportional war deaths had a positive relationship with greater support for an active WORLD ROLE, draftee death intensity was negatively correlated with postwar support. I also present

suggestive evidence of a place-based connection, including a modest interaction between rurality and postwar shifts, as well as persistent rural-urban gaps in postwar support across postwar surveys items. While not definitive, this initial descriptive evidence suggests war was experienced unevenly and did not produce a uniform reaction.

The second phase presents results from a series of regressions estimating the relationship between opinion shifts and my key theoretical variables. Beyond the WORLD ROLE outcome question, I explore support for specific pillars of the postwar foreign policy consensus. My results point to the influence of regional heterogeneity in how war translated into postwar opinion, particularly Southern distinctiveness. Therefore, in the third and final phase, I compare Southern and non-Southern counties to examine this dynamic. Collectively, the results provide qualified support for my theory, setting up the empirical examination in subsequent chapters.

Descriptive Evidence of Postwar Opinion Changes. I first present descriptive evidence that visualizes the geographic distribution of the main dependent variable examined in this chapter: public support for an active U.S. role in world affairs. Figure 3.2 visualizes county MRP estimates of prewar and postwar opinion. This provides a baseline understanding of where support for U.S. intervention in WWII was strongest, the breadth of support for global engagement after the war, and counties that experienced the greatest change from before and after the war.

Panel A aligns with historiography of prewar debates over U.S. intervention. The South—a reliable bloc of FDR's New Deal coalition—displays the highest levels of support for U.S.

involvement in the war, with some intra-regional variation but overwhelmingly toward support (DeConde 1958). The lowest levels of support are concentrated in parts of the Midwest and West,

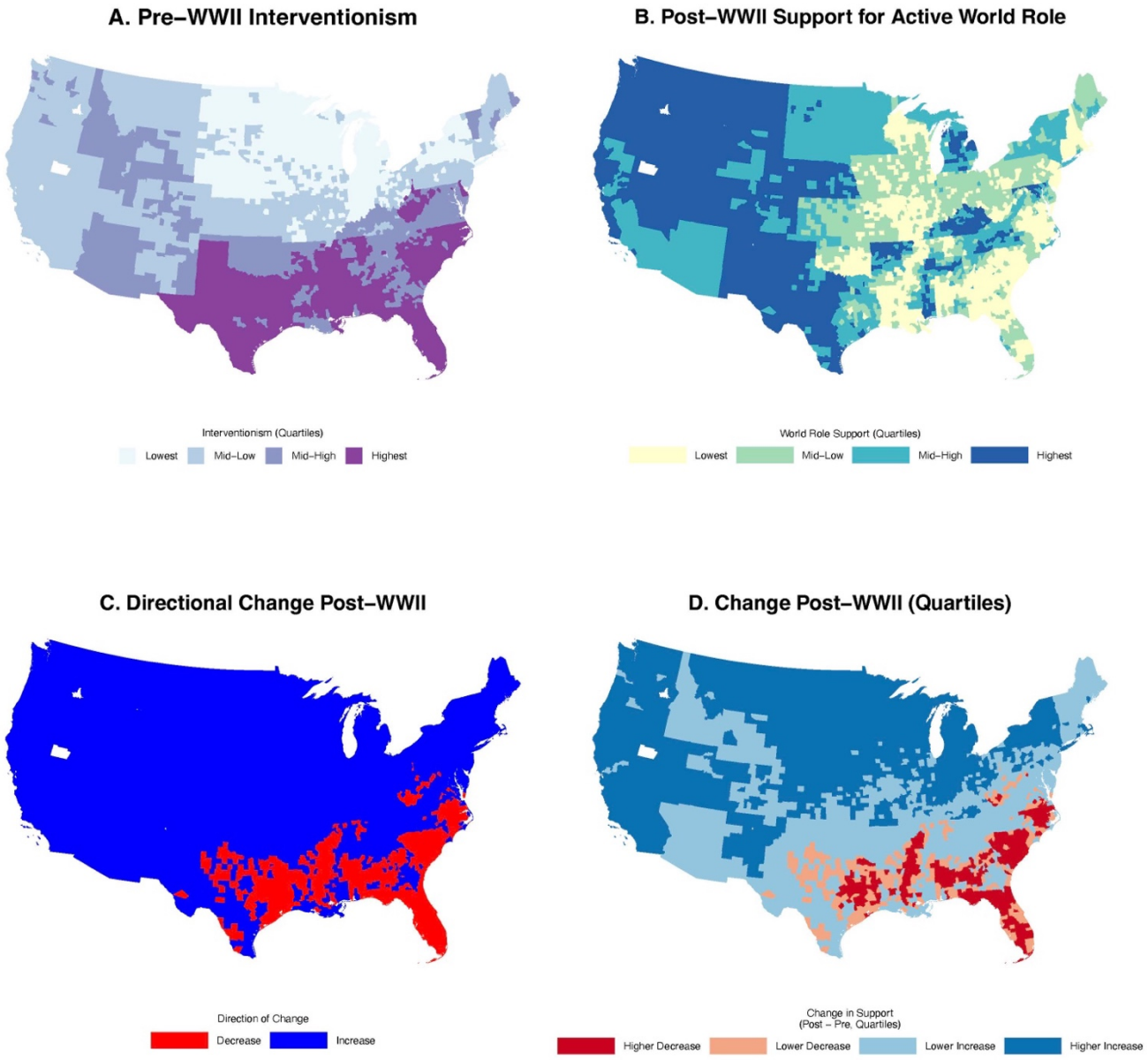


Figure 3.2 Geographic Variation in Public Support for U.S. Global Engagement, 1939-1950

particularly the Midwest, reflecting longstanding skepticism toward internationalism in the region (Smuckler 1953; Hurt 2008, Ch. 1). The story changes in Panel B. In the first half decade of the

Cold War, the South's support for an active world role declined sharply from its levels of pre-WWII interventionism, whereas previously noninterventionist regions underwent the greatest increase. The shift apparent in panels A and B point to a regional reordering in the basis of support about broad questions of U.S. grand strategy, one that coincided with the nation's largest war of the century. These patterns establish baseline support for the key empirical focus of this chapter: that local wartime experiences corresponded to different levels of support for the nation's postwar grand strategy.

Panels C and D highlight the direction and magnitude of shifts in postwar opinion. Most counties grew in support for postwar international engagement. However, the South stands out for supporting an active WORLD ROLE in the postwar era less than it supported U.S. intervention in WWII. Another notable pattern in Panel D is that the largest increase was concentrated in the historically noninterventionist Midwest. An initial takeaway is that there was a broad shift in national opinion, but there are clear between and within region connections at play.

Two points are worth highlighting. First, there was considerable subnational variation in postwar opinion shifts. While most of the country underwent a positive shift, the regional and county variation challenges strong versions of the "WWII as watershed" thesis. This variation suggests something distinctive about how the war might have impacted places differently. Second, there is a notable reversal at both ends of the spectrum. The least interventionist counties before the war became more supportive global engagement afterward, while the most pro-interventionist counties experienced the least increase, or decreased in some cases. These patterns matter not only for understanding this specific case, but for broader theories about how conflict shapes public opinion, in particular at the local level where it might impact lawmaker representation.

Table 3.2 Summarizing Change in Support for an Active World Role (Δ MRP)

Category	N	Mean Δ MRP (%)	
National	3017	15.2 (14.7–15.6)	
Midwest	1042	27.3 (26.9–27.6)	
Northeast	217	21 (20.1–21.9)	
South	1356	2.7 (2.3–3.1)	
West	402	22.6 (22.3–23)	
FDR Won (1940)	1857	8.4 (7.9–8.9)	
FDR Lost (1940)	1160	25.8 (25.4–26.3)	
	Mean Δ MRP (%) by Tercile		
	Low	*Medium*	*High*
Deaths per capita	10.4 (9.5–11.3)	17.6 (16.8–18.3)	17.6 (16.9–18.3)
Draftee death intensity	19.4 (18.6–20.2)	13.7 (13–14.5)	12.4 (11.6–13.1)
Rurality	16.6 (15.9–17.3)	11.6 (10.7–12.4)	17.4 (16.6–18.2)

Note: Values in the parentheses following the Mean Δ MRP (%) represent 95% confidence intervals. For example, the National average shift in support was an increase of 15.2% with a 95% confidence interval of 14.7-15.6. For the categories grouped into terciles, the N for each category is a third of the total counties in the sample.

Table 3.2 summarizes how shifts in postwar opinion varied across my theoretical variables. The values align with the spatial patterns visualized in the maps in Figure 3.2. The average increase in postwar support was highest at 27% in the historically noninterventionist Midwest, whereas the historically internationalist South had an average of only 2.7%. How might prewar political factors relate to these shifts? Counties that did not vote a majority for President Roosevelt in 1940 underwent larger increases in postwar support than counties that did vote a majority for him.

To explore broad trends, the bottom half of Table 3.2 presents my theoretical variables of interest. Three important insights emerge. First, counties with higher per capita deaths had greater shifts toward support for postwar engagement. Second, the opposite pattern is true for draftee death intensity. The inference here is that higher levels of forced sacrifice translated into lower shifts in

support. Third, these shifts varied by rurality. Given the patterns in Figure 3.2 and Table 3.2, there are reasons to believe that the war's impact on postwar support for grand strategy varied by local wartime experiences and was distributed unevenly across the country.

Overall, this descriptive evidence presents a high level picture of subnational, prewar and early Cold War opinion on U.S. foreign policy. Table 3.2 presents initial evidence of notable subnational variation in how the war impacted postwar opinion. These patterns reflect my theoretical expectations that the type and local context of wartime experience matter for how it shapes future beliefs. Next, I probe these findings with additional descriptive evidence to elucidate place-based patterns in these opinion dynamics.

Descriptive Evidence: Exploring a Subnational Connection. A key insight from the previous discussion is that shifts in opinion are broadly consistent with my theory about war and postwar support for grand strategy. Table 3.2 indicates the relationship is more nuanced than a story of national transformation. I therefore examine how war exposure relates to shifts in opinion at the national and regional levels. This sets up my subsequent analyses on the role of county level rurality in moderating this relationship.

Figure 3.3 presents the bivariate relationship between my two measures of war exposure (x-axis) and change in postwar opinion (y-axis). Aggregate national trends across all counties are shown in Panels A and B, while Panels C and D disaggregate by region. A main takeaway from the top two panels is consistent with my previous discussion. The positive slope in Panel A indicates that counties with higher per capita deaths saw higher increases in postwar support. Conversely, the negative slope in Panel B indicates that counties with higher draftee death intensity—i.e., a higher share of conscripts among local war dead—tended to experience less increase in support. My inference is that these patterns, at the aggregate level, align with my

argument that the impact of war on support for the nation's grand strategy depends on the type of local sacrifice.

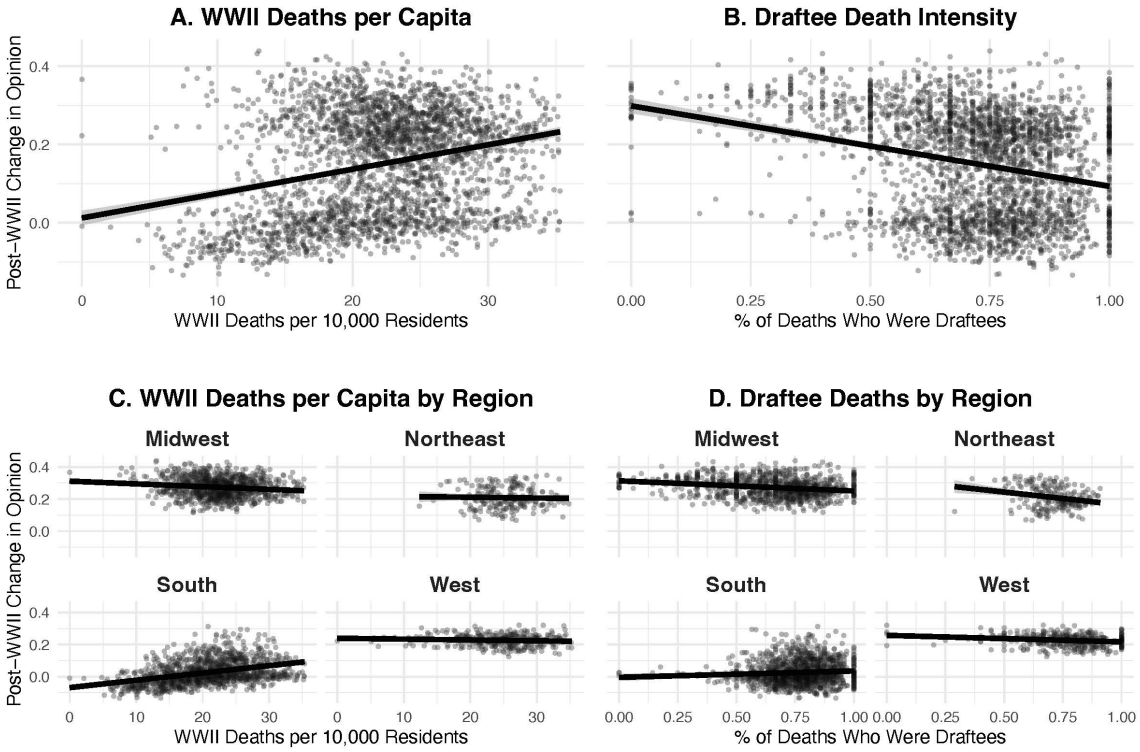


Figure 3.3 Change in Support for Active U.S. Role by WWII War Exposure and Region
Note: Each dot represents a county. In panels depicting WWII deaths per capita, the x-axis is trimmed to the 95th percentile to remove outliers for visualization purposes.

To illustrate these trends, consider two counties. Deuel County, Nebraska had an estimated prewar support for U.S. intervention in WWII of 36%. Nantucket County, Massachusetts had a similar prewar estimate around 37%. However, Deuel County experienced a significantly higher death rate of 33.5 per 10,000 residents—over a standard deviation above the national median—compared to Nantucket's 23.5 deaths per capita. After the war, Deuel County's estimated support for an active world role was roughly 10% higher than Nantucket's. This example highlights how counties with similar levels of prewar opinion differ in their postwar support based on how they experienced the war. It also highlights local context: Deuel County was completely rural, Nantucket was not, and neither supported FDR in 1940. An inference is that postwar opinion

shifted in places that had the greatest potential to increase—those with low prewar support and therefore a higher ceiling for postwar increases in opinion—and higher overall war exposure.

To be sure, this example does not completely capture the between-region variation evident in Panels C and D. For example, the key inference from Figure 3.3 is that the national level trends are not uniform across regions. The positive relationship between per capita deaths and change in postwar opinion (Panel A) is driven mostly by the South (Panel C); indeed, the relationship appears slightly negative in the Midwest, while flat if not trending slightly negative for the Northeast and West. A similar reversal appears in Panels B and D. Whereas draftee death intensity predicts lower shifts in postwar opinion, the relationship is modestly positive in the South compared to other regions.

While these descriptive findings may seem to point in opposite directions, I interpret this variation as evidence in support of my theory. It supports my argument in two ways. First, Figure 3.3 shows that at the aggregate national level, higher deaths per capita are positively associated with greater public support for an expansive grand strategy rooted in the public's high cost tolerance. Second, the regional heterogeneity visualized in Panels C and D suggest that the relationship between wartime experience and postwar opinion is shaped by subnational context. That Southern counties appear to be driving the positive national trend, while other regions like the Midwest experienced a negative or flat relationship, further suggests the possibility of between-region dynamics.

What is going on between and within the regions to cause these patterns in postwar opinion shifts? In line with my theory, one factor is that a place's local character, particularly its rurality, may moderate how war exposure impacts postwar opinion shifts. To investigate this question, I turn to assess how these relationships vary by levels of rurality within and between regions.

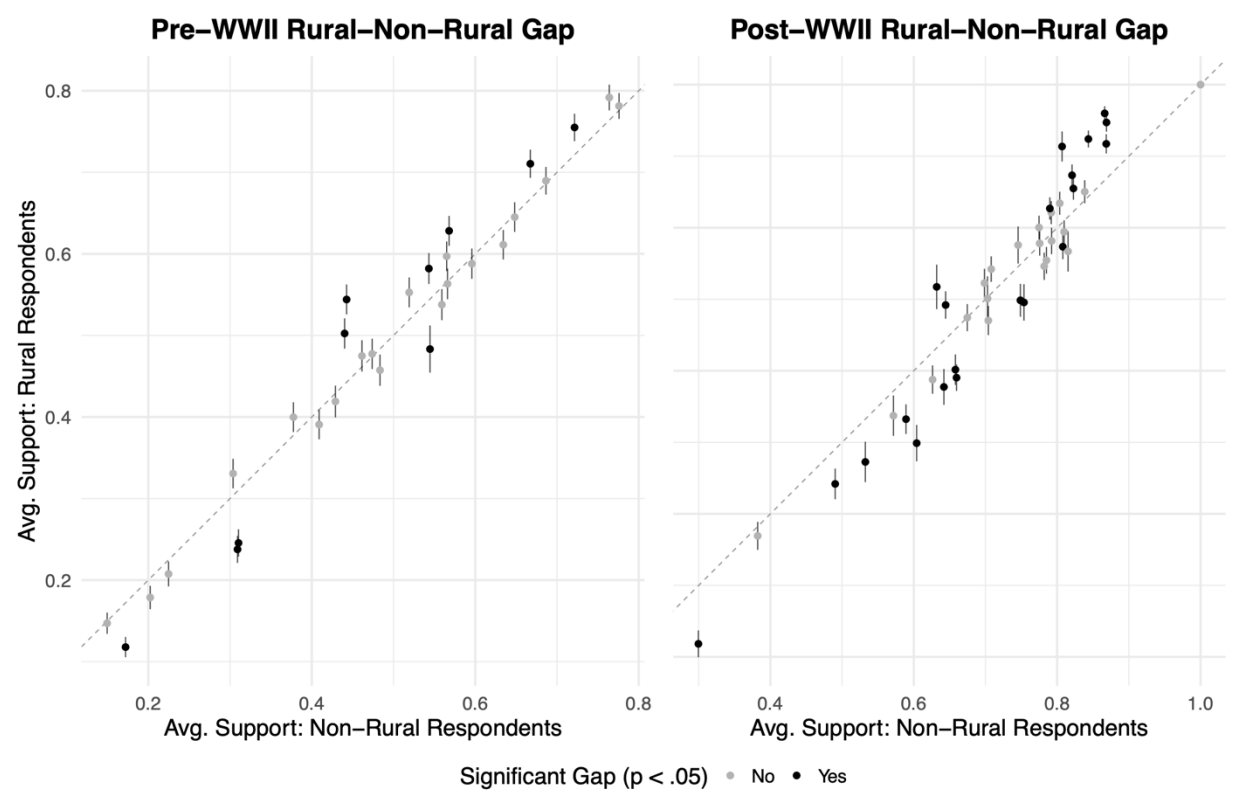
Descriptive Evidence: Place-Based Differences in Public Opinion. As an initial descriptive look at how rurality might interact with war exposure, I structure this section to answer two questions: First, did rural and non-rural areas express different levels of support for U.S. global engagement after the war? Second, if so, were these differences related to varying local wartime experiences—specifically, did rurality moderate these experiences? As I discuss in Chapter 2, by "moderate" I mean that rurality amplifies the impact and salience of war exposure compared to non-rural places.

To examine the role of place, I first present evidence of rural-non-rural gaps in foreign policy opinion before and after World War II. Figure 3.4 visualizes this gap across the survey items I used to construct my MRP estimates. The dots in the lefthand panel correspond to prewar questions related to U.S. intervention in WWII; the righthand panel visualizes postwar questions related to support for global engagement, including the WORLD ROLE questions. Across both periods, rural respondents were on average about six percentage points less supportive of the respective items compared to non-rural residents.

There are two main takeaways from Figure 3.4. First, there is variation in the direction of place-based gaps across both periods. Black points indicate statistically significant gaps in support between rural (y-axis) and non-rural (x-axis) residents. In the prewar sample on the left, there are some issues where rural respondents are less supportive of intervention, and other items where they are more supportive.[32] Second, the proportion of significant gaps clearly increases in the postwar era, depicted on the right. Whereas approximately one third of prewar items were

[32] For example, among the survey items characterized by significant place-based gaps, rural residents express more support for aiding Allies, less support for entering the war, more support for convoys, less support for amending the draft, and more support for amending the Neutrality Acts.

characterized by a significant rural-non-rural gap, the proportion increases in the immediate postwar years to roughly one-half.[33]

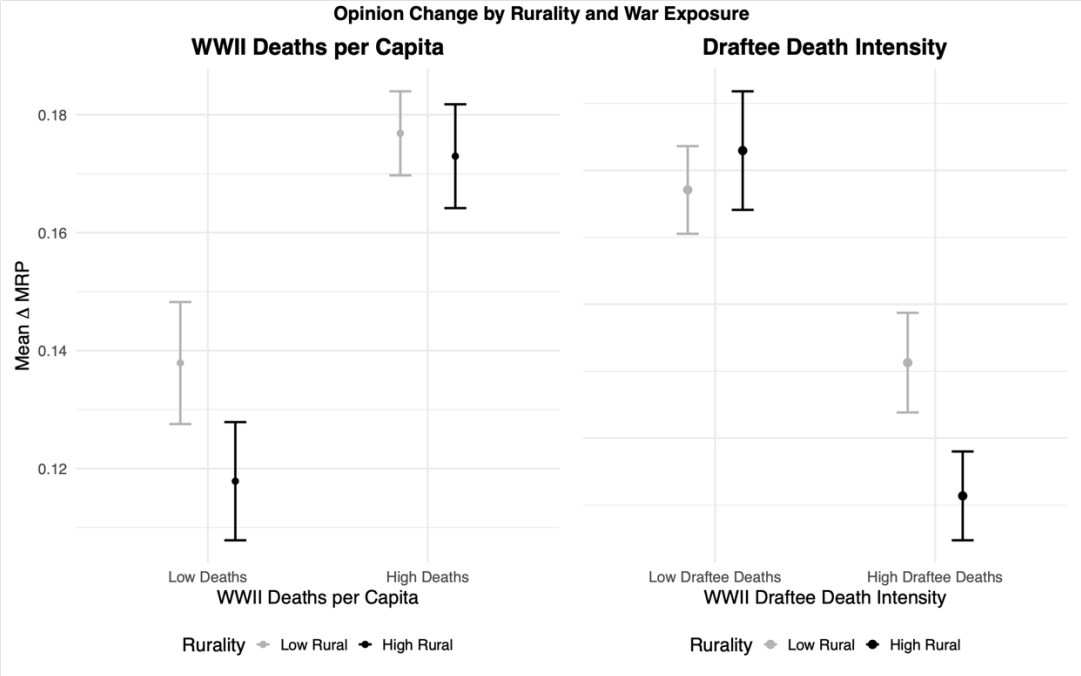


Note: Each point represents the average support for the foreign policy question by rural vs. non-rural residence. Vertical bars on each point are 95% confidence intervals of the rural-non-rural difference. Black points indicate the difference in average support between rural and non-rural residents is statistically significant. In the pre-WWII surveys visualized in the lefthand panel, 11 of the 30 survey items are significant, and 21 of the 41 items in the post-WWII surveys in the righthand panel are significant. The average absolute rural-non-rural difference among pre-WWII respondents was 6%, and among post-WWII respondents is was 6.5%.

Figure 3.4 Place-Based Gaps in Support for U.S. Global Engagement, Pre-WWII (1939-1941) and Post-WWII (1945-1950)

While Figure 3.4 does not explain this difference in patterns, it does provide reasons to believe place became more relevant in shaping opinion after the war. This descriptive snapshot offers an empirical motivation to further examine how wartime experiences relate to these dynamics. To that end, Figure 3.5 presents evidence of the relationship between opinion shifts, rurality, and type of war exposure.

[33] Appendix C.1 disaggregates Figure 3.4 by the survey item issue type.



Note: The points represent the average estimated change in opinion between pre-WWII interventionism and post-WWII support for an active WORLD ROLE by county rurality and type of war exposure. Rurality is represented as a binary split, with High Rural referring to counties about the national median, and Low Rural below the median. Deaths per capita and draftee death intensity are also represented as a median split. The error bars represent 95% confidence intervals for the average difference in the MRP estimates within each rurality-war exposure category.

Figure 3.5 Post-WWII Opinion Change by County Rurality and War Exposure, 1945-1950

Figure 3.5 offers further suggestive evidence in support of my theory about the role of wartime experience and local context. In each panel, I disaggregate counties into two groups based on their level of war exposure and rurality (high vs. low). This grouping affords both a straightforward means of comparison and aligns with my theoretical distinction between high and low burdens of war sacrifice. The y-axis reflects the average increase in postwar support (ΔMRP), with dots and whiskers corresponding to the average increase and confidence interval for each grouping by war exposure and rurality.

The lefthand panel in Figure 3.5 shows that counties with higher deaths per capita experienced a greater increase in postwar support than counties with lower death rates. The relationship is more nuanced when comparing differences by rurality. For example, among high-death counties, there is little difference in postwar opinion changes by rurality, cutting against my

theory's expectations that rurality amplifies war exposure. High deaths per capita appear to have a similar relationship with postwar opinion shifts in high and low rural counties. Conversely, there is a slight difference for low death counties, with high rural places experiencing a slightly lower increase in support than less rural areas. My inference from this pattern is that, in counties with a lower share of war's sacrifice, rurality may weaken support for expansive postwar aims, suggesting that the communal dynamics I theorize are less activated when war exposure is low.

The patterns depicted in the righthand panel for draftee death intensity align more clearly with my theoretical expectations. First, counties with higher draftee death intensity had noticeably lower increases in support than counties with lower draftee intensity. Substantively, this means that counties where a higher share of deaths were coercively imposed, residents were less supportive of the U.S. taking an active world role in the early Cold War years. Second, the relationship between coercive sacrifice and postwar opinion shifts is moderated by rurality. Among counties with low draftee death intensity, more rural counties had a slightly higher increase in postwar support than low rural counties. Conversely, among high draftee death counties, more rural places show the lowest change in postwar opinion. This pattern is consistent with my theory's expectation that both the coerciveness of wartime experience and local context matter for how war impacts postwar opinion.

Furthermore, there is an interesting pattern where the change in postwar support was similar for high rural counties with high draftee death intensity and low proportional deaths. A substantive interpretation is that low war contact—in the form of having fewer residents fight and die—dampened the postwar increase in public support. The logic is that decreased war exposure resulted in lower support for an expansive postwar grand strategy. Conversely, the coercive aspects of high war exposure cut in the opposite direction, as indicated by the low average change for high

draftee death intensity counties. Places with a high coercive war experience—those with many deaths of residents *forced* to serve in the war—experienced a shift comparable to high rural counties with lower overall deaths. This supports my broader argument: war's impact on postwar cost tolerance was conditional on both the type of wartime experience and local context in which it occurred.

Based on these initial descriptive patterns in line with my theory, I now turn to modeling the relationships depicted in the foregoing discussion. The focus in the next section will be estimating the impact of local war exposure on postwar support for global engagement. Following this, I explore (1) the temporal persistence of these postwar opinion changes, and (2) the distinctiveness apparent in between-region trends, most notably South vs. non-South counties, which has emerged as a source of variation in the national opinion results.

Regression Results: Conflict Exposure and Postwar Support for Global Engagement. The previous section provided a descriptive foundation from which to expect that WWII did not translate into uniform levels of support for greater global engagement. I now present the results of several regression models to more precisely isolate these relationships and assess the hypotheses I developed in Chapter 2.

The following analysis responds to three questions. First, motivated by the geographic patterns and correlations identified above, what is the magnitude and statistical significance of these relationships? For example, how much does a county with high war exposure differ from a county with low exposure when it comes to shifts in postwar views, and how do these shifts vary by region and local context? Second, to what extent does rurality moderate the relationship between war exposure and postwar opinion? Along these lines, does rurality operate similarly across regions, or—as suggested by the Southern distinctiveness identified earlier—does its effects

vary geographically? My analysis here is therefore aimed at evaluating one of my core theoretical claims: when it comes to how communities draw lessons from their wartime sacrifice, all war is local.

I then turn to examine how long these postwar shifts in opinion might last. Suppose coercive war experiences exert a significantly negative effect on postwar support, do those effects persist? Should we expect the WWII experience to continue shaping postwar sentiment above and beyond the Korean War experience, for example? To address this, I estimate support for the WORLD ROLE position a decade after WWII—in the aftermath of the Korean War—focusing on whether WWII-related effects are detectable while also accounting for local war exposure in the more temporally proximate war.

Before turning to these MRP based models, I start by summarizing the results of Equation 1, described in the Research Design section, which estimates *individual* level support for an active WORLD ROLE using the Gallup and ANES surveys used to construct my postwar MRP opinion estimates. For space considerations, the full results are reported in Appendix C.2.1, but I summarize the findings here. Recall that Equation 1 estimates individual level opinion using demographic traits (e.g., gender, race, education) in addition to place fixed effects and war exposure. I estimate models separately for each measure of war exposure.

There are two main findings from these individual level models. The first takeaway is that the effects of war exposure vary in size and significance across model specifications. The results sometimes align with my theoretical predictions, such as the negative and statistically significant coefficient for draftee deaths in Table 3C.2, or the positive and significant coefficients for WWII deaths per capita in Tables 3C.5 and 3C.10. The statistical significance often fades in the more fully specified models, however. This suggests that variation in individual opinion is explained by

other individual attributes, which is what the results indicate. The second main takeaway is that individual opinion is consistent with existing research on the association of certain demographic traits with specific foreign policy opinions. For example, across all the individual level models presented in Appendix C, female and Black respondents express significantly less support for taking an active WORLD ROLE, and higher educational attainment is positively and significantly correlated with greater support.

A third finding from these pooled individual models indicates temporal trends. For example, Tables 3C.1-3C.4 report model results from the six pooled Gallup surveys from 1945-1950, and the coefficient for survey year (indicating the year the survey was fielded) is consistently negative and statistically significant. This means that support for global engagement decreased over this period. Conversely, the three pooled ANES surveys from 1956-1960 show a positive and statistically significant temporal trend. One interpretation of these cross-cutting results is historical: the American public, coming out of four years of WWII mobilization, may have been hesitant to embrace an extroverted role because of the costs involved, and domestic economic concerns were more important. Although the Cold War was taking form in the backdrop of these early Gallup surveys, it had not yet consolidated as it was in the later 1950s when the ANES surveys were fielded. A decade later, in the aftermath of the Korean War, the positive temporal trend suggests a consolidated public consensus around the merits of global engagement.

Perhaps the most notable result from these individual level models—apparent in Tables 3C.5 and 3C.10—is the continuing effect of WWII deaths per capita. Respondents in counties with higher WWII deaths per capita expressed greater support for taking an active WORLD ROLE a decade after the war. Moreover, the negative and statistically significant coefficient for Korean War deaths per capita suggests divergent responses to these two wars (Table 3C.8 and 3C.10). While it is not

possible to directly measure draftee deaths from the Korean War, my theory would expect that the decreased postwar support resulted from feelings of coercion and alienation. This interpretation is supported by histories of public ambivalence toward the Korean War and uncertainty about its strategic value (Casey 2010; Brewer 2009; Jervis 1980). These individual level results raise a question around which my theory revolves: do different types of war exposure translate into shifts in *place-level* opinion?

I now turn to the main regression results that test my theoretical expectations about the type of wartime experience. Table 3.3 presents regression models estimating the relationship between the change in county support for an active WORLD ROLE (postwar MRP minus prewar MRP) and local war exposure.[34] These models include either the continuous or binary (median split) measures of my war exposure variables, capturing my theoretically relevant concept of distribution of sacrifice. Moreover, to identify whether postwar opinion is simply a reflection of prewar trends, Models 5-8 control for the prewar MRP estimates.

Table 3.3 WWII Exposure and Estimated County Support for Global Engagement, 1945-1950

	Dependent Variable: Post-WWII Change in Opinion (Δ MRP)							
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
WWII Deaths per 10k (continuous)	0.003***				0.001***			
	(0.0002)				(0.0001)			
WWII Deaths per 10k (binary)		0.048***				0.018***		
		(0.005)				(0.001)		
WWII Draftee Death % (continuous)			−0.205***				−0.039***	
			(0.013)				(0.004)	
WWII Draftee Death % (binary)				−0.050***				−0.009***
				(0.005)				(0.001)
Pre-WWII Interventionism					−1.140***	−1.141***	−1.140***	−1.140***
					(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)
Controls	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region Fixed Effects	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,065	3,065	3,046	3,046	3,065	3,065	3,046	3,046
R^2	0.033	0.033	0.075	0.036	0.940	0.940	0.938	0.937
Adjusted R^2	0.033	0.033	0.074	0.036	0.940	0.940	0.938	0.936

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The results in Table 3.3 are generally in line with my theory. First, both the continuous and binary measures of WWII deaths per capita are positive and statistically significant, consistent

[34] The coefficient plot for these models included in Appendix C.2.4.

with my theoretical expectations that greater proportional war exposure generates increased support for the war's strategic aims. For example, the coefficient for WWII deaths per capita in Model 2 means that counties above the national median in proportional deaths experienced a greater increase in support for an active WORLD ROLE compared to counties below the median. Turning to my expectations about coercive wartime experiences, Models 3-4 and 7-8 indicate that coercive war exposure—the proportion of conscripted soldiers among the total war dead—depresses the change in support after the war. For example, the coefficient of -0.205 in Model 3 suggests that a one standard deviation increase in draftee death intensity (approximately 17%) translates into a 3.5% smaller increase in postwar support.[35] A 1.5 standard deviation increase translates into a decreased shift of 5.2%, a meaningful difference considering the average shift in postwar MRP estimates was around 15%.

The results for the binary measure of draftee death intensity (Model 4) further affirm this finding. Counties above the national median in the share of draftees among the local war dead saw an average 5% smaller increase in support for postwar global engagement compared to counties below the national median. This result is strong support for my theory. Together, these results indicate that the effects of war on postwar opinion about grand strategy depend on the specific type of conflict exposure, and not that war produces a uniform shift in public attitudes.

Beyond local war exposure, a consistent finding in Table 3.3 is the negative and statistically significant coefficient for Pre-WWII Interventionism. Substantively, the results in Models 5-8 indicate a ceiling effect: the more a county supported U.S. intervention in WWII, the smaller its increase in postwar support for taking an active WORLD ROLE. In other words, there was less room

[35] The standard deviation for county level WWII draftee death intensity is 0.17. Therefore, to find the expected change in post-WWII MRP with the coefficient from Model 3, a one standard deviation increase in draftee death intensity is -0.205*0.17=-0.035.

for growth in support. Looking at Model 5, for example, controlling for pre-WWII interventionism and region fixed effects, an increase in WWII deaths by 1 per 10,000 county residents is associated with a 0.1% increase in county support for postwar global engagement. The negative coefficient for Pre-WWII Interventionism suggests that a 1% increase in pre-WWII interventionism is associated with a 1.14% smaller increase in postwar support. A one standard deviation increase in prewar support for intervention corresponds to a decreased change in postwar opinion of 13.8%, approximately the national average in the postwar opinion shift. That the change in postwar support was less in counties with higher draftee death intensity supports two points from my theory: (1) war has uneven effects based on the type and concentration of local sacrifice, and (2) more coercive experiences depress support for strategic aims associated with the war.

An important point about my model specifications is worth noting. I do not control for state fixed effects or other local covariates because they are already captured in the MRP estimates. Recall that the county MRP estimates (represented in Equations 2-4 in the Research Design section) are derived from national level opinion models weighted by the demographic combination comprised in each county. These models include individual demographic predictors and recent presidential vote share, which accounts for unit level heterogeneity. Therefore, the MRP estimates already capture place specific factors controlled for in the individual level response models discussed above (estimated with Equation 1).

The bottom line is that these regression models are not reporting a causal effect independent of other factors, but estimating the associational relationship between place level opinion and war exposure. Put differently, these results support an interpretation that "counties with these demographic compositions, with this level and type of war exposure, also experienced this degree of change in postwar opinion." While not strictly causal, this offers theoretically meaningful

inferences based on the best available empirical evidence to test my claim that the political legacy of war is conditioned by the nature of sacrifice and the local context in which it occurs.

Regression Results: Wartime Sacrifice and Local Context. The previous set of regression models affirmed the first part of my theory: the impact of war on postwar opinion depends on the *type* of wartime experience. This section takes up the second part, whether the relationship depends on local context, rurality in particular. Did more rural counties respond differently to war in how they thought about the nation's WORLD ROLE? To test this, I estimate models interacting war exposure with rurality.

Before presenting the results, an important distinction between MRP estimates (used for the dependent variable) and rurality as an independent variable is useful. One might think it is redundant to expect a rural moderation effect because the MRP estimates are a function of the proportion of rural residents in each county. However, my focus here is not on identifying whether opinion shifted in rural counties differently than non-rural counties, but *whether the effect of war exposure varies by county rurality*. In other words, my interaction models are testing rural moderation, not the effect of the rural composition of counties. Although the proportion of rural residents is captured in the poststratification stage of MRP (Equation 4), the models I describe here estimate opinion *change* between pre and postwar periods. Therefore, my focus is estimating whether war exposure had a differential effect based on rurality, not overall support in rural places.

To evaluate rural moderation, I estimate a series of interaction models pairing various operationalizations of war exposure and county rurality (continuous and binary measures). These models resemble those discussed above but differ by incorporating the interaction term to assess my theoretical expectation about local context. In particular, binary median split measures of war exposure are intended to test hypotheses related to the distribution of sacrifice. These binary

measures offer a straightforward interpretation of whether (1) high war exposure in (2) high rural counties was associated with different opinion shifts compared to other combinations.

Table 3.4 Summary of Rural Interaction Model Results

Interaction	Effect Direction	Significant	Theory Support
Deaths × Rurality (cont. × cont.)	−	No	No
Deaths × Rurality (cont. × bin)	−	No	No
Deaths × Rurality (bin × cont.)	+	Yes	Yes
Deaths × Rurality (bin × bin)	+	Yes	Yes
Dratee × Rurality (all models)	±	No	No

The results of this first set of interaction models are summarized in Table 3.4 and presented fully in Table 3C.13. Overall, support in these models for the moderating role of rurality is mixed: some models—particularly those interacting WWII deaths per capita with rurality—generate significant coefficients in the expected direction. That is, the relationship between war deaths and opinion change is increasing in more rural counties. For example, the model interacting Deaths × Rurality (bin × bin) reports the effect on change in support in counties *above the national median in deaths per capita,* and *above the national median in the percentage of county rural population*. The coefficient of 0.006 ($p<0.05$) (Table 3C.13) means that counties above the national median in proportional deaths and rurality experienced a greater increase in postwar support for global engagement compared to counties with low deaths and rurality. However, the interaction models for draftee death intensity are inconsistent. For example, the coefficients reported for the bottom four interaction terms in Table 3C.13 have varying signs, and none are significant. An inference from this first set of models indicates that, while some evidence does affirm my theory's claim about rural context amplifying the impact of war, evidence for the divergent impact of coercive intensity (draftee deaths) is limited.

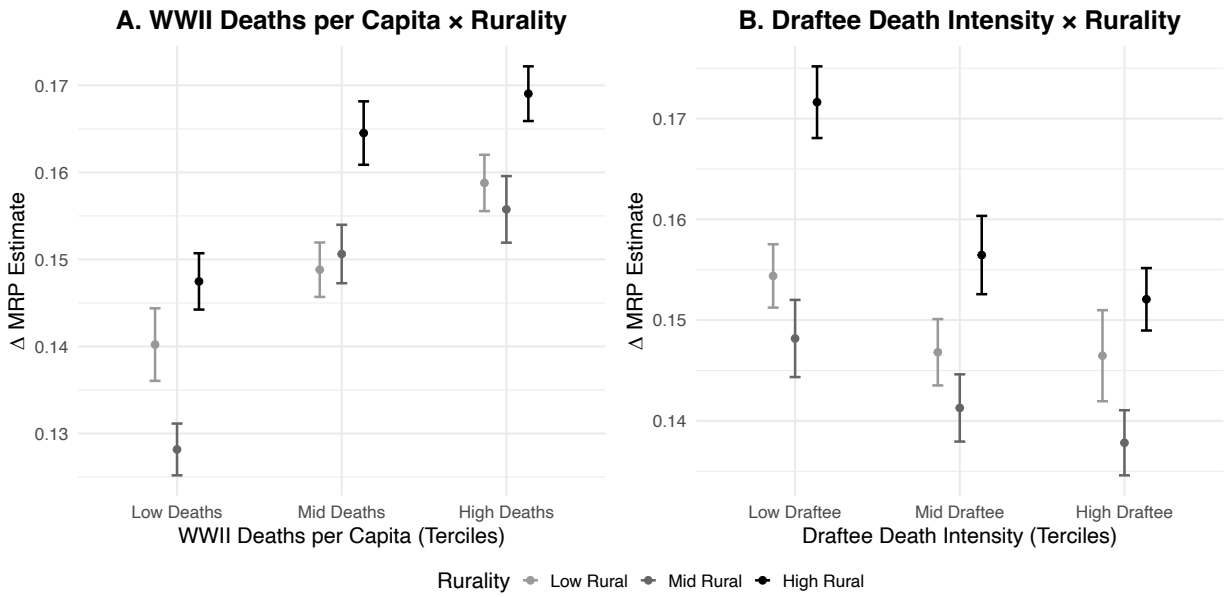


Figure 3.6 How Rurality Shapes the Impact of WWII Exposure on Change in Postwar Support for U.S. Global Engagement (Terciles), Gallup 1945-1950

To address these inconclusive results from the continuous and binary interaction models reported in Table 3.4, I estimate a second set of interaction models using tercile categories for the independent variables. In these models, I assign counties into equal categories of low, medium, and high war exposure and rurality, therefore enabling a test of moderation between different thresholds of each variable. Again, the full results are included in Table 3C.14, and Figure 3.6 plots the predicted change in postwar opinion estimated by these models.

Each point and confidence interval in Figure 3.6 reflects the combined effect of each model's separate terms and their corresponding interaction term coefficient. The results visualized in Figure 3.6 broadly support my theoretical expectations. For example, Panel A suggests that higher deaths per capita *in more rural counties* experienced a greater positive shift in postwar opinion. Conversely, Panel B shows that higher draftee death intensity *in more rural counties* produced a lower shift in opinion. Together, the results of these tercile models align more with my theory than the combinations of binary and continuous interactions discussed previously. Here, as my theory expects, greater proportional war deaths had a stronger impact on postwar opinion

change in the most rural counties, whereas the direction reverses when the wartime experience was measured as more coercive.

How should we interpret the seemingly incongruent patterns between the predicted opinion change in Figure 3.6 and the interaction term coefficients reported in Table 3C.14? As an example, consider the predicted change in postwar opinion for counties with high draftee deaths, represented by the righthand group in Panel B of Figure 3.6. Notably, estimated support appears higher for high draftee deaths in high rural counties compared to low or mid rurality terciles, which seems to run counter to theoretical expectations. However, I emphasize that Figure 3.6 is visualizing the predicted values of change in postwar opinion, which is a function of both the main coefficient *and* interaction terms. For reference, the interaction term for High Draftee × High Rural in Table 3C.14 is -0.012 ($p<0.01$), while the coefficient for High Draftee × *Mid Rural* is -0.002 and not significant. This means that, consistent with my theoretical expectations, high coercive intensity *in more rural counties* depresses the war's impact on support for postwar engagement.

Why, then, does Figure 3.6 show that the estimated opinion change for counties with high draftee deaths and *high rurality* is greater than high draftee deaths in *low or mid rural counties*? To understand this, we must consider the positive and significant main effect of high rurality. While the results show that rurality moderates the directional size of draftee death intensity (more negative), rurality by itself has a positive impact on change in support. These cross-cutting coefficient terms indicate the need to put interaction terms in context. A key and consistent takeaway across both panels is that the direction in postwar opinion change mirrors the increase in war exposure threshold: more deaths per capita corresponds with greater shifts, and greater draftee death intensity corresponds with lower changes. Both relationships are amplified in high rural counties.

Next, to determine whether rurality moderates war exposure differently across regions, I estimate a final series of interaction models disaggregated by the four main geographic regions: Northeast, South, Midwest, and West. The fully specified results are presented in Tables 3C.15-3C.16 and corresponding coefficient plots in Figures 3C.4-3C.5. These results enable a more comprehensive assessment of earlier observations about regional variation. This analysis sets up my concluding empirical test of my theory's external validity where I examine the case of Southern distinctiveness as an example of within-polity variation in democratic context.

The figures from these region-specific models reveal a couple patterns with theoretical implications. Looking first at the interaction terms for draftee death intensity in Figure 3C.5, the negative interaction effect of High Draftee Deaths is most pronounced in High Rural counties *in the South* compared to the other regions. Substantively, this means that the depressive moderating impact of rurality on coercive intensity was greatest in Southern rural counties. Likewise, there are also negative and significant coefficients for these interactions among counties in the Midwest, as reported in Table 3C.16. On the other hand, region differences are less apparent when looking at deaths per capita in Table 3C.15 and Figure 3C.4. Viewed together, these results suggest reasons to think that *regional* distinctiveness may play a role in how rurality moderates the impact of war sacrifice on local opinion.

Overall, my interpretation of these three sets of interaction models is that they offer nuanced but consistent support for my main theoretical claim: the impact of war on postwar opinion about grand strategy depends on the *type* of wartime experience and the *local context* in which sacrifice occurs. The relationship between proportional war deaths and postwar opinion is amplified in more rural places, and the moderating role of local context appears particularly distinctive in the South compared to other regions. The implications are significant, especially

when placed in the broader context of postwar era political realignments on foreign and domestic policy. Furthermore, given that geographically bounded regions often have distinctive political identities—in both the U.S. and comparative contexts—these results offer further motivation to explore differences between South and non-South reactions to war sacrifice. Before turning to this comparison, I examine a final hypothesis concerning the temporal persistence of these war induced changes in opinion.

Temporal Persistence of War's Political Effects. My analysis up to this point has focused on opinion shifts in the early postwar years, using MRP estimates from pooled Gallup surveys (1945–1950). I now turn to examine whether and how long these war-induced changes in opinion persisted. Do they decay quickly, as existing research finds (Althaus et al. 2012), or did local effects cohere into *legacies*?[36] Recall that the watershed thesis maintains that WWII caused a decisive and lasting turn in favor of postwar internationalism, whereas revisionist accounts argue instead that the war affirmed preexisting trends. John Jeffries (1996), for example, writes that the war "reaffirmed old ways of thinking" more than it caused any transformation. While my results so far indicate the war was associated with changes in early postwar opinion, here I investigate whether those effects are detectable a decade later.

I also return in this section to a key intuition of my theory—the idea that rurality not only amplifies war's effects on opinion but makes them durable, continuing to characterize local political culture after the war. As I argue in Chapter 2, rural communities are distinct from cities—particularly in their sense of communal cohesion, in group solidarity, and place-based sense of

[36] While there is no universal definition of a "political legacy," one recent review of a growing body of research on "historical persistence" defines persistence as an effect that is detectable a decade or more after the historical cause. "The decision to set a decade-long time scale for long-term persistence is arbitrary, but it distinguishes historical persistence from analyses that explore short-run political dynamics or structural causal relationships without a historical component" (Cirone and Pepinsky 2022, 242).

linked fate. My theory expects that rurality both amplifies the effects of war but also makes those effects last longer, or at least become more salient and resonant to future residents. Put differently, I would expect more rural counties to retain or "hold onto" their wartime experiences longer than less rural areas. To be sure, even if the rural interaction at a later point in time is not strong or significant, evidence that the local connection *matters less* can still be theoretically meaningful. As temporal distance from a war grows, national narratives may outweigh local wartime experiences. While local residents may have distinct memories or derive place-based meaning from their community's wartime sacrifice, their views may align more closely with national memory than local experiences. I explore these ideas further in Chapter 5.

Building on my previous analyses of rural interactions, I now examine whether the results discussed above obtain a decade later. To do this, I estimate a nearly identical set of interaction models based on MRP estimates from the 1956-1960 ANES surveys. There are two main differences between these models and those from the early postwar period that used Gallup surveys. First, instead of the dependent variable representing *change* between pre-WWII interventionism and post-WWII support for active WORLD ROLE, the dependent variable in these models is simply *support* for the active WORLD ROLE position. However, each model still controls for county prewar interventionism, therefore enabling an inference about whether the results are indeed attributed to WWII or are a function of preexisting patterns of support.

The second difference is that these models include county level Korean War exposure, which I conceptualize as a mediating variable. For example, it is plausible that the most recent war experience might crowd out the effects of a previous war, in this case WWII, on opinion a decade later. For consistency in testing my theoretical expectations, I include Korean War deaths per capita in models testing the effect of WWII deaths per capita; in models testing WWII draftee death

intensity, I include Korean KIA intensity—the proportion of war deaths that were soldiers killed in action. While KIA intensity is not exactly the same idea as coercive war intensity, it represents a community's sense of vivid and politically salient sacrifice.

Table 3.5 summarizes the main findings from these persistence-oriented models. The first set of models—displayed in the first row of Table 3.5—reports results from models testing whether WWII exposure was detectable in county level opinion a decade after the war. Full results are reported in Table 3C.17. The key takeaway is that county level WWII exposure had a lasting positive impact on county level opinion. The signs for both WWII deaths per capita (+) and draftee intensity (−) are theoretically consistent and significant. Overall sacrifice, in terms of local proportional deaths, is associated with higher support for global engagement. However, when measured as coercive intensity, or forced sacrifice, higher levels of coercive intensity in WWII is associated with expressing *less* support for global engagement even a decade later.

Table 3.5 Summary of War Exposure and Rural Moderation on Support for Active World Role, ANES 1956-1960

Model Specification	WWII Deaths Per Capita	Draftee Intensity	Korean War Exposure	Rural Moderation	Theory Support
Main effects—war variables only [a]	+	−	Mixed (+ for deaths per capita)	N/A	Yes. WWII exposure predicts opinion after Korean War, controlling for Korean War exposure.
Rural interactions [b]	Not significant	Not significant	Korean deaths per capita only [c]	Not significant	Limited. Rural moderation weakened over time.

[a] These models are summarized in Table C17. These models do not include an interaction term.
[b] These models are summarized in Table C18 and C19. "Not significant" for WWII Deaths per Capita and Draftee Intensity are referring to the interaction terms for the war exposure variable and rurality.
[c] This is referring to the coefficient in Table C18 for Korea PC × Rurality in Model 5. The sign of this term (−) is opposite of the sign for the main effect, suggesting rurality reverses the effect of Korean War deaths per capita.

Moreover, the results for Korean War deaths per capita are consistent with the results from the main effect for WWII deaths per capita. That is, Korean War deaths per capita are positively correlated with county support for an active WORLD ROLE. I take this suggestive evidence as

offering further validity for my theory's claim that local war exposure matters for postwar views about grand strategy.

The second set of models are summarized in the second row of Table 3.5 and test whether rurality continued to moderate war effects over time. The full results for these interaction models are displayed in Tables 3C.18 and 3C.19. The key insight from these interaction models departs from prior findings: none of the persistence focused ANES interaction models in C18 show a significant interaction term for any combination of WWII exposure and rurality, controlling for Korean War exposure. An interpretation is that the rural amplification detected in the early postwar period may have been temporally bounded or faded in strength in the following decade. While it is still notable that local war exposure continues shaping future opinion, the unique moderating role of rurality appears more limited a decade later.

An interesting exception is that there is slight evidence of an interaction effect for Korean War deaths per capita *that points in the opposite direction* from the main effect for deaths per capita. In Model 5 of Table 3C.18, the coefficient for Korean War deaths per capita is positive at 0.1 ($p<0.01$), but its interaction term is negative at -0.009 ($p<0.01$).[37] This reversal is interesting and suggests something potentially unique about how the Korean War was interpreted locally compared to the WWII experience.

Overall, the takeaway from Table 3.5 presents a mixed conclusion. On the one hand, the political legacy of WWII—in terms of public views about the nation's grand strategy—was significant and detectable at least a decade after the war ended. Local wartime experiences, rather than simply the collective "good war" experience or aggregate national deaths, was a significant

[37] The key difference between the models in Table 3C.18 and 3C.19 is that those in 3C.18 do not include a measure of Korean War exposure in every model. Alternatively, all models in Table 3C.19 control for the measure of Korean War exposure resembling the main WWII exposure variable modeled in the interaction.

predictor of opinion about global engagement in the late 1950s, above and beyond another important but more limited war. On the other hand, the amplifying effects of rurality weakened over time. Although rurality may have amplified reactions to local sacrifice in the early postwar years, I speculate that the meaning attributed to these local experiences may have become nationalized and residents may have embraced these narratives over local memories.

Besides the main war exposure variables of interest, two consistent results merit discussion. First, pre-WWII interventionism remains negative and statistically significant across all ANES models. This suggests a lasting influence of pre-WWII sentiment about foreign affairs, which I interpret as indicating a strong and persistent influence of place-based views even amid historically significant external shocks to the domestic political system. Despite a lack of persistent rural moderation, this finding points to a broader interpretation of geographically rooted political identities and beliefs, which is notable considering the once longstanding view of the public as having unstable foreign policy views (Almond 1950). Second, county rurality itself is negative and statistically significant across all model specifications. This result speaks to the emergence of a rural-urban cleavage in opinion about world affairs. This is notable because it predates the origins attributed in recent scholarship of a salient rural-urban divide to the 1970s (Brown and Mettler 2024). That rurality predicts less support for global engagement in the late 1950s, even factoring in WWII and Korean War exposure, suggests a place-based divide on foreign policy was already taking shape at the heyday of the Cold War. This finding resonates with observations by scholars in the early Cold War about rural districts expressing less support for both pre-WWII era and early Cold War internationalist legislation (Smuckler 1953; Rieselbach 1960).

I now conclude with my final empirical analysis, a quasi-test of external validity by exploiting within-polity variation in democratic context. Specifically, I assess whether the political effects of wartime experiences were similar across Southern and non-Southern counties.

Exploring Southern Distinctiveness: Wartime Experience in a Non-Democratic Context. A consistent finding throughout my results is that both local *and* regional context matter for how war impacted postwar opinion about grand strategy. In the American case, regional variation offers a quasi-test of how regime type might influence these results. Specifically, the South during the early postwar years represents a "least likely" case for responsiveness to the effects of war. Given the continuation of Jim Crow and other nondemocratic features (Mickey 2015; Caughey 2018), the South presents a convenient test of my theory's external validity. My theory would be strengthened, and therefore expected to travel beyond the U.S., by finding that the results identified earlier also obtain in the South. If similar patterns do not hold, this suggests my theory might be limited to democratic contexts.

I present the results of my South vs. non-South analysis in two parts. First, I summarize results from interaction models that estimate how county war exposure impacted postwar opinion, inside and outside the South, using the Gallup (1945-1950) and ANES (1956-1960) MRP estimates. These models enable an inference about whether wartime experiences produced different opinion changes in democratic vs. less democratic contexts. I refer to these as the binary South-non-South models. Second, to probe the robustness of these findings, I conduct a quasi-regression discontinuity design using a buffer zone of counties along the South-non-South border. The focus here is identifying whether it is in fact variation in democratic context that is driving the results of the interaction models.

Figure 3.7 visualizes the interaction coefficients from the binary models. The black dots represent estimates from the Gallup models (Table 3C.20), and the grey dots indicate estimates from the ANES models (Table 3C.21). The dashed horizonal line at 0 represents the null hypothesis of no difference in the relationship between wartime experience and county opinion between counties inside vs. outside the South.

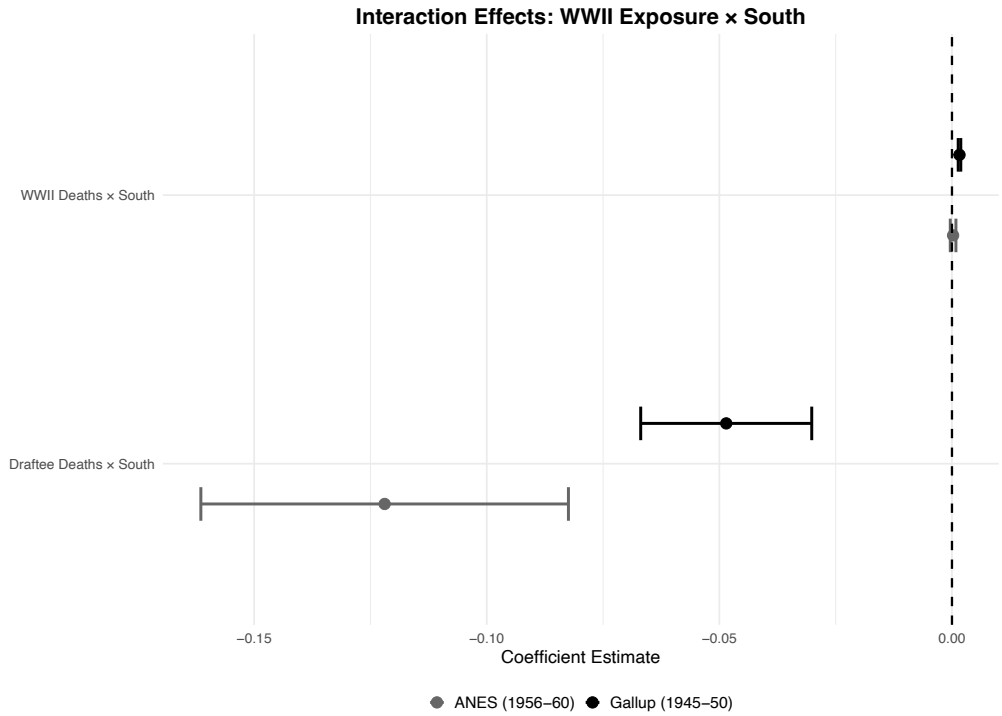


Figure 3.7 Interaction Between WWII Exposure and South on Postwar Support for Global Engagement, Gallup 1945-1950 and ANES 1956-1960

The topline takeaway is that the results discussed earlier also obtain in the South. In some cases, they are more robust in the South. Two results highlight this. First, the main effects for each measure of WWII exposure algin with my theoretical expectations. WWII deaths per capita predict greater support in both survey periods; draftee intensity predicts lower support, however, this is limited to the early postwar years (Table 3C.20). An interesting exception here appears in the ANES models, where Model 4 in Table 3C.21 indicates that greater WWII coercive intensity

corresponded with *greater support*, not less, which cuts against my theory. However, importantly, the interaction term in this model is significant and points in the expected direction (negative), indicating Southern counties still interpreted their coercive WWII experience more negatively a decade later compared to non-Southern counties. Recalling my previous speculation about how local memories may give way to national narratives, this finding suggests this possibility may not have applied uniformly.

The second key takeaway from Figure 3.7 offers further support for my theory. The negative impact of draftee death intensity on postwar global engagement is amplified in Southern counties. Consider the grey dot and whisker for the Draftee Deaths × South interaction term for the ANES models. This corresponds to the coefficient of -0.122 ($p<0.01$) in Table 3C.21. Substantively, this means that a one standard deviation increase in WWII draftee death intensity decreases support for an active WORLD ROLE by 3.5% *among counties in the South* one decade later. This suggests that the local connection of war may be sharpened further by distinct regionally situated political contexts.

A final important point to note is that the main effect for South vs. non-South counties reverses across the survey periods. In the early postwar years, *change* in support was lower in Southern counties (Table 3C.20)—likely because they exhibited stronger pre-WWII interventionism—but a decade later the positive coefficient in ANES models means they were more supportive than non-Southern counties overall (Table 3C.21).

Overall, I take these results from the binary models as suggestive supportive for my theory's portability to non-democratic contexts. The results indicate further reasons to think that local wartime experiences interact with a bundle of place-based identities, even in places where democracy is attenuated. In the U.S., Southern distinctiveness, owing to its unique political culture

and institutions in the early Cold War, did not suppress the communal lessons drawn from war sacrifice in ways meaningfully different from other parts of the country.

To probe whether regime type or distinctive regional culture might be driving these patterns, I conclude by reporting results from a quasi-regression discontinuity design that compares counties at different distances inside and outside the South. I create a buffer zone along the Southern border at three intervals: 25, 50, and 100 miles. The buffer spans the South-non-South border between states that seceded and those that remained in the Union during the Civil War.[38] The rationale is to exploit a discontinuity in regime type—i.e., the influence of Jim Crow and less democratic institutions in the South—while holding regional culture and identity relatively constant. That is, while there is some overlap in Southern culture on both sides of the buffer zone, Southern counties shared a distinct embeddedness in a less democratic political context. By estimating regression models at varying distances from the regional border, my goal is to distinguish whether observed differences in postwar opinion are attributable to different regime context or and broader regional culture.

Table 3.6 Southern Distinctiveness: Binary and County Buffer Zone Regression Results

Term	**Gallup (1945-1950)**				**ANES (1956-1960)**			
Model	Binary[a]	25 mi[b]	50 mi[b]	100 mi[b]	Binary[c]	25 mi[d]	50 mi[d]	100 mi[d]
WWII deaths per 10k	+ ***	+ ns	+ **	+ ***	+ ***	– *	– ns	– ns
WWII draftee deaths %	– ***	– ns	– *	– ns	+ ns	+ ns	– **	– ns
WWII per cap. × South	– **	– ns	– ns	– ns	+ ns	+ ns	– ns	– ns
WWII draftees × South	– *	+ ns	+ **	+ *	+ ***	+ ns	+ ***	+ ***

Note: *** p<.01; ** p<.05; * p<.1; ns = not significant.
[a] The coefficients from the Gallup Binary models are displayed in Table C20.
[b] The coefficients from the Gallup South-Non-South buffer zone models are displayed in Table C22.
[c] The coefficients from the ANES Binary models are displayed in Table C21.
[d] The coefficients from the ANES South-Non-South buffer zone models are displayed in Table C23.

[38] The buffer runs along the north borders of Arkansas, Tennessee, and Virginia, and the southern borders of Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Maryland.

Instead of reviewing each buffer zone model separately, Table 3.6 summarizes the full results from the binary South-non-South models discussed earlier and each of the three buffer zone models. I highlight a few important takeaways. First, looking at the main effects of the war exposure variables in the Gallup models (1945-1950), the results support theoretical expectations. For example, the coefficients for WWII deaths per capita show that proportional deaths are associated with greater postwar change in support for an active WORLD ROLE. This holds even at greater buffer distances (50 and 100 miles). Turning to draftee death intensity, some coefficients are imprecise, but they generally point in the expected negative direction, consistent with my argument that coercive war experiences depress postwar support. Moreover, in both the Gallup and ANES models, the coefficient at the 50-mile buffer zone is negative and significant, suggesting support for the theory's portability across regime context.

Second, as I discussed in my review of the binary South-non-South models, there is interesting reversal in coefficient direction of the WWII deaths per capita × South interaction term. There is a similar reversal among some of the buffer zone models, although with some variation in statistical significance. For example, in all three Gallup buffer zone intervals, the main coefficient for WWII per capita is positive, but the interaction term for WWII per cap. × South is negative, although not statistically significant. An implication is that, at least near the Southern border, the positive effect of proportional deaths may be dampened by Southern political context. Shifting to WWII draftee death intensity, the Gallup interaction term for WWII draftees × South is positive across all three buffer distances; it is positive and significant for the 50 and 100 mile distances. The same pattern obtains in the ANES models, where all interaction terms for WWII draftee intensity × South are positive and significant, cutting against my theoretical expectation about coercive intensity depressing support for postwar global engagement.

Third, the buffer zone results generally tell a mixed story. While the main effects of war exposure generally conform to theoretical expectations, the interaction results differ across buffer distances. One interpretation is that these results are picking up state level idiosyncrasies or local institutional influences not reflected in the binary models. This might be because the buffer zones only capture counties along the border and not the entire region. However, the border discontinuity offers a strong test of within-polity variation in regime type. Therefore, if subnational *political* context were to shape how war translates into postwar opinion, these results may reflect the influence of local political regime type rather than regional culture.

Overall, my analysis of Southern distinctiveness offers a nuanced understanding of my theory's generalizability. The main theoretical takeaway is that my core claim is supported: postwar support for grand strategy depends on local wartime experience. The results of these models indicate that proportional and coercive wartime experiences align with theoretical expectations both inside and outside the South. However, the results of the buffer zone analysis indicate that local political context, not simply regional cultural distinctiveness, complicates a straightforward story about how war impacts local opinion. In particular, variations in the sign and significance of interaction terms across the buffer zone distances indicates that wartime experiences cannot be treated as a uniform phenomenon. The theoretical takeaway, therefore, is that local context matters but so does the broader political context, such as varying levels of democratic representativeness, in how communities translate war into postwar beliefs. These results show that understanding the relationship between war and postwar opinion requires attention to where people live, their community's historical wartime experiences, and the broader political and institutional context.

3.6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I presented a systematic analysis of how WWII influenced mass public support for the U.S.'s postwar grand strategy. Building on my theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2, this chapter's results highlight a congruence between two seemingly unrelated political observations: the aphorism popularized by former House Speaker Tip O'Neill that "all politics is local," and the intuition by David Mayhew (2005) that war is "capable of generating new political universes." The results here suggest both can be right. Consistent with my theory, I find that WWII influenced postwar opinion, although not uniformly. Instead, the evidence in this chapter shows that "all war is local," and that postwar opinion shifts reflect the *type* of wartime experience and particular *local context*. The main payoff from my analysis is that understanding how war impacts the domestic politics of grand strategy requires attention to who pays the costs of war, and where those costs are concentrated.

Beyond this historically significant case, this chapter speaks to broader theoretical debates about the political effects of war, their intertemporal transmission, and the domestic political foundations of grand strategy. My analysis in this chapter combined historical public opinion data and underutilized local war data to shed light on enduring questions about the relationship between war and democracy, and important historical debates about the role of war in U.S. political history. Methodologically, I demonstrated the value of adapting techniques pioneered in American politics—specifically multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP)—to study questions of enduring importance to international relations. In this way, this chapter presents evidence in support of my theory, suggests it may be applicable in other contexts, and supports a broader argument for scholars to consider the relationship between war and political geography.

The results presented in this chapter offer broad support for my theoretical expectations. First, the effects of war on the public's postwar opinion about grand strategy depends on the *type* of wartime experience: proportional war deaths were associated with greater county level support for taking an active role in world affairs, while coercive intensity—measured as the proportion of drafted soldiers among war dead—predicts lower support. Second, the impact of war on opinion depends on *local context*, in particular rurality.

My initial descriptive analysis of the county MRP estimates established a foundation that provided suggestive evidence for my argument. Spatial visualizations of pre and postwar opinion established patterns of geographic variation that provided reasons to suspect the war was not experienced equally. Further inspection of bivariate relations between county war exposure and postwar opinion shifts supported my theory's intuition.

A series of regression models provided further evidence for key aspects of my theory. In the early postwar years, I find support for the first key part of my theory: counties with higher deaths per capita experienced greater increases in postwar support for global engagement, while counties with greater coercive intensity had a smaller increase in support. Notably, these results persist a decade later, even after controlling for Korean war exposure. Evidence in support of my theory's second main claim about rural moderation is mixed. While there is evidence of a local connection in the early postwar Gallup polls, the rural effect appears to fade in the later ANES era, and in some cases the interaction reverses. However, the fact that I do find evidence that rurality amplifies the impact of war deaths in the binned interaction models lends suggestive evidence in support of my theory that *more deaths* in *more rural places* have a more notable impact on postwar opinion changes. Some of these findings are further affirmed by the results of a series of individual level models based on the surveys used to create the county MRP estimates. A main finding here

is that respondents in counties with greater WWII deaths per capita expressed greater support for taking an active WORLD ROLE, suggesting that the broader patterns I observe also obtain among individuals.

To address concerns that my focus on a single case may limit my theory's generalizability, I employed two approaches to test whether the effect of wartime experience may vary by regime type. First, using a set of binary South-non-South models to capture broad differences in democratic context, I find that my broader results apply in both contexts. In some models, the effects of war are even sharpened in Southern counties. This is important because it shows both responsiveness to external political shocks even in non-democratic contexts and because it speaks to broader understanding of the political evolution of the U.S. postwar South.

I examined these findings further with a buffer zone quasi-regression discontinuity design that compared counties at three distances on either side of the South-non-South border. While the main effects of WWII exposure affirm theoretical predictions, the results for the interaction terms are mixed. Coercive intensity sometimes predicts greater support for postwar global engagement in Southern counties, the opposite of my prediction. I suggest that this result, despite cutting against my expectation, still suggests the importance of local context—in this case geographically situated political institutions—in how communities draw lessons from war. One possibility is that these results reflect a postwar dynamic where communities in a historically nondemocratic area seek to identify with national priorities—in this case global engagement—to assign meaning to wartime sacrifices. These border zone findings warrant further exploration and point to interesting avenues for research on the role of war in American political development, especially as it relates to realignment of political coalitions.

The findings presented in this chapter support my main theoretical argument that the impact of war on public support for grand strategy depends on the depends on the *type* of wartime sacrifice and *where* that sacrifice occurs. While no theory predicts all outcomes, the results indicate that proportional war deaths consistently predict greater postwar support, and coercive intensity is associated with less support. Moreover, these relationships are amplified in more rural contexts, especially in the early postwar survey period. Despite the role of rurality fading a decade later, I posit that local memories remain salient, mobilizable memories that underlie national narratives of the war's meaning. My finding that war's effects on postwar opinion persists a decade later further indicates the durability of wartime influences on postwar support.

More generally, this chapter contributes to the dissertation's broader interest in reinvigorating attention to the international influences on American political development. By addressing this important historical case often treated as a critical juncture in U.S. foreign policy (Legro 2000), I show that both the watershed and revisionist accounts are partly correct. The war did produce greater support for global engagement. However, this fact is qualified by finding that these effects were uneven, limited by coercion, and local political context. Therefore, a major contribution of this chapter is complicating received understandings of WWII as transforming the nation's foreign policy "mood." Put simply, the war did not produce a universal transformation in views or fundamentally foreclose support for less global engagement. My focus on this single theoretically and historically important case demonstrates the value of pursing a question driven approach with the historical social science methods most appropriate to the task. I hope this chapter illustrates the potential for continued historically oriented research on the subnational politics of foreign and national security policy.

This chapter establishes that war influenced one important dimension of the postwar domestic politics of grand strategy: mass public support. My remaining empirical chapters address two additional aspects of my dissertation's outcome of interest. First, to what extent did these wartime experiences and local context shape how these postwar opinion shifts were represented by lawmakers? To that end, Chapter 4 examines whether and how these WWII induced changes made their way into the congressional politics of the early Cold War foreign policy consensus. Second, how are these memories of war passed down over time, made salient, and to what effect? Chapter 5 takes up the longer-term legacies of war, drawing on extensive fieldwork evidence to analyze the interplay between local and national cultures of war remembrance.

CHAPTER 4

Local Legacies of War and the Postwar Consensus in Congress

> "American postwar planners brought to their tasks notions of security, justice, and governance forged within the United States during the New Deal."
>
> — G. John Ikenberry (2011, 167)

> "The New Deal and this Administration is having its wings clipped and from now on you can expect Congress to continue the clipping."
>
> — Senate Minority Whip Kenneth S. Wherry (R-NE), 1944[1]

4.1 INTRODUCTION

"Politics stops at the water's edge," Senator Arthur Vandenburg famously declared as the Cold War got underway. This phrase is often invoked to suggest that foreign policy is somehow insulated from the same political pressures and incentives that characterize domestic politics. Despite its rhetorical appeal, it obscures the intense political contestation, factionalism, and competing interests that shape U.S. foreign policy (Milner and Tingley 2015; Saunders 2024). Although war often empowers the executive (Howell et al. 2013), I join others in emphasizing the porousness between domestic and foreign policy, especially in the wake of major wars. The distributional nature of wartime sacrifice, which varies widely by geography, can reshape the political landscape by giving rise to new coalitions and interests (Mayhew 2005; Saldin 2010).

In this chapter, I examine how U.S. involvement in World War II shaped the congressional politics of postwar foreign policy. The specific questions guiding this chapter are the following: How did lawmakers respond to the wartime experiences of their districts? Did the war

[1] Quoted in Young (2013, 227), citing Ross (1969, 91).

fundamentally alter elite ideological commitments, legislative support for postwar foreign policy, or democratic representation of constituent preferences on grand strategy?

To answer these questions, I test the theory of local war legacies developed in Chapter 2, extending the analysis of public opinion in Chapter 3 to the congressional level. Whereas Chapter 3 documented how wartime sacrifice and subnational context impacted public support for postwar global engagement, this chapter focuses on whether those shifts made it upward to impact congressional behavior. Like my theory's expectations about war's impact on public opinion, I expect that lawmaker responses to war will depend on the nature and intensity of their district's wartime sacrifice, the local context in which sacrifice comes home, and whether lawmakers are sincere or strategic democratic representatives.

In addition to testing my theory, this chapter advances the dissertation's reevaluation of the "watershed thesis"—a dominant historical narrative that operates as a shadow foil for my analysis. According to this view, WWII caused a decisive break in U.S. foreign policy, discrediting "isolationism" and forging a bipartisan postwar consensus around U.S. global leadership. The watershed thesis makes two assumptions about the war's influence through Congress: that prewar non-interventionists transformed their views in response to the war (the "conversion" hypothesis), or they were voted out of office by a newly internationalist public and replaced with new pro-engagement lawmakers (the "purge" hypothesis). Senator Arthur Vandenburg is often treated as emblematic of the conversion story. The purge narrative is often associated with the fate of prewar supporters of the America First Committee, many of whom were voted out or retired in the years after Pearl Harbor.

This chapter proceeds in five parts. First, I summarize my theory as it relates to legislative behavior, emphasizing the distinction between sincere and strategic lawmakers and the idea of

contingent democratic representation. Second, I situate my theoretical test in the historical context of the postwar foreign policy consensus and its relationship with the New Deal. Third, I describe my empirical strategy, including how I measure district war exposure, lawmaker ideology, voting, and democratic representation. Fourth, I present my results in three stages: ideological change, voting on key postwar foreign policy legislation, and democratic responsiveness. The final part of my analysis examines whether these outcomes vary in places with an abbreviated electoral connection, particularly the American South. This analysis offers quasi-within polity variation in regime type. Fifth, I conclude by synthesizing the findings, discuss their implications for my theory of local war legacies, and contextualize them in the dissertation's broader contribution to debates about theories of war, democratic representation, and the domestic politics of grand strategy.

I highlight three main findings. First, I find little evidence of within-lawmaker ideological updating during the war. Instead, members of the "WWII House"—those who served before, during, and immediately after the war—largely maintained their prewar ideological convictions. However, there was more notable between-lawmaker changes: the ideology of those elected during and after the war was noticeably different from those they replaced. This lends greater support to the purge hypothesis than the conversion hypothesis. Post-WWII ideological change in Congress was attributable more to turnover than war-induced ideological updating. I support this interpretation with analysis of election results reported in the Appendix, which shows strong negative relationship between district war deaths and incumbent tenure.

Second, I present evidence consistent with my theory of local war legacies: lawmakers' voting on foreign policy legislation reflected the nature and intensity of the district's wartime experience. Both measures of war exposure (per capita deaths and draftee death intensity) predicted support for lawmaker voting for the postwar consensus position. This suggests that

different types of sacrifice were related to varying levels of lawmakers' postwar support for a more forward leaning grand strategy. Notably, lawmakers representing more rural districts expressed less support for the postwar consensus, indicating a possible ceiling effect on the war's influence in certain places. This suggests that while lawmakers were responsive to constituents' wartime experiences, sometimes they were constrained by ideological, political, or coalitional forces from faithfully aligning with their preferences.

Third, building on the previous point, my analysis of democratic representation reveals lawmakers in the wake of war acted both sincerely and strategically. In some cases, lawmakers aligned with constituent opinion on the U.S.'s role in the world; in other cases, lawmakers voted the opposite of district opinion. On average, my results reveal that estimated district support for an active U.S. role in world affairs—as measured by my MRP estimates from Chapter 3—was negatively related with lawmaker support for the postwar consensus. The takeaway here is that postwar congressional behavior reflected strategic representation, rather than sincere democratic responsiveness. This echoes contemporaneous concerns of a public-elite disconnect on foreign policy in the early Cold War.

Finally, I test whether these patterns obtain in the less democratic American South. While Southern lawmakers are traditionally thought to have had more flexibility due to single party domination and voter suppression, I find no evidence of a systematic difference in legislator responsiveness to district wartime experiences between Southern and non-Southern lawmakers. This suggests that my theory of contingent representation applies even in less democratic contexts with an attenuated electoral connection.

Collectively, these findings support my theory of local war legacies: wartime sacrifice shapes elite political behavior, and it depends on the *type* of wartime exposure, local context, and

lawmaker orientation. This reinforces the broader argument of the dissertation, which is that war can reconfigure the postwar domestic politics of grand strategy, but rarely through a straightforward ideological break or uniform national response. Rather, WWII accelerated—but did not exclusively cause—a reconfiguration of elite foreign policy coalitions around U.S. global leadership. Postwar shifts reflected the distributional patterns of local sacrifice, regional dynamics, and electoral incentives.

This interpretation reflects the theoretical framework of this dissertation, which integrates insights from international relations, American political development, and the democratic politics of war. Empirically, the chapter challenges longstanding narratives about WWII as catalyzing a postwar foreign policy consensus. I show the war did spur change, but in more uneven ways than often appreciated. In the concluding section, I reflect on how these findings revise understandings of WWII's political legacies and explore the broader implications for understanding the domestic political foundations of American grand strategy historically and in the future.

4.2 Theory: The Electoral Connection, Local Sacrifice, and Democratic Foreign Policy

How does war shape the postwar politics of grand strategy? In particular, how do members of Congress respond to the wartime experiences of their districts? This chapter builds on the theory developed in Chapter 2 and tested with historical public opinion data in Chapter 3, extending its insights to elite legislator behavior. My theory of local war legacies makes three main claims: (1) the impact of war depends on the type and intensity of the war exposure; (2) lawmakers vary in how they incorporate district wartime experiences into congressional behavior; and (3) the strength of this connection is moderated by local context, specifically rurality. In this section, I review the

aspects of my theory developed in Chapter 2 that make claims about how war influences the elite politics of grand strategy in the wake of war.

At baseline, I expect that election minded lawmakers will respond to constituent wartime experiences and preferences. However, building on scholarship documenting limitations in democratic representation (Canes-Wrone et al. 2002), my theory allows for the possibility that members of Congress (MC) deviate from district opinion. I refer to this part of my dissertation's theoretical framework as my theory of contingent representation. This theory synthesizes insights from research on democratic responsiveness, legislative behavior, and foreign policy to provide fresh insights on how local wartime experiences shape electoral incentives, and in turn, elite foreign policy behavior.

The Electoral Connection, War, and Foreign Policy. The first premise of my theory is that war's impact on MC behavior flows through the electoral connection. While a longstanding assumption questioned whether public opinion matters in the foreign policy domain (Holsti 2009; Aldrich et al. 1989), a growing view among scholars of public opinion shows that the public does hold coherent and durable foreign policy views, and those views subsequently inform elite preferences (Kerzter and Zeitzoff 2017; Kertzer 2022; Chu and Reccia 2022). I argue that wartime experiences are a key determinant of public opinion on world affairs in the wake of war, and as this chapter takes up, how legislators respond to war.

As discussed in Chapter 2, my theory distinguishes between two core features of wartime experience: the type and intensity. The *type* of war exposure refers to the degree of coerciveness. More coercive experiences—which I operationalize using draftee deaths—correspond with decreased support for the state and the strategic goals associated with the war. Conversely, I expect that overall war exposure in the form of proportional war deaths—measured as per capita deaths—

may instead foster support for the state's war aims and postwar strategy. The *intensity* of exposure refers to the distributional burden of sacrifice, which I operationalize as whether a place experienced above or below the national median in war deaths. All else equal, I expect that war's political effects are more pronounced in places with disproportionate, or above the national median, war exposure. Combined, coercive and unequal experiences are expected to decrease support for the strategic aims associated with the war, whereas proportional deaths correspond to greater support.

From this discussion, I derive the following hypotheses. I describe in the Empirical Strategy section how I will test these.

> H1a. Electoral Connection. More coercive and unequal wartime experiences will produce anti-incumbent electoral backlash.
>
> H1b. Purge hypothesis. Lawmakers who opposed war involvement but whose districts later experienced high wartime sacrifice will be voted out of office.

How do lawmakers respond to their district's wartime experiences? My theory distinguishes between two ideal types of lawmakers: sincere and strategic. Sincere lawmakers act according to a faithful model of democratic representation driven by an interest in reelection (Mayhew 1974). Sincere lawmakers would exhibit a symmetrical relationship between district war experiences, opinion, and their political behavior. Alternatively, strategic lawmakers selectively represent district preferences. Strategic lawmakers will, at times, vote in line with constituent experiences and opinion. However, at other times lawmakers will deviate from public preferences for other politically motivated reasons, like ideology or coalitional dynamics.

My theory does not predict whether lawmakers will be sincere or strategic. Rather, I treat this issue as an empirical question. If lawmakers are sincere, we should observe a positive relationship between district wartime experiences, opinion, and MC voting on postwar foreign

policy legislation. If instead they are strategic, we will observe lawmaker deviations, and possibly even an inversion, of the relationship.

> H2. Legislative Representation. Sincere lawmakers will reflect district opinion in their voting on foreign affairs legislation in the wake of war.

Place as Moderator: All War is Local. The third key factor in my theory concerns the role of local context, specifically rurality, in conditioning the political resonance of wartime experiences. As argued in Chapter 2, war is felt more acutely in rural places due to a heightened social cohesion, communal identification and solidarity, and perceived underrepresentation. Together, these communal dynamics amplify the salience of war in rural places and strengthen the pressures on lawmakers to be responsive to district preferences.

These claims about the moderating role of local context draws on research in American politics that conceptualizes place as a distinct political context that informs and shapes political identity (Ternullo 2024). In particular, the rural-urban divide has been examined as a particularly salient feature of place based political dynamics (Cramer 2016; Shea and Jacobs 2023; Rodden 2019). This scholarship shows that rural voters tend to view national political issues through a distributive and place-based lens, meaning they care about how the issue impacts rural communities. The takeaway is that voters' local context plays an important role in how citizens form political views and bring them to the ballot box.

How do these place-based dynamics shape the electoral connection and legislator behavior? I argue that local context shapes (1) the strength and salience of war related memories, and (2) informs how lawmakers interact with their constituents, or their "home style."

Drawing on Fenno's (1978) concept of homestyle, I expect that MCs from more rural districts will be especially responsive to district wartime experience, reflecting those experiences in their voting behavior and political ideology. Here, I adapt Fenno's (1978, 29 fn3) observation

that the "objective measure that coincides most closely with their [MC's] subjective judgment appears to be an urban-suburban-rural measure." Fenno is referring to the various district level factors MCs consider when deciding how to allocate their time and attention. Put directly, I claim that local context is an important factor in how MCs cultivate their homestyle, especially when it comes to big questions of foreign relations in the wake of war. Rurality makes war more salient, and MC homestyle amplifies its expression.

Recent scholarship on lawmakers' local roots reinforces this point on geographic variation in homestyle. Research by Charles Hunt (2022) and others shows how legislators' geographic ties influence their behavior in office. Local roots, according to Hunt (2022, 4), "are a signal of shared local experience and familiarity with one's constituents and the shared space they both call 'home'...Local roots therefore represent a genuine place-based connection established between a member and their particular district prior to their service in Congress." An implication of local roots, contrasted with an MC's homestyle, is that the influence of district level war exposure arises from who the MC is *before* taking office, not what they do *once elected* (Hunt 2022, 5). Other scholars test the impact of legislators' home district origins, finding that local legislators tend to emphasize constituent work and engage in more bipartisan behavior (Crosson and Kaslovsky 2025).

The takeaway from this work is that the impact of war on postwar politics can vary by place. Unifying both the "place as homestyle" and "place as identity" interpretation is the idea that wartime experience translates into distinct MC behavior when it comes to foreign affairs.

> H3. Local Connection. The war-related electoral connection will be amplified in more rural districts. The relationship between wartime experiences and legislator behavior on foreign policy will be amplified in rural districts.

An Attenuated Electoral Connection: War and Democracy in the American South. The final component of my theory concerns generalizability across regime type. As I argue in Chapter 2 and show empirically in Chapter 3, my theory of local war legacies can apply in even less democratic contexts. This is an important claim to address because, as I argue above, the electoral connection is a core feature underpinning my theory of contingent representation. To recap the findings of my public opinion analysis in Chapter 3, I find that there was no systematic difference between counties inside and outside the South in how wartime exposure shaped postwar opinion on world affairs. The takeaway is that local wartime experiences rather than political regime type alone is an important determinant of postwar preferences.

I argue that this logic applies to political elites as well. Political officials—whether or not they are subjected to competitive elections—have incentives to be responsive to local wartime sacrifices. In non-democratic contexts, complete neglect of local sacrifices risks fostering anti-government resentment, protests, and possibly local subversion. In more democratic settings, electoral mechanisms make political officials directly responsive to voters. Even strategic lawmakers cannot completely disregard district opinion without risking a credible challenger. They must carefully calibrate their behavior to maintain credibility with constituents.

In less democratic contexts with an abbreviated electoral connection—like the postwar American South, where one party dominance and voter suppression constrained electoral competition—legislators still faced intra-party competition. Falling too far out of step with party or district preferences posed real political risks. Because wartime experience shapes postwar political identity and behavior, I expect lawmakers to be responsive to these local factors despite notable differences in institutional constraints.

H4. Abbreviated Electoral Connection. Even in less democratic contexts where inter-party electoral competition is constrained, the relationship between wartime experience and lawmaker behavior will obtain.

Now that I have established the theoretical context, I turn next to the historical background of the postwar American foreign policy consensus, the empirical setting in which I test this theory. I then describe the empirical strategy used to evaluate these expectations.

4.3 The Postwar Consensus in the Shadow of the New Deal

Scholars often characterize Congress from the end of WWII to the beginning of the Vietnam War as broadly supportive of U.S. global engagement (Meernik 1993; Chaudoin et al. 2010). According to Jordan Tama (2024, 9), this period "featured broad US consensus in support of an internationalist and anti-communist foreign policy," even amid normal partisan disagreements on the margins. Legislative support aligned with core pillars of what came to be known as the postwar consensus, defined by support for alliances, multilateralism, high defense spending, forward military deployments, and anti-communist containment (Friedman 2024; Wittkopf and McCormick 1990).

WWII is often treated as the historical impetus of this consensus. In popular imagination and scholarly studies, the "good war" is treated as a transformative moment that discredited isolationism and legitimized global engagement as the only viable strategy (Ruggie 1997; Legro 2000; Saldin 2010; Wertheim 2020). "Much of the U.S. desire to stay engaged in world affairs *emanated out of the war*…A widespread consensus developed that authoritarianism had to be confronted lest a Hitler-like figure be allowed to emerge again" (Saldin 2010, 141-142, emphasis added). However, in this section—mirroring my broader framing of WWII as a motivation throughout this dissertation—I emphasize that this understanding obscures a more nuanced understanding of the war's impact on postwar politics. In particular, I foreground scholarship that

emphasizes how the war accentuated rather than pacified longstanding congressional tensions on foreign policy and their broader coalitional makeup.

Claims about the war's transformative effects inevitably rest on an understanding of congressional support in the preceding years. The years before WWII were characterized by intense disagreements over the scope of U.S. foreign policy. Just two decades prior, the Senate failed to ratify the League of Nations treaty. Moreover, President Roosevelt faced entrenched Republican resistance to the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act despite overwhelming Democratic majorities (Irwin 1998). In the run up to WWII, much of Congress remained opposed to U.S. involvement, narrowly passing key prewar pieces of legislation. The American people and their representatives were, if anything, lukewarm about getting involved in another global conflict (Doenecke 2000).

After the war, however, many assumed the tune in Congress was different. Explanations for a relatively swift transformation in legislative support for the U.S. taking on greater global responsibility emphasize legislators' personal ideological conversion and embrace of internationalism (Kaplan 2015), intra-elite bargaining (Rathbun 2011), or electoral replacement of prewar isolationists with postwar internationalists (Divine 1967). Either way, the "good war" is almost always treated by scholars and popular accounts as doing the heavy lifting. John Ruggie's (1997, 101) observation on this point is representative of the traditional view: "By 1944, the lesson that not even the United States could insulate itself against being dragged into war, together with FDR's painstaking politicking, had thoroughly discredited isolationism." But how much of a shift in congressional support can be attributed to the war?

A close look at vote patterns on key legislative pillars of the postwar consensus tells a more complicated story than war-induced transformation. For example, among lawmakers who served

the entirety of WWII and voted on key foreign policy legislation in the early Cold War, support for the postwar consensus averaged around 60%. Despite majority support, prewar partisan and regional cleavages on foreign policy persisted. Traditionally noninterventionist Midwest Republicans averaged 41% support for the consensus, compared to internationalist Southern Democrats who averaged 66% support. That these two factions adhered in the early postwar years to their prewar alignment on global engagement suggests a more complicated story than a unidirectional trend toward postwar internationalism.[2] It is unclear whether WWII did indeed realign the congressional politics of foreign policy.

These persistent party-region cleavages highlight the value of placing these congressional politics in the context of the broader New Deal political order. As historians and IR scholars have argued, the New Deal was more than a domestic reform project. G. John Ikenberry (2011, 2018), for example, argues that the New Deal provided the domestic institutional and ideological foundation for the U.S. led postwar international order. Roosevelt and wartime planners understood that their vision for a postwar order emanated from and rested on the domestic political bargains that facilitated the New Deal's successes in the preceding decade (Liggio and Martin 1976; Borgwardt 2005; Preston 2025). The point here is that the New Deal supplied the ideas and domestic political support to enable Roosevelt's postwar vision. However, shifts in political coalitions afoot during and immediately after the war complicates an emphasis on the New Deal order's role in *sustaining* U.S. postwar engagement.

[2] Among the 261 MCs who served the entire duration of WWII, what I term the "WWII House," the average postwar congressional tenure was an additional 10 years, with the average last year of service in 1955. Those with the highest average post-WWII tenure were Midwest Republicans (traditionally non-interventionists) and Southern Democrats (traditionally New Deal coalition internationalists). This lends initial prima facie evidence against the idea of a "purge hypothesis" whereby prewar "isolationists" were quickly expelled by a public awakened by the war to a newfound internationalism.

Importantly, connections between the New Deal and postwar order downplay an important development: the war catalyzed a shakeup in Roosevelt's New Deal coalition, specifically the ascendence of a bipartisan conservative, anti-statist coalition. Once a reliable bloc of the Democratic party, Southern MCs found common cause with anti-statist Republicans immediately before and during WWII (Young 2013). Together, they were united in opposition to concentration of federal power, albeit for different reasons. Whereas Republicans had long opposed labor unions and the growing welfare state, Southern opposition was driven by perceptions of federal encroachment on state and local autonomy, e.g. the preservation of racial hierarchy (Caughey 2018, 69-73; Patterson 1967; Sinclair 1982).

At the same time, the coalitional makeup of Roosevelt's foreign policy was shifting. Although strong supporters of WWII interventionism, Southern MCs began to drift from their historical internationalism and instead vote a more introverted, cautious orientation (Lersche Jr. 1964; Seabury 1957; Fordham 2022). While standing behind the more hawkish security elements of the postwar consensus—as Southern support for the Vietnam War demonstrates (Fry 2002, Ch. 8)—they were less supportive of other aspects of foreign policy activism like foreign aid and multilateralism perceived to encroach on U.S. sovereignty. Taking seriously these coalitional dynamics has implications for theories of the origins and durability of the U.S. postwar order. Notably, these wartime and early postwar shifts complicate understandings of the New Deal order as offering a stable consensual foundation from which the U.S. pursued its postwar foreign policy.

Situating the postwar consensus in the congressional politics of the New Deal security order complicates received wisdoms about the origins and evolution of the postwar consensus, and especially WWII's role in entrenching it. A central feature of Ikenberry's account of the U.S. post-WWII liberal international order is that American postwar planners replicated the success of the

New Deal at the international level. However, typically absent from these interpretations is recognition of the precarious and waning support for the domestic New Deal order just as the international order was taking shape. Taking seriously this history privileges a more politically contingent and contested pathway to the postwar consensus, one that aligns with my theory's emphasis on variations in wartime sacrifice and local context. This historical interpretation further aligns with my findings from Chapter 3, which documents the war's uneven relationship with postwar opinion, one that varied by wartime experience and local conditions. In what follows, I shift my focus to Congress to explore whether the war's impact on political elites followed a similar pattern.

4.4 Empirical Strategy

The key empirical task in this chapter is to estimate the impact of WWII on congressional behavior as it relates to the emergence of a postwar foreign policy consensus around robust U.S. global engagement. My particular focus is on whether war shapes postwar politics by causing lawmakers to update their ideological commitments, or by causing the electoral replacement of lawmakers who fall out of touch with war-induced changes in constituent opinion. Both stories expect war to cause a detectable difference in lawmaker behavior on foreign policy, but the pathway is different.

I address this question in a two-part analysis. First, to what extent did the war spur ideological change *within* lawmakers, as opposed to turnover *between* lawmakers? *Within*-lawmaker change refers to a change in the same lawmaker's behavior at different points in time. *Between*-lawmaker change refers to differences in behavior between different lawmakers. Second, how did the WWII experience influence congressional voting on key pieces of legislation related to the postwar foreign policy consensus? Both questions speak to the nature of the electoral

connection in foreign affairs, as well as my theory about the local legacies of war and the postwar politics of grand strategy.

To answer these questions, I leverage variation in lawmaker entry and tenure to organize lawmakers into three cohorts: (1) those who served before, during and after WWII (the "WWII House"); (2) those elected during the war ("wartime entrants"); and (3) those elected after the war ("postwar entrants"). This approach enables me to identify whether the war prompted ideological updating within incumbents—a key claim of the watershed thesis—or instead fostered the replacement of prewar noninterventionists with postwar internationalists. The watershed thesis would expect that lawmakers who served during the war underwent an ideological conversion toward a pro-postwar consensus position. Conversely, my theory expects the war's impact on lawmaker behavior will depend on the type of war exposure and be moderated by district rurality. Therefore, in my empirical results, I disaggregate my analysis by these three lawmaker cohorts to evaluate both the conversion and replacement mechanisms of change. Table 4B.1 in the Appendix summarizes the makeup of these three cohorts.

In this section, I describe how I will systematically assess these questions. I begin by describing the three main outcome variable data sources I use in this analysis: (1) legislator ideology scores, (2) key congressional votes on important foreign policy legislation related to the early postwar consensus, and (3) county level election results. I then discuss the main explanatory variables of interest: district war exposure, rurality, and prewar legislator voting on WWII interventionism, following the same approach used in Chapter 3. Together, these data enable me to present a systematic picture of whether and to what extent the war produced a postwar legislator consensus on the U.S.'s world role.

Dependent Variables

Whereas Chapter 3 addresses WWII's impact on public opinion, this chapter examines whether and how it shaped congressional politics in the postwar era. Here, I discuss the three dependent variables I use to evaluate this relationship: (1) lawmaker ideology, (2) congressional voting, and (3) congressional election outcomes.

Ideology. The first outcome of interest is lawmaker ideology, which reflects how members are positioned on the broad political spectrum. This measure is relevant to assessing war's impact on the domestic politics of grand strategy because it captures the deeper organizing principles that guide political representatives' behavior. As explained in Chapter 2, grand strategy involves more than preferences for discrete policies; grand strategy is comprised of more general views about the optimal relationship between strategic ends and means. Competing grand strategies differ in the importance they assign to different theories of state action and are often associated with different political ideologies (Avey et al. 2018).

Assessing the relationship between districts' wartime experience and ideological change therefore provides a valuable proxy for determining whether war shifts lawmakers' strategic orientation. Furthermore, lawmaker ideology offers a useful lens into whether voters' wartime experiences informed their representative's core political beliefs. That is, do lawmakers internalize the wartime sacrifices of their constituents in a way that meaningfully changes their voting behavior over longer periods of time?

To measure lawmaker ideology, I use two well-established data sources in the congressional politics literature. One of the most common measures is the NOMINATE score developed by Poole and Rosenthal (2011), which assigns legislators "ideal points" as a function of their voting history. These scores span two dimensions. The first dimension corresponds to beliefs

about economic regulation and redistribution, a consistent conservative-liberal cleavage in U.S. political history.[3] The second dimension characterizes an ideological cleavage unique to a specific historical context; in the mid-twentieth century, scholars interpret this dimension as capturing views on race and region, helping to distinguish factions within the Democratic Party (Caughey and Schickler 2016, 129). An important feature of NOMINATE scores is that they are static, meaning an MC's score does not change over their congressional tenure. The downside is that this limits their usefulness in tracing within-MC ideological change over time, a core empirical test of my theory.

To assess change over time, I instead use Nokken-Poole (NP) ideology scores, which are estimated for each separate Congress (Nokken and Poole 2004). In this way, NP scores enable an analysis of ideological change *within* MCs over time (e.g., before and after WWII), and between cohorts (e.g., wartime vs. postwar entrants).[4] NP scores are therefore better suited for my empirical task of estimating whether WWII caused a shift in lawmaker ideology or replacement.

Lawmaker Voting. The second outcome I use to assess the war's impact on the postwar politics of grand strategy is lawmaker voting on key pieces of foreign policy legislation. According to the watershed thesis, WWII catalyzed a bipartisan convergence around robust international engagement, a view known as the postwar consensus. Foundational pillars of this consensus were the Marshall Plan, the creation of NATO, and unprecedented military and foreign aid intended to counter Soviet influence.

To estimate the relationship between district war exposure and lawmaker voting, I identify 25 "key votes" related to foreign and defense policy between the end of WWII and the 1964

[3] Positive scores along this first dimension correspond with greater conservatism, and lower (negative) scores correspond to greater liberalism, or support for government intervention in the economy.
[4] Both the NOMINATE and NP scores for MCs by Congress are downloadable from Voteview (Lewis et al. 2024).

passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.[5] These votes represent the core policies of the early postwar consensus. For example, H.R. 2616, passed on May 9, 1947 (287-108), authorized aid to Greece and Turkey, corresponding with President Truman's announcement of the containment doctrine. I recoded each vote to indicate whether the lawmaker aligned with the pro-postwar consensus position, enabling a straightforward comparison of support for an engaged postwar foreign policy.[6] A full list of these key votes appears in Table 4D.2 in the Appendix, and Figure 4D.1 visualizes average party support for the pro-consensus position over time.[7]

Following existing research, I aggregate these votes into an index representing the proportion of support for the postwar consensus.[8] I refer to this as the *Postwar Consensus Index*. Because a district can be represented by multiple lawmakers across this period, I create two versions of the index. The first is an MC-level index, capturing an individual legislator's alignment with the pro-postwar consensus. It is scaled 0 to 1, where an individual MC's index is 1 if they voted the pro consensus position on all key votes, and 0 if they voted "Nay" or "Present" every time. A second, district-level index reflects the cumulative votes of all MCs who represented the district. For districts with MC turnover, therefore, this second index enables me to identify whether support was driven by partisan replacement, intra-party ideological competition, or genuine

[5] The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was selected as a cutoff because this marks a major legislative milestone authorizing the U.S.'s full scale military escalation in Vietnam. "Key votes" have been determined by the *Congressional Quarterly* since 1945. A key vote is one that represents "a matter of major controversy, a matter of presidential or political power, or a matter of potentially great impact on the nation and the lives of Americans." The CQ editors follow an additional procedure in determining key votes. "For each group of related votes on an issue in each chamber, one key vote is usually chosen — one that, in the opinion of CQ Roll Call editors, was most important in determining the outcome of the issue for the year or best reflected the views of individual lawmakers on that issue."

[6] For example, a vote of "Nay" on three of the twenty-five votes aligned with a pro-CWC position. These votes typically involved Republicans attempting to roll back or limit preexisting institutions or funding they perceived as excessive. Voteview notes that "Nay" votes in these instances aligned with the president's position.

[7] A clear takeaway from Figure 4D.1 is that there was considerable variation in average party support across the early postwar period. Among the twenty-five key votes, the average difference between the parties was 27%. The vote with the greatest partisan cleavage was the 1963 Foreign Assistance Act with a difference in average party support of 60%.

[8] Scholars have constructed indices representing New Deal liberalism, support for alcohol prohibition, and other issue areas, for example (Caughey 2018). On prohibition, see Olson and Snyder (2021).

responsiveness to district preferences. I therefore use the district level index in my main models discussed in the Results section.

To complement the index-based analysis of legislator voting, I also estimate models predicting MC voting on individual roll call votes. Whereas the *Postwar Consensus Index* summarizes roll call votes at the MC or district level, these models treat each of the 25 key votes as a separate outcome, enabling an inference about how district war exposure translated into lawmaker support for specific pieces of legislation. This enables a more fine-grained inference about the war's impact, including *within*-lawmaker variation across votes and *between*-lawmaker differences across districts. While the index is more amenable to inferring overall alignment with the postwar consensus, individual roll calls enable an analysis of support for vote-level responsiveness. My analysis of legislator voting will therefore use both the index and individual roll call-based measures.

Elections. The third outcome of interest is county level congressional election results. The primary purpose of these data is assessing the war-induced mechanisms of change discussed earlier. In particular, examining election outcomes assists in determining whether postwar changes resulted from ideological updating or electoral turnover. For example, if there is a statistically significant relationship between county war exposure and House election outcomes, this would lend suggestive evidence in support of the "purge hypothesis." However, if there is no such relationship but I still observe ideological change among incumbents, this suggests a process of within-legislator updating in response to their district's wartime experience.

Due to space considerations, I do not report these results in the main text of this chapter, but I summarize my findings throughout my discussion of ideological change and lawmaker responsiveness. In Appendix C, I first estimate the relationship between county level war exposure

and Democratic vote share in House and presidential elections from 1946-1964. This provides a descriptive snapshot of whether and how war exposure translated into postwar electoral shifts. Second, I analyze whether wartime incumbents from high war exposure districts were more or less likely to be re-elected after the war. These analyses inform my discussion of results about the war's impact on lawmaker ideology and support for the postwar consensus in the Results section.

Table 4.1 Outcome Variables

Outcome	Measurement	Analysis	Southern Distinctiveness
Ideology	Δ in NP scores by cohort	Within-MC updating vs. between-MC replacement	Weak relationship due to elite insulation and low issue salience
Congressional Voting	Postwar Consensus Index and individual roll call votes	MC and district alignment with postwar consensus; legislative representation of public opinion	Weak lawmaker responsiveness due to constraints on inter-party competition
Elections	County Democratic Party vote share and incumbent turnover	War exposure and electoral replacement of prewar incumbents	Weak relationship effected due to abbreviated electoral connection

Table 4.1 summarizes the three outcomes of interest and the corresponding analyses that will guide the Results section. The righthand column describes the expectation predicted by conventional understandings of an abbreviated electoral connection in the South. Two features cut against my theoretical expectation that war exposure should influence postwar legislative representation there. First, the South was not a full representative democracy. As a one-party enclave, inter-party electoral competition was weak and power was confined to a small selectorate (Mickey 2015). The second feature is the long-held view of foreign policy as a low salience issue, a constraint not unique to the South but one that would reinforce the effects of an abbreviated electoral connection in a nondemocracy. A finding that war exposure had a meaningful relationship with legislative representation, despite these two factors, would lend evidence in favor of my theory of local legacies of war.

Explanatory Variables

My theory expects that the outcomes described above—ideological change, congressional voting, and electoral outcomes—will be shaped by the type of wartime experience and local context. Here, I discuss the explanatory variables used to test these expectations. The data and models I describe here resemble those in Chapter 3.

War Exposure. The main explanatory variable in this chapter is district level war exposure. While Chapter 3 examined how local war experiences informed public opinion, my focus here shifts to how local sacrifices influenced lawmaker behavior. I therefore aggregate the county level war data featured in Chapter 3 to the congressional district level.

To capture my theoretical distinctions between type and intensity of wartime sacrifice, I create two measures of district level war exposure. The proportional measure reflects WWII deaths per capita, measured by the number of citizens in each district. The coercion-based measure reflects the proportion of draftees among the war dead from a given district.

To construct these measures of district war exposure, I adapt my county level dataset of WWII casualties featured in Chapter 3. Due to the different levels of analysis, two important issues must be addressed: (1) counties that span multiple districts, and (2) redistricting. For counties that span multiple districts, my solution is to evenly apportion the county's war deaths and population to each district in which the county resides.[9] For example, Bond County, Illinois spanned Districts 21, 22, and 23 in the 77th Congress (1941-1943). I allocate Bond County's 48 total war dead across these three districts, each receiving 16. I apply the same method to calculate district level rurality. I then calculate district level war exposure.

[9] To determine which district corresponds to counties, I use the crosswalks developed by Ferrara et al. (2024).

An obvious downside to this apportionment method is that it entails certain assumptions that may be unrealistic given local geographic context, such as cases where a county spans multiple districts but a majority of its population is concentrated in a single district. However, this method offers a straightforward and easily interpretable way of addressing the boundary alignment issue, especially in the absence of precise historical congressional district data.

Furthermore, an implication of redistricting over time is that district war exposure changes as boundaries shift to encompass different counties. To account for redistricting, I create separate datasets for each Congress to reflect the shifting district borders. For example, while Bond County, Illinois was divided into three districts in the 77th Congress (1941-1943), later in the 84th Congress (1955-1957) the county existed exclusively within one district. Ignoring these changes could potentially misrepresent the distribution of wartime sacrifices. Figure 4A.1 visualizes district war exposure at the end of WWII, and Figure 4A.2 visualizes how redistricting impacts variation in district level war exposure.[10]

Pre-WWII Interventionism. The second primary explanatory variable is the district's prewar support for U.S. intervention in WWII. The purpose of this variable is to serve as a historical baseline of each district's orientation toward global engagement before the war. Substantively, it mirrors the prewar opinion controls in Chapter 3, thereby supporting an inference of whether postwar trends in congressional representation reflect a continuation of prewar preferences or instead a war-induced shift.

Including this measure is important theoretically—i.e., distinguishing between the impact of wartime sacrifice versus prewar trends—and historically, given that the watershed thesis claims the war fostered greater elite support for a more assertive posture in world affairs. Therefore, the

[10] Historical congressional district shape files were obtained from Lewis et al. (2013).

"Great Debate" over U.S. entry in WWII, which cast FDR-aligned interventionists against noninterventionists in prewar debates before Pearl Habor, is the historically relevant baseline for comparison to the postwar consensus (Doenecke 2000; Divine 1965).

To create this *Pre-WWII Interventionism Index*, I identified six important roll call votes from 1938-1941 that represent the main congressional debates over U.S. involvement in WWII. Like the *Postwar Consensus Index*, I recode each vote to indicate MC support for the pro-intervention position. For example, the 1938 Ludlow Amendment—an effort by noninterventionists to limit U.S. involvement in foreign wars—was opposed by Roosevelt-aligned interventionists, with a "Nay" vote therefore corresponding to the pro-intervention position. Other important votes entailed support for the Lend-Lease Act and repealing the Neutrality Act, with "Aye" votes on each corresponding to the pro-intervention position.

Due to MC turnover, I aggregate MC position taking on these prewar votes at the district level. I code this index on a scale from 0 to 1, indicating the proportion of pro-intervention votes cast by each district's representatives. Table 4D.1 in the Appendix summarizes these votes and the partisan and regional distribution of support.

The combination of this district level measure of prewar interventionism and district war exposure enables an initial descriptive snapshot of the partisan and ideological distribution of war sacrifice. Table 4.2 summarizes average district level war exposure by party and prewar interventionism of lawmakers representing the district. I highlight two patterns from these data. First, there are clear asymmetries in the relationship between war exposure and the two explanatory variables. For example, districts controlled by Republicans across 1938-1941 had higher average deaths per capita compared to Democrat Controlled districts. "Strong Democratic" districts—those that experienced some partisan turnover but were mostly Democratic—had slightly higher per

capita deaths but higher variation, likely a result of fewer districts. The asymmetry reverses in partisan differences for draftee death intensity, where Democratic districts had higher rates of draftees among their war dead. While Table 4.2 does not fully speak to this, these patterns are likely attributable to the regional basis of political coalitions at the time, such as the South being a Democratic stronghold. These patterns mapped onto geographic variation in war exposure discussed in Chapter 3, and also visualized by district war exposure in Figure 4A.1.

Table 4.2 War Exposure by Party and Pre-WWII Interventionism

	Pre-WWII District Party Control			
District War Exposure	Democrat		Republican	
	Controlled (n = 247)	*Strong* (n = 36)	*Controlled* (n = 98)	*Strong* (n = 64)
WWII Deaths per Capita	22.84 (4.69)	24.91 (5.8)	24.24 (2.01)	23.64 (2.51)
WWII Draftee Death Intensity	0.731 (0.089)	0.705 (0.098)	0.656 (0.1)	0.697 (0.111)

	Pre-WWII District Interventionism	
	High (n = 224)	*Low* (n = 224)
WWII Deaths per Capita	22.97 (5.19)	23.89 (2.55)
WWII Draftee Death Intensity	.727 (0.086)	0.686 (0.109)

Note: For each measure of District War Exposure, values in parentheses are the standard deviation. For example, districts controlled by Democrats across all years 1938-1941 had an average death rate of 22.84 per 10,000 residents, with a standard deviation of 4.69.

A second pattern is the slight asymmetry as it relates to prewar interventionism and war exposure. Intuitively, one would expect a negative reaction if it were the case that places with the greatest opposition to joining the war ended up paying a disproportionate share of the sacrifice. While districts with lower scores in the *Pre-WWII Interventionism* index did have slightly higher deaths per capita, the relationship reverses for draftee intensity. This again is likely a reflection of regional patterns in political coalitions and war exposure. The overall takeaway from this descriptive snapshot is that neither party bore a disproportionate burden of the war; rather, the patterns of sacrifice point to geographic bases of political coalitions during this period. The

implication is that any postwar changes in the outcome variables are more likely attributable to underlying war exposure and local context rather than unique partisan reactions to sacrifice.

Postwar Opinion: MRP Estimates. The final explanatory variable of interest is estimated district level opinion on postwar global engagement. Conceptually, this measure enables a test of whether lawmakers accurately represented constituents' foreign policy views. This measure complements but is distinct from the measure of district war exposure, which captures the impact of constituent wartime experiences on legislator behavior. While war exposure is treated as a potential cause of both constituent opinion and legislator behavior, the postwar opinion measure instead enables a test of whether they are positively related with legislator voting. Including both war exposure and estimated opinion in the same model enables a comparison of their joint explanatory power. However, because postwar opinion is treated as a function of war exposure—as I analyzed in Chapter 3—this suggests possible post-treatment bias where one explanatory variable is a function of another. To account for this, I estimate models with and without both measures to determine their joint and independent relationship with legislators' postwar behavior.

To construct this district level measure of opinion, I aggregate the county MRP estimates used in Chapter 3 to congressional districts. Specifically, I use the estimates of support for the WORLD ROLE question, as it aligns with the postwar consensus. For example, support for the U.S. taking an active role in world affairs corresponds to supporting the legislative pillars of the *Postwar Consensus Index*, such as NATO and the Marshall Plan. Conversely, believing the U.S. should "stay out" of world affairs maps onto opposing these pieces of legislation.

Because some counties span multiple districts, I weight the county MRP estimates by the share of the county's population apportioned to its associated districts. This approach follows the same procedure used to allocate county war deaths and population to districts. While this method

does not fully reflect the exact demographic combinations of each district, it is a meaningful proxy for assessing democratic representation of subnational opinion.

In the Results section, I use these opinion estimates to assess whether lawmakers were responsive to district war exposure, constituent opinion, or to both. Ultimately this enables a direct test of my theory about war's impact on postwar congressional behavior, which reveals important insights about the nature of democratic representation on foreign policy in the wake of war.

4.5 Results

I present my results in three parts. First, I describe baseline patterns in the relationship between district wartime experience and the main outcomes of interest. I begin with ideological change to determine whether WWII shifted ideological patterns through within-lawmaker updating or between-lawmaker turnover. Understanding how WWII altered elite ideology is an important first step in assessing whether we should expect it to have downstream consequences on the domestic politics of grand strategy. I then examine how war exposure and rurality related to postwar congressional voting. These baseline descriptive patterns provide initial evidence on whether postwar congressional behavior was noticeably different compared to before the war.

Second, I present the results of regression models estimating whether district war exposure, rurality, and constituent opinion predicted lawmaker voting. My approach mirrors the models in Chapter 3. I control for various district level and regional effects to isolate the impact of war exposure and rurality on postwar congressional behavior. The main models analyze change in MC ideology, support for the postwar consensus, and importantly, legislator representation of public opinion. Together, these models enable a direct test of my theory of contingent democratic responsiveness to local wartime experiences.

Third, I analyze regional variation, specifically whether the impact of war on democratic representation differed in the South. Considering the attenuated nature of the Southern electoral connection during this period, my focus is assessing my theory's generalizability to non-democratic contexts. The goal is therefore to identify whether there are limits on war's effects on legislative representation. These three sections provide a systematic test of whether and how WWII fundamentally transformed the elite political foundations of an extroverted U.S. grand strategy.

Descriptive Evidence: War and Ideological Change. I first visualize ideological change across the three congressional cohorts defined in the Empirical Strategy section. Figure 4.1 plots change in Nokken-Poole Dimension 1 (economic beliefs) and Dimension 2 (regional distinctiveness and race) for the WWII House, Wartime Entrants, and Postwar Entrants.

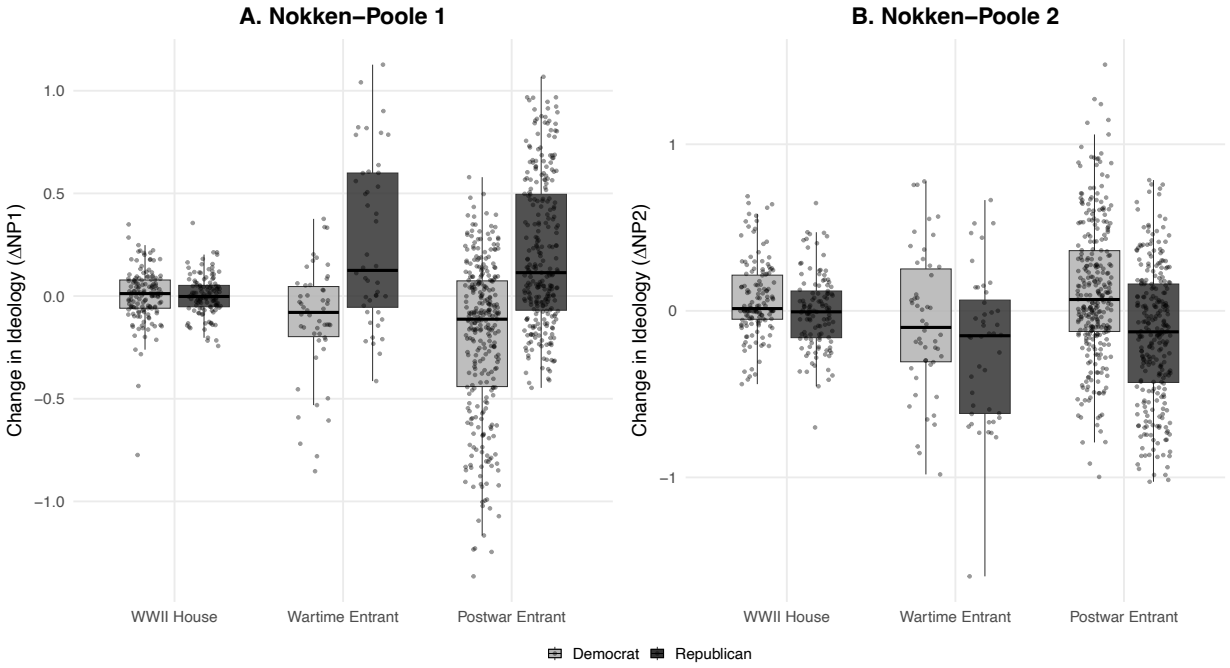


Figure 4.1 Ideological Change by House Cohort

Note: Each dot represents an MC. The WWII House visualizes all MCs who served the entire duration of WWII. Wartime Entrants includes MCs elected during WWII. Postwar Entrants includes all MCs elected after WWII and before the Vietnam War.

For the WWII House on the lefthand side of the x-axis, the vertical spread of dots is depicting *within*-MC change in ideology between the 76th Congress (1939-1941) and the 79th

Congress (1945-1947), immediately before and after U.S. involvement in WWII. For Wartime and Postwar Entrants, the dots are capturing the difference between an incoming MC's NP score and their predecessor's final NP score. Comparisons across these three cohorts enables an inference of whether postwar ideological shifts are attributable to individual ideological updating or electoral replacement.

There are a couple takeaways from Figure 4.1. First, for the WWII House, there was little change in the median score in either dimension. Substantively, this means those who served the entire duration of the war largely maintained their prewar ideological commitments. This descriptive snapshot cuts against watershed thesis expectations that the war caused a decisive shift in the political beliefs of incumbents.

Second, there are more noticeable ideological shifts among the Wartime and Postwar Entrants, which supports a story of replacement. Among Republicans, those elected during the war had more positive NP-1 scores, indicating greater economic conservativism—i.e., opposition to the New Deal—and more negative NP-2 scores, indicating less regional distinctiveness. Meanwhile, Democratic Wartime Entrants showed slightly more economic liberalism in NP-1, and roughly similar change in NP-2, indicating more distinctive views on region and race.

Among Postwar Entrants, the largest of the three cohorts, there is a noticeably different pattern among Democrats. Whereas changes in the first NP dimension mirrors those of the Wartime Entrants, the change in NP-2 reverses for Democrats, indicating a growing distinctiveness toward regional identity and views on race in the postwar era.

A key takeaway from Figure 4.1 is that ideological shifts between the prewar and postwar periods are better attributed to *replacement* than individual updating. Among Republicans, those elected during and after WWII had more conservative economic views, indicating an overall

decline in New Deal era support for economic redistribution. Among Democrats, economic liberalism continued but those elected after the war had sharper regional views than before the war. An interpretation of these patterns is that WWII reshaped postwar congressional politics by causing the replacement of MCs with different ideological beliefs rather than by converting those who served before the war. I explore this hypothesis in greater detail in the later section featuring regression results.

Descriptive Evidence: War and Support for the Postwar Consensus. I next examine the relationship between district war exposure and MC support for the postwar consensus. Figure 4.2 visualizes how the two measures of district level WWII exposure relate to district scores on the *Postwar Consensus Index*, which reflects the proportion a district's MC voted the pro-consensus position on key foreign policy legislation from 1945 to 1964.

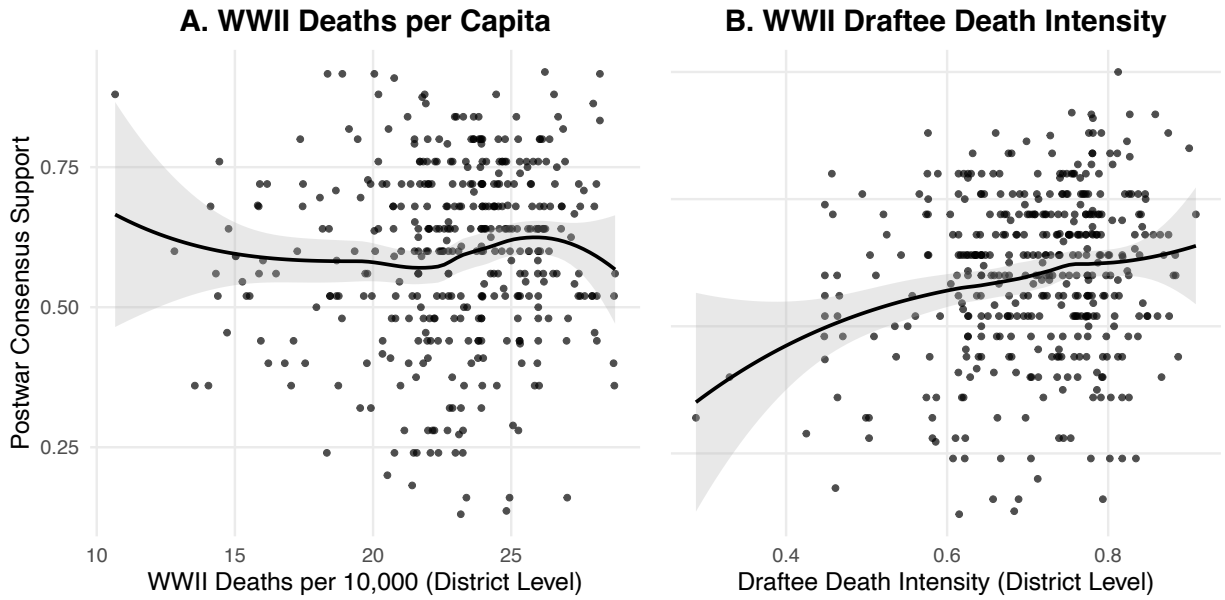


Figure 4.2 District War Exposure and Support for the Postwar Consensus

Note: Each point represents a congressional district. WWII deaths per capita is Panel A is trimmed to exclude the top 5% of outlier districts for visualization purposes. District boundaries reflect the 76th Congress (1939–1941).

Each point in Figure 4.2 represents a prewar congressional district. Panel A shows an uneven trend but overall a slightly negative relationship between district WWII deaths per capita

and support for the postwar consensus. The slope suggests that districts experiencing higher proportional war deaths tended to be represented on average by MCs who were less supportive of key postwar foreign policy legislation. Notably, this pattern contrasts with the finding in Chapter 3, where higher county per capita deaths corresponded with greater public support for taking an active role in world affairs. This divergence suggests an asymmetry in how the mass public and political elites reacted to local wartime sacrifice.

Panel B reveals a positive relationship between draftee death intensity and MC support for the postwar consensus, again running counter to the results from the public opinion analysis in Chapter 3. What might account for this incongruence? One possible interpretation is that while the public may react to coercive wartime sacrifices by becoming skeptical of greater international commitments, political representatives may view these sacrifices—either strategically or sincerely—as reason for more global engagement which they believe may avert future sacrifices. Moreover, as revealed in a key finding from my public opinion results, it is possible that these trends may mask regional variation. I explore a first cut look at these bivariate relations by geographic region in Figure 4A.3. A key takeaway from Figure 4A.3 is that the trends depicted in Figure 4.2 have meaningful regional variation. I interpret these trends in greater detail in Appendix B.

Furthermore, to assess whether these postwar patterns are a continuation of prewar legislator voting, Figure 4D.4 in the Appendix visualizes the relationship between districts' score on the *Prewar Interventionism Index* and their *Postwar Interventionism Index* score. While there is a modest but slightly positive relationship, and is more pronounced at lower levels of prewar support, overall the correlation is weak. The main takeaway is that while there is some continuity in congressional behavior on foreign policy, it cannot fully explain postwar patterns. This, I argue,

leaves open the possibility that other factors like wartime experience and local context play a role in these postwar trends.

One important caveat is worth acknowledging. The descriptive visualizations discussed so far rely on prewar district boundaries, while the postwar outcomes such as ideological change and the *Postwar Consensus Index* span the postwar period. To address this, I conduct robustness checks in the Appendix with later district boundaries. The descriptive patterns do not change significantly, thereby strengthening the inferences discussed here.

Descriptive Evidence: War, Rurality, and Support for the Postwar Consensus. How did war exposure and rurality jointly shape a district's position on the *Postwar Consensus Index*? Figure 4.3 visualizes the relationship between district support for the postwar consensus index conditional on WWII exposure and rurality at the time of the war. The patterns lend initial support for my theory.

First, across both measures of war exposure, districts above the national median had slightly higher support for the postwar consensus. This is consistent with my theoretical expectation that higher intensity wartime experiences have more noticeable effects. The second pattern is that higher rurality is associated with less support across both measures of war exposure. In both panels, more rural districts express lower support then less rural districts, consistent with my argument that rurality moderates the effects of war.

Figure 4.3 also suggests a further contrast with the public opinion results. For example, the observed positive relationship between draftee death intensity and postwar support in Panel B cuts against the public opinion findings where greater coercive intensity predicted less support for postwar global engagement. The incongruence between these two results raises the question of why lawmakers in high draftee intensity districts expressed *greater*, not *less*, support for the

postwar consensus compared to lower draftee intensity districts. This descriptive pattern highlights the need to explore democratic representation more systemically.

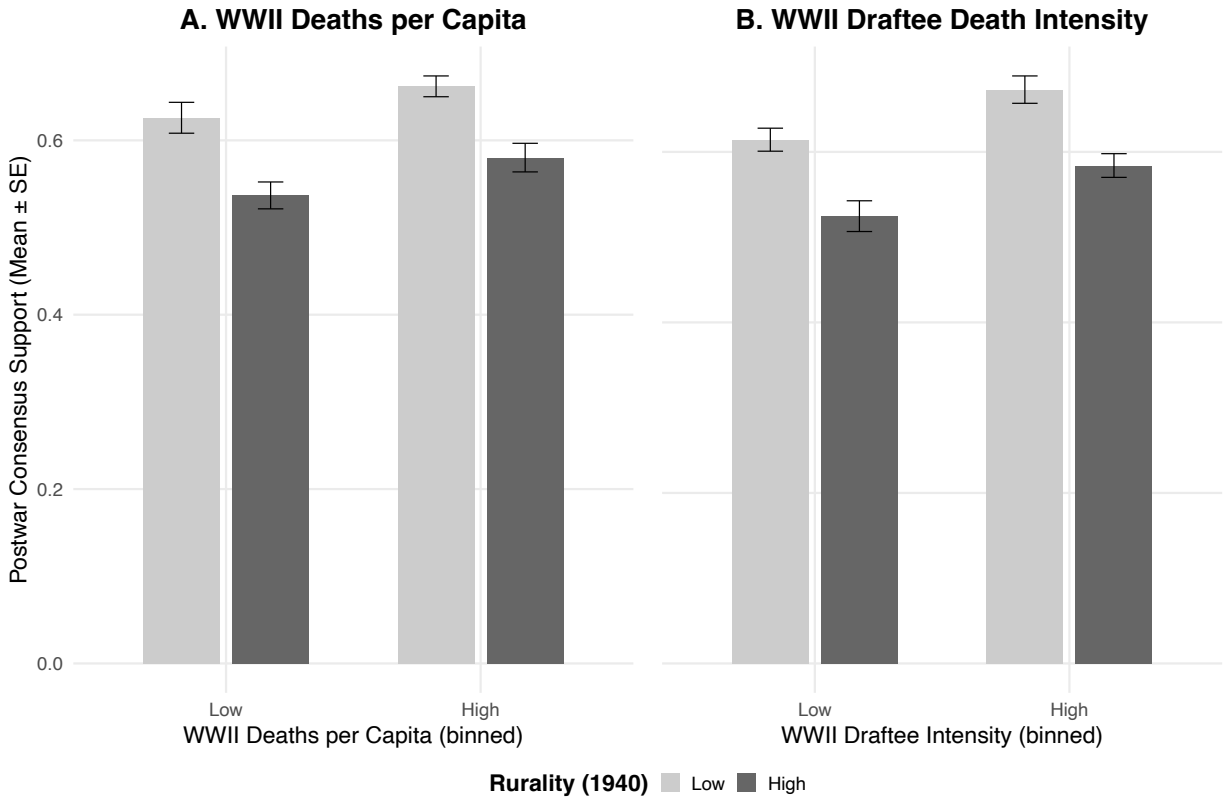


Figure 4.3 Postwar Consensus Support by District War Exposure and Rurality

The bottom line from these descriptive patterns is that the political consequences of war are shaped not only by the type and intensity of war exposure, but also reflect the idea that lawmakers may exercise strategic agency in how they respond to constituent sacrifices. The fact that these results do not directly mirror those of Chapter 3 does not undermine my theoretical argument; it affirms my theoretical distinction between sincere and strategic lawmakers.

To further disentangle these patterns, in the next section I present a series of regression models estimating how war exposure and rurality influenced postwar ideological shifts, MC support for the postwar consensus, and legislative representation of public opinion.

Regression Results: War and Ideological Change. I begin by reporting results from regression models that estimate the impact of WWII exposure on ideological change across the three House cohorts. The descriptive patterns above indicated little within-MC ideological change in the WWII House, but more noticeable asymmetric changes in the second NP dimension among lawmakers in the Wartime and Postwar Entrants cohorts. To examine these patterns further, for each cohort I model ideological change as a function of district WWII exposure (per capita deaths and draftee death intensity), rurality, prewar interventionism, controlling for legislator party and region fixed effects. Table 4.3 summarizes the main results from these models, and the full results are included in Appendix E.

Table 4.3 Summary of Model Results for WWII Exposure and Ideological Change by Cohort

Cohort	ΔNP1 (Economic)	ΔNP2 (Race/Region)	Interpretation
WWII House	Per capita deaths (–)**	Per capita deaths (+)**	Higher proportional deaths → liberal economic beliefs and hardening regional identity
Wartime Entrants	Republican (+)***	Pre-WWII interventionism (–)***; Republican (–)***; West (–)***	GOP and regional shifts, not linked to war exposure
Postwar Entrants	Draftee intensity (+)**; Rurality (–)***; Republican (+)***; South (+)***	Pre-WWII interventionism (–)***; Republican (–)***	Postwar blowback from coercive war experience; Republican, rural, and regional shifts

Note: Only coefficients with significant effects ($p<0.05$) included. Full regression results included in Tables X in Appendix.

Among the WWII House, there are slight but statistically significant changes in both NP dimensions: higher WWII deaths per capita correspond to MCs becoming slightly more liberal on economic issues (NP-1) but more conservative on regional and racial issues (NP-2). Combined with strong negative coefficients for pre-WWII interventionism and Republican MCs, a substantive interpretation of these results is that there was modest ideological updating during the war, but it is less clear how this maps directly onto postwar foreign policy support.

Among Wartime Entrants, the most striking result is that neither war exposure measure predicted ideological change. This suggests that wartime turnover was not attributable to the district's wartime experience; consequently, there are reasons to doubt that MCs were ousted for failure to update their ideology during the war. However, there are still notable differences between Wartime Entrants and the MCs they replaced, especially among Republicans. For example, compared to the predecessor, Republicans elected during the war had significantly more conservative views on economic policy (NP-1), and more liberal views on regional issues (NP-2), an early indication of broader postwar ideological sorting beginning to take shape.

Lastly, there are clearer signs of a wartime legacy among Postwar Entrants. Districts with higher draftee death intensity elected MCs with more conservative economic beliefs (NP-1). This result aligns with the idea that coercive wartime experiences can foster blowback to central state authority. Moreover, rural districts elected MCs that shifted in a more economically liberal direction after the war, emphasizing how wartime experiences vary by local context. The asymmetric coefficients for pre-WWII interventionism and Republican MCs further reflects a regional sorting in party-region coalitions in the postwar period. That NP-1 became more positive for Southern postwar entrants speaks to the deepening of wartime fault lines in FDR's New Deal coalition. This suggests that the war exposed ideological tensions, offering systematic empirical evidence that complements histories of this period (Young 2013; Sinclair 1982; Patterson 1967).

Viewed together, these results are consistent with the story from my public opinion findings: WWII did not foster a uniform ideological transformation in Congress. Instead, the war's impact on ideological convictions varied across cohorts, supporting a theory of contingent wartime legacies. While ideological scores are not a direct proxy for grand strategy preferences, these shifts offer a glimpse into a wartime fracturing of prewar political coalitions that supported FDR's

interventionist agenda. The war, based on these initial model results, initiated an ideological and regional shakeup whose fuller consequences would evolve in subsequent decades.

To assess whether these ideological shifts mapped onto support for the postwar consensus, I turn next to estimating district level support for the *Postwar Consensus Index.*

Regression Results: Congressional Support for the Postwar Consensus. Did WWII truly give rise to an elite consensus in favor of robust U.S. global engagement? To test this received wisdom, and the explanatory power of my theory of contingent representation of war legacies, I estimate a series of regression models predicting district level support for the postwar consensus.

The outcome of interest is the *Postwar Consensus Index*: the proportion that a district's representative voted the pro-postwar consensus position among the 25 key foreign policy votes between the end of WWII and the U.S.'s full scale involvement in the Vietnam War (1945-1964). Whereas the previous section examined ideological change as a proxy for war's impact on elite political behavior, this section discusses results of a direct test of the watershed thesis and my theory of democratic representation of the local legacies of war.

I organize my discussion around two sets of models. Full results are depicted in Appendix E.2, but here I address the key insights. Table 4E.4 reports the results of baseline models using continuous and binned measures of the theoretical variables of interest. Table 4E.5 summarizes the results of interaction models testing whether district rurality moderates the impact of war exposure on postwar MC voting. Each model controls for the district's *Pre-WWII Interventionism* score, partisanship—coded as the party holding the seat for most of the votes cast—and region fixed effects, mirroring the emphasis on subnational regional variation from Chapter 3.

The most theoretically relevant finding from the baseline model results in Table 4.E4 is that both measures of war exposure are positively and statistically significantly related to districts'

Postwar Consensus Index score. For example, Model 3 in Table 4E.4 reports that high WWII deaths per capita corresponds to a 2.8 percentage point increase in support for the postwar consensus ($p<0.1$). Moreover, districts that experienced high draftee death intensity (Model 4) exhibited almost 4 percentage points ($p<0.05$) greater support compared to districts with low draftee death intensity.

While the coefficient may be small, the effects are notable when compared to the distribution of the *Postwar Consensus Index*. For example, using the results for deaths per capita in Model 1 as a reference, a one standard deviation increase in deaths per capita (4.11) would correspond to a roughly 2.5 percentage point increase in the district's expected MC support over the two-decade period. This is enough to shift a district from the 50th to the 61st percentile in terms of postwar support. Looking instead at draftee death intensity in Model 2, a one standard deviation increase in the proportion of draftees among all deaths (0.1) would correspond to a nearly 2 percentage point increase in support for the postwar consensus—shifting a district from the 50th to the 84th percentile. Importantly, the result for draftee death intensity seems to cut against the pattern from Chapter 3, where county draftee death intensity predicted less support for postwar global engagement. These mismatched results point to the presence of public-elite mismatch in opinion and voting on foreign policy legislation, a key focus of my theory.

Another standout finding is the strong negative relationship between district rurality and postwar consensus support. This means that MCs representing more rural districts were consistently less supportive of key legislative pillars of the postwar consensus. One possible explanation is that rurality is reflecting deeper regional or local political or social identities at play. This could be the case given that some geographic regions were strongly associated with support compared to the baseline and omitted category of the Midwest.

A final result concerns the role of partisanship. Across all models, districts controlled by Republicans express less support for the *Postwar Consensus Index*, suggesting a partisan cleavage—despite consistent passage of pro-consensus legislation—in the early Cold War.[11]

These baseline results provide partial support for my theory. War exposure consistently predicts MC support for the postwar consensus, supporting my theory's claim that lawmakers associate constituent sacrifice with support for the war's aims. However, the negative coefficient for district rurality and the incongruence with previous public opinion results (Chapter 3) point to lawmakers strategically responding to constituents' wartime experiences, not their preferences per se. These results, followed by those I elaborate below, underscore my theory's emphasis on lawmakers' strategic responses to wartime sacrifice, simultaneously being constrained and working within factors like partisanship, local context, and regional identity.

The second set of models tests whether the impact of wartime experience on legislator voting is moderated by district rurality, a key theoretical expectation. Did local context inform how lawmakers responded to their district's wartime experience?

The results in Table 4E.5 do not show that elite reactions to district war experience are conditional on district rurality. Across all models, the interaction terms are not statistically significant. Moreover, the standalone war exposure coefficients are null, except for high draftee death intensity in Model 4. On its face, this challenges my theoretical expectation about the contingent war legacies—in particular, that the electoral connection will be amplified in rural districts. However, situating these findings in light of previous results raises alternative interpretations to make sense of these findings.

[11] Figure 4D.1 visualizes the partisan gap in support for the 25 votes used to construct the *postwar Consensus Index*. While a majority of these votes received majority support, the takeaway form Figure 4D.1 is the consistent wide gap over time, which runs counter to dominant narratives of a broad and deep post *bipartisan* consensus.

First, the impact of local context may be mediated by partisanship or regional effects, both of which are predictive in the baseline models. Second, rurality may tighten the congruence between mass and elite preferences. Instead of amplifying war's effects, rurality may instead bring public opinion and elites together. Third, as my theory posits, lawmakers may act strategically, especially in electorally or ideologically safe districts, in ways that decouple constituent experiences from voting.

To probe these alternative possibilities, I next conduct an analysis using district opinion estimates aggregated from the county opinion analysis in Chapter 3. This will enable both a direct test of whether lawmakers were strategic or sincere, and whether democratic representation varied by wartime experience and rurality.

Regression Results: War, Democratic Representation, and Congressional Support for the Postwar Consensus. The models in this section build on those discussed above but introduce one main difference: district level estimates of public support for the U.S. taking an active role in world affairs, adapted from the county level MRP estimates featured in Chapter 3. This primary independent variable of interest is based on the pooled Gallup survey data from 1945-1950 aggregated to postwar districts. It captures how supportive district public opinion was for U.S. global engagement. I include the same covariates as the previous set of models, and I estimate separate models using both continuous and binary measures of war exposure and rurality to reflect my theoretical distinction between low and high burdens of sacrifice, and local context.

The key relationship of interest is between district opinion and support for the postwar consensus. A positive coefficient indicates lawmakers aligned with constituent support for global engagement. This would suggest sincere lawmaker representation of public preferences. Conversely, a negative or null coefficient suggests a public-elite disconnect. This would be

consistent with lawmakers as strategic—selectively responsive to constituent opinion when it serves their goals—or otherwise constrained by partisan or regional dynamics limiting their ability to accurately represent constituent views.

To further examine the null findings from the previous models, I also estimate a second set of models that interact district opinion with rurality. Compared to the previous models that interacted war exposure with rurality, these test whether the electoral connection is amplified in rural districts. This is a key test of my theory: the electoral connection is stronger in more rural areas where communal social dynamics and lawmaker relations are tighter. A positive interaction coefficient would support this theoretical expectation—showing that opinion on global engagement in the wake of war is meaningful and informs lawmaker behavior in rural districts. A negative coefficient, on the other hand, would undercut this expectation, showing that lawmakers have more flexibility to diverge from district opinion in rural districts. In this way, a negative or null coefficient would suggest that rurality may attenuate the electoral connection, or shield lawmakers from deviating from democratic representation when it comes to foreign affairs.

A final note concerns the interpretation of these models. Recalling my estimation strategy in Chapter 3, in which I treated county opinion as a function of war exposure, do I risk inferential bias by including both measures as explanatory variables here? To address this, in the Appendix I report results of similar models excluding the war exposure variables. The key results discussed below remain robust to this specification, increasing confidence in the role of public opinion as doing work in shaping elites' postwar political behavior.

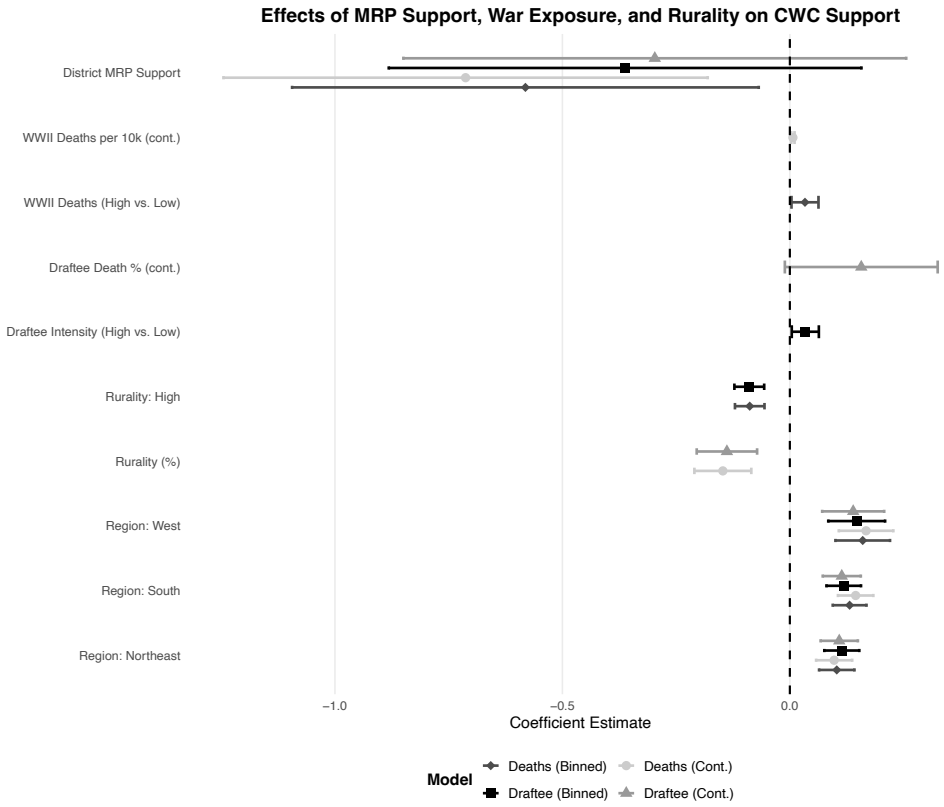


Figure 4.4 District Opinion, War Exposure, and Support for the Postwar Consensus

Figure 4.4 plots the coefficients from the baseline models estimating the relationship between district support for postwar global engagement (Gallup based MRP estimates) and MC voting for the postwar consensus. The full regression results are in Table 4E.6 in the Appendix. The standout finding is that district opinion is negatively and significantly related to lawmaker support for the postwar consensus. Put simply, members of Congress often voted against their district's preferences. This disconnect challenges conventional understandings of a broad consensus in American political culture about the merits of U.S. postwar internationalism; alternatively, it lends new evidence to revisionist accounts that emphasize elite efforts to secure public consent to an ambitious grand strategy (Christensen 1996). This finding also supports my theory's emphasis on the strategic-sincerity representation tradeoff faced by lawmakers. Rather than faithfully representing public preferences—which were majority supportive of global

engagement at this time—lawmakers face certain constraints or incentives to act against, or misread, their voters' preferences.

This finding is even more interesting when compared to the positive and significant coefficients for both war exposure variables. Greater district WWII exposure, both proportional and coercive—corresponded with greater lawmaker voting for the postwar consensus. A theoretically plausible interpretation of these cross-cutting results is that lawmakers may have over-weighted the political implications of their district's war exposure, misattributing it as a heuristic for constituent preferences about the ends and means of U.S. postwar grand strategy. Such misattribution of public preferences to war exposure may have led lawmakers to discount actual opinion.

Another possibility is that these results reflect regional heterogeneity. For example, while the three region coefficients in Table 4E.6 are all positive relative to the omitted Midwest baseline, they capture only the impact of each region. To explore whether there is fluctuation in lawmaker representation of district opinion by region, Figure 4.5 visualizes the relationship between district opinion on the x-axis and district support for the postwar consensus on the y-axis, by region.

The slope lines reveal an obvious trend. The main takeaway is that there is stronger, positive public-elite congruence on global engagement in the South. Substantively, this means that public support for taking an active world role predicted lawmakers similarly supporting the postwar consensus. In the other three regions, the relationship is negative, indicating lawmakers acted the opposite of constituent preferences. This mismatch is quite significant given historical understandings of the South as less democratic in this period.

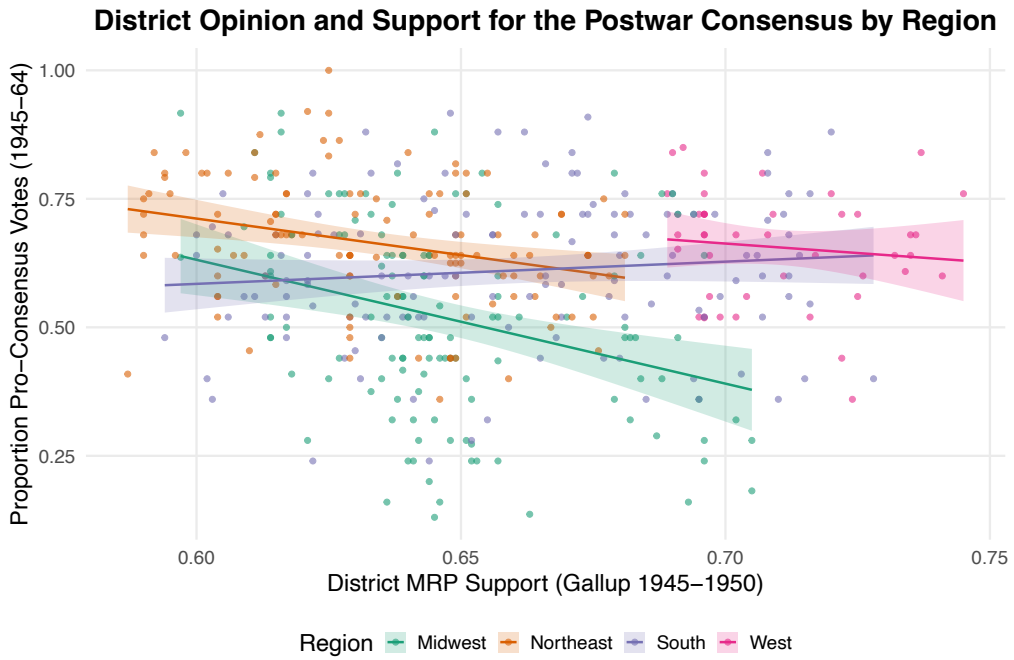


Figure 4.5 District Opinion and Support for the Postwar Consensus, by Region

Drawing on existing research, one explanation might be that Southern lawmakers were more responsive to public opinion on foreign affairs because intra-party competition at this time was rooted mostly in domestic issues (Caughey 2018). In this way, Southern lawmakers may have viewed global engagement as a low-risk issue that they could sincerely represent. In the other regions, war induced ideological sorting and other political incentives may have led lawmakers to act more in line with strategic representation.

These results set up the second test of the representation component of my theory of local war legacies: does local context moderate lawmaker-public relations with respect to foreign policy? Next, I discuss the results of the second set of models interacting district opinion with rurality to test whether the electoral connection is heightened by rurality, as my theory predicts.

Regression Results: Rurality and Democratic Responsiveness in the Wake of War. Table 4.4 reports results from the interaction models testing a core theoretical claim: democratic responsiveness to public opinion on grand strategy in the wake of war is tighter in more rural

districts. These models include the same covariates as previous specifications, but the focus here is the interaction between district opinion (Gallup MRP estimates) and rurality. Table 4.4 reports only the main coefficients of interest, and the full results are included in Table 4E.7.

Table 4.4 District Rurality and Democratic Responsive to Public Opinion

	Continuous		**Binned**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
District MRP Support	-1.186^{**}	-0.789	-1.113^{***}	-0.934^{***}
	(0.472)	(0.498)	(0.352)	(0.357)
Rurality (1940)	-0.764	-0.758		
	(0.505)	(0.519)		
Rurality: High			-0.729^{**}	-0.770^{***}
			(0.287)	(0.288)
MRP Support × Rurality	**0.951**	**0.956**		
	(0.777)	(0.799)		
MRP Support × Rurality (high)			**0.972****	**1.034****
			(0.434)	(0.436)
Observations	420	416	420	416
R^2	0.217	0.196	0.228	0.229
Adjusted R^2	0.203	0.182	0.215	0.216
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

There are two main takeaways. First, the coefficients for the standalone variables, district opinion and rurality, are consistent with previous models. For example, District MRP Support has a negative and statistically significant coefficient, affirming the earlier finding that lawmaker support for the postwar consensus was inverse to public opinion. One difference between these results and the previous models is that the coefficients for the continuous rurality measure (Models 1 and 2) are null. An interpretation of this difference is that the effect of local context may be nonlinear, instead operating more like a threshold effect. That is, the moderating role of rurality on democratic representation may only obtain after cross a high-rurality threshold This distinction aligns with my theoretical logic of war intensity as being either high or low, and local context dynamics (rurality) being either high or low.

For example, the coefficient for "High Rural" in Model 3 (-0.729) indicates that districts above the national median in rurality were represented by MCs who voted against the postwar consensus more often than those representing low rural districts, all else equal. This result conforms with previous findings (Tables 4.E5 and 4.E7) suggesting rurality was associated with distinct postwar preferences, plausibly attributable to preexisting regional and coalitional dynamics.

The second and more theoretically important takeaway concerns the interaction term. These are bolded in Table 4.4. The binned rurality interaction terms (MRP Opinion × High Rurality in Models 3-4) are positive and statistically significant, consistent with theoretical expectations. Democratic responsiveness is strengthened in more rural districts. Moreover, it is especially convincing that the interaction term runs opposite the standalone variables. For example, the coefficients for district opinion and rurality are both negative, but their interaction is positive. This suggests that congressional behavior in *the most rural districts*, where political accountability is heightened, are more responsive to constituents in the wake of war.

Furthermore, while the asymmetry in statistical significance between the continuous and binned interaction terms may seem to undermine my theory, I interpret this instead as additional support for the idea of a threshold effect. That the interaction is only significant with the binned measure supports the idea that a threshold effect exists between high rural and low rural places. This supports my theoretical emphasis, building on existing work on rural politics, on rural places as constituting a socially and political distinct identity recognized as such by local residents. In highly rural districts, constituents and their MCs are aware of local norms and social dynamics that shape the meaning and practice of politics, which in turn informs memories of wartime sacrifice and their aggregation into political preferences. The idea is that the difference between places that

are clearly rural vs. not rural is more politically meaningful than moving from "somewhat rural" to "more rural." When the distinction is strong and well understood, it is in these cases where lawmakers are limited in their ability to strategically deviate from local opinion.

Building on this interpretation, the results also suggest that in low rural (more urban) districts, public support for global engagement predicted less MC support for the consensus. Given this, it suggests an attenuated electoral connection in more urban places, perhaps because elected officials may be less beholden to mass preferences, or they may exhibit stronger party discipline which constrains sincere representation.

Given the previous findings on regional heterogeneity, I explore variation in the opinion × rurality interaction term by region, thus setting the stage for my final analysis in the following section where I explore the distinctiveness of democratic responsiveness in the South. Figure 4E.1 visualizes the marginal effect of district MRP opinion on district support for the postwar consensus, estimated separately for each region. The model results do not show evidence that the moderating role of rurality varied significantly between regions. Importantly, this affirms the main finding that democratic responsiveness is amplified in high rural districts, regardless of regions.

Despite not finding significant regional variation, the previous relationship in Figure 4.5 suggesting Southern distinctiveness deserves focused attention. Finally, I mirror my approach in Chapter 3 by examining whether there are differences in how the effects of war impact elite political behavior across regime type. In the following section, I summarize results of several analyses building on findings discussed so far. My main focus is determining whether lawmakers in the South—what scholars refer to as an authoritarian enclave (Mickey 2015)—responded systematically differently to constituent war experiences than in the more democratic non-South.

Special emphasis will be made on reconciling the findings from the war exposure models with the just mentioned finding about rural moderation not varying by region.

Mass-Elite Congruence in a Non-Democratic Context: Democratic Responsiveness in the Post-WWII American South. Are elected officials in less democratic contexts less responsive to constituent opinion on foreign policy, particularly in the wake of war when memories of sacrifice are most salient?

As discussed in the empirical strategy section, my theory posits competing expectations for lawmaker behavior in nondemocratic contexts. On the one hand, in settings with weak inter-party electoral competition, such as the one-party South, legislators have greater leeway to act strategically, deviating from public opinion. Accordingly, this view would expect Southern lawmakers voting on the postwar consensus to deviate more from public opinion. On the other hand, one-party systems can still incentivize responsiveness to public opinion to gain intra-party leverage. For example, when an issue is broadly settled, such as views on global engagement, candidates attempt to signal they are the more faithful representatives of constituent preferences. This view would therefore expect lawmakers to more sincerely align with public opinion to preempt electoral challenges from party elites.

My core theoretical expectation, affirmed by the findings in Chapter 3, is that democratic responsiveness operates similarly in the South compared to non-South districts. While the institutional and electoral contexts varied, the mechanisms connecting local wartime experiences to elite behavior—local community dynamics, lawmaker embeddedness, and memories of war—still obtain. I test this expectation with the following models that compare the effects of war exposure, district opinion, and rurality on voting for the postwar consensus across Southern and non-Southern districts.

The first set of models, reported in Table 4E.8 in the Appendix, offers a first test of the question about regime type variation: whether support for the postwar consensus varied between Southern and non-Southern districts. The core variable of interest is the interaction between war exposure and a binary indicator of whether the district is in the South or not.

Table 4.5 Summary of South-non-South Responsiveness

Theory Relationship	Model	South Interaction	Interpretation
War Exposure	WWII Deaths × South	↓ *	Slightly negative responsiveness to proportional exposure in the South
War Exposure	Draftee Intensity × South	Null	No difference in responsiveness to coercive war exposure
Democratic Responsiveness	MRP Opinion × South	Null	Southern MCs not more or less responsive to opinion
Democratic Responsiveness	MRP Opinion (main effect)	Null	Regional, not democratic, variation may explain earlier negative effect

The main takeaway from the first set of models is that there is minimal evidence of legislative responsiveness being contingent on democratic context. The only significant result is a slightly negative coefficient (-0.008, $p<0.1$) for WWII Deaths x South in the continuous model. Substantively, this suggests that, in the South, districts with higher proportional war deaths were slightly more likely to be represented by MCs who voted against the postwar consensus, compared to non-Southern districts. Nonetheless, the effect is quite small and not consistent across the three other interaction models, compared to a more consistent result for the standalone variables. That is, the main effects for the standalone variables—war exposure, district partisanship, and rurality—reflect previous findings discussed above. For example, Republican district control and rurality are both associated with lower support for the postwar consensus. Moreover, on its own, war exposure is consistently predictive of greater support, except in the unique case of Southern attenuation in the continuous interaction model.

The second set of models, presented in Table 4E.9 in the Appendix, tests whether democratic responsiveness to district opinion varied between Southern and non-Southern districts. The variable of interest is the interaction term for District MRP Opinion x South. The results indicate there is no evidence of variation in responsiveness among Southern lawmakers. Across both binned and continuous models, the interaction term is statistically insignificant, indicating no meaningful difference in MC responsiveness in and outside the South. For further validation, I subset districts inside and outside the south (Models 3 and 4 in Table 4E.9), which also show no significant results in the interaction term.

I interpret the lack of a clear Southern effect on MC responsiveness as supporting my theoretical expectation that the impact of local wartime experiences operates similarly across regime contexts. While the American South is only a single case of within-polity variation in democratic institutions, these findings complement those from Chapter 3 and together lend support for my theory. They reinforce my broader claims that the impacts of war are not uniform, instead reflecting the intensity and distribution of local sacrifices, and the local context that shapes how wartime experiences processed and acted upon by political officials.

Finally, to visualize the lack of significant South-non-South differences, Figure 6 maps the residuals from the MRP Opinion × South interaction model from the war exposure model summarized in Table 4.5. These residuals reflect the difference between the district's score on the *Postwar Consensus Index* and estimated district opinion from the Gallup-based MRP estimates discussed previously. Put simply, the map is showing the distance between lawmaker voting and district opinion. The descriptive value of the map is therefore to visualize the finding that Southern lawmakers were not systematically different in how they represented constituent preferences on the U.S. role in the world.

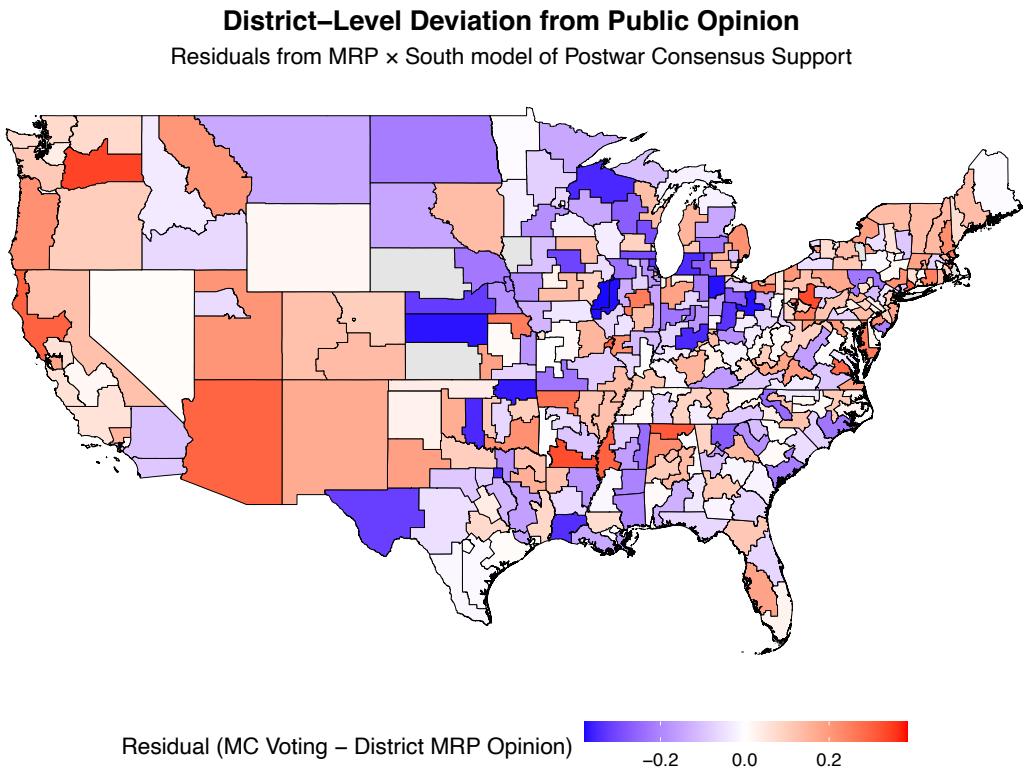


Figure 4.6 Difference Between Lawmaker Support for the Postwar Consensus and District Opinion, Residual from Interaction Model

Note: The residuals visualized here correspond to the Binned Rurality model for All Districts in Table 4E.9.

Darker red districts indicate districts where MCs voted for the postwar consensus position at a higher rate than suggested by district opinion. Conversely, blue districts indicate where MCs voted the consensus position less than their district's constituents supported global engagement. The map is therefore a descriptive snapshot of the spatial distribution of democratic responsiveness in the early Cold War. It shows a rough approximation of the public-elite gap in support for the postwar foreign policy consensus, controlling for variation in democratic institutions across the South-non-South divide. While there are some regional patterns, such as clustering in the West and parts of the Northeast, the key takeaway is that, as the models suggest, there is no systematic difference between Southern and non-Southern districts.

Viewed alongside the previous results, this analysis supports my broader theoretical claim: while the local legacies of war may reflect regional political culture (Chapter 3), democratic context alone does not determine how political officials respond to the public's wartime experiences. Despite the South's less democratic features during this period—e.g., disenfranchisement and one-party hegemony—the patterns observed here are not substantially different from those outside the South. This supports a core theoretical insight of the dissertation: local wartime sacrifice, community dynamics, and legislator responsiveness interact with the electoral connection to shape the legacies of war.

In the next section, I review how these results contribute to the broader scope of the dissertation, developing a more historically grounded and theoretically nuanced account of how war reshaped the domestic political foundations of American grand strategy.

4.6 Discussion

In this chapter, I addressed two questions central to the causes and consequences of war. Theoretically, how does war impact the domestic politics of grand strategy? Historically, how did the American experience in WWII shape the congressional politics of postwar U.S. foreign policy? While prior research offers valuable insights into the institutional, ideological, and social consequences of this war (Sparrow 1996; Saldin 2010; Mettler 2007), this analysis is the first to systematically examine the connection between constituent wartime experiences and legislative responsiveness as it relates to the postwar foreign policy consensus. Therefore, this chapter contributes both to research on the legacies of conflict and research on democratic representation.

The findings offer qualified support for my theory of local war legacies and its claim that wartime sacrifice influences elite political behavior in conditional ways. Legislators responded to district war exposure and constituent preferences both sincerely and strategically, shaped by the

nature and intensity of wartime experience, local context, and regional political dynamics. While lawmakers faithfully reflected constituent opinion in some districts, others voted against them. That Southern and non-Southern lawmakers had little systematic variation in democratic responsiveness underscores the idea that elites respond to wartime sacrifice even in attenuated democratic contexts.

Historically, these results complicate watershed interpretations of WWII's role in fostering a bipartisan foreign policy consensus in the early Cold War. While some models show a positive relationship between district war exposure and MC support for the postwar consensus, others show null or inconsistent effects. Importantly, evidence shows that wartime ideological change occurred not through individual updating but through electoral turnover. These findings therefore support the purge hypothesis more than the conversion narrative, and even the wartime and postwar entrants were not drastically different in their orientations than their predecessors. A bottom line is that WWII did shape congressional politics, but not through a widespread, unidirectional realignment anchored in support for the postwar consensus.

These findings have important implications for understanding the origins and durability of domestic political support for the "U.S. led postwar international order." Accounts like Ikenberry's (2011; 2018) treat WWII as the catalyst for the U.S.'s liberal internationalist vision, rooted in the New Deal political order's coalitional and governance model. Yet this chapter shows that, if anything, the war fostered uneven congressional support for global engagement that was conditioned by local wartime experiences and context. Even lawmakers who served during the New Deal or were elected in the early postwar years did not always align their support for the postwar consensus with district wartime experiences. Moreover, members of the WWII House became more ideologically conservative during the war years, consistent with studies by legislative

scholars (Young 2013; Sinclair 1982; Patterson 1967). This cuts against watershed accounts' emphasis on WWII as locking in domestic political support.

Beyond amending the interpretation of this important historical case, this chapter contributes to literature on how international political forces influence domestic politics. Research at the nexus of IR and American political development, for example, calls for greater attention to how external forces like war and trade reshaped the American polity (Katznelson and Shefter 2002; Mayhew 2005; Saldin 2010). IR scholars, for their part, have argued for the merits of investing attention to ways in which leading states' international position is both shaped and constrained by its domestic politics (Ikenberry and Nexon 2019; Kier and Krebs 2010). My findings respond to this invitation by offering a pathway through which war impacts postwar politics: local sacrifice and the electoral connection. A takeaway of my IR-APD informed account is that major wars do not necessarily repudiate prewar strategic beliefs about the nation's role in the war. Rather, to understand war's impact, scholars should consider subnational variation in wartime experiences and the relevant local conditions that influence office holder behavior.

Nonetheless, I acknowledge that my analysis does have its limitations. For example, while I find support for the idea of conditional legislator responsiveness, I do not systematically test the mechanisms underlying variation in lawmaker orientation. In my discussion, I proposed a couple reasons for why some lawmakers may sincerely respond to district experiences while others are strategic. Some strategic lawmakers may respond to pressures like intra-elite bargaining or personal ideology. It is also possible that some may misread public responses to war, as research shows that elected officials can misinterpret public opinion (Kertzer 2022; Broockman and Skovron 2018; Pilet et al. 2023). These potential explanations are promising pathways for future research, and my results provide a strong foundation for extension.

A second issue concerns the process of public-lawmaker interaction. How did lawmakers learn of their district's wartime sacrifice, e.g. did constituents voice their experiences directly? What role did the War Department play in shaping the public conversation and public-lawmaker relations?[12] These questions can be addressed with intentional archival research of lawmaker records, such as consulting correspondence or other material documenting this connection. Moreover, the War Department maintained extensive lists and postwar analyses of war casualties.[13] In future extensions, I plan to conduct systematic archival research of lawmaker and War Department materials to explore how public and government knowledge of the distribution of sacrifice shaped postwar representation.

A third issue concerns generalizability. This chapter addresses the single case of WWII, which I consider a most likely case of war catalyzing a political realignment on grand strategy. Given the uneven and contingent effects revealed in my analysis, are there reasons to expect similar findings in other cases of more limited or strategically ambiguous wars? Testing my theory in other wars, such as Korea, Vietnam, and the War on Terror can evaluate the scope conditions of my theory. Nonetheless, the value of focusing on one case rests in its theoretical and historical importance. Because it is a canonical example of wartime political transformation, my results point to the theoretical promise of revisiting other cases around which enduring political and policy narratives revolve.

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[12] Steven Casey's (2013) *When Soldiers Fall* is particularly valuable. Chapters 2 and 3 describe how the War Department, informed by lessons from WWI, maintained systematic records of wartime casualties and actively publicized them. Local newspapers commonly reported on war deaths, and casualty lists were sent to Members of Congress and media outlets. Casey's (2013) extensive list of primary sources and archival trail of War Department files provides a strong roadmap for my archival research intended to fill out the picture of public-lawmaker relations on wartime sacrifices.

[13] Examples of archival collections relevant to this purpose include: the War Department's Casualties Division, the Legislative and Policy Precedent Files, and the Army Service Forces. Additionally, records at the Roosevelt Presidential Library will be valuable, including intelligence reports compiled by the Office of War Information on domestic public opinion regarding the war effort, and documents held in the President's Secretary's File and the Office of Government Reports.

Finally, this chapter paves the way for a fuller research agenda on tracing war's long term political effects on the domestic politics of foreign policy. Together with my public opinion results in Chapter 3, this chapter shows that communities respond to war through their local context. My historical approach in these chapters raises the question of how do these wartime experiences endure? How might communal memories of wartime sacrifice evolve and change over time in ways that influence future political behavior? As scholars of historical political economy recognize, there is a need to pay greater attention to theorizing and tracing how historical causes produce future political effects (Cirone and Pepinsky 2022). These questions motivate the following chapter, where I shift my focus to the practices and symbolic legacies of war remembrance and veteran commemoration.

Chapter 5 draws on my extensive fieldwork evidence to distill insights into how communities remember, articulate, and make politically salient their community's past wartime experiences. I combine my historical quantitative insights on public opinion and legislative representation with in-depth qualitative research to examine how the political meaning of war memory sustains or erodes over time. Understanding political change in the U.S., specifically how international and domestic forces interact to influence grand strategy, requires getting close to how people experience and practice these ideas in their everyday lives.

CHAPTER 5

"Memories Still Linger": The American Practice of Veteran Commemoration and War Remembrance

> "When I was in the service, if you traveled in your uniform, [people] didn't want to have nothing to do with you. If you was in the Vietnam era…they called a lot of them, you know women killers, child killers and stuff like that right there. So they weren't really welcomed when they came home."
>
> —Vietnam veteran and American Legion Post Commander[1]

> "These guys in my eyes will never get the recognition they deserve. No veteran does. I don't think any veteran does. There's just not enough you can do for these guys for what they've done for us."
>
> —Non-Veteran American Legion Auxiliary Member[2]

5.1 INTRODUCTION

"You can probably tell there's still a lot of bitterness about Vietnam." Janet, a retired Army dental assistant who served in the Vietnam War, whispered this to me as we sat at a table full of beer bottles in an American Legion post in rural Kansas.[3] The veteran she referred to, seated to my immediate right, was the second man drafted from the county during the war. He had just finished correcting a non-veteran patron who misstated the year President Kennedy sent advisors to Vietnam. What followed was a colorful critique of the U.S.'s belief that South Vietnamese troops could be trained to fight off the North. To this draftee veteran, the war was doomed from the start.

This anecdote captures the central concern of this chapter: how are American memories of war reproduced over time, and to what effect? The previous two chapters showed how local

[1] Interview 12, November 1, 2023.
[2] Interview 61, December 9, 2024.
[3] Casual gathering at an American Legion post in Central Plains, Kansas, August 16, 2023. Per my IRB protocol, IRB23-1346, names of participants and specific locales are given pseudonyms to protect confidentially.

legacies of WWII shaped public opinion and legislative behavior in the near and medium term. This chapter focuses on the present, asking how historical legacies of war endure, evolve, and interact with national narratives. In doing so, I highlight a tension. Despite the U.S.'s visible and politically salient pro-veteran culture (Feaver 2023)—including historically generous government benefits (Dean 1992), societal recognition (Kleykamp et al. 2017), and bipartisan reverence (Cormack 2018)—there remains a strong perception of veterans as mistreated or forgotten. These beliefs are central to how past sacrifice is remembered and carry important implications for political discourse on national security.

I argue that American commemorative practices around war and veterans adhere to a logic of atonement. At its core, this logic centers on redressing perceived past mistreatment of veterans, especially those from the Vietnam era. Civic organizations and public rituals position living veterans as the object of national gratitude, reflecting what I call a moral economy of remembrance. In this moral economy, citizens and communities feel obligated to honor veterans and speak about war in reverent terms. These obligations are enacted through patriotic scripts, a repertoire of language and gestures that guide what should and should not be said about veterans and past wars. The result is a culture of remembrance that prioritizes recognition over reckoning. This culture affirms and celebrates past service and sacrifice, while sidelining questions about the political origins or consequences of past conflicts. This presents clear implications for understanding domestic political support for grand strategy. By emphasizing certain narratives and foregoing alternatives, these practices constrain the potential for meaningful public debate about the costs and purposes of the military as an instrument of grand strategy.

This chapter is informed by fieldwork conducted over 18 months, including participant observation in predominantly rural communities with high historical war exposure, over 70

interviews with veterans and civic volunteers, and serving as a volunteer on four Honor Flights to Washington, D.C. Together, these experiences constitute a firsthand account of present day commemorative practices, showing how participants made sense of past wars, military service, and balance local and national identities. My fieldwork marks a methodological shift from Chapters 3 and 4, which relied on historical polling and legislative data. Here, I showcase qualitative evidence to trace the mechanisms by which memory is activated, expressed, and made politically salient in everyday life.

Furthermore, this chapter fulfills the dissertation's broader mixed-methods design. The previous empirical chapters established that local war legacies are indeed detectable in the short and medium term. This chapter investigates the enduring purchase of those legacies in the present, bringing them to life. My approach also responds to the call in historical political economy to trace mechanisms by which historical effects persist, evolve, and attenuate over time (Cirone and Pepinsky 2022; Charnysh et al. 2023; Acharya et al. 2024).[4] More personally, I designed this part of the dissertation to incorporate the voices of ordinary Americans. I intentionally sought to move beyond stylized survey vignettes to recover the ground truth of how people think about war memory. How do they think and talk about it, commemorate it, and pass it on? In an era where experimental survey research dominants the study of public opinion, this chapter seeks to re-anchor debates about the U.S.'s global role—and more specifically, the public's role in those debates—in the lived experiences of the very people scholars often theorize about.

[4] Moreover, as I discuss in the Research Design section, my approach reflects the intuition behind Lieberman's (2005) concept of nested analysis, where a large-N framework is used to identify a smaller number of cases for closer process tracing. My mixed-method design takes inspiration from this approach by integrating multiple literatures collectively concerned with how historical causes generate long-term effects. I sought to integrate them in a creative, theoretically rich, and substantively novel way to study a topic not addressed in these literatures, domestic support for grand strategy.

Three core findings emerged from my fieldwork. First, I observed what I call reticent remembrance, a widespread belief that veterans are reluctant to share their military or wartime experiences. This theme emerged across interviews and commemorative events, although it is not universal. Some veterans spoke freely and at length about their service, while others remained reserved. I argue that this norm of reticence is less a universal behavior and more a social expectation, one that projects an image of veterans as humble, stoic, and self-sacrificing. As one longtime Honor Flight volunteer recalled, describing the reflections of a WWII veteran and past flight participant who had just returned home: "We talked for about two hours about what I'd done for the last three or four years. Finally, his dad said, 'Well, son, it's 10:00 and I've got you scheduled to deliver a load of freight at 5:00 in the morning.' That's the last we ever talked about it. He said he'd never talk about it again."[5] These kinds of reflections, whether shared firsthand by veterans or secondhand by volunteers or family members, were quite common in my fieldwork.

Second, I argue that this reticent remembrance contributes to the homogenization of veteran identity. Across my fieldwork, I observed veterans honored in ways that emphasized their courage, sacrifice, and historical lack of recognition. While a ceremony speaker or volunteer might draw attention to service branch pride, there was rarely differentiation between experiences or roles. What mattered above all else was that the veteran had served, with secondary importance placed on their conflict era. The dominant image in the American war imagination is that of a combat veteran, not the mechanic, supply officer, or chaplain. This flattening of experiences reinforces the logic of atonement. When all veterans are viewed as deserving of equal recognition, the past is remembered as what needs redressing, not for its complexity.

[5] Interview 60, December 9, 2024.

Third, I discuss the important role of commemorative infrastructure: the civic organizations, volunteer groups, and community leaders who enact these commemorative practices. From Quilts of Valor ceremonies, American Legion Auxiliaries, to Honor Flight homecomings, these actors and events embody the moral economy of remembrance and maintain the grammar of patriotic scripts. In doing so, they foreground a version of history that honors military service and celebrates past war sacrifices but often elides critique. These practices are sincere, nonpartisan, and volunteer driven, but they are not historically or politically neutral. They shape how war is remembered, who and what is recognized, and which lessons are emphasized.

Throughout the chapter, I foreground the rural settings in which my fieldwork took place. In these communities, commemorative infrastructure plays a prominent role in civic life. Veteran recognition is often a key public event, occupying a central spot in the local social calendar. The prominence of these rituals reflects the deep resonance of war and military memory in places with high historical war exposure. In towns I visited, there are traces of this memory throughout the material and social infrastructure. There are military and patriotic themed murals on the sides of buildings, local parks feature war memorials and statues, and residents would often point these out to me with pride. In this sense, the chapter reinforces a theme that runs throughout the dissertation: all war, and its remembrance, is local.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I begin by extending the theoretical framework of collective memory and commemorative practices developed in Chapter 2, focusing specifically on how these practices relate to grand strategic discourse. I distinguish my argument in relation to existing literature on ontological security and cultures of militarism in international relations, proposing instead a more sympathetic and grounded reading of commemorative practices. I then describe my fieldwork research design and methods, including my selection of field sites, outreach

to potential participants, and identification of veteran-serving organizations. The empirical core of the chapter contextualizes three interrelated themes: reticent remembrance, the logic of atonement, and patriotic scripts. I contextualize each with detailed fieldwork evidence. I conclude the chapter by discussing implications for civil-military relations, collective memory, and the domestic politics of grand strategy.



Figure 5.1 Examples of Material Commemoration in Central Plains
Top left: Mural dedicated to a WWII B-29 bomber crew. Many Army Air Corps crews that went on to bomb Japan were trained in nearby training airfields, an enduring source of local pride and meaning. Top right: Impromptu "Wall of Honor" in the entryway of a local hardware store. Photographs of local veterans, both living and deceased, are maintained by a store employee and Navy veteran. I was introduced to him by a local Legion Auxiliary member, and he enthusiastically met me to explain its origins. Bottom left: The traveling "Wall that Heals" in a town in Central Plains. Organizers told me it attracted more visitors than when it visits cities twice and three times as big. I met residents from towns near and far who came to see it. Bottom right: Exterior mural of a prominent VFW post in Central Plains, reflecting its historical significance and associated with notable political figures.

The key takeaway is that the past is made present through local commemorative practices. These practices reflect and reproduce a national political culture of atonement. While these practices often narrow the boundaries of discourse on national security affairs, they are not completely inelastic. Because these practices are reflective of and responsive to politics and social

life, there is potential for them to be repurposed to question or reimagine existing strategic discourse. I return to the possibility and implications of this idea in the concluding section and final chapter.

5.2 Commemorative Practices and the Legacies of War

In this section, I develop the idea that local legacies of war interact with a national collective memory of war. I draw on scholarship that shows how collective memory is fundamentally political, contested, and instrumentalized over time. I then develop the concept of the logic of atonement, which I argue underpins American commemorative practices around war and veterans. I conclude by linking these dynamics to the domestic politics of grand strategy. To preview, I establish that local legacies operate like collective memory, this collective memory operates according to a moral economy of remembrance, and that these patterns matter for how Americans understand the nation's role in the world.

Collective Memory, National Identity, and Commemoration. My point of departure is a rich interdisciplinary literature in IR, comparative politics, and historical sociology that treats collective memory as both a rhetorical resource and political process. This chapter builds on that foundation to argue that the local legacies of war I document reflect a broader national political culture that balances ideas of national identity, civic obligation, and the nation's strategic orientation.

I adapt Jo's (2022, 2) parsimonious definition of collective memory as "an intersubjective understanding of the past." The emphasis here is on *intersubjective*, meaning that the content and valence of memory exists independently of any one individual. A key idea is that memory is not just an individual's personal reflections, but a shared mental framework that shapes and reflects how a broader community remembers the past. Importantly, collective memory emphasizes some

facts about a historical event and omits others. In this way, collective memory differs from history—a factual account of what happened—and instead reflects what a given group finds meaningful about the past (Xu and Zhao 2023). Collective memory is therefore an inherently political process, as is the process by which memory is reproduced and activated over time.[6]

Another key insight is that memory is not simply a recollection of the past but is informed by present day context. This point is central in Bodnar's (1994) account of public commemorative events and rituals in U.S. culture. Commemorative practices may be focused on discrete issues like veteran commemoration, but they reflect deeper questions of social and political order. As Bodnar (1994, 14) writes, "Public memory is produced from a political discussion that involves not so much specific economic or moral problems but rather fundamental issues about the entire existence of a society: its organization, structure of power, and the very meaning of it past and present." Even when these acts are sincere and nonpartisan—a consistent theme in my fieldwork—they promote certain views of national identity, belonging, and moral obligation. These visions, I argue, align with a strategic worldview underpinning an assertive American role in the world. My fieldwork shows how this unfolds in everyday acts and in more intentional acts of honoring.

The study of collective memory in IR has been applied to understand questions ranging from elite behavior, legitimation practices, and the construction of national identities (Klymenko 2022; Subotić 2018; Wang 2018). Memory can serve as a heuristic in elites' handling of international crises (Jervis 1976) or supply historical analogies used in elite foreign policy decision making (Khong 1992). A key insight from this literature is that collective memory, because it is bound up with notions of identity and security, can constrain or enable national security discourse by influencing which courses of action are seen as viable. "Collective memory provides group

[6] For example, collective memory of anti-Vietnam War protestors as "anti-troop" developed in the absence of any credible media coverage depicting protesters in this way (Beamish et al. 1995).

members with a feeling of sameness and sense of who they are – i.e. with ontological security" (Gustafsson 2014, 73). Because collective memory informs how actors understand problems and solutions in the present, it can serve to enable or constrain elites' political projects (Müller 2002). In this chapter, I take a bottom-up approach to collective memory, examining how citizens, not just political leaders, remember war and venerate military service in ways that shape the domestic political foundations of U.S. national security.[7]

A key insight from this literature is that memory and national identity are intertwined (Gillis 1994). Collective memory serves as a pillar of national identity, providing a sense of shared belonging and values to sustain obligation and contribution. I argue that war is a particularly powerful source of this collective memory function because it clarifies fundamental questions of sacrifice, imposes a moral hierarchy of national contributions, and imbues meaning to citizenship, namely, contributing to something greater than any individual. To be sure, this is not unique to the U.S. (Gillis 1994), as war has long been studied as a key driver of national political and cultural change (Posen 1993). In the American case, however, I argue that commemorative practices are centered less on celebrating past victories or strategic successes. Instead, they focus on redressing past sacrifices and mistreatment—making amends for what is owed to veterans—guided by what I call a logic of atonement.

War memory is fundamentally the product of contestation. Jo (2022, 5) identifies two contexts as relevant to memory politics. First is the historical trajectory through which collective memory is formed and contested over time. Second is the present-day purpose for which collective memory is mobilized. My discussion in the following sections address both stages. I first trace

[7] To draw further from Bodnar (1994, 13-14), my approach aligns with vernacular cultural expression rather than official cultural expression. While the later concerns elite efforts to promote unity of interest and identity, the former "conveys what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like" (14).

how a shared understanding of veteran mistreatment emerged after the Vietnam War and became embedded in commemorative practices. I then show how this narrative informs how these memories are made politically salient in the present, structuring which historical references are made in everyday discourse on war and military service. I argue that American commemorative practice helps explain why some lessons from past wars are emphasized while others sidelined.

Collective memory is also about whose voice and experience matter. As discussed above, memory is not simply held in individual minds but shaped through the enactment of practices like public rituals and share national narratives that reinforce dominant understandings (Halbwachs 1992; Connerton 1989). The key point here is that collective memory is an inherently social phenomenon. I connect this insight with work in political geography (Agnew 1987) to argue that these social commemorative dynamics can vary by place. The fieldwork evidence presented in this chapter aligns with my theoretical expectation that rural communities have distinct commemorative infrastructures. In these places, I find that war memory is reproduced through the social activities at VFWs halls, American Legions posts, civic ceremonies, local museums, and public artwork. These practices honor local sacrifice and connects it to a broader national identity. These observations align with my theory's claim that war remembrance is localized in politically meaningful ways.

I show that local commemorative practices interact with and reproduce national memories of war. In the following section, I argue that these practices are structured by a logic of atonement, a shared expectation that society must compensate for past failures to honor veterans. This logic has important implications for how Americans understand the relationship between military service, war, and the nation's role in the world.

The Logic of Atonement. A central claim of this chapter is that American commemorative practice is defined by a logic of atonement. By "atonement," I refer to the act of "making amends" for past transgressions (Radzik 2009). In this context, commemorative practices revolve around redressing the belief that veterans, particularly those of the Vietnam era, were mistreated or insufficiently honored. Because this sense of redress is never fully satisfied, it becomes a ritualized and ongoing act, reinforcing the perception of past wrongdoing it seeks to redress. This logic appears in smaller gestures, like restaurants offering discounts for veterans or priority airline boarding, and larger symbolic events I document in this chapter. As one Vietnam veteran reflected, summarizing the shift toward recognizing veterans over the past two decades: "Our country is trying to make up for the disservice that it did to the veterans during those '70s and '60s."[8]

Atonement is a common feature of the world's major religions and is often considered an obligation to remain in good standing within a faith community. It typically involves two components. The substantive component concerns the underlying transgression for which amends are being made. The procedural component involves practicing the atonement credibly and meaningfully, often through a script and repetition. In American commemorative practice, this procedure includes both official events like public ceremonies and symbolic rituals, as well as more informal gestures and speech acts like telling a veteran "Thank you for your service." Importantly, understood as atonement, these acts are about more than honoring veterans, they affirm the speaker's moral standing.[9] This moral economy of remembrance therefore reinforces shared expectations about how to honor and when.

[8] Interview 30, November 15, 2024.

[9] As I emphasize throughout this chapter, this is not to say that such acts are insincere. While some may have a performative sensibility, on the whole I found these acts to be genuine expressions of gratitude. My broader point is to draw meaning from the ubiquitous nature of these practice and what they say about the American political culture of commemoration and remembrance.

It is important to clarify that I am not arguing atonement is the only motivation behind American commemoration. Sincere gratitude, civic pride, and personal or familial connections all matter. In my fieldwork, for example, I often encountered women volunteers in commemorative organizations who cited a family member—typically their father or another older male relative or friend—as the inspiration for their involvement. These motivations are undoubtedly sincere. My broader point is that these sentiments are often nested within a higher-order logic of atonement.

Nowhere is the clearer than the focus on Vietnam veterans, where commemorative events and recognition are framed as fulfilling an overdue obligation to give these veterans the welcome home or appreciation they never received. As a U.S. Senator remarked at a Vietnam veterans memorial dedication I attended: "We gather to honor a new symbol of remembrance, a place for healing, and a tribute to the courage of those who served in Vietnam. Today is more than just a dedication of steel and stone. It's a day to celebrate and remember the sacrifices that will now be enshrined here." This recognition, the Senator emphasized, was necessary because "our soldiers returned home to a country they didn't recognize, never receiving the honor and glory or the gratitude they deserved." The memorial itself was part of the process of making amends: "It's a place where the struggles of the past meet the present, and where our community can gather to remember and show gratitude again."[10]

The emphasis on personal and national sacrifice in American commemorative practice plays a central role in the logic of atonement. Sacrifice is what is believed to be deserving of recognition. Without atonement, military service might be understood as any other profession, especially in the all-volunteer force era where enlistment is voluntary and compensated.

[10] Dedication of Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Central Plains, November 11, 2024.

Atonement pushes against this occupational framing, justifying recognition and treatment of veterans as a distinct and protected class deserving of special recognition.

Underlying this logic is the narrative that veterans have not only been historically unappreciated historically but also explicitly disrespected or neglected. While often centered on Vietnam veterans, this narrative is commonly widened to include veterans of the "forgotten" Korean War, the peacetime Cold War, and even WWII, with some fieldwork participants arguing WWII veterans were neglected despite popular portrayals of their status as the vaunted "Greatest Generation." As one Honor Flight volunteer reflected, "They had ticker tape parades for Eisenhower down Fifth Avenue, but a huge percentage of those guys just came home. They took off the uniforms, put on the coveralls or their suits and went back to work."[11] As I describe in my fieldwork section, this grouping together of diverse service and conflict experiences into a shared narrative of mistreatment and neglect reflects the homogenization of veteran identity, a core part of the logic of atonement. As a result, the dominant image of veterans in American political culture is of a historically wronged group deserving continuous symbolic and material redress.

Although this view is the prevailing one in today's political culture, it is in tension with earlier visions of military service. President Roosevelt, for example, advocated a model of military service rooted in personal sacrifice to the nation (Ross 1969). This view was his response to demands of able-bodied WWI veterans advocating for compensation in the 1930s, including lobbying from major veteran groups. Resisting the idea of all veterans, regardless of experience or sacrifice, being perceived as a protected class, Roosevelt's core idea is that military service should be viewed as a patriotic obligation of all citizens.

[11] Interview 60, December 9, 2024.

Today's reality is a marked divergence from this pre-WWII civic duty model of military service. The general trend since WWII, and especially in the wake of Vietnam, is veterans being viewed as a protected class, receiving extensive state benefits, symbolic honors, and bipartisan political deference. The puzzle, then, is that this dominant status coexists with a resonant narrative of veteran neglect and the need for redress. I argue that this tension lies at the core of American commemorative practices.

Implications for National Security Discourse. The logic of atonement is not just about reverential social practices. It has consequences for U.S. foreign policy. Specifically, I argue that it sustains and biases against critiques of an ambitious, military-forward grand strategic posture. This claim echoes existing research showing strong psychological and social tendencies that favor forceful action in international affairs (Friedman 2023; Kertzer et al. 2022; Schwartz and Blair 2020). Viewed through the lens of IR research on narrative and rhetoric, atonement functions as a legitimating discourse (Goddard and Krebs 2015), underpinning the idea that deference to the military and trust in expansive foreign policy aims are the default position. In turn, this imposes higher political cost on alternative positions, even making them seem taboo or unpatriotic.

Many veterans I spoke with expressed views consistent with what scholars term "military conservatism," a general reluctance to engage in foreign conflicts but a strong preference for decisive action once force is used.[12] This view was often anchored in reflections on the Vietnam War, with veterans voicing a strong belief that politicians and domestic protests prevented the

[12] I draw on Blair and Horowitz (2022, 2), who adapt Huntington's (1957) model of civil-military relations and describe military conservatism as the idea that "veterans tend to be cautious about force in general, but when it is used, they prefer decisive action to ensure victory." While not synonymous with an expansive grand strategy, I frequently observed this vocabulary in how veterans talk about U.S. security policy, the idea of general reluctance to use force but strong support for escalation when necessary.

military from winning the war. As Bill, a Legion post commander I got to know during my fieldwork, put it:

> If we're going to go over there, let's go. Let's don't sit here and talk about it. And then call the allies over there, tell them we're coming over there in 30 goddamn days, you know? We just make the world know: we're going over to Iraq, we're going over to Iran. You know? Goddamn, if we're going to go, let's just go.[13]

This view was shared by Keith, a soft spoken and decorated Vietnam veteran:

> I don't want to be considered a warmonger, but when you go fight a war, you go fight to win. There are no ifs, ands or buts, you have to win. If you're not going to do that then don't go at all. You can't fight with one hand behind your back. It doesn't work. Vietnam showed us that.[14]

These views were representative of a pattern I encountered in conversations with veterans. American military presence should be strong and decisive, used only when necessary. Once used, it should not face political constraints.

Because American commemorative practices emphasize sacrifice, valor, and making moral amends, questioning military action can be reframed as questioning the virtue of veterans themselves. Challenging one may be viewed as challenging both. As Feaver (2023) and others have argued, high public confidence in the military can become conflated with political support for its missions, even if the public holds latent doubts about the overreliance on the military in foreign policy. Commemoration comes from a sincere place, but its consequences are not neutral.

The bias toward military reverence is further reinforced by atonement's performative nature. Atonement is never fully achieved because its meaning derives from repetition, thereby perpetuating a sense of national obligation. As an example, I later revisit this chapter's epigraph that "we can never do enough" to honor veterans. This reaffirmation becomes routine, making contrary behaviors seem socially fraught. Consider this: how might one respond to that expression

[13] Interview 12, November 1, 2023.
[14] Interview 34, February 28, 2024.

in a way that invites serious reflection on U.S. grand strategy? It would likely take adroit rhetorical skill. Even then, deviating from this logic risks social sanction. In this way, atonement acts as a form of discursive boundary maintenance, reinforcing who is seen as patriotic, supportive of veterans, and moved by past war sacrifice. The goal becomes recognition without reckoning.

A central takeaway is that atonement is not centrally concerned with resolution, but instead making amends (recognition), and thereby sustains a continual need for more recognition. The broader takeaway is that commemorative practices, often viewed as apolitical or strictly civically minded, are intertwined with the domestic political foundations of grand strategy. These practices help shape the narrative terrain through which national security is imagined, discussed, the moral themes it draws on, and the incentives against critique.

Taking stock, my argument foregrounds how collective memory of war is not static or independent, but is performed and activated through sincere commemorative practices. My core claim is that these practices in the U.S. are driven by a logic of atonement. This logic explains how war memories persist yet evolve in substance over time, become politically instrumentalized, especially as it relates to national security. The effects are consequential, shaping how grand strategy is imagined and debated. In the next section, I describe how I designed and conducted the fieldwork that generated these theoretical insights.

5.3 Data and Methods

Data Collection. This chapter draws on qualitative evidence from 76 semi-structured interviews with veterans, their family members, and veteran organization volunteers from August 2023 to April 2025. Most participants were recruited through site visits, snowball sampling, and outreach to veteran organizations. In addition to interviews, I conducted extensive participant observation

on four Honor Flights and attended numerous veteran events, memorial dedications, and archival research at local historical societies. Together, these complementary sources enabled me to trace how communities with high historical war exposure commemorate and draw meaning from war and military service.

While previous empirical chapters examined historical public opinion and elite behavior, the evidence in this chapter is generated through firsthand observation. Guided by a deductive theory of how war shapes domestic support for grand strategy (Chapter 2), I used fieldwork to trace in person the local mechanisms by which local legacies are reproduced and activated in the present. Put simply, I theorize deductively how war matters, and then I went to see what it looked like on the ground. To this end, my site selection focused on predominantly rural areas with high historical war exposure to examine how local communal dynamics reproduce local legacies, interacting with and reinforcing national collective memory.

I refer to my fieldwork site as "Central Plains," a cluster of counties in central Kansas selected for two main reasons. First, they are predominantly rural, allowing me to explore how rural identity interacts with commemorative practices. Second, these counties have high historical war exposure, which I define as being above the national median in either WWII deaths per capita or draftee death intensity.[15] In this way, my research design resembles Lierberman's (2005, 437-438) "nested analysis" approach, which "allows for both the testing of deductively formed hypotheses and the inductive generation of theory." I also create an original dataset of county level war memorials.[16] Figure 5.2 visualizes variation in these data and the general boundaries of Central

[15] Data from WWII are used as the baseline for historical war exposure because the war had the highest number of enlistments and fatalities, and because the war is widely regarded as a turning point in contemporary U.S. foreign policy. For a recent example of conflict scholars using a median split to distinguish high and low subnational war exposure, see De Juan et al. (2024).
[16] Data used to create this dataset are collected from the Historical Markers Database.

Plains, which I conceptualize as a geographic cluster rather than a strictly bounded geographic demarcation.

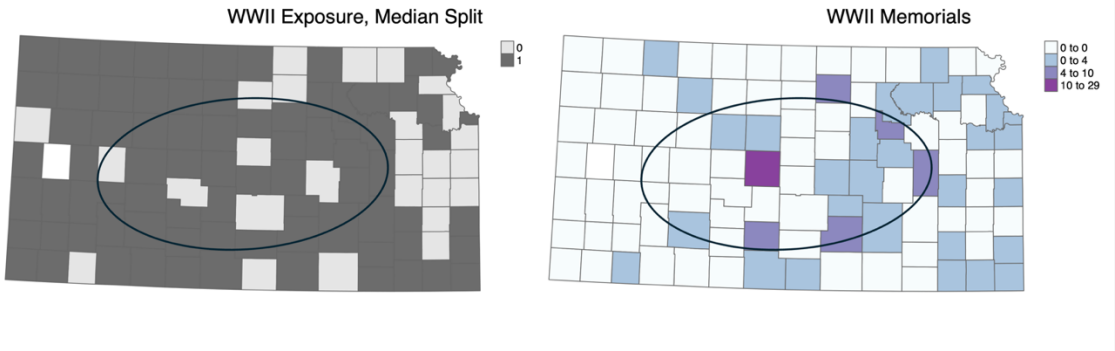

Figure 5.2 Central Plains War Exposure and Unique WWII Memorials

Note: The darkened circle represents "Central Plains." It comprises counties both above and below the national median WWII exposure, and variation in the number of unique WWII memorials by county. "Unique" memorials means that the memorial is dedicated exclusively to WWII, compared to general war or veterans memorials.

After settling on Central Plains, I identified towns to begin fieldwork and participant recruitment. During my initial trip in summer 2023, I quickly learned that American Legion and VFW post commanders were an ideal point of contact.[17] These leaders are typically well integrated into local social life. Drawing again on Bodnar (1994), I understood these leaders as operating between both "official" and "vernacular" cultures. They were well position for snowball sampling and offered valuable context on local history, veteran backgrounds, and the local commemorative infrastructure.

From fall 2023 through winter 2024, I conducted in-person interviews at American Legion and VFW posts, restaurants, homes, and public spaces. I also conducted interviews virtually when in-person meetings were not feasible, or when following up with participants referred to me by others. Veterans often brought mementos from their military service—items like medals, photographs, or service documents—that offered a springboard for personal reflection. Many

[17] My exploratory sampling strategy took inspiration from Ternullo's (2024) outreach to local leaders and political groups.

would often share that it was the first time in many years that they had reflected on their service. A retired Army officer told me that our conversation was the most he had spoken about his service in decades.[18] Because of this, I often found veterans eager to share.



Figure 5.3 Examples of Veteran's Personal Mementos

In addition to interviews, I visited local gathering spots—diners, the public library, and historical societies—to get a sense of the historical and social lay of the land. In small towns across Central Plains, it quickly became clear how interconnected the area was. During my first visit, I

[18] Unrecorded meeting with retired Army officer and elected official, September 13, 2023. He was referring to being invited to speak about his Army career to a civic group. For context, he reflected that it is uncommon for career veterans to sit around discussing their service. This is more often a projection from society onto veterans, an inaccurate expectation that they are deeply reminiscence or emotionally invested in their service experience.

stopped at a popular coffee shop and approached a group of retired men meeting for their regular get together, "solving the world's problems" as they put it. I made small talk with one veteran, 90 years old, who recalled watching B-29 bombers fly nearby as a boy. Later that day at the local historical society, I shared this encounter and the staff immediately knew who he was. Many moments like this underscored the importance of remembering names and building rapport, small gestures that prompted referrals, meaningful conversations, and reflections on familial and local military connections.

One recurring theme across several towns was the local pride in the area's cluster of WWII-era bomber training airfields, which feature prominently in local identity and memory. The county historical society has extensive records documenting the history and impact of this WWII connection. I was often recommended to visit a mural honoring a B-29 bomber crew or to check out a nearby airfield where a monument marks this historical connection. I took mental note of these suggestions as evidence that the area's war legacy continues to be a source of meaning, through both material infrastructure and informal social memory.

Honor Flight. The second track of my fieldwork involved participant observation research with Honor Flight, a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to transport veterans to Washington, D.C. to visit war and military service memorials. During my first trip to Central Plains, I me Janet, the Vietnam veteran featured in this chapter's introduction. She spoke with enthusiasm about her recent Honor Flight, describing the trip as cathartic. As another Vietnam veteran from the same town recalled of arriving in D.C. on his Honor Flight trip:

> There were hundreds of people out there in that crowd…They were congratulating us and were singing "God Bless America." I have a hard time even talking about it…It was one of the most moving experiences I've had…Those Honor Flights have helped veterans deal with the anger and frustration that had been inside of them for 50-plus years.[19]

[19] Interview 58, November 15, 2024.

The frequency with which Honor Flight came up in conversations in Central Plains—along with its visibility in local news—highlighted its importance as part of the area's commemorative infrastructure. I decided to reach out to two nearby "hubs" (i.e., local chapters) to explore volunteer opportunities. After building trust with organizers, I was invited to volunteer. The argument developed in this chapter draws heavily on this immersive experience with Honor Flight, reinforced by similar themes I observed in Central Plains. More broadly, this dual track fieldwork speaks to a key methodological insight from my dissertation: meaningful access in fieldwork requires time, trust, and persistence. Some of what I consider this dissertation's most valuable insights resulted from fortunate timing, relationship building, and perhaps most importantly, being welcomed by organization volunteers.[20]

Honor Flight Network was founded in 2005 after the completion of the National WWII Memorial in Washington, D.C. It is now organized into over 100 regional "hubs" and has transported over 300,000 veterans. Though initially created for WWII veterans, most participants today served during the Vietnam era. While hubs are located mostly in metropolitan areas, most of the veterans I interacted with lived in, or at had roots in, rural or small-town communities like those in Central Plains. The demographic makeup of flights is also notable. The flights are overwhelmingly male (no more than five women veterans on any of the four flights I attended), mostly white, and predominantly working class and rural. This composition is largely reflective of the composition of military service of the Vietnam and pre-Vietnam era. Although participants came from a broad geographer area, in many ways they were demographically representative of the veterans and rural communities I interacted with in Central Plains.[21]

[20] I remain particularly grateful for Honor Flight leaders who allowed me to accompany them and be interviewed.
[21] All four veterans I escorted as a Volunteer Guardian fit this background.

My involvement with Honor Flight took two forms. First, I served as a Volunteer Guardian, or travel companion, accompanying veterans on four flights with two different hubs.[22] This role involves assisting the veterans and generally providing company on what can be a physically and emotionally tiring trip. It allowed for sustained interaction, including personal conversation and connection during the trip. Second, I volunteered as a biographer, interviewing veterans and writing one-page profiles with photos they shared with me, compiled into a commemorative book provided to all flight participants. These interviews echoed themes I observed from fieldwork in Central Plains. Veterans were happy to share, reflective, and were appreciative of the opportunity to speak about their service. My biographer experience deepened my appreciation for the personal, sincere impact the trip has on veterans.

Honor Flight provided a unique opportunity for participant observation of commemorative practice in action. While prior research examines Honor Flight as therapeutic tourism for senior citizens (Daniels et al. 2019), it has received little attention from an IR perspective.[23] One notable exception is Steele's (2022) analysis of Honor Flight as reflecting U.S. ontological insecurity, arguing that the trips represent a form of "vicarious victory" and promotes "everyday militarism" in American political culture. While my fieldwork affirms some aspects of Steele's insights—particularly the program's deeply symbolic meaning—my firsthand perspective led me to a more nuanced and sympathetic interpretation. As I elaborate in later sections, Honor Flight does indeed reflect a search for meaning and healing, especially for Vietnam veterans. However, it is less about

[22] This consisted of two single-day trips and two three-day overnight trips. The single day trips are wheels up at 5AM and return after 9PM. This means that my day started at 1:30AM to arrive at the airport at the designated time.
[23] The physical challenges inherent in senior citizen travel was a recurring theme during my four trips. During both the Volunteer Guardian training and preflight meetings, organization leaders strongly emphasized safety precautions such as locking wheelchairs when veterans get up and sit down, carrying band aids and water, and exercising caution at specific memorials where the steps are difficult to see. Given that each flight had approximately 100 veterans with an average age in the mid to late 70s, these precautions were taken seriously. Each flight had a nurse or doctor, and some trip volunteers were EMTs or firefighters.

militarism than it is about moral redress. In this way, my account builds on but also complicates the idea that Honor Flight is simply a display of patriotism.

Data Analysis. The evidence I collected offers insights into how collective memory is reproduced through everyday practices. My approach responds to calls for greater attention to the mechanisms by which historical events remain politically salient over time (Cirone and Pepinsky 2022). My fieldwork in areas of high historical war exposure presents a unique window into how war memories evolve over time. In this way, I bring into conversation multi-method research on the intergenerational transmission of war trauma (Balcells 2012) with work on local political context (Ternullo 2024; Cramer 2016).

My interviews followed a semi-structured format tailored to the participant's identity, such as whether they were a veteran, organization leader, volunteer, or family member. Questions focused on personal background, reflections on military service, U.S. foreign policy, and community life. As themes started to recur, especially around veteran mistreatment, I incorporated prompts that tapped into reflections on "coming home" and veteran treatment by society. This was in response to participant references to memories of veteran neglect, disrespect, or insufficient appreciation. These recollections were commonly accompanied by a contrast to other conflict eras, e.g. Vietnam as the height of mistreatment compared to WWII as the model of sufficient honoring.

Over the course of my fieldwork, several additional patterns emerged that I then incorporated into ongoing data collection. One recurring reflection was the idea that veterans do not speak about their experiences. Likewise, as I explored this belief more intentionally, I noticed that veterans were more inclined to discuss others' deeds than their own. In some cases, a veteran's combat experiences were shared with me not by the veteran themself but by their friends. For example, I later learned from Florence, a buddy of Keith—the Vietnam draftee I had interviewed

previously—that Keith was a decorated "tunnel rat." "A Silver Star recipient, highly decorated, and wounded," Florence shared. Florence added I "need to pull him in again" to learn more, to which his wife responded, "but he probably doesn't like to talk about it."[24] A similar account was shared by another friend.[25] Keith had only shared that he was drafted and served in the infantry, enough for me to surmise what to not ask directly. Over time, I grew to understand this asymmetry—e.g., the sharing of stories about others—as a valuable clue to how memories of war and service are socially assigned and reproduced, often through reverential descriptions of complex experiences.

Positionality. My position as a "credible visitor" (Porisky and Glas 2023) likely shaped my access and insights from this fieldwork. Although I am not from Central Plains, I grew up in a small Kansas town and attended a state university. This cultural background went a long way toward building rapport. I knew local references like highways, lakes, and counties, and shared cultural cues like knowing the rivalries between state schools. I was not a local, but I also was not a stranger. Sharing that I had visited the area many times before lent credibility to my purpose.

At the same time, my non-veteran researcher status did create some distance. Some potential participants expressed reservations about speaking with someone who has not served. Others, especially *non-veteran* volunteers, expressed suspicion of my motives. For some, this concern came from fears about exploitation of elderly veterans.[26] Concerns about my motives were understandable and I addressed them with transparency about my research aims and methods. In most cases, the suspicion faded over time as I built trust and demonstrated follow through.

[24] Interview 36, March 7, 2024.
[25] Interview 35, February 29, 2024.
[26] I learned from interactions on the flights that senior citizen veterans are frequent targets of scams and dubious offers to join class action lawsuits. Some volunteers were particularly sensitive to protecting the names of veteran participants. In my initial outreach, one of the first questions I was asked was what I intended to do with the information, clarifying explicitly whether it would be used for business purposes. I always clarified that the sole purpose was to inform academic research and participants would be protected by university IRB approval.

However, in some cases this feeling lingered.[27] I grew to see these reactions not simply as personal idiosyncrasies but as reflecting a deeper sensibility rooted in the logic of atonement. The skepticism, especially when asked about why I wanted to speak with veterans, came from a place of stewardship over veteran memory and sacrifice. While far from a universal reaction, it was noticeable enough to inspire my thinking it reflected something more meaningful than routine social friction. This impression was the origin of my thinking about the logic of atonement that I claim structures American commemorative practice.

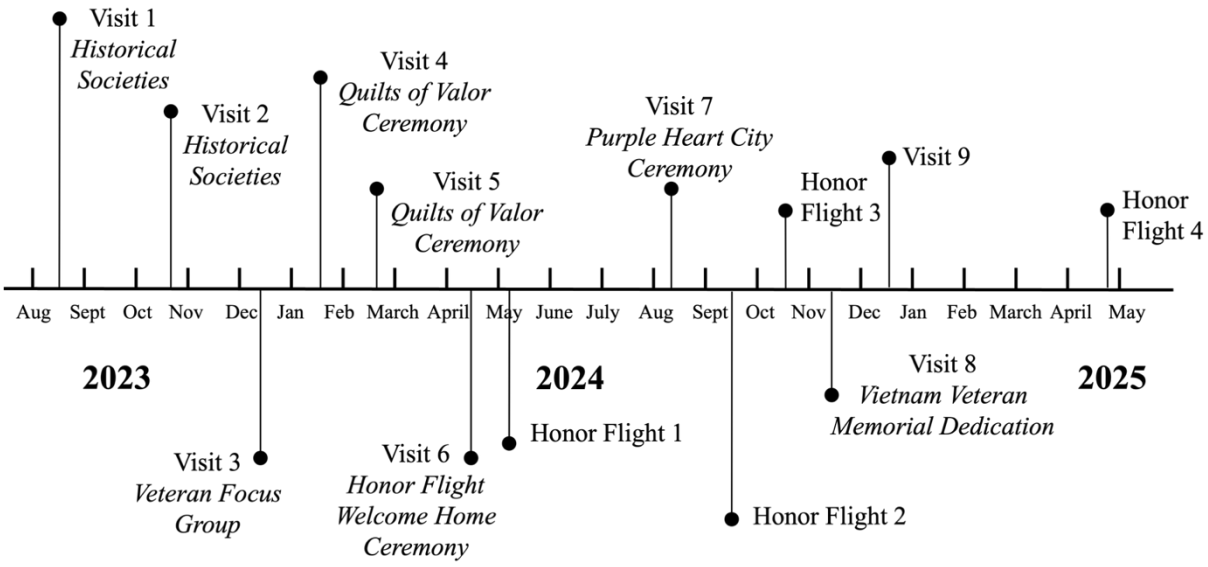

Figure 5.4 Fieldwork Timeline

Note: Italics indicate activities I participated in or observed during site visits. I list the prominent ones but exclude the many tours of Legion and VFW posts, bingo nights, coffee gatherings, etc. I conducted in-person interviews during each of the visits, and virtual interviews between visits.

[27] In one case, a former county party chairman suspected I was conducting political opposition research. He even looked up my voting record. When I explained that my interest was purely academic and I mentioned my university's IRB approval to allay his concerns, he responded "I have my own way of handling things." In other cases, some would question the merits of my research with comments like "Why would you want to know *that*?" I interpreted these remarks as polite signals of discomfort toward an outsider's presence.

Honor Flight was an important exception. The extensive time and emotional intensity of the experience forged deep connections, trust, and veterans' openness about their military and personal life experiences. While I did not formally record these conversations, they deeply informed the themes I develop in this chapter. Following each flight and fieldwork site visit, I documented detailed reflections in a field journal that expanded to over 200 pages. I also transcribed each interview to consult later when analyzing themes and drawing interpretations.

Overall, my status as both familiar and unfamiliar proved valuable. I was familiar enough to be granted trust and access, yet distant enough to see meaning in what others might take for granted. With this methodological foundation in place, I now turn to the empirical core of the chapter, tracing the commemorative practices and logic of atonement that bridges local legacies of war with national collective memory.

5.4 FINDINGS

Drawing on fieldwork evidence, I develop my argument in three stages. First, I describe the norm of reticent remembrance, the idea that veterans are perceived to withhold sharing details about their military service. While the historical origins of this norm predate the Vietnam War, it solidified in the war's aftermath as veterans sought to distance themselves from what became a contentious political issue. Second, I describe how this belief contributes to a broader, present day collective memory of war rooted in perceived mistreatment of veterans, especially those from the Vietnam era. I trace how these feelings are anchored in a sense of societal guilt and moral obligation, organized around what I term the logic of atonement. This logic directs war remembrance and veteran commemoration toward making amends for the past mistreatment of veterans, rather than interrogating the causes and consequences of past wars. Third, I examine how

this logic is reproduced through "patriotic scripts," civic rituals and everyday expressions that reinforce a homogenized, valorized depiction of veterans in society. I argue that this distinctive American commemorative culture makes collective memory readily mobilizable to support foreign policy agendas often at odds with *historical understandings* of past wars. While I maintain that these practices promote symbolic deference to the military, and thereby bias toward an expansive grand strategy, I ultimately contend they also contain sensibilities that could be reoriented to support a more selective posture.

5.4.1 Reticent Remembrance and the Homogenization of Veterans

A common pattern across my fieldwork is the perception among participants that veterans are reluctant to speak about their experiences. I term this phenomenon "reticent remembrance." This belief is widespread, not only among veterans' family members and veteran organization volunteers, but also veterans themselves, who commonly describe fellow veterans as hesitant to open up. I homed in on this recurring pattern because it complicates theories of historical persistence that emphasize the direct transmission of wartime experiences from firsthand participants to their society back home (Walden and Zhukov 2020).

I argue that reticent remembrance is not simply a cultural norm but an enabling condition for the broader logic of atonement. I often found that participants' references to veterans' silence justified well-meaning citizens to consider it their duty to fill in the gaps with reverence. The result is the use of patriotic scripts to commemorate war and service in general terms, without needing to address complicating nuances or conflicting details of individual wartime experiences.

My development of this dynamic draws on Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory of social interaction, which compares everyday encounters to performances guided by scripts and

norms for proper behavior. In this way, reticence—especially as it is projected onto veterans by others—functions as a sort of "backstage" understanding that veterans do not discuss their service. This backstage understanding informs the "frontstage" public performance of veteran reverence. The absence of details is meaningful and presents an opportunity to fill in the details. My fieldwork revealed several instances of either veterans or family members reflecting this dynamic. One seasoned Honor Flight volunteer, whose family included a combat Vietnam veteran, recalled growing up with a proud patriotic extended family, but the combat veteran relative "did not talk about it ever."[28] The absence of detail or sharing is understood not necessarily as avoidance but in some cases as a virtue, something that is respected. It is this dynamic that I argue enables the logic of atonement to persist.

Veterans and non-veterans alike often said that veterans do not share openly about their service. It might be common knowledge that a veteran served, and they might proudly wear a Vietnam veteran cap adorned with campaign and unit badges, but I often heard that veterans refrain from sharing details about their time in uniform.[29] While most welcomed my request to interview them, some noted up front there were certain things they might not be comfortable discussing.[30] I always made it clear that this was understandable and we would only discuss what they felt

[28] Interview 62, February 8, 2025.

[29] These expressions are commonly accompanied with a recognition that "there are others more deserving than me." I have observed these refrains in my interviews as well as veteran interviews with local media upon returning from an Honor Flight. After the October 2024 Honor Flight I attended, one veteran participant was featured in a local media story sharing that "This whole trip has given me a different perspective, has made you feel different, and I hope they keep it up. Got a lot of veterans that deserve this far more than I do."

[30] Per my IRB protocol, I never asked whether a participant saw combat, knew somehow who died or was injured, etc. Given most of my veteran interviewees were Vietnam War veterans, I could generally infer the likelihood that they had conflict exposure. The two most relevant markers were their military occupational specialty—i.e. their military job—and the years they were "in country." After conducting several interviews with Vietnam veterans, I learned that a telling indicator of whether a potential participant might have seen combat or experienced loss of friends was whether they were "in country" in 1968. A nontrivial portion of the Vietnam veterans I have interacted with were deployed in 1968, the year of the Tet offensive, a period with the highest American casualties during the war.

comfortable sharing. Most veteran interviewees were quite forthcoming about their service, but they often framed other veterans as more private.[31]

A common refrain was veterans referencing other veterans' silence. As one Vietnam veteran, Del, put it, "If you want to hear some war stories, I don't know that he [a friend and combat veteran] would share them because he won't share hardly anything with me."[32] Among family members, I often heard that a parent or grandparent did not speak about their war or military experience until later in life, if at all.[33] Similarly, Del shared that his friend's GWOT veteran son "doesn't know half the shit I know that his father did."

Reticence was often described by family members as being lifelong. When veteran family members did discuss their time in the military, I was told that such revelations were exceptional or attributed to end of life reflections. I heard on several occasions that it was a family member who encouraged an Honor Flight participant to attend the flight. For example, Ted, one of the veterans for which I accompanied as a Volunteer Guardian, commented that his wife wanted him to go on the trip more than he did. In another example, Janice, an active volunteer with her local American Legion Auxiliary, commented that "a lot of them don't like to go [on Honor Flights] either." Referring to her husband next to her, "he didn't want to go at all. But finally, we got him to go."[34]

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[31] Veterans' willingness to share varied considerably. One potential interviewee mentioned it would be difficult to open up because they had PTSD; another combat veteran with PTSD had no reservations about recounting many combat experiences; and an Army chaplain recalled several vivid experiences. My broader point is that there is a perception among non-veterans *and* veterans—regardless of war or traumatic exposure—that veterans as a group tend to withhold. Notably, this perception diverges from past government research on Vietnam veterans. As a major report on Vietnam veteran readjustment notes: "We and our interviewers were repeatedly struck by the extent to which nonveterans as well as veterans wanted to talk about the war years, and were grateful for the opportunity to do so" (Egendorf 1981, xlvii).

[32] Interview 20, December 8, 2023.

[33] Another example of reticence is captured in Steele's (2022) analysis of Honor Flights as an example of U.S. ontological insecurity. Steele (2022, 6) quotes a Guardian—the same role I had on four Honor Flights—as observing about his grandfather veteran, "It was a very emotional time for all of them. That generation was so modest about what they had accomplished. You didn't hear much about it growing up."

[34] Interview 61, December 9, 2024.

To be sure, these accounts were balanced by a fair number of participants reflecting that their father or grandfather did recount some stories. Examples of this came from interviews I conducted as an Honor Flight biographer. For example, one veteran recounted his father serving on the frontlines of WWI, later living with a German family as part of the occupying forces.[35] Another veteran knew quite a lot of detail about his family's military history and proudly showed me awards of gallantry and other memorabilia hanging on the walls of his home.[36] At least in my fieldwork sample, however, these seemed to be exception. The more common interviewee reflection was expressed by Evelyn, a retired nurse and Honor Flight volunteer. WWII veterans, Evelyn reflected, are "incredibly stoic…And so they don't discuss [war and military service], you know, they might tell *some* stories. I think it's probably better because veterans, by and large, have gotten more recognition than ever. But essentially they came back at, what, 21, 22 years old and [were told], son, see you in the field tomorrow kind of stuff, right? Just go on with your life."[37]

Evelyn's reflection on the stoicism of WWII veterans is a common perception shared by non-veteran interviewees. The image that emerges in these accounts is stoicism, neglect, and struggling with traumatic memories for much of their adult life. In this conception, society is inconsiderate and unappreciative of the tribulations experienced by the veterans and therefore owes something to make amends.

My observation of reticent remembrance has historical roots. The early post-WWII decades are often contrasted with the post-Vietnam all-volunteer force (AVF) era in terms of society's familiarity with the military. Because society had a higher proportion of veterans in the postwar era, it could be inferred that veterans were more comfortable sharing their wartime experiences or

[35] Interview 41, April 6, 2024.
[36] Interview 37, March 7, 2024.
[37] Interview 22, December 20, 2023.

that society generally had a stronger grasp of the veteran experience. As historian Michael Gambone (2005, 87) notes, however, veteran reticence to discuss war was a fact of life then as it is believed to be now.

> For tens of thousands, silence separated the war years from their families and loved ones. In many cases, their reticence was a reflection of a generation raised with the ethic of personal modesty. Embellishing a tale or simply including a personal reference was simply not done. For others, it was the result of a deliberate effort to spare the listener from the horror of the event.

This norm was further entrenched after Vietnam. Several veterans shared with me that they did not want to attract unwanted attention, choosing to distance themselves from their service and quietly move on with life. This view came up during a group conversation with three Vietnam veterans at their VFW post in Central Plains. I consider this exchange representative of a broader sentiment expressed to me by veterans from this era.

> **Tom:** When I came back from Vietnam, when I got out, that was it. I didn't want to look back. I wanted to get back to my life, you know, the people that I knew, the things that I had going on. The military was behind me then.
>
> **Jack:** But I think that's why a lot of the Vietnam people never got back together [compared to WWII veterans]. You want to get back and forget about all that. And so you just keep it to yourself.[38]

The ethos of "keeping it to yourself" reflects the idea of reticence. Leo, another Vietnam veteran and active volunteer in local civic veteran issues, echoed this idea in telling me, "Since the longest time, we just didn't talk about it…You knew if you brought it up, it was controversial. And, you know, some people would react positively, but most of them would, you know, no big deal. They didn't want to have a lot to do with you. I mean, we just didn't talk about it."[39]

I observed the consequences of this dynamic during interviews, particularly when veterans would deflect recognition, or a non-veteran would narrate their experience. At a casual American

[38] Interview 9, October 17, 2023.
[39] Interview 59, December 11, 2024.

Legion coffee gathering in Central Plains, Janice, a Legion Auxiliary member and wife of a Vietnam veteran, remarked:

> **Janice:** But even the ones that went over there fighting, they feel like they don't deserve it [the recognition]. Well, there's a guy that lost a leg. He deserves it more than I do [referring to what a veteran would say]. Yeah, none of these guys feel like they deserve it. So to me it's rough on them. I mean, it's something that they have a hard time forgetting sometimes.

John, a Vietnam veteran standing besides us, downplayed this characterization:

> **John:** You know, there's not a hell of a lot of remembering about it anymore. Be right honest with you…there's every once in a while I'll think of something I'll chuckle at a little bit. Something we did.
>
> **Janice:** But the bad stuff, you don't want to remember.
>
> **John:** No, I don't think I ever really had anything that bad. But there's a lot of guys that did though, you know.
>
> **Janice:** Yeah, you served. And that's the main thing.[40]

What stood out from this interaction was the roles: the non-veteran insisting on recognition, and the veteran downplaying it. This was common, but it was a rare instance where a non-veteran was corrected by a veteran about how their experience was being characterized. These types of observations about a veteran's struggles or war experiences are typically made when they are not present. It illustrates the incongruence between (1) the veteran's actual wartime experiences and (2) the social expectation that they fit the perception of a battle-hardened veteran wrestling with difficult memories.

It was also common for veterans to acknowledge being more open when in the company of only their peers. Del, an Army air traffic controller who served in Vietnam, referred to a Navy corpsman friend who saw a lot of action during the Tet offensive. "You'll find veterans who served

[40] Interview 61, December 9, 2024.

in like areas are more willing to speak to other veterans who have done the same thing than they are to anybody else."[41]

Several interviewees echoed this idea in explaining why they are involved with their local American Legion or VFW. According to Vick, a retired Army officer and former American Legion post commander in Central Plains, "The average person doesn't understand, including your own family. But you sit down with another veteran, and all of a sudden, you've got someone that understands and has been there, and even if the subject doesn't come up exactly, you can catch the outer edges of it and get that camaraderie back and kind of help get you back on track."[42] This sentiment was further shared by Brent, a GWOT Army veteran and VFW post commander I met in Central Plains. Brent shared that

> the goal for most VFWs is to give veterans and their families a place to go for comradeship…yeah, we may share a few war stories, but most of the time it's just being around guys that kind of know the struggles you go through…I don't really want to say a shoulder to cry on, but kind of in that sense, someone who understands.[43]

To be sure, not all veterans shared the idea of relaxing around comradery. I also heard other retired veterans express that they were not the Legion or VFW "type." By this they were referring to the stereotype of these places as drinking halls, an image that post leaders assured me they have worked to address. There is also an awareness among post regulars about the difficulty in attracting younger veterans of the GWOT generation.[44]

Veterans offered several reasons for reticent remembrance. For one, there is a widely held view that non-veterans are simply unable to relate. This view is captured by Daniel, a GWOT

[41] Interview 20, December 8, 2023.
[42] Interview 13, November 6, 2023.
[43] Interview 28, January 25, 2024
[44] On this point, research conducted by the Center for a New American Security into the market of veteran serving organizations concluded that GWOT era veterans were more inclined to support cause oriented organizations founded post-9/11, and that these organizations comprised a large share of growth in the veteran organization infrastructure compared to the legacy groups like Legion and VFW (McCormick et al. 2018).

veteran referred to me by Evelyn. Describing why he kept his memories of deployment to himself, Daniel recalled his wife "knew very little…she knew I had a lot of trouble sleeping. And I scared the wits out of her sometimes…But she also didn't really want to know, because I might leave again. And then she would have more to fear…I think some things you just keep to yourself and take to your grave. I think war is always like that."[45] To Brent, another GWOT Army veteran, reticence could also be attributable to a lack of relatability among non-veterans. "If I talk to my wife, she hasn't been there. She doesn't know exactly what I went through. She can say she understands, and that's what a lot of veterans feel like. Well, you say you understand but you don't."[46]

Another explanation may reflect military socialization, such as military norms like operational security (or "OPSEC"). According to a staff report published by the Center for Development Psychology at the Uniformed Services University, OPSEC—the military practice of not sharing information with those who do not need to know—is such a deeply ingrained habit that it might prevent combat veterans from asking family for help processing PTSD. Veterans may also compartmentalize their war experience to protect their family or to not deal with the memories themselves (Nofziger 2018). At least one of my interviewees touched on this idea. Steve, a navy submariner, recalled learning of President Nixon's resignation from a news article in the mess hall. With no one else around, Steve remembers thinking, "What's this? Is this a test to see how curious I am? Or some practical joke?" Steve recalls that "Everybody just went about their job as if nothing had happened. I think that's kind of remarkable."[47]

[45] Interview 23, January 11, 2024.
[46] Interview 28, January 25, 2024.
[47] Interview 27, January 24, 2024.

In this way, internalization becomes a post-service habit for many veterans. Moreover, another plausible explanation that would come up in interviews is that veterans are simply too busy with work and family life to give much attention to reflecting on their military experience. Many shared that they became involved in a veteran organization in retirement, not because they were more reflective but because they had more time.

A key insight is that non-veterans often feel a duty to fill in the space thought to be created by perceived veteran silence. When veterans are thought to be reserved and burdened by tough memories, others share their story for them in elevated and valorizing terms. For example, Luna, a Legion Auxiliary member, recalled delivering a quilt to a veteran who declined, saying "Many more guys out there deserve it more than I do… I was just a cook." To this Luna told me she replied, "Just a cook is not just a cook. How could those guys serve and do what they did without you? You are just as important as they are."[48] This response is sincere, and telling. I consider it indicative of the broader logic of atonement: even when veterans downplay recognition, this prompts further recognition and appreciation. This dynamic, I argue, is key to the homogenization of veteran identity.

By homogenization, I mean the tendency of society to minimize differences among veteran experiences. The consequence is a uniform, valorized image of veterans that flattens individual distinctions in favor of attributes like selflessness, apolitical character, and struggling with difficult memories. On this later point, I would often hear depictions of veterans struggling with tough memories for most of their adult life. As Luna explains of a veteran she knew, "They come here [to the Legion] and they have a good time. But they still got nightmares. My friend, she said you didn't wake her husband up because he'd come out fighting. He'll swing at you."[49] Another

[48] Interview 61, December 9, 2024.
[49] Interview 61, December 9, 2024.

Vietnam veteran I accompanied on an Honor Flight, Pat, recalled how both his family and commanding officer assumed he was a heroin addict upon returning home, assuming it was how he would cope with the toll of serving in Vietnam. Together, the combination of reticent remembrance and veteran homogenization contributes to what I describe as the valorization of veterans. Importantly, I use valorization to refer to the elevation of veterans as a distinct and celebrated social group, what scholars of comparative veteran politics refer to as "horizontal status" (Crotty et al. 2020).[50]

This process has a couple implications for the collective memory of war. First, it resembles Jo's (2022) description of accrediting, or "who has a say" when it comes to collective memory. In my account, I observe civically minded actors assuming a responsibility to narrate the experiences of veterans. These actors speak for veterans in a way that flattens the diversity of experiences, homogenizing and valorizing the status of veterans in society. Second, a result of these dynamics is that these practices reproduce collective memories of past conflicts that can be at odds with historical accounts.

In this way, my account partly mirrors what Steele (2022) describes as the objectification of veterans. My interpretation differs from Steele's in that my fieldwork supports a bottom-up interpretation of commemoration, driven largely by civilians and other veterans seeking to do right, not unconsciously reproducing militarism. While I believe Steele and I arrive at the same place—that such practices intrinsically bias toward a high cost tolerance grand strategy, I do not believe these are simply top-down, invariably pro-nationalism practices, but they are sustained through heartfelt, if often unreflexive adherence, to social scripts.

[50] Horizontal status differs from vertical status, or the relationship between veterans and the state. Both relations are important in my account, but my fieldwork concentrated mostly on horizontal status as I captured how citizens reflect on their service or that of people they know.

Reticent remembrance and homogenization are the facilitating conditions for the logic of atonement. The effect is a compression of different military experiences—not just an infantryman, mechanic, cook, or dentist, but "veteran"—and therefore justifies symbolic and material compensation regardless of specific war or military service details. In fact, the details become secondary to the shared perception of past mistreatment.

Before turning more explicitly to the logic of atonement, I conclude here with observations on the strategic consequences of these dynamics. If all veterans are equally honorable and deserving of recognition, the conflicts they served in become equally worth recognition, regardless of cause or outcome. These observations align with Mosse's (1990) seminal examination of how societies emphasize military sacrifice to avoid the difficulty of assigning political blame and accountability. In the U.S., reticent remembrance and veteran homogenization turns what could be critique of past wars into reverence, in turn narrowing the window of legitimate discourse on national security issues.

I turn next to developing how these patterns underwrite the broader logic of atonement, which informs how Americans think about war and military service, justifying continued deference to those who served in ways that condition domestic support for grand strategy.

5.4.2 The Logic of Atonement

A recurring pattern in my fieldwork was references to the mistreatment of Vietnam veterans in commemorative acts and informal conversations. Civic actors, family members, and veterans themselves framed acts of recognition—Honor Flights, Quilts of Valor ceremonies, and memorial dedications—not just as gratitude for past service but as righting a historical wrong. I grew to understand these patterns as a powerful moral narrative that says society owes a debt to veterans

who have historically been underappreciated. This narrative is rooted in a shared obligation to bestow recognition on all veterans to make amends for that mistreatment. In what follows, I describe the origins and expression of what I call a "logic of atonement" that characterizes American commemorative practice. I present fieldwork evidence in four parts: the origins of the mistreatment narrative, its tension with revisionist historical interpretations, its enactment through everyday practices, and its broader consequences.

Historical Mistreatment. Across my interviews with veterans and their family members, one observation was consistent: veterans today are treated dramatically better—"a hell of a lot better"—than those who served during the Vietnam era. Consider the comparison made by Dennis, a Vietnam veteran and Honor Flight participant I befriended, and his friend Dale, a younger veteran who was a child during the Vietnam War.

> **Me [to both]:** Looking back, how were veterans treated at the time you got out? What was the general society's view of the military and veterans?
>
> **Dale (younger veteran):** It was good. It was much better. When Afghanistan was going on, people were treated a hell of a lot better than Vietnam, the veterans were. Night and day. The Vietnam veterans today are now being treated as they should have back when they first got out. I wasn't even in at the time, and I remember it really angered me when I saw on the news Vietnam guys coming in and being protested, spit on. I was a kid at the time. But when I got out, it was very positive.
>
> **Dennis (Vietnam veteran):** When I got out, though, the hotel where I was working was on what they called "fraternity row," and nobody wanted to have anything to do with any type of military whatsoever, because they were all rich kids who were trying to stay in college, having a good time with parties that they threw. They did not want to hear the word Vietnam.
>
> **Me:** What do you remember about when you transitioned out?
>
> **Dennis:** I had to take the bumper sticker off my car saying I was a Vietnam vet because if I left it on there, my car, all my tires deflated, car windows broke, everything.[51]

[51] Interview 63, February 21, 2025.

This narrative recurred throughout my fieldwork in both firsthand accounts—from veterans sharing of being heckled, spat on, and treated suspiciously—and secondhand references from friends or family members who shared these stories with conviction. "Whenever Vietnam veterans came back to the United States…people would throw their pop on you and push you and shove you, and call you a baby killer and warmongers and just all those things that idiots did in those days," shared Gerald, a Navy supply clerk who served in Vietnam from 1967-1968.[52]

These stories were reinforced through contrast with the hero's welcome given to WWII veterans.[53] "You know, when they came home from World War One and World War Two, they had parades up and down the streets and bands playing and all kinds of welcome home," shared Gerald. "There wasn't that for veterans of the Vietnam War. You got home and you got spit on. You got ridiculed. There was violence to meet you when you came home."[54] This juxtaposition is also familiar to non-veteran interviewees. Janice, the Legion Auxiliary leader from earlier, commented that "The only celebration I've really ever seen or heard about was the World War II guys coming back, and then the guys from Desert Storm and stuff like that. But Vietnam never did."[55]

The Vietnam veterans I spoke with almost universally described their transition to civilian life in negative terms. Consider Jack, a drafted Vietnam veteran from Central Plains who served in the Air Cavalry "in country" from 1965-1967. After showing me around his historic VFW post, we sat on barstools in the post's downstairs meeting room.[56] Jack recalled the reaction he received wearing his Army uniform when he returned home from Vietnam. A woman at the airport followed

[52] Interview 58, November 15, 2024. I met Gerald at a Vietnam veteran memorial dedication at a town in Central Plains. He was involved in the steering committee that organized the memorial.
[53] For a revisionist interpretation of the reintegration of WWII veterans, see Childers (2009).
[54] Interview 58, November 15, 2024.
[55] Interview 61, December 9, 2024.
[56] This post was particularly historic due to a long track record of receiving national awards for membership, as well as having prominent figures among its membership. Despite struggles experienced by many small-town veteran organizations, this post remained active and well supported by the local community. It maintains a bar and weekly dinners open to the public.

him shouting "baby killer." When we met again on my subsequent visit to Central Plains, he shared more detail on his return home. "I got off the airplane in Omaha, Nebraska, and my dad was waiting at the fence to get me and these kids from one of the colleges there came out there and threw tomatoes all on me…I was in my whites, dress whites. And that don't make you feel good."[57]

Jack's story about airport protests was shared by several other interviewees. In another firsthand account, Janet, the Vietnam era Army nurse from the introduction, described being heckled by protestors and having soda pop thrown on her while marching in a parade near her base in California.[58] A similar story was shared by Pat, one of the Vietnam veterans I accompanied on an Honor Flight. "What we got was crap thrown at us and kids throwing cherry bombs and M-80 firecrackers and stuff, scaring the shit out of us because we were really susceptible to noise," Pat remembers.[59] Many Vietnam veterans from Honor Flights I attended also recalled being spat on by protestors. Kevin, a helicopter crew member who was drafted, remembers "when I was going through San Francisco International, I mean, you were being taunted and literally spit at…it was just a terrible atmosphere to come home to."[60]

Other participants relayed similar stories secondhand. These secondhand accounts of veteran mistreatment took two forms: veterans speaking about other veterans, and non-veteran family members or volunteers speaking about veterans they know. Among veterans, some would qualify their reflections by saying they did not experience the same mistreatment themselves. For example, Lance, an ordinance specialist who served in Vietnam from 1967-1968, recalled being advised to change into civilian clothes upon arriving at the Los Angeles airport. Lance remembered

[57] Interview 9, October 17, 2023.
[58] Interview 11, October 22, 2023.
[59] Interview 54, November 20, 2024.
[60] Interview 56, November 22, 2024.

receiving "bad looks and all, but no I wasn't spit on…But I know others that [were]."[61] Or the veteran would speak in general about how they remember veterans being treated. "When I was in the service, which was from 72 to 78, if you traveled in your uniform, people didn't want to have nothing to do with you," recalled Bill, a Legion post commander in Central Plains.[62] Non-veterans echoed these stories of mistreatment. Luna recalled knowing two brothers who returned from the service together, "And when they came home and the bus station, which is right across the street over here, they were literally met and spit on."[63]

These firsthand and secondhand accounts form the bedrock of contemporary commemorative practice. They are what many people are thinking of when they feel a moral imperative to honor veterans. I emphasize their sincerity not to question their veracity but to underscore the deeply ingrained nature of these beliefs in local civic rituals and national collective memory of war.

What surprised me most was learning that memories of mistreatment came not only from anti-war protestors but also from fellow veterans. Several Vietnam veterans recalled not being welcomed by VFW or American Legion posts, largely due to the claim that Vietnam was considered a "conflict," not a "war." Coupled with this claim was the perception that Vietnam veterans did not "win" their conflict. This distinction was brought up by Gregg, the main speaker at a Vietnam memorial dedication I attended in Central Plains. "You know, our country called it a conflict…A conflict and a war, that's two different things…when there were 58, 281 people—men and women who gave their lives—that's not a conflict. That's a war. And so our country just really didn't pay any just due to our military by calling that a conflict rather than a war. It was a war."[64]

[61] Interview 59, December 11, 2024.
[62] Interview 12, November 1, 2023.
[63] Interview 61, December 9, 2024.
[64] Interview 58, November 15, 2024.

How the war ended also mattered for how returning veterans were treated by older cohorts. Keith, the drafted infantryman, shared about facing resistance from older veterans upon returning home. "[The VFW] wasn't a good place either, because the people there were all mostly World War II and some Korean veterans who really looked down on you because you didn't win the war. So you weren't comfortable there."[65] As my fieldwork progressed, what emerged was a strong and sincerely shared view of the Vietnam generation as a disrespected class, receiving far less than what was owed to them.[66]

Historical Disjuncture. These observations capture a key feature of collective memory: it can be in tension with the historical record. The deeply personal reflections captured in my interviews coexist with historical scholarship that questions how widespread such mistreatment was. I do not highlight this tension to challenge the authenticity of what participants shared, but to underscore the power and endurance of collective memory.[67]

I highlight three features of the post-Vietnam narrative that appear in tension with the historical record: (1) society was broadly unappreciative or neglected Vietnam veterans; (2) Vietnam veterans received far less support compared to the WWII generation; and (3) Vietnam veterans were subjected to acts of hostility from anti-war protestors.

My interviews conform with images of a troubled and scorned Vietnam veteran, a depiction that framed popular understandings in the war's aftermath. "By the 1980s it became common in the United States to view the Vietnam veteran as beset by a wide range of problems and betrayed

[65] Interview 34, February 28, 2024.
[66] The idea of veterans as a distinct class or social group emerged in the interwar period (Crotty et al. 2020).
[67] To be clear, I accept what interviewees tell me. It is not my position to challenge their recollection of their experiences or those of people important to them.

by his fellow citizens and government. The Vietvet was seen as unique amongst veterans of all American wars in receiving this ungrateful, if not outright hostile treatment" (Dean 1992, 60).[68]

Yet, public opinion surveys commissioned by the Veterans Administration and published in 1980 complicate this picture. The report summarizing the results found that "The public rates its feelings toward Vietnam Era Veterans as very warm and overwhelmingly believes that these veterans deserve respect for their service. The public's feelings toward the veterans who actually served in Vietnam are especially warm and on par with their feelings toward veterans of World War II and Korea" (VA Report 1980, xl).[69] Moreover, while veterans themselves identified issues with their readjustment, the report notes that "recognition of the special problems facing Vietnam Veterans is greatest among those groups that were most opposed to the war" (xli).

Perhaps the most contested aspect is the image of hostile confrontations between protestors and veterans. Sociologist Jerry Lembecke (1998), himself a Vietnam veteran, describes the conventional narrative as involving a returning veteran coming home through LAX in his fatigues, being confronted by hippie protestors who spit on him and call him "baby killer" and "warmonger." Drawing on extensive research of news coverage, archival records of anti-war organizations, and oral histories, Lembecke assesses that "relations between veterans and the anti-war movement were empathetic and mutually supportive" (4), that there was "virtually no reason to think that the alleged acts of spitting ever occurred" (5), but that the "myth is less about something that did or did not happen than about the *belief* that it did." Lembcke argues that the spitting image memory persisted because it was politically useful—initially for the Nixon administration's efforts to turn

[68] Dean identifies four aspects of the conventional narrative about the Vietvet: (1) difficult readjustment, (2) heightened social problems, (3) uniquely mistreated compared to past eras, and (4) government benefits.
[69] The VA Report was intended to "develop an understanding of what problems [Vietnam veterans] do in fact face, how the public characterizes these veterans, what problems the public believes they face, and how the American people perceive their obligation to the veterans of the Vietnam era" (VA Report 1980, xxi).

veterans against anti-war protestors, and later for the Bush Sr. Administration's efforts to mobilize support for the Gulf War (Beamish et al. 1995). Nonetheless, Lembecke acknowledges that some veterans recall these events in vivid detail. Ultimately, he concludes their salience lies in their sincerely held belief, not in their verifiability.

Others argue that the Vietnam generation's uniqueness stems from strong perceptions of betrayal *despite* receiving historically unprecedented government benefits.[70] As Dean (1992, 73) notes:

> The fact that the Vietnam veteran could readjust to civilian life so well in objective terms and yet either feel or be portrayed as feeling bitter and betrayed indicates, first, that the image of the veteran is potent and will always be subject to use by different factions in society to achieve their agenda…Second, expectations have increased to the point where all veterans…have a claim not just for 'readjustment' benefits…but for sympathy and exclusive eligibility for continuing veterans' benefits, which at times may seem completely out of proportion to the actual detriment (if any) incurred.

While this disconnect was seldom acknowledged in my fieldwork, there was one rare moment when a longtime Honor Flight volunteer seemed to gesture toward it. During an interview, he stated plainly that there was "no evidence" of veterans being spat upon.[71] The fact that this statement came from a highly dedicated volunteer is telling. It is indicative not of skepticism, I argue, but speaks to the underlying logic of atonement in action. What matters is not the empirical veracity of every detail, but a shared moral conviction to recognize veterans as a class.

Atonement in Action. As I define it, the logic of atonement involves both substance and ritual. This conception mirrors the process of atonement in major religions: acknowledging wrongdoing and professing a sincere commitment to avoid future wrongdoing. Unlike the religious practice, commemorative practice offers no closure and instead must be continually enacted.

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[70] Dean (1992, 64) notes that Vietnam veterans used the GI Bill at higher rates than WWII and Korean War veterans.
[71] Interview 60, December 9, 2024.

I observed this logic play out in several ways. At memorial dedications and civic functions in Central Plains, commemorative events revolve around themes of sacrifice, recognition, and healing. At a Veterans Day dedication of a Vietnam Veteran Memorial, a U.S. Senator declared the site as "a new symbol of remembrance, a place for healing, and a tribute to the courage of those who served in Vietnam. Today is more than just a dedication of steel and stone. It's a day to celebrate and remember the sacrifices that will now be enshrined here."[72] This redemptive ethos is also embodied in Honor Flight's mission statement: "A nation where all of America's veterans experience the honor, gratitude, and community of support they deserve." This sentiment of *deservingness*, the idea that all veterans should be honored and appreciated, is central to the a logic of atonement that guides American commemorative practice.



Figure 5.5 Commemorative Dedications in Central Plains

[72] Dedication of Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Central Plains, November 11, 2024.

Top left: County Vietnam Veteran memorial dedication. The photograph faces the memorial, showing the real-life scaled replica of an Army Huey helicopter used in Vietnam. On its side, a replica door gunner is modeled on a local Vietnam veteran who attended the event and whom I interviewed. A Vietnam veteran and event speaker is being interviewed by the local news. Top right: Crowd gathers at the memorial to hear remarks by a U.S. Senator. Bottom left: Crowd gathers in a different section of the memorial park to listen to the high school band and local veteran leaders. Bottom right: Another town in Central Plains commemorates its designation as a Purple Heart City. Local officials and veteran leaders attend and speak.

Local media coverage plays a critical role in reproducing this logic. During and after Honor Flight trips, regional news outlets air stories framed as giving veterans the "welcome home they never received." These stories often echo the narrative of past veteran mistreatment, framing Honor Flight as a redemptive experience. One broadcast after the October 2024 flight I attended explained that the trips are "a way to bring a sense of closure and pride, along with comraderie." Another segment, following the September 2024 flight I attended, stated: "It is a trip of a lifetime, but for this group, it was an honor that was long overdue for their service, sacrifice, and selflessness…For many here, it's the first time they've even been celebrated. Back when Vietnam and Korean veterans returned home from war, they were overlooked and mistreated…But today, that all changes." As one welcome home attendee said in an interview in the airport crowd, "They just need to have a warm welcome. They didn't have that before, and they deserve it."

On one flight I attended, a local news crew even embedded with us, broadcasting live updates and recording heartfelt interviews with veterans for a feature segment. These stories were not just reporting the news; they performed a symbolic function within a moral economy of remembrance, affirming the nation's commitment to veterans and reinforcing the patriotic scripts through which society enacts its atonement.

These experiences, and importantly the recognition they receive, means a lot to the veterans. In the same September 2024 news segment, one Vietnam veteran recalled being subjected to "calling us names or spitting at us," followed by another who aid, "We weren't really respected

for what we did." These broadcasts position Honor Flight as righting these past wrongs. My broader point, however, is that these practices also reproduce the need for continued moral redress.

One moment that drove home the meaning of Honor Flight for me was when Lacy, a longtime leader who had been on dozens of flights, showed me her personal collection of over 100 handwritten thank you cards from veterans. "They are nothing short of incredible," she told me.

> Some of them, when we get home, I reflect back on them, and you would think they might not even be capable of writing something like that, like they do. This is a 75-year-old Vietnam veteran who wrote that, and I have tons of them like that. But he would not have gone. On the way home, he called me back there and he cried and he said, 'I cannot tell you how much I appreciate you talking me into this.' And that was before he sent that.[73]

Here, Lacy was reflecting on how these men—senior citizens, mostly reserved, working class veterans—often do not seem outwardly like the type to write heartfelt messages. Many are relucent to go on the trip at all, saying there are "others more deserving." But Lacy's point is that the emotional impact of the trip is evident to the veterans afterwards, as the stacks of such sentiments demonstrates.



Figure 5.6 Thank You Letters from Veterans to Honor Flight Leader

[73] Interview 62, February 8, 2025.

Note: One of several stacks.

Below are a few representative excerpts:

> **Note 1:** "A mere thank you card is not enough for your time making Honor Flights a success. It was an experience of a lifetime and [I] regret not doing it sooner. Still I believe there are many veterans more deserving. I am telling my veteran friends that they should 'go'" (July 1, 2024).
>
> **Note 2:** "I never expected how the reception would be both at the airports, but also at the memorials. Young people on bus trips saying thank you as well as adults. Walking on hallowed ground at Arlington. I had survival guilt come creeping back at the wall. A lot of tears shed from the visit at the wall, the mail and all other activity" (June 20, 2016).
>
> **Note 3:** "I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed the flight. You really do a good job leading the flight. It was great to see the history of our country. I don't care what unthankful people say, this USA is the greatest in the world. There was so much comradery among us veterans. I would lay my own life down for again this country" (June 29, 2022).
>
> **Note 4:** "While the trip, in itself, was so rewarding, all of the personal notes and letters of support, encouragement and love, added a 'special touch' to the trip, as well! Our world seems to be in turmoil and chaos right now. But Honor Flight makes me aware that our nation is full of patriots, who love our nation and our veterans, and this gives me great hope that the best is yet to come for our nation" (September 27, 2021).
>
> These letters, many accompanied by donation checks for hundreds or even thousands of dollars, speak to how much these trips mean. As Lacy explained, this type of impact is what it is all about. "All the healing and the welcome homes and watching them get off the plane when we land in Baltimore and all those people clapping for them. It's just so heartwarming."[74] It is healing for the volunteers, veterans, and society as a whole. Encountering this personal archive was a turning point in my fieldwork. It drove home that the logic of atonement is not just symbolic or performative. It is sincerely and emotionally felt, and consequential for those who experience it.

Importantly, the participants in these practices are not those who committed the original wrongdoing these experiences aim to redress. The volunteers, school children, and airport travelers who stop to clap for the group of veterans are not atoning for their personal mistreatment of

[74] Interview 62, February 8, 2025.

veterans. Rather, they are fulfilling a social expectation to right the perceived moral debt owed to senior citizen veterans who are believed to have suffered. In this way, the logic of atonement aligns with Steele's (2022, 11-13) insight that veterans are often treated not as subjects of history, but objects of gratitude.

Another key observation is that atonement does not seem to be ever completely satisfied. There is no endpoint of satisfactory resolution. Instead, the commemorative infrastructure I observed must continue because the perceived historical injustice can never fully be resolved. From my fieldwork, I distilled four core features of this logic:

1. Recognition of a perceived historical injustice.
2. Rites and expectations to redress the injustice.
3. Social, political, and economic incentives that preclude closure.
4. A bias in favor of veteran and military valorization over revision.[75]

Consequences. What are the consequences of the logic of atonement? I observe that it separates veterans from the wars they fought in, shielding them from criticism of the political decisions associated with the war. At the same time, it also links them to the war symbolically, thereby making criticism of the war itself risk appearing disrespectful to the veterans who served. This dynamic makes public reckoning, by which I mean credible learning, with war more difficult.

To be sure, I often heard veterans blame political leaders for past wars, Vietnam in particular. "You can't fight with one hand behind your back," Keith remarked.[76] This was a common refrain from Vietnam veterans, referring to frustration with domestic political interference in the military's ability to win. Many others echoed these frustrations. Veteran reflections tended to align with a form of military conservativism: skeptical views about the use

[75] My use of the term "bias" is not intended to be normative or carry a negative connotation. Rather, I follow Kertzer and colleagues' (2022, fn6) understanding of the term as signifying behavioral regularities that conflict with standard rationalist expectations.
[76] Interview 34, February 28, 2024.

of military force, but support for tactical escalation to end a war. Observations like these support my intuition that the legacies of war can contain underlying sentiments in favor of a more restrained, or less assertive, grand strategy.

However, the logic of atonement also props up a hawkish status quo. It foregrounds the military and patriotism in public life, discouraging dissent. Doubt or dissent from status quo military policy can appear ungrateful or unsupportive of troops. Expressing doubt about the military's usefulness in promoting a certain strategy can be reputationally risky, even if commemoration is framed as apolitical. In this way, the dynamic resembles Krebs's (2015) argument that foreign policy critiques outside the legitimate discursive frame risk being marginalized, therefore perpetuating status quo policies.

By foregrounding moral redress, commemorative practices avoid hard conversations about political accountability. They instead redirect attention away from understanding why wars were fought and their consequences to making amends. Consequently, the effort to correct historical mistreatment narrows public debate about the strategic lessons, and enabling political conditions, underlying past wars, and by extension accountability.

My fieldwork reveals that the logic of atonement is a central organizing principle of American commemorative practice. Its main purpose is to right past wrongs through continual reinforcement. In the next section, I show how this logic is enacted through patriotic scripts that guide how citizens recognize and remember.

5.4.3 Patriotic Scripts and the Practice of Honor

The logic of atonement is enacted through what I call patriotic scripts, the language and behaviors that guide how Americans commemorate veterans and remember war. A familiar example is when

a stranger walks up to a military service member in uniform to shake their hand and say, "thanks for your service."[77] These scripts structure interactions in everyday life and in formal commemorative settings, from quilt ceremonies in Central Plains to Honor Flight tours in Washington, D.C.

Adapting Goffman's (1959) theory of symbolic interactionism, I conceptualize patriotic scripts as the way people fulfill roles when honoring veterans or speaking about war. They refer to both *what* is expressed and *how*. While these roles are shaped by interpersonal expectations—that is, they are socially conditioned but still reflect individual agency—I do not consider these behaviors as merely mechanical or performed cynically. Rather, most volunteers and passersby who enact these scripts are genuinely sincere. The key point is that my fieldwork revealed consistent patterns in these behaviors, prompting me to view them as scripts. It is this repetition that makes the repertoire of reverent vocabulary and gestures seem natural and morally appropriate, thereby reinforcing and insulating collective memory from critical scrutiny.

Patriotic Scripts: What is Said and How. Patriotic scripts refer to how people talk about and interact with veterans. Phrases like "thank you for your service," deferential treatment of older veterans, and spontaneous applause for veterans in airports all exemplify patriotic scripts. These are scripts in Goffman's (1959) sense: individuals "maintain face"—that is, preserve their reputation and social credibility—by performing expected roles in social settings. Scholars have adapted Goffman's insights to explain crisis escalation dynamics, showing how states manage relations by keeping backstage tensions from spilling into front stage confrontation (Carson 2018). Similarly, because patriotic scripts are familiar, they are recognizable to both the person enacting

[77] I witnessed this example play out regularly on Honor Flights I attended. A related example is when passersby in airports stop to clap as the veterans deboard the plane, or at the welcome home celebrations upon their return. On my first Honor Flight, there were many school fieldtrips in Washington, D.C., and several of them spontaneously formed a greeting line at various memorials we visited, thanking the veterans and clapping as we got off the bus.

them and the veteran receiving it. My argument here is that patriotic scripts are not epiphenomenal; they are not just instances of citizens being nice or cordial. They are a core organizing principle of American commemorative practice.

I observed firsthand how these scripts are enacted interpersonally and institutionally. On all four Honor Flights I attended, passersby approached veterans to shake their hands, thank them for their service, and applaud spontaneously as we passed by. I also observed on numerous occasions middle aged men, and sometimes younger men in their 30s or 40s, stand at attention and salute the group. In one instance, I saw a man in his truck do this as our bus passed through the intersection; at another point, a younger man, likely a GWOT veteran, saluted from the sidewalk. These were spontaneous, solemn acts. These displays of respect were especially common when we arrived at memorials in Washington.[78] Middle schoolers would walk up to the veterans to tell them thanks for your service. Veterans had a mix of responses.[79] Some offered warm responses and engaged with the students; others seemed unsure how to react, humbly deflecting the attention. On two different trips, I overheard veterans discuss among themselves how they reacted to people offering them thanks for their service. Some joked with each other about having fun with it, some quipping that "you were worth it," while others responding simply with "it was my honor." These backstage conversations speak to how veterans themselves understand and negotiate these scripts.

[78] The itinerary varies by each Honor Flight hub, but most aim to visit the major war and military service memorials. Because each trip may include over 100 participants, the group is divided into smaller groups that travel by separate charter buses following staggered routes throughout the day. Common stops include the WWII Memorial, Korean War Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Air Force Memorial, Pentagon 9/11 Memorial, Navy Memorial, Marine Corps Memorial, and Arlington National Cemetery for the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

[79] For example, it can seem performative when, while walking through an airport terminal, a woman shouts that everyone should clap and appreciate "what they've done for us." Though well-intended, such gestures made in an elevated and declarative tone can come across to some as forced. Nonetheless, these sentiments reflect a sincere and public display of honoring veterans.

In this way, veterans also have their own backstage, just as volunteers and organizers coordinate public facing commemoration.[80]

Part of the mixed responses, I believe, stems from the varied ways veterans reflect on their own service. Some hesitate to accept recognition because they insist others are more deserving because they sacrificed more.[81] For every modest or awkward response, however, there were many more veterans visibly moved, beaming and soaking in the appreciation. Many had long looked forward to the trip and were sincerely grateful for the support.

Personally, I witnessed firsthand the healing of longstanding trauma. As referenced earlier through the personal archive of handwritten thank you cards, I think it is fair to say the modal Honor Flight experience is one of catharsis, making amends on both sides, healing old wounds, and for many, finally finding peace. As one veteran wrote in a thank you, "I can say I am 'home' after all these years" (June 17, 2014). Another shared, "You helped greatly to remove the dark cloud I had in my heart" (June 7, 2019).

What initially appeared to be reflexive gestures or acts of social conformity—like middle schoolers approaching veterans together with their friends—over time were clarified as deeply meaningful for what they symbolized beyond the discrete moments I was observing. I found myself participating not because I had to, but because it felt wrong not to, and also because I wanted to. Reflecting on my own family's history of military service, these gestures channeled a

[80] To be sure, many Honor Flight volunteers are veterans themselves, including many who are former Honor Flight participants. However, part of the experience and the flight's symbolism is based on preserving the distinction between volunteers and flight participants.

[81] Veteran humility can be a source of frustration for Honor Flight organizers. For example, some leaders told me that recruiting Vietnam-era participants has grown more difficult as the cohort ages. Despite success in managing flights and fundraising, many veterans respond by saying others are more deserving of the spot on the trip, or that they will "get around to it someday." One leader noted that seasoned volunteers are also aging, and expressed frustration that delaying participation can unknowingly impact the viability of future operations. In other words, waiting until later may seem humble, but some organizers view it as hindering efforts to serve as many veterans as possible before it is too late.

proud connection to relatives who have served. Patriotic scripts create a sense of connection, continuity, and community.

As a researcher, I remained keenly aware of my role, but at times it was difficult to stay detached, especially when walking through my first welcome home tunnel. It was a very charged and patriotic atmosphere, replete with signs, bagpipes, and a line of people saying "thanks for your service," and to me as a Volunteer Guardian, "thanks for helping your veteran," to which I replied, "It was my honor." The scripts worked on me too.

Civic organizations reinforce these interpersonal enactments of patriotic scripts. Veteran serving organizations and adjacent civic nonprofits—what I consider the institutional pillars of American commemorative infrastructure—create manuals, formal guidance, and norms that shape formal commemorative practices. These official practices are then filtered into everyday expressions and interactions. These organizations institutionalize the logic of atonement, ensuring commemoration emphasizes reverence, healing, and honoring veterans.

Quilts of Valor. One of the clearest examples of institutionalized scripts is Quilts of Valor, a nonprofit organization that presents handmade quilts to local veterans "touched by war." Like Honor Flight, Quilts of Valor is a national network organized into local chapters, each covering a designated geographic area. As of 2025, the organization lists over 600 chapters and has awarded more than 400,000 quilts since its founding in 2003.[82] Everything about the organization is intentional. The quilts are not meant to be display pieces; group members emphasize they should be used by the veteran, at the same time being viewed as symbols of recognition and redemption. The quilts have unique and patriotic themes with vivid colors and patterns. Each quilt is a message

[82] https://www.qovf.org/.

that society honors the veteran for their sacrifices. As the organization puts it, "The Quilt says unequivocally, 'Thank you for your service and sacrifice in serving our nation.'"

I first encountered Quilts of Valor at a particularly active American Legion post in Central Plains. The local chapter has a close relationship with the post; many of its members were also part of the Legion Auxiliary, and they stored their supplies in the building. I attended two ceremonies hosted by this chapter, the second marking the chapter's 1000th quilt presentation. These were well attended evening events, including the honored veterans and their family members, post regulars, and community members. Both ceremonies included a meal with a warm, communal atmosphere.[83]

At the first ceremony, I sat with a veteran and his wife; I learned during the award presentation that the veteran was one being honored. At the second, I sat with organization members and gained valuable insight into the time and dedication it takes to make the quilts. These ceremonies are often held as standalone events, like the ones I attended in Central Plains. They are also often paired with Honor Flight welcome home receptions. For example, one welcome home rally I attended at a rural high school was immediately followed by a Quilts of Valor award ceremony.

[83] As a personal aside, I often had in mind Robert Putnam (2000) when visiting these Central Plains veteran posts. It was like stepping back in time, and these events would make Putnam proud.







Figure 5.7 Quilts of Valor Ceremonies in Kansas

Top: Honor Flight veterans are presented with quilts by the local Quilts of Valor chapter, with student guardians—members of the high school honor society—behind them. I attended this welcome home ceremony but did not participate in the flight. Image obtained from the group's Facebook page. Bottom left: Award ceremony at the American Legion post in Central Plains, where I performed fieldwork. A veteran recipient poses with family and the chapter leader while Legion members hold up the awarded quilt. Bottom right: Close up image of a quilt shared on the Facebook page of the high school led Honor Flight hub.

The quilt award ceremonies follow a methodical script. Each begins with a Quilts of Valor leader reciting the honored veteran's biography, withholding the veteran's name until the end for dramatic effect.[84] As this happens, two members of the American Legion post hold up the quilt in front of the audience. Volunteers told me it typically comes as a surprise to the veterans, with some

[84] Ceremonies typically honor multiple veterans receiving quilts.

becoming emotional during the experience.[85] The veteran then steps forward to receive the quilt and photos are taken of them and their family in front of the quilt. The emotional and symbolic resonance of these events is echoed in local newspaper coverage. As the local chapter's leader is quoted after an award ceremony I attended, "They'll stand up there when they're getting their quilt, tears just flowing down their faces. For a lot of veterans, it's emotional. That's why I'm so passionate about it, because I've seen how it can change lives" (Duryee 2024).

To frequent attendees, deviations from the script are noticeable. For example, at the second award ceremony I attended, one of the Legion members had his middle school aged grandson assist in holding up the quilt. The retired gentleman sitting across from me grew visibly disgruntled and whispered disapproval to his wife, a longtime Quilt of Valor member who had made over 30 quilts. It "was not right" that the kid was holding the quilt. This micro-interaction was unnoticed by most, but it struck me immediately as meaningful; it signaled that the script was not being followed and, in some way, was thought to diminish the act being performed.

Every aspect of the organization is detailed in a 51-page Member's Manual available on its national website.[86] An additional 17-page Policies and Procedures Resource Manual outlines chapter operations, expectations for award ceremonies, and key definitions relating to the organization's mission, such as the "Meaning of Valor" (Section 5.11). The website also specifies guidelines for quilt construction, including standards for size, patterns, fabric, and stitching. These guidelines are designed to ensure quality control and uniformity across the chapters.

[85] Interestingly, the Quilts of Valor Member's Manual includes a policy prohibiting surprise awards. Section 11.3. Surprise Awards states: "The Foundation does not allow surprise awards out of respect for service members and veterans. There also is the potential for a negative impact such as an unexpected emotional event or medical issue. Some individuals do not like surprises of any kind." This policy was hinted at in conversation with a local chapter member, but I was surprised to find such an explicit rule.

[86] https://www.qovf.org/policies-and-procedures-3/. I am consulting the March 29, 2024 edition.

The organization's manuals are instructive examples of codified patriotic scripts, particularly in their description of award eligibility. The Policies and Procedures manual details two key changes to the original mission statement and award eligibility. Originally, the mission was "to cover all those Service Members and Veterans wounded physically or psychologically with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor." The phrase "wounded physically or psychologically" was later broadened to "touched by war."[87] A section titled "Light of Inclusion" describes how eligibility, originally restricted to post-9/11 veterans, was expanded to include all veterans "touched by war."[88] The organization defines "touched by war" as any honorably discharged veteran who served during a conflict era, whether deployed to a warzone or serving stateside in peacetime.

The shift from "wounded" to "touched" by war reflects a meaningful discursive shift that speaks to the homogenization of veteran identity in American commemorative practice. A quote from the organization's former executive director captures this idea of inclusive veteran valorization. "We'll never know exactly what each Veteran experiences and how they are touched by war. But we can welcome our Veterans home, support them and their families, and thank them for their service whenever possible."[89] The emphasis is less on the specifics or complexities of wartime experiences, instead focusing on the broader conviction in veteran deservingness and society's corresponding obligation to honor and care for military personnel after their service ends.

The language used at these ceremonies mirrored the vocabulary I often heard in interviews. The emphasis was consistently on the valorization of veteran identity and compensating for

[87] Section 5.05 Our Mission Statement in Policies and Procedures, p.10.
[88] Reflecting this broadening of veteran identity, "touched by war" is defined expansively in Section 7.3 of the organization's Member's Manual. It includes experiences ranging from direct combat experience, to being wounded in training, to "Being there to listen, to minister, and to support others struggling with the demons of being in a war zone."
[89] Quote from Lori Thompson, former Executive Director 2021-2023. https://www.qovf.org/about-qovf/our-history/. Quoted from site version on November 21, 2024.

society's past neglect of veterans. A feature story in the local newspaper on the group's 1000th award ceremony captured several themes of veteran commemoration. Referring to who qualifies for a quilt, the article noted "Some served but didn't see combat action. Others, such as Vietnam veterans, were treated poorly when they came home from a war they fought in that became increasingly unpopular." The Legion post commander echoed the idea of reticent remembrance: "A lot of these guys and gals feel like they don't deserve it [the recognition]" (Duryee 2024). It is this sense of undeservingness that the ceremony seeks to confront, making amends on behalf of society but also healing for the veteran, regardless of the specifics of their service history.

Honor Flight. Honor Flights are saturated with patriotic scripts. Every moment—from departure to return—is carefully planned to express gratitude to the veterans. There is a strong emphasis on uniformity, both for practical reasons—ensuring the group is easily identifiable throughout the tour—but also, I believe, for symbolic reasons. Matching group t-shirts and hats, name roll calls after we re-boarded the bus following each stop, early morning wake up calls, and shared meals all fostered group cohesion. In this way, I grew to see the trip as simulating aspects of military life familiar to the veteran participants. From the perspective of a Volunteer Guardian, our role was clear: take care of everything for the veterans. This role was emphasized throughout training and preflight calls. Our duty was to ensure a seamless experience for the veterans.

Both hubs I volunteered with were serious about keeping the attention squarely on the veterans. Seasoned volunteers sometimes expressed displeasure about anything that might detract from that focus. For example, it used to be the case—and still is with some hubs—that members of Congress would meet Honor Flight groups during the trip, often at the WWII Memorial. While some veterans might enjoy these visits, others may be less receptive or might view it cynically, especially if they have strong political views. Some volunteers noted annoyance with these

episodes, considering them unnecessary distractions. Such reflections represent an ethos I detected across both hubs, which is a strong protective stewardship over veteran identity and the broader experience. This sensibility manifested in orienting all aspects of the trip toward maximizing honoring veterans.

One of the most meaningful parts of the trip is "mail call," where veterans are surprised with letters written by their family, friends, school children, and past flight participants. Volunteers explain that the moment is meant to recreate the experience of receiving letters from home while they were in the military. This is often one of the most emotional parts of the trip. Each hub may do it differently. In one hub, letters were handed out on the flight back home. At another hub, the mail was presented after dinner one night. The flight leader asked the veterans to imagine themselves back in uniform, reading mail from home. Honor Flight social media posts and volunteer recaps routinely describe this part of the trip as an emotional peak, and one often hears there "was not a dry eye in the room." I would say this is mostly accurate. It was very moving to observe a large group of seventy- and eighty-year-old men, and a few women, quietly opening letters from family and strangers alike. It clearly has a major impact on them.

Another powerful moment is the "welcome home" ceremony. All four flights I volunteered on followed a similar pattern. Before landing, the flight leader addressed the group on the plane's intercom, asking the veterans to imagine themselves as their twenty-something year old selves returning from service decades earlier. While there is a wide variety of military experiences represented on the flight, the dominant image being evoked here is of the unappreciated Vietnam veteran. To be sure, many on the trip fit that profile, but not all.[90] "You may not have received the

[90] This reflects, I believe, the homogenization of veteran identity. Each flight has a wide variety of veteran experiences, from career enlisted and officers, draftees who fulfilled their two-year obligation and discharged, to those who never served overseas. Still, the mental image emphasized in these settings often revolves around the young, drafted military servicemember returning home from a war zone.

welcome home and appreciation you deserved back then, but you will now. Think of today as making up for what you were owed." Upon landing, planes are welcomed at the airport by a fire truck water cannon salute.

Welcome home celebrations vary by hub, but the first Honor Flight I volunteered on culminated in an electrifying airport ceremony. Veterans were met by cheering crowds, a bagpipe procession, flags and streamers, and family members holding posters. There were local news crews at all four welcome home ceremonies I participated in, interviewing veterans and attendees. Most veterans walking through the procession were beaming with pride; some soaked up the moment and embraced the attention; others were more reserved, fitting the archetype of a stoic veteran. Volunteers coordinate every step of this welcome home experience, pumping up the crowd and ensuring a strong showing for the veterans.

At the second hub I volunteered for, the ceremony was held at a ballroom in a nearby hotel. Veterans were presented and recognized in front of their family, complete with cheerleaders and speeches by local notables, often figures with a veteran connection. A bugler played taps, and the event blended reverence with patriotic celebration. Together, these welcome homes were among the most emotionally and electrically charged moments of my fieldwork.

Despite the academic distance I tried to maintain in my fieldwork, it would be difficult for any participant observer not to be moved by the experience. As a non-veteran, it was a bit disorienting to be thanked by veterans and other attendees as I accompanied the veteran I escorted through the cheering welcome line. "It was my honor," I often replied. This was a sincere and accurate sentiment, thought I sometimes struggled to find the right words to fully express my feelings in those moments. Having spent every hour of the trip—three full days in one hub, and nearly a full day in the other—with my veteran, I saw firsthand how much the experience meant

to them. We became friends, and in the end, it truly was my personal honor to be by their side on that journey.



Figure 5.8 Honor Flight "Welcome Home" Ceremonies

Top left: Start of the welcome home procession from my first Honor Flight. Volunteer Guardians escort their veteran through a line of veteran service organization members who offer handshakes and saying "welcome home." Top right: further down the same tunnel, family members and friends cheer and hold signs. Bottom left: More crowds from the same trip, some holding posters with youthful images of veteran family members in uniform. Local news crews move through the crowd broadcasting interviews with veterans live. Bottom right: A welcome home ceremony hosted by the second hub I volunteered with, held in a hotel ballroom near the airport. Veterans sit in rows wearing matching flight t-shirts as they are recognized in front of family and community members.

It is worth emphasizing that not all veterans felt entirely comfortable with the attention. Several I spoke with expressed appreciation for the trip and attention, but admitted feeling a bit awkward amid the fanfare. Many of these veterans, mostly men who live in or are from small towns, are accustomed to quiet lives. The sudden shift to the spotlight can be overwhelming. Moreover, I see this dynamic as speaking to more than simply veterans processing the attention. It reflects how veterans themselves come to terms with and negotiate the homogenization and

valorization elements of the logic of atonement. Yes, some Honor Flight participants are indeed combat veterans, and most did serve in the Vietnam era, but not all did, and not all Vietnam veterans served "in country." Nonetheless, they are all treated uniformly in the eyes of the grateful public. There is no distinction between veteran service records by volunteers, family members, and local media reporting. News coverage almost always emphasize the trip's healing power, giving the veterans a welcome home they never received, and "making up for past mistreatment." The net effect is a singular image of veteran sacrifice, healing, and societal redemption projected onto a diverse group of senior citizen veterans.

Some of the tensions I navigated during these experiences stemmed from balancing my role as a researcher with my genuine support for the mission. From the outset, based on my fieldwork and initial outreach, I had a sense that I was being assessed. After submitting volunteer interest forms through each hub's website, I was contacted by coordinators who asked how I learned about the organization and my interest in volunteering. These conversations, at times, felt like informal vetting, an effort to ensure I was interested in volunteering for the *right* reasons. In retrospect, this was understandable. As I would later learn, these groups are sustained by a core group of tight-knit volunteers, many who have long known each other and are protective of veterans. Given concerns about scams targeting veterans and the emotional weight of the trip, it makes sense that I was met with questions.

During onboarding calls and trainings, the emotional nature of the experience for veterans was a consistent theme. The trips are framed not only as honoring the veterans for their service, but as a privilege for those assisting the mission. This framing reinforced the sense of stewardship volunteers expressed over veterans' memories and experiences.

At one hub, the website says volunteers must "earn" the role of accompanying a veteran as a guardian on the trip.[91] Others told me they were protective of veterans because they are often targets of scams. This was something I later heard from a veteran on a flight who described regularly receiving letters asking to participate in veteran class action lawsuits. These moments led me to see Honor Flight as more than a commemorative trip for veterans. For particularly committed and passionate volunteers, the experience represents a form of duty and care that flow from the logic of atonement. These behaviors come from a sincere place, and in so doing reflect the broader patriotic scripts I would later come to see as key vocabulary and gestures for how to honor veterans.

5.4.4 Patriotic Scripts as the Sinew of Commemorative Infrastructure

A core insight from my fieldwork is that patriotic scripts do more than guide behavior; they hold commemorative infrastructure together. Patriotic scripts acculturate civilians and veterans to expected norms around remembrance. Institutions codify these practices explicitly and are then passed down implicitly through repetition and socialization of new volunteers.

These scripts are transmitted more through socialization and internationalization than through rebuke. I never saw a volunteer corrected for breaking the script, but deviation did stand out. A common norm is not to pry for details about a veteran's experiences. For example, I overheard a volunteer ask a WWII veteran about details of their service, to which the veteran

[91] I was fortunate that one hub allowed me to volunteer on the first scheduled flight after completing my volunteer training, roughly four months after I reached out. With the other hub, nearly a year passed between my outreach and my first flight. The delay was due mainly to timing and the reassignment of veterans to family members who could accompany them. I remain incredibly grateful for the opportunity to participate. I recognize that both hubs extended me trust and generosity in allowing me to accompany them.

replied that they do not talk about it.[92] Per my IRB protocol—and based on past experience of interacting with veterans—I never asked about sensitive details such as whether they saw combat. Instead, conversation flowed naturally, and my questions were more open ended. This left room for what sometimes seemed like embellishment. On rare occasions, a veteran might share improbable accounts referencing dates, units, and geography that do not align. This played into a dynamic where I sometimes felt that veterans projected onto me that they thought I was interested in hearing of war stories and action.

While uncommon, these moments contrast with what I came to see as more representative of combat veteran behavior, at least among those I interacted with during my fieldwork. One combat veteran I sat beside on a flight was quiet and reserved. When flight leaders passed around a sheet of paper for veterans to list names for the "Spirit Flight"—a moment of reflection at a memorial where veterans read aloud the names of comrades who passed—he declined the paper. "There are too many," he said. I later learned he had been a door gunner in Vietnam. After visiting the Vietnam Wall, I saw him by himself and asked how the trip was going. He said he did not spend much time at the Wall because it was uneasy, "spooky," he said, to be near it. This quiet, reserved demeanor contrasted sharply with other veterans who eagerly shared stories of action, sometimes recounting secret missions or proudly showing me medals. In these cases, I did not challenge their accounts but listened intently. It was not my role to verify empirical accuracy. My role was to observe what was remembered, how people shared it, and what these acts reveal about how Americans commemorate veterans and make sense of past wars.

As the sinew of commemorative infrastructure, patriotic scripts reinforce veteran reverence. They create expectations about how to speak about the military and war. Although these

[92] This itself presents a dilemma, because some veterans are happy and eager to share details, while this specific example plays into the norm of veterans repressing difficult memories.

organizations are officially apolitical, the patriotic scripts they enact inevitably portray the military in a favorable light by virtue of their emphasis on veteran celebration. In this way, patriotic scripts not only provide a vocabulary of honoring but also, intended or not, help insulate the military from criticism.

5.4.5 Implications for Grand Strategy

While patriotic scripts are not foreign policy doctrine, I maintain they do shape how Americans think about war. They normalize a mode of civic engagement that orients Americans toward the military with deference and confidence. My intuition is that these practices reproduce a political culture that intrinsically reveres and trusts the military. However, I stop short of calling this "militarism," because the citizens and volunteers I interacted with were not calling for the unreflexive use of military force. Rather, these practices promoted deference and making amends for society's past mistreatment, which I see as distinct from a strong version of militarism.

I join others in observing that a consequence of these practices is the constraints they place on discourse. They enforce boundaries of respectability and implicit normative expectations for what can and cannot be said. As a researcher, I understood that challenging a historical interpretation or questioning a personal narrative would breach the script, thereby violating the front stage social interaction. I also observed how these scripts revolve around personal and community sacrifice, rarely interrogating the causes or strategic consequences of the wars being remembered. In this way, "thanks for your service" often actually means "thanks for what you were asked to do"—with little attention paid to who did the asking (political and military leaders) or why (strategic context).

A broader interpretation of my fieldwork is that these commemorative practices do not necessarily point toward a single grand strategic orientation. While I do believe they tend to bias toward an assertive U.S. role in world affairs, they also contain emotional and symbolic resources that align with more restrained visions. Because these practices revolve around making amends for past mistreatment of veterans, they fundamentally reflect a critical intuition that prescribes a need, indeed an obligation, to revise a morally deficient status quo. This sensibility could plausibly be mobilized to question the wisdom of strategic overreach and emphasize the value of applying lessons from it. As Lacy, the dedicated volunteer, reflected, "I tell them [the veterans] we're 60 years late, but we're trying…You can't undo it. But we can maybe heal and learn from it."[93] These sentiments gesture toward a possible rhetorical shift from making amends for past mistreatment to ensuring that such sacrifices are not required lightly again. I return to this observation in the concluding section.

5.5 Conclusion

Growing up during the Global War on Terror, I vividly remember passersby approaching uniformed soldiers at sporting events or other public gatherings to shake their hands and thank them for their service. I also recall a sense of mystery surrounding older veterans who were said not to talk about their military experience. Looking back, I now realize my upbringing coincided with the military's growing status as the most trusted and revered institution in American political life (Feaver 2023; Robinson 2022). These moments did not necessarily inspire this dissertation, but they have long been in the background.

[93] Interview 62, February 8, 2025.

After more than a year of fieldwork, combined with historical and quantitative analysis, I argue that American commemorative practices around veterans and war are structured by a logic of atonement. This logic shapes how people talk about and interact with veterans, and how they think about war more broadly. While these gestures may at times seem performative, I believe they are sincere. The commemorative infrastructure that reproduces these practices, enacting them in patriotic scripts, is powered by volunteers dedicated to redressing society's past mistreatment of veterans. This culture is not overtly political, but they reproduce a reverential culture that intrinsically insulates the military from critique. Because the military is associated with an assertive grand strategy, challenging it or the political leaders responsible for past wars risks indicting a collective memory that has become central to national unity.

This chapter developed three core themes about how legacies of war are reproduced and made salient over time. First, I documented a pattern I term "reticent remembrance," which is the widespread assumption that veterans are reluctant to speak about their war or military experiences. This perceived silence creates room for well-meaning citizens to fill in the details in ways that elevate veterans' status as exemplars of democratic citizenship and sacrifice. Second, I traced how this dynamic fits into a broader logic of atonement, the belief that society must make amends for past neglect and mistreatment of veterans. These beliefs are pervasive and sincerely held, even if they are in tension with certain aspects of the historical record. Third, I introduce the concept of patriotic scripts that guide how institutions and ordinary citizens honor veterans. These scripts maintain a moral economy of remembrance, creating expectations for what should and should not be said.

This chapter contributes to the broader dissertation in several ways. Building on the previous empirical chapters, which showed how local war exposure shaped public opinion and

congressional behavior, this chapter describes how these legacies manifest in the present. A core insight is that these legacies are not static but remain latent in local commemorative institutions and are responsive to evolving political conditions. Civic organizations like Honor Flight and Quilts of Valor are key nodes in this infrastructure. They may be national in reach and structure, but their work is most vividly realized at the local level. Honor Flight draws from nearby counties, and the commemorative practices I observed occurred in small towns with high historical war exposure. These experiences affirm a central claim of this dissertation: war's impact is localized and is especially meaningful in rural communities where sacrifice is integrated into communal identity and purpose.

This chapter also showcases the merits of pairing quantitative historical analysis with participant observation. While there are limitations in my approach—notably the lack of urban fieldwork—the insights gained offer a unique look into how collective memory is enacted in everyday life. Moreover, the design responds to calls to trace the mechanisms of persistence (Cirone and Pepinsky 2022), complicating increasingly common approaches to historical causal inference. By visiting the communities that appear as rows in large datasets of historical war exposure, I observed firsthand how historical events are kept alive through material and symbolic infrastructure. Doing this can complicate clean causal identification strategies, but it offers valuable on-the-ground insights into the ordinary reproduction of historical legacies in the present.

I conclude by reflecting on the chapter's broader implications. While I hesitate to describe these practices as militarism, I understand how they could be interpreted that way. Scholars like Steele (2022) and Krebs and Ralston (2024) argue that contemporary commemorative practices, and the broader national security state, render veterans symbolic objects through which Americans project anxieties over imperial decline or the costs of military interventionism. My findings

partially complement this view, but I ultimately offer a more sympathetic interpretation. The people I interacted with were not calling for war or greater U.S. military dominance. They were genuinely dedicated to honoring those who served. Nonetheless, I recognize that the cumulative result of these practices is a discursive context that narrows the boundaries of debate around national security. Because support for a strong military is often equated with an assertive grand strategy, the logic of atonement makes it difficult to question a militarized foreign policy without seeming unpatriotic. In this way, overt deference is the price of entry into national security discourse.

Yet many of the veterans and volunteers I interacted with expressed views aligned with a more restrained strategic orientation, or at least skepticism of the status quo. Several questioned America's role as the "world's policeman" or criticized allies that fail to contribute their fair share. Reflecting on a long combat deployment in Iraq, Daniel shared, "It changed the way I saw the world. You began to see the arrogance of the United States…we don't have a very good grasp of what we're doing, especially on the political landscape."[94] A Vietnam-era Air Force pilot expressed similar frustrations. "We could have won that war without dragging it out. Like Ukraine, go beat the crap out of them [Russia], then you come home. And I think that was a mistake in Iraq. And what were we doing in Afghanistan? Beat the crap out of them and come home."[95]

These sensibilities—skepticism of elite-driven war making, frustration over a lack of strategic clarity, and support for decisive action if force is used—suggest that the rhetorical and emotional power embedded in patriotic scripts could be redirected. Rather than reinforcing the status quo, these commemorative practices could be mobilized to question it. Many of the residents in Central Plains I met voiced a sense that veterans had long been taken for granted, that those on

[94] Interview 23, January 11, 2024.
[95] Interview 35, February 29, 2024.

the bottom of the totem pole bore the highest cost for the misjudgments of political elites. A plausible shift in emphasis would move from moral *redress* to moral *vigilance*, aimed at preventing future misuse of military force. In this way, honoring past sacrifice would involve holding political and military leaders accountable, rather than tacitly backing the policies that required such sacrifices in the first place.

I close with a reflection from Daniel, the chaplain I interviewed who had ministered thousands of soldiers in his career, often in combat zones. During our conversation, he reflected on how his service influenced his theology. "I've heard countless times," he said somberly,

> 'I cannot believe in a God like that.' You know, the best guy or gal who ever lived just died and they've got an unborn baby on the way at home they'll never get to see. How can you believe in a God like that? Where was God on that patrol?[96]

His point was not to endorse fatalism, but to express the rawness of what war is, and how people struggle to make sense of it both in the moment and in the years that follow. Daniel's words capture the complexity I observed throughout my fieldwork: a heartfelt conviction to honor veterans, a search to make sense of their sacrifices, and a hope that those sacrifices might inform wiser strategic decisions in the future.

While the logic of atonement centers on moral redress, its deeper potential lies in strategic and political accountability. Veterans like Daniel were proud of their service—he told me he still "supports the flag," despite his now critical views—and other Vietnam veterans described responding to the draft as their duty, "it was how we were raised." But beneath this pride is a longing for those sacrifices to mean something.

In response to my question about whether his deployments shaped his foreign policy views, Daniel responded, "I don't think we learn lessons from past wars, hardly at all. Part of it is I don't

[96] Interview 23, January 11, 2024.

think we ever really realized how messed up we really were, and still are." Even so, he offered a hopeful reflection: "I don't think anyone wants peace more than a military service person…There's something that comes with service that makes you realize the importance of diplomacy, how critically important that is." This sentiment captures what I came to believe through my fieldwork: the commemorative practices I observed are not simply about honoring the past. They reflect a desire to make use of it. Memories still linger, but many of those I met seemed to want those memories to do more than commemorate. They want those memories to matter.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

> "It might come as a surprise to people now living in the United States to learn that the memory and the meaning of that war was actually a matter of contention among Americans who lived through those times."
>
> —John Bodnar (2010, 1), *The "Good War" in American Memory*

The impact of war on support for grand strategy depends on both the nature of wartime experience and the local context in which it unfolds. This dissertation emphasized two key dimensions of wartime experience: its coerciveness and concentration. These two factors capture how evenly a war is distributed across groups and places. Put simply, more coercive and unequally distributed experiences are more likely to alienate people from the state and its grand strategic vision, while less coercive and more evenly shared experiences are more likely to foster public support. Rural communities are particularly prone to embed these experiences into a local identity and political meaning making. After war ends, these experiences remain salient through commemorative practices that interact with national political dynamics and local memory. Overall, this dissertation shows that war leaves lasting political imprints on domestic support for grand strategy. To understand how leaders pursue grand strategy, this dissertation shows that we must understand how the public experienced, remembers, and activates memories of war.

This dissertation examined the domestic effects of war on grand strategy through the canonical case of the American experience in the Second World War. While conventional wisdom treats WWII as a turning point in public and elite support for expansive U.S. global engagement, I framed this dissertation to bring attention to and adjudicate between that dominant narrative and a revisionist interpretation that emphasizes contingency and qualification. My findings lend

support to both schools of thought, but the balance of my evidence and theory leans in the revisionist direction. Reading my findings into contemporary policy debates suggests that analysts invoke WWII often without accounting for meaningful local variation in how people experienced the war. While postwar support for U.S. global engagement was undoubtedly high in the early postwar period, this dissertation highlights how public support was influenced by the nature of local wartime experiences, how legislators responded to local sacrifices, and how communities later commemorated them. A core takeaway is that war's domestic effects are contingent, uneven, and symbolically malleable. War is powerful because it often becomes bound up with national identity, memory, and debates over proper compensation for military service.

This concluding chapter proceeds as follows. First, I review the dissertation's main findings in light of the hypotheses derived in Chapter 2, assessing the extent to which the three empirical chapters affirmed core theoretical expectations. Second, I elaborate the dissertation's contributions to the broader study of how international and domestic forces interact to shape grand strategy, highlighting theoretical, methodological, and historical value added. Third, I identify avenues for future research, including how war and international forces more broadly interact with domestic political dynamics, public opinion about foreign policy in particular. Fourth, I draw out the policy implications of my findings and argument. Finally, I conclude with a return to the stakes of the project: how war, memory, place, and politics interact across time and space, and what this means for understanding how people and states navigate their place in the world.

6.1 Summary of Findings

To evaluate my theory of local war legacies, I tested ten observable implications across three dimensions: (1) how wartime experience shapes public cost tolerance; (2) how elites respond to

war; and (3) how memories of war are reproduced and made salient through commemorative practices. The American experience in WWII offers a most likely case of war-induced transformation and enables within polity variation in regime type. Another advantage is the availability of rich underutilized historical data, including historical subnational public opinion and county level casualties. A final advantage stems from WWII's role in American national identity. That is, WWII presents an ideal case to trace how important historical events continue to exert influence in the present, often in ways that evolve from their original understanding and interact with subsequent events. I extend this intuition by showing that future echoes of the past interact with subsequent historical events, such as the Vietnam War.

Across three empirical chapters, my findings affirm my theory and aligns closest with Kier and Krebs's (2010) conception of war as a catalyst and interruption, less so as a transformation. A key takeaway is that my findings emphasize the uneven yet enduring effects of war, especially when wartime experiences are more coercive and concentrated in rural communities.

Chapter 3 tests the mass public level expectations of my theory. I find consistent support for H2 (Coercion as Catalyst). Counties with a higher share of draftees among WWII fatalities expressed lower support for an active American role in world affairs in the early postwar period. Conversely, consistent with H3 (Unequal Sacrifice as Catalyst), support was higher in counties with more proportional (non-coercive) sacrifice. Furthermore, I find that rurality amplifies these effects, confirming H4 (Rurality as Moderator) and a core claim in my theory that rural places are more likely to internalize wartime experiences. These findings offer evidence to contextualize a pattern observed by scholars in the postwar era that rural areas were less supportive of expansive U.S. global engagement in the early Cold War (Smuckler 1953; Rieselbach 1960). While these accounts attributed rural introversion to regional culture or ethnic history—e.g., the concentration

of German immigrants in the noninterventionist Midwest—my analysis reveals one previously unaccounted for factor was how communities experienced war itself.

These findings complicate narratives of WWII as a unifying, transformative moment. While postwar support for international engagement did remain high overall, it varied considerably based on how and where the war was experienced. Notably, prewar interventionism—measured as public support for the U.S. intervening in WWII—remained a consistent predictor of postwar opinion, supporting revisionist interpretations that view war as a catalyst of preexisting trends rather than a decisive transformation. Moreover, the lack of a meaningful difference between South and non-South counties lends further support to the generalizability of the findings, suggesting that local wartime experience, rather than regime type, explains variation in cost tolerance.

Building on these results, Chapter 4 shifts to the elite level, testing whether wartime experience impacted elite behavior. In line with H6 (Representing Transformation), districts with higher per capita war deaths were represented by lawmakers more likely to vote for the postwar consensus, supporting my core theoretical expectation that lawmakers respond to their constituents' wartime experience. However, contrary to H6, I find limited support for the idea that coercive exposure reduced legislator support in the same way it did among the public. I attribute this to regional and institutional constraints, such as the fact that high coercion districts were concentrated in the South where party loyalty was strong.

Chapter 4 presents further evidence of a local connection at play when it comes to how lawmakers reacted to war. Consistent with H7 (Legislator Type and Transformation), legislator responsiveness was stronger in more rural districts. I take this as evidence in line with my theory that rurality tightens the electoral connection because lawmakers face higher costs for deviating too far from opinion in these types of places. Moreover, I do not find evidence for the watershed

view that prewar non-interventionists were electorally purged during and after the war. Instead, the results show ideological shifts were driven primarily by cohort replacement, suggesting that district wartime experiences were reflected through the election of lawmakers more aligned with the ideological preferences of constituents, rather than outright punishment of prewar noninterventionists. This is quite notable and suggests that elite behavior was indeed responsive to local wartime experiences, but not through retrospective punishment of noninterventionists legislators but through alignment with newly elected ones.

Chapter 5 presents evidence evaluating the third component of my theory related to commemorative practices and the persistence of war legacies. My fieldwork in Central Plains—a predominantly rural area of high WWII exposure counties—supports H8 (Commemorative Infrastructure) and H10 (Rural Remembrance). In the communities I visited, war memory is embedded in local material infrastructure and civic identity through memorials, Honor Flights, veterans' organizations, and local media coverage of these practices. A core observation from my fieldwork is that these practices are not merely symbolic but form a civic infrastructure that continues to make war memories salient to future generations.

From my fieldwork evidence, I develop the concept of the logic of atonement to explain why American commemorative practices emphasize recognition over reckoning, offering support for H9. Sincerely motivated civic actors describe their activities as honoring veterans, offering them the welcome home or thanks they never received, especially to those believed to have been historically mistreated (Vietnam veterans). These practices are enacted through patriotic scripts—e.g., "thank you for your service"—which act as culturally sanctioned expressions of military deference. While participants often expressed views consistent with latent military conservativism—i.e., reluctance to use military force, but tactical escalation when it is used—the

logic of atonement tends to affirm rather than challenge a hawkish bias in national security discourse. However, a key insight is that these practices contain rhetorical potential. In places marked by feelings of perceived neglect, the emotional register of commemoration could plausibly be reoriented toward substantive critique. Rather than recognizing past service and sacrifice, commemorative practices may contain untapped rhetorical resources for advancing a new vision of accountability, one that moves from honoring the military to preventing future misuse of it.

Viewed together, the empirical chapters cohere into a unified account of how WWII's domestic legacy unfolded across the three components of my theory: the coerciveness and concentration of sacrifice, moderated by rurality, and sustained and activated through commemorative practices. This account diverges from alternative explanations emphasizing other theoretical mechanisms such as war outcome, type, scale, or propaganda, and further challenges the idea that war effects will be less apparent in less than fully democratic contexts with an attenuated electoral connection. Even in the Jim Crow South, elite behavior was responsive to district level wartime experiences.

A key finding across these chapters is that war does not imprint uniform effects across a polity. The consistent finding to emerge is that wartime experiences are deeply local, these experiences are interpreted through place-based identities, and are later expressed and made salient through commemorative practices centered around moral redress. These local reactions to war, rather than elite driven narratives imposed from the top down, informs mass political thinking about grand strategy, and what elites must contend with when attempting to mobilize the public for grand strategic projects.

6.2 CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation makes contributions across several literatures, offering a novel framework for understanding how war impacts politics across time and space. I group these contributions into three categories—theoretical, methodological, and historical—which I elaborate below.

First, the central theoretical contribution of this dissertation is its framework for understanding how war shapes postwar domestic support for grand strategy. Integrating insights from IR, APD, historical persistence studies, and memory politics, my theory explains outcomes across three levels of analysis: the mass public, elected officials, and local civic life.

For scholars of IR, my theory advances a second image reversed logic (Gourevitch 1978) that treats war not as a dependent variable—as is more common in IR theory (Fearon 1995; Powell 2006)—but as an independent variable that acts upon the domestic politics of grand strategy (Stein and Russett 1980; Thompson 1993; Lissner 2021). In this way, I show how war provides a useful lens for understanding how the internal politics of hegemonic states both shape and are shaped by their role in the international system (Ikenberry and Nexon 2019). This framework builds on neoclassical realism's insight that domestic politics can both constrain and enable leaders' pursuit of grand strategic projects (Christensen 1996). I depart from existing studies by foregrounding public cost tolerance as a geographically uneven and war-induced input. That is, while war may result from hegemonic ambitions, the consequences are distributed unequally across society, and these uneven experiences shape public support for those same strategic ambitions. By tracing how war is experienced and remembered locally, this dissertation shifts attention from elite level decision making to how publics interpret the nation's strategic interests in light of past sacrifice. These public interpretations then ultimately influence the space within which leaders operate (Hyde and Saunders 2020).

This dissertation also offers insights for scholars of APD by applying the field's attention to timing and path dependence to a domain that has received comparatively less focus: foreign policy. It aims to revitalize interest in external forces as drivers of domestic political dynamics, an intuition pioneered by previous generations of scholarship but less emphasized in recent work.[1] By focusing on WWII, often studied as a generative episode for institution building and coalitional transformation, I bring novel historical data and methods to bear to surface the meaningful variety and contingency that underlie conventional narratives of the war's domestic legacy.

For scholars of historical persistence, this dissertation demonstrates how historical events can exert long term influences not only through institutional or familial connections, but also through memory, identity, and locally situated commemorative practices. A key move in this study is to highlight the value of aggregating micro level processes—such as local wartime sacrifice—into higher order outcomes, such as a state's strategic orientation. While I refrain from making strong causal claims throughout the dissertation, I believe my theoretical framework lays a generative foundation for how scholars of historical political economy can take up questions of enduring interest to IR scholars, namely the causes and consequences of war. To that end, this study provides an example of how research designs common in persistence studies could be adapted to shed light on big picture theoretical questions of interest to IR.[2]

[1] For notable recent work emphasizing external influences on the nation's early political development dating back to the founding, see Gailmard (2024) and Edling (2020). This broader effort to reconnect APD with IR is a theme I develop in a coauthored working paper (Conklin and Gerstle 2025).

[2] A growing literature in HPE and persistence studies shows how conflict exposure can shape postwar political behavior, often in ways with important international implications. For example, several studies show that subnational war exposure increased support for nationalism (Surdea-Hernea 2025; De Juan et al. 2024; Koenig 2023) or political extremism generally (Acemoglu et al. 2022), resulting in electoral support for parties that later played major roles in international events, such as the rise of the Nazi party. These contributions demonstrate the relevance of persistence studies to IR. More explicit engagement between the two literatures—such as linking wartime experiences to later foreign policy attitudes (Grossman et al. 2015), specifying how regime type matters for war's effects, and how public preferences aggregate to elite-led national security decision making—would be a promising direction for future scholarship.

For scholars of collective memory and memory politics, this dissertation is both an example and an invitation for continued study of how war memories impact national security and foreign policy. While much of collective memory studies is comparative in scope, I show how commemorative practices in the U.S. offers a productive way to form new insights into how political meaning is derived from past wars. This dissertation highlights the ample opportunities to apply the theoretical toolkit of memory politics to study topics related to national security and foreign policy more broadly. Notably, my concept of the logic of atonement offers a novel way for conceptualizing the symbolic politics of war remembrance and veteran commemoration. Another key contribution is my insight that the logic of atonement has multivocal qualities. By this I mean that it both affirms a deferential attitude toward the military, reinforcing a hawkish political culture, but it can also be repurposed to challenge rather than perpetuate a status quo deferential national security culture. Drawing on insights from research on rural politics, this potential is especially the case in rural communities with identities rooted in a sense of place-based deprivation and perceived neglect by power centers, beliefs that align with the coercion logic underpinning my theory. My fieldwork therefore serves as an invitation for further exploration and comparison of whether a dynamic exists elsewhere or at other points in time.

A second key contribution of this dissertation is its methodological approach. From the outset, this was a question driven project. I did not set out with a preferred method, but with a deep interest in the historical case, the drivers of public support for broader strategic questions, and a theoretical interest in how war impacts domestic politics. To that end, I allowed these empirical and theoretical interests to guide the methodological tools I employed. The result was a mixed methods research design that can serve as a template for research across multiple literatures on the effects, transmission, and persistence of external forces like war on domestic political processes.

This set up offers several methodological contributions. First, using MRP—a technique pioneered in American politics—I created subnational estimates of public support for a key pillar of postwar grand strategy: support for taking an active role in the world. While existing studies in IR and public opinion about foreign policy have engaged some of these historical surveys (Berinsky 2009; Friedman 2024; Holsti 2009), this is among the first to use these surveys to create subnational opinion estimates and link them to county level WWII casualty data. This innovation enables an analysis of how local war exposure related to postwar support for grand strategy, a question central to historiography of this case and broader theoretical debates, but was previously constrained by lack of data and methods tractable to the question.

Second, I use county level war death data in a novel way. Rather than treating all deaths similarly and politically equivalent, I use the data and historical circumstances of this war—when the draft was operative—to distinguish between coercive and proportional sacrifice. While I build on existing uses of these data, this dissertation is one of the first to link these data to both subnational opinion and elite congressional behavior, thereby enabling a comprehensive test of how subnational wartime experiences aggregate upward to influence national level outcomes.

Third, my fieldwork component responds to calls, particularly in the historical persistence literature, for greater attention to mechanisms of intertemporal transmission (Cremaschi and Masullo 2024; Balcells 2012; Walden and Zhukov 2020). Put simply, if WWII were to have a longstanding impact on local commemorative practices, one way to identify it is to go investigate it in person. To be sure, while I refrained from asserting strong causal claims from my fieldwork, I show how contemporary commemorative practices are deeply reflective of and reinterpret earlier wartime experiences. I also show how collective memory interacts with later historical events—in this case, the Vietnam War—in ways that reflect political dynamics of the moment and therefore

create incentives to diverge from the historical record. My fieldwork followed a deductive "nested analysis" intuition (Lieberman 2005). Importantly, however, it allowed for inductive work that generated my concept of the logic of atonement, which likely would not have arisen from a strictly deductive or survey driven approach inattentive to how legacies play out in everyday life.

Together, these contributions reflect this dissertation's broader commitment to theoretical synthesis, methodological flexibility, and historical sensibility in pursuit of developing an answer to a theoretically and historically important question. Rather than prioritizing any one of these methods in isolation—MRP, historical data collection and analysis, or fieldwork—I combine them to construct as comprehensive answer afforded by the data. To be sure, I do see potential in using survey experiments to test claims consistent with my fieldwork evidence—such as testing the efficacy and resonance of leader appeals to historical memories of sacrifice, for example (Ochsner and Roesel 2024)—but my point here is that fieldwork serves a crucial and arguably underutilized role in historically oriented research designs. My integration of fieldwork shows it need not be limited to verifying present day causal mechanisms; it can also be used inductively to shed light on why a theorized outcome does not persist, deepening theoretical insights into distal effects (Acharya et al. 2024) and reading nuance into prevailing historical interpretations of crucial historical events.

A third contribution of this dissertation is substantive and historical. Beginning with the observation that political officials, military officials, and foreign policy analysts often invoke WWII as a moment of public and elite clarity behind global engagement, I admittedly approached this framing skeptically. This is due to my familiarity with, at the outset of this project, revisionist historiography that questions the depth and breadth of a national transformation in views. To resolve these tensions in a way that also generates broader social scientific insights, I employed a

question driven research design to adjudicate these competing historical narratives about the war's domestic political legacy, which I believed had broader insights into theories of how war reshapes the domestic political order.

What makes my contribution here distinctive is that I bring social scientific findings and methods to bear on this major historical case, integrating theory and methods that have been systematically applied to study the effects of war in other cases. These literatures, I show, are directly applicable to evaluating these competing claims long debated by historians. Specifically, I integrate insights from literatures on war casualties, historical persistence, and collective memory to assess whether WWII truly consolidated broad public backing for U.S. global engagement in ways that meaningfully departed from prewar patterns. Or, as the revisionist school of thought contends, its effects were more contingent, uneven, contested, and reflective more of prewar trends than a decisive shift.

My findings support portions of each account but generally tilt in the revisionist direction. In Chapter 3, I show that proprotional war deaths (non-coercive sacrifice) were positively associated with support for postwar international engagement, aligning with the "war as transformation" view. However, my finding that coercive sacrifice depressed support both affirms a revisionist interpretation and offers theoretical nuance to how scholars conceptualize war exposure. My key insight here is that not all war exposure is the same, making my disaggregation of wartime experience a theoretical contribution in itself. Instead of treating war as a monolith, I show that the type of sacrifice matters both historically and theoretically.

The finding that prewar interventionism remained a strong predictor of postwar opinion further supports a "war as interruption" interpretation whereby war imposes a temporary change to preexisting trends that return in the war's aftermath. Moreover, consistent with my theory,

rurality amplifies the effects of wartime experience. This finding contributes to our understanding of how war translates into postwar beliefs by complicating the idea of a unified national reaction to conflict, reinforcing the importance of local political geography.

In Chapter 4, I find that lawmakers from high casualty districts voted for the postwar consensus at higher rates, evidence that aligns with a watershed interpretation of WWII. However, additional evidence in the chapter cuts against it: prewar noninterventionists were not systematically punished, and postwar lawmaker support for the postwar consensus appeared to reflect a continuation of prewar WWII interventionism. The takeaway from these results is a more complex legacy than a straightforward view of the war as generating a national reaction. According to my analysis of available historical evidence, my findings indicate that what matters was preexisting trends, the type and extent of wartime experience, and the local context. Together these factors demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of how war translates into postwar cost tolerance, and its representation by elected leaders.

The broader payoff of this contribution is not just adjudicating historical debates about WWII. This contribution shows that the lessons we draw from past conflicts continue to shape contemporary political behavior. Leaders and analysts often invoke stylized narratives of WWII to justify foreign policies or frame public policy debate.[3] By offering this more nuanced account, based on available historical evidence and social scientific methods, this contribution offers scholars and citizens tools to be skeptical of overly simplistic analogies and historical references, and encouraging better understanding of how appeals to historical memory interact with political incentives for shaping foreign policy discourse.

[3] This was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, when commentators argued that what was needed was a societal mobilization and spirit of sacrifice on the scale of WWII (Nevins 2020). For a counter to this comparison, see Greenfield (2020).

Finally, while focused on the U.S., my reevaluation of a canonical case offers a portable framework for studying other historically significant wars. For example, ongoing conflicts like the War in Ukraine indicate the importance of understanding how wartime experiences will translate into postwar strategic trajectories (Bocquillon et al. 2024). There are other historical cases where this framework could generate new insights. Other cases of war exerting an outsized importance on historical memory and postwar politics include WWII in Russia (i.e., the "Great Patriotic War"), or WWI in France or the UK, examples where dominant narratives of war and memory may obscure deeply local and contingent variation in wartime experiences.

Viewed together, the contributions of this dissertation span theory, method, and historical substance. I develop a new theoretical framework for understanding war's domestic political effects on support for grand strategy, a mixed method design tailored to answer the motivating research questions, and a historically driven reevaluation of a canonical case that still offers insights beyond the U.S. The upshot is that the impact of war is not uniform but deeply local, contested, and meaningful in the immediate aftermath of war and into the future.

6.3 Directions for Future Research

This dissertation points to several promising avenues for future research that extend its theoretical insights and address its limitations. I highlight four productive directions here.

First, this dissertation showcases the value of studying international politics and war from the bottom up. Building on scholarship that examines the local effects of trade, I apply a similar lens to war and national security. This approach reveals how insights from American politics—such as work on local politics and place-based deprivation—can offer insights into how citizens interpret major foreign policy questions. A more intentional IR focus on the local consequences of

foreign policy complements recent policy discourse on promoting a "foreign policy for the middle class" (Ahmed and Engel 2020) and research on the localized effects of trade (Bisbee and Rosendorff 2024; Autor et al. 2020). A key theoretical question probed by these overlapping interests is how major powers reconcile the benefits of global influence with its domestic costs, costs that can erode the public's cost tolerance necessary to sustain that influence. Future work could examine local politics as the site where these tensions are surfaced (Beckley 2025).

Along these lines, future work could explore how geography and local information environments shape support for grand strategy and its component policies. For example, how do perceptions of uneven costs and benefits influence support for related foreign policies? How do memories of past war sacrifice influence support for the use of military force, historically and cross nationally? Notably, as scholars of comparative memory politics note, this is a question of enduring relevance not only in the U.S. but in other regions beset with contested histories.

Understanding how national leaders interact with these local dynamics is equally important. A limitation of my study is its limited attention to lawmakers' personal reactions to local war exposure. Future research could examine how lawmakers from high sacrifice districts discuss war, publicly and privately, and how it informs their interactions with military officials. Relatedly, do military planners consider geographic or demographic patterns of sacrifice when planning future mobilization and warfighting strategy? These questions could be explored historically and cross-nationally, especially through comparisons across regime type.

Second, recent IR scholarship has explored the sources and dynamics of a "hawkish bias" among both elites (Kertzer et al. 2022; Jost et al. 2024) and the mass public (Pomeroy 2024; Friedman 2023), an inclination toward the use of force.[4] My fieldwork suggests that this bias may

[4] A related but distinct version of the "hawkish bias" relates to the idea that hawkish leaders are more effective at brokering rapprochement because their "going against type" is seen as more sincere (Mattes and Weeks 2019).

be reinforced through memory politics around war and veterans. I argue that the logic of atonement fosters deference to the military, especially where feelings of neglect or mistreatment linger. This raises a question about the malleability of the hawkish bias. For example, can elite framing of past wars reshape local memories and narratives? Can patriotic scripts be redirected to generate skepticism of military interventions or support for a scaled down global presence? Might emphasizing the uneven distribution of past sacrifice mitigate hawkishness in places with high historical exposure? Further work in this direction would benefit from integrating insights from rural politics on place-based resentment (Cramer 2016), civil-military relations research on social desirability bias (Feaver 2023), and IR research on the social and psychological roots of hawkishness (Pomeroy 2024; Friedman 2023).

Third, this dissertation's mixed methods design offers a model for linking historical data and fieldwork to study how war—and other global forces like trade—reverberate domestically. While I focus on historical war exposure, similar methods could examine how communities interpret the local effects of trade, such as in deindustrialized areas. Do the mechanisms underpinning local war legacies also apply in other domains? Trade related job loss in specialized industries, like wartime sacrifice, impose long lasting local hardships. Another extension is to study communities with low historical war exposure or military service generally. Does the logic of atonement operate similarly there?

Future work could also explore additional outcomes. How do local legacies shape future military service, for example?[5] As granular historical conflict data becomes increasingly available across comparative contexts, there are plenty of opportunities to connect these data to downstream

[5] Examples along these lines include research on how past local sacrifice inspires future sacrifice (Carozzi et al. 2023), and how locally concentrated state repression inspires future service for or against the state (Henn and Huff 2024).

political effects. To that end, one extension to better connect my historical empirical chapters with my fieldwork is to incorporate a dataset of physical war memorials.

Fourth, my theory could be tested in other historical and comparative contexts. Although developed in the case of WWII era U.S., my theory applies more broadly. For example, do coercive forms of sacrifice similarly depress support for associated strategic aims in the post-Vietnam era of the all-volunteer force? As noted in Chapter 2, even nominally voluntary military service may not be completely voluntary where limited economic opportunities constrain vocational choices. One way to test this is to compare reactions to wartime deaths in places with fewer economic prospects versus more prosperous areas. My theory could also be tested in other countries like Ukraine, Israel, or Russia, where militaries are formed through mixed recruitment systems. Another scope condition that could be explored cross nationally relates to where war is fought: how do reactions to wartime sacrifice differ when war is fought at home or in distant theaters, as in the U.S. case?

Finally, digital media and partisan polarization raise additional questions about whether place still matters. For example, while some might argue that today's media diminishes local distinctiveness, other evidence supports the idea that media reinforces place attachment. Despite the prevalence of social media use, social media networks tend to reflect users' geographic communities (Bailey et al. 2018), and local media remains a highly trusted source of news (Peterson et al. 2024). These factors, combined with the fact that people rely on peers when forming foreign policy judgments (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017), suggest place-based information environments remain relevant. One way to test this is to examine more recent wars, like the War on Terror, across rural and urban areas, focusing on media framing and community reaction to local war sacrifices.

These research opportunities extend a broader contribution of this dissertation: a portable framework for studying how war's political legacies are shaped by local context, embedded in memory, and reactivated over time. As ongoing conflicts continue and a multipolar world takes shape, understanding the consequences—not just the causes—of war will remain important to both theory and practice of international politics.

6.4 Lessons for U.S. Foreign Policy

This dissertation offers several lessons for policymakers and participants in public debates about U.S. foreign policy. In public discourse and political rhetoric, WWII and the "U.S. led postwar international order" it gave rise to is routinely invoked to defend the necessity of U.S. leadership and to criticize those calling for a scaled back posture (McConnell 2025; Rice 2024; Coons 2020).[6] This framing draws on the war's longtime status in popular culture and media (Samet 2021; Owen 2010). Following the 2016 election, a common refrain in debates about U.S. grand strategy was the call for elites to better articulate the strategic value of engagement to shore up *public will*.[7] Often implicit in these narratives is the belief that WWII taught the American people a hard lesson about the pitfalls of "isolationism," one that must not be forgotten.

[6] Some even call for leaders to deliberately adapt FDR's rhetorical tactics for dealing with his foreign policy critics (Sykes 2024).

[7] For early reflections on the implications of Donald Trump's 2016 election for U.S. foreign policy, see the January/February 2017 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, titled "Out of Order? The Future of the International System," https://www.foreignaffairs.com/issues/2017/96/1. See also the January/February 2019 issue of *Foreign* Affairs, titled "Who Will Run the World? America, China, and Global Order," https://www.foreignaffairs.com/issues/2019/98/1. For a representative defense of continued U.S. leadership, see Daalder and Lindsay (2018). Critics such as Walt (2018) and Mearsheimer (2018) offer sharp indictments of continued U.S. primacy. My own thinking was informed by what I call the "great liberal international order debate" that unfolded in the years after 2016, where I observed scholars and practitioners exchange over Twitter, *Foreign Affairs*, policy adjacent journals, think tank publications, and major newspaper editorials. While too extensive to cite exhaustively, a common thread among defenders of U.S. engagement is the view that waning public support for U.S. leadership—while understandable given a recent poor military and economic track record—could and should be overcome through elite efforts to mobilize public will.

This dissertation joins others in complicating familiar narratives of a post-WWII halcyon era of public and elite consensus on U.S. global leadership (Friedman 2024; Rathbun 2011). I show that the war's legacy was more contingent and uneven than often assumed. There was no single national experience, an insight emphasized by earlier scholarship (Bodnar 2010; Jeffries 1996; Leff 1991). This is not to dimmish the achievements of the "greatest generation," but rather to honor them by properly casting their legacy in ways that can meaningfully inform, rather than distort, today's understanding of how the war shaped American political life. Many Americans who served on the frontlines and the home front, as Patterson (1996) notes, "were deeply patriotic, and they had served because it was their duty. Many had fought bravely. But most of them, polls suggested, had not cherished idealistic notions about destroying fascism or building a brave new world." Jeffries (1996, 9) observes similarly:

> The identification of World War II as the Good War is essentially a postwar phenomenon, a product to an important degree of nostalgia and selective memory, of movies and the media, and of changing times and lengthening perspectives. Wartime Americans thought the war a necessary war, a just war, ultimately a successful war, but not necessarily a 'good' war. Even as they enjoyed wartime prosperity and feared that peace might mean a return to prewar economic stagnation, they longed for the war to be over.

The key takeaway is that the war had less to do with a public epiphany than the fact that local sacrifices were experienced and remembered differently across communities. As my fieldwork shows, these memories are often filtered through later wars, especially Vietnam, and become embedded in commemorative practices. Yes, U.S. grand strategy shifted after WWII, but this dissertation joins other accounts in showing that this shift is not solely attributable to a unanimous public mandate. Rather, it reflected elite responses to the public's ambivalent and uneven mood toward global engagement.

This complexity matters for policymaking. For elected officials, the lesson of WWII is not that it ended isolationism, but that public support for global engagement depends on perceptions

of fairness and sacrifice. The fact that postwar support was lower in places with more coercive mobilization—and amplified in rural communities where sacrifice is more communally felt—speaks to how local experiences undergird national attitudes. These insights help make sense of contemporary efforts to align foreign policy with domestic concerns. Both the Trump and Biden administrations embraced the manra that "foreign policy is domestic policy." For example, the Biden Administration's emphasis on a "foreign policy for the middle class" and the Trump Administration's framing its foreign policy as protecting American workers from being "ripped off" by allies and globalization reflect a shared recognition: sustaining the U.S.'s international influence requires addressing grievances of communities that feel neglected or left behind by globalization, deindustrialization, and distant wars. Similarly, bipartisan interest in industrial policy reflects the political power of geographic and class-based discontent, often concentrated in electorally pivotal areas.

More broadly, these trends suggest that consensual appeals to WWII history or the "rules based international order" are insufficient, if not out of touch, for sustaining public support for U.S. primacy. In an era of global populism, policymakers would be wise to view foreign policy not merely as statecraft, but as something that leaves uneven, localized legacies that shape public support for international engagement.

For military planners, a related lesson is that public confidence in military missions is tied to perceptions of fairness, representation, and treatment of veterans. As my fieldwork shows, perceptions of the military are often tied up with a belief that veterans were mistreated historically and are owed moral, economic, political, and symbolic compensation. While public trust in the military has remained high since 9/11, a takeaway from this dissertation is that this trust is not

inelastic. If military service were to become more coercive or visibly unequal, tolerance for the sacrifices necessary to sustain a global military posture could erode.

This dissertation also informs recurring debates about reinstating the draft. Advocates claim that conscription increases public investment in national security and therefore acts as a check on military overreach (Ackerman 2019; Rangel 2014). Critics respond that it would reduce military quality and be politically tenuous (Henderson 2024; Bandow 2012). My theory introduces another dimension to this debate: coercive sacrifice can depress public support for a war's strategic aims—a finding supported by survey experimental research (Horowitz and Levendusky 2011)—especially in communities already predisposed to feelings of alimentation or resentment. If the goal of the draft is to restore democratic accountability or deepen public investment in foreign policy, it may backfire, inadvertently fostering opposition to the very goals its proponents seek to promote. On the other hand, advocates of a more restrained orientation might see merit in the draft as a way to sensitize the public to the costs of war. Either way, the key point is that imposing sacrifice may reduce, rather than mobilize, public will.

These lessons point to a broader insight from this dissertation: cost tolerance is not just a rational cost benefit calculation about the benefits of international engagement, nor is it simply shaped by elites. Public beliefs about the nation's role in the world are shaped by lived experiences, how communities experience, remember, and reinterpret sacrifice. These beliefs, in turn, shape elite sensitivity to public opinion. The frequent invocation of historical war memory indicates elites' intuitive understanding that war legacies matter. As I observed in my fieldwork, people carry these memories of mistreatment and pride around in their minds, and military and war-related issues remain particularly potent. Local legacies of war act as an enabler of unreflexive hawkishness and, I believe, can also be a constraint on overly assertive action.

There is an optimistic takeaway here. The public does not instinctively oppose U.S. international engagement. Instead, this dissertation joins other research suggesting that fairness of sacrifice, proper recognition and compensation for it, are central to sustaining support. When costs are broadly shared or perceived to be fairly distributed, and when sacrifice is publicly affirmed, support can plausibly be sustained and made more resilient. This interpretation echoes an intuition voiced by FDR near the end of WWII: the war may have temporary secured support, but it did not permanently end public skepticism of international engagement.

The lesson from this dissertation is that public support for grand strategy is tied not only to partisanship or strategic logic, but to notions of shared sacrifice, local meaning, and symbolic recognition. Elite appeals to a bygone era of consensus often miss this, and in doing so, risk perpetuating the very resentment and public disconnect from foreign policy they seek to overcome. Recognizing this reality is a necessary step for anyone seeking to advance a particular vision for U.S. engagement in the world, whether expansive or more restrained.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX FOR CHAPTER 3

Putting War in the Postwar Consensus: Local Sacrifice and Public Support for Active Global Engagement

A War Data Sources and Coding

In this section, I describe the sources and processing involved to prepare the local war deaths data used in my main analyses. I first explain my process for identifying and collecting the data. Next, I describe the steps involved in processing and cleaning the data. While several casualties studies have used the same data I describe here, I performed the full data collection and processing working starting with the raw data, clean it, and prepare it for my own purposes. I then walk through the creation of the proportional and intensity-based measures of war exposure.

A.1 Sources for Historical War Data

Table 3.1 in the main text reports summary statistics for the WWII exposure variables used to operationalize my theory's variables of coercive intensity and distribution of sacrifice. Here, I describe the sources used to construct these variables. As noted in footnote 15 of the main text, I also collected Vietnam War casualty data. Although I do not include these in the main analyses, in include them here to mention the additional steps necessary to create county level measures of Vietnam War exposure, which could support future research building on my analyses.

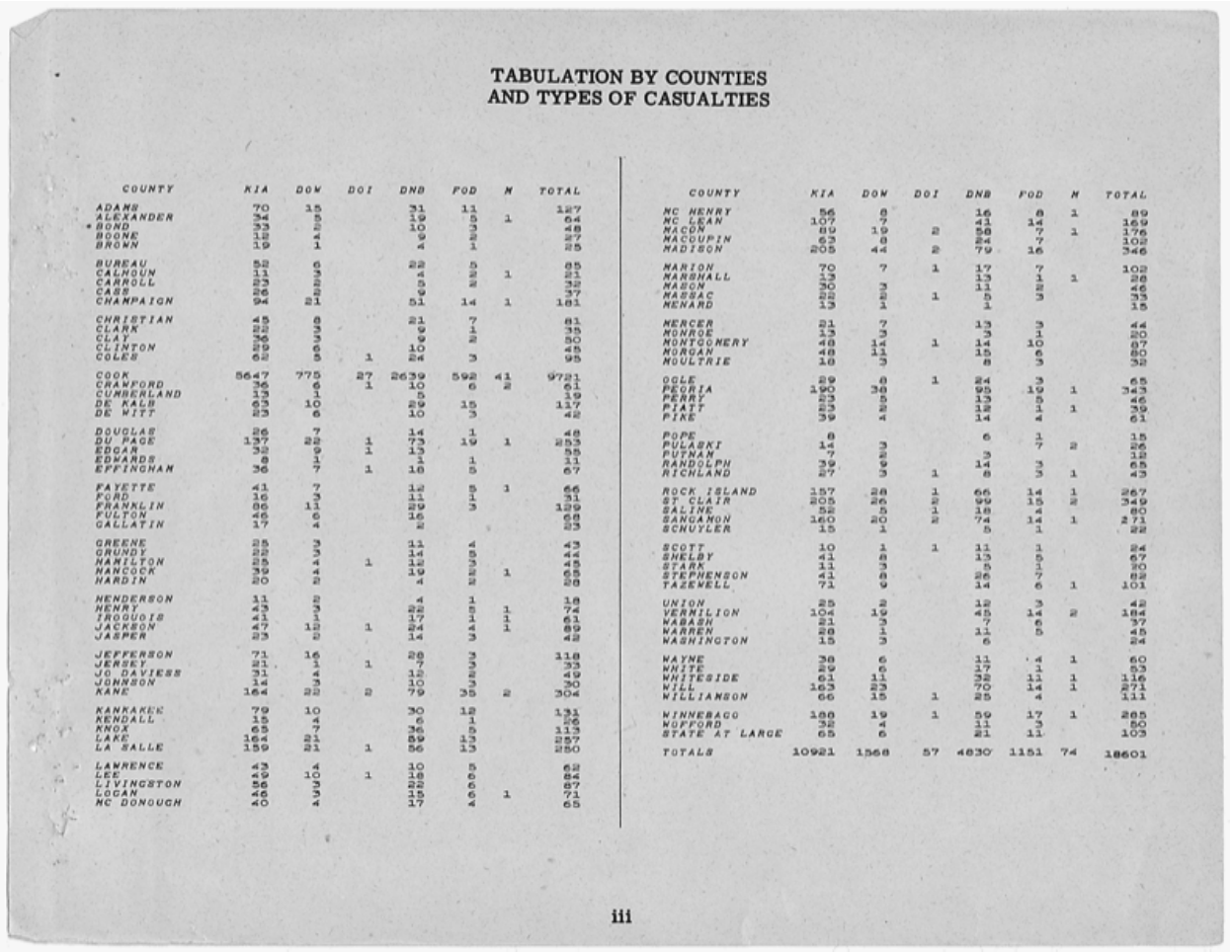
WWII Casualties

There are two main sources for data on American WWII casualties. The first is the *WWII State Army Honor Lists* maintained by the National Archives.[1] These booklets list the individual Army soldiers from each county who died during the war.[2] The second source is a newly released individual level dataset created by Andreas Ferrara (2024), made available through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR 38927). Based on the same county level casualty booklets, Ferrara's dataset links individual casualty records to the soldiers' enlistment record, matching on their unique Army Serial Number (ASN). This resource was published after I had already collected and processed the county casualty data, but as I mention below, ICPSR 38927 enabled me to create my measure of coercive intensity based on county level draftee deaths.

Each state booklet includes a tabulation page listing the number of casualties by type and total for each county in the state. Each tabulation page includes a column for KIA (killed in action), DOW (died of wounds), DOI (died of injuries), DNB (died non battle), FOD (finding of death), M (missing), and Total. For example, Figure 3A.1 shows the county tabulation page from the Illinois booklet available on the National Archives webpage.[3] Cook County, Illinois, the county in which Chicago resides, had a total of 9,721 Army casualties during WWII, 5,647 of which (58%) were killed in action. From these pages, it is possible to create a county level dataset of WWII Army deaths that includes both total county casualties and casualties by type. The first casualties study to make use of these data, as far as I can identify, was Kriner and Shen (2010). At an early stage

[1] "WWII Army and Army Air Force Casualties" state booklets available from the National Archives. https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/army-casualties.
[2] The Army at the time included the Army Air Corps, the precursor to the Air Force. Additional booklets exist for Navy and Marine Corps personnel, although the formatting is slightly different from the Army state booklets. https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/navy-casualties.
[3] https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/army-casualties/illinois.html.

of this project, I did not know that Kriner and Shen (2010) had already hand coded this dataset into .csv format, I personally hand coded this dataset into my own .csv file. Later, after learning they used the same data, Douglas Kriner generously shared his data with me. I compared our two county level datasets and confirmed strong inter-coder reliability.



TABULATION BY COUNTIES
AND TYPES OF CASUALTIES

COUNTY	KIA	DOW	DOI	DNB	FOD	M	TOTAL
ADAMS	70	15		31	11		127
ALEXANDER	34	5		19	5	1	64
BOND	33	2		10	3		48
BOONE	12	1		9	2		27
BROWN	19	1		4	1		25
BUREAU	52	6		22	5		85
CALHOUN	11	3		4	2	1	21
CARROLL	23	2		6	2		32
CASS	26	2		9			37
CHAMPAIGN	94	21		51	14	1	181
CHRISTIAN	45	8		21	7		81
CLARK	22	3		9	1		35
CLAY	36	3		9	2		50
CLINTON	29	3		10			45
COLES	62	5	1	24	3		95
COOK	5647	775	27	2639	592	41	9721
CRAWFORD	36	6	1	10	6	2	61
CUMBERLAND	13	1		5			19
DE KALB	63	10		29	15		117
DE WITT	23	6		10	3		42
DOUGLAS	26	7		14	1		48
DU PAGE	137	22	1	73	19	1	253
EDGAR	32	9	1	13			55
EDWARDS	8	1		1	1		11
EFFINGHAM	36	7	1	18	5		67
FAYETTE	41	7		12	5	1	66
FORD	16	3		11	1		31
FRANKLIN	86	11		29	3		129
FULTON	46	6		16			68
GALLATIN	17	4		2			23
GREENE	25	3		11	4		43
GRUNDY	22	5		14	3		44
HAMILTON	25	4	1	12	3		45
HANCOCK	32	4		19	3	1	59
HARDIN	20	2		4	2		28
HENDERSON	11	2		4	1		18
HENRY	43	3		22	5	1	74
IROQUOIS	41	1		17	1	1	61
JACKSON	47	12	1	24	4	1	89
JASPER	23	2		14	3		42
JEFFERSON	71	16		28	3		118
JERSEY	21	1	1	7	3		33
JO DAVIESS	31	4		12	2		49
JOHNSON	12	3		10	5		30
KANE	164	22	2	79	35	2	304
KANKAKEE	79	10		30	12		131
KENDALL	15	4		6	1		26
KNOX	65	7		36	5		113
LAKE	164	21		89	13		287
LA SALLE	159	21	1	56	13		250
LAWRENCE	43	4		10	5		62
LEE	49	10	1	18	6		84
LIVINGSTON	56	3		22	6		87
LOGAN	46	3		15	6	1	71
MC DONOUGH	40	4		17	4		65
MC HENRY	56	8		16	8	1	89
MC LEAN	107	7		41	14		169
MACON	89	19	2	58	7	1	176
MACOUPIN	62	8		24	7		102
MADISON	205	44	2	79	16		346
MARION	70	7	1	17	7		102
MARSHALL	13			13	1	1	28
MASON	30	3		11	2		46
MASSAC	22	2	1	5	3		33
MENARD	13	1		1			15
MERCER	21	7		13	3		44
MONROE	15	3		3	1		20
MONTGOMERY	48	14	1	14	10		87
MORGAN	48	11		15	6		80
MOULTRIE	18	3		8	3		32
OGLE	29	8	1	24	3		65
PEORIA	190	30		95	19	1	343
PERRY	23	5		13	5		46
PIATT	23	2		12	1	1	39
PIKE	39	4		14	4		61
POPE	8			6	1		15
PULASKI	14	3			7	2	26
PUTNAM	7	2		3			12
RANDOLPH	39	9		14	3		65
RICHLAND	27	3	1	8	3	1	43
ROCK ISLAND	157	28	1	66	14	1	267
ST CLAIR	205	26	2	99	15	2	349
SALINE	52	5	1	18	4		80
SANGAMON	160	20	2	74	14	1	271
SCHUYLER	15	1		5	1		22
SCOTT	10	1	1	11	1		24
SHELBY	41	8		13	5		67
STARK	11	3		5	1		20
STEPHENSON	41	8		26	7		82
TAZEWELL	71	9		14	6	1	101
UNION	25	2		12	3		42
VERMILION	104	19		45	14	2	184
WABASH	21	3		7	6		37
WARREN	28	1		11	5		45
WASHINGTON	15	3		6			24
WAYNE	38	6		11	4	1	60
WHITE	29	6		17	1		53
WHITESIDE	61	11		32	11	1	116
WILL	163	23		70	14	1	271
WILLIAMSON	66	15	1	25	4		111
WINNEBAGO	180	19	1	59	17	1	285
WOODFORD	32	4		11	3		50
STATE AT LARGE	65	6		21	11		103
TOTALS	10921	1568	57	4830	1151	74	18601

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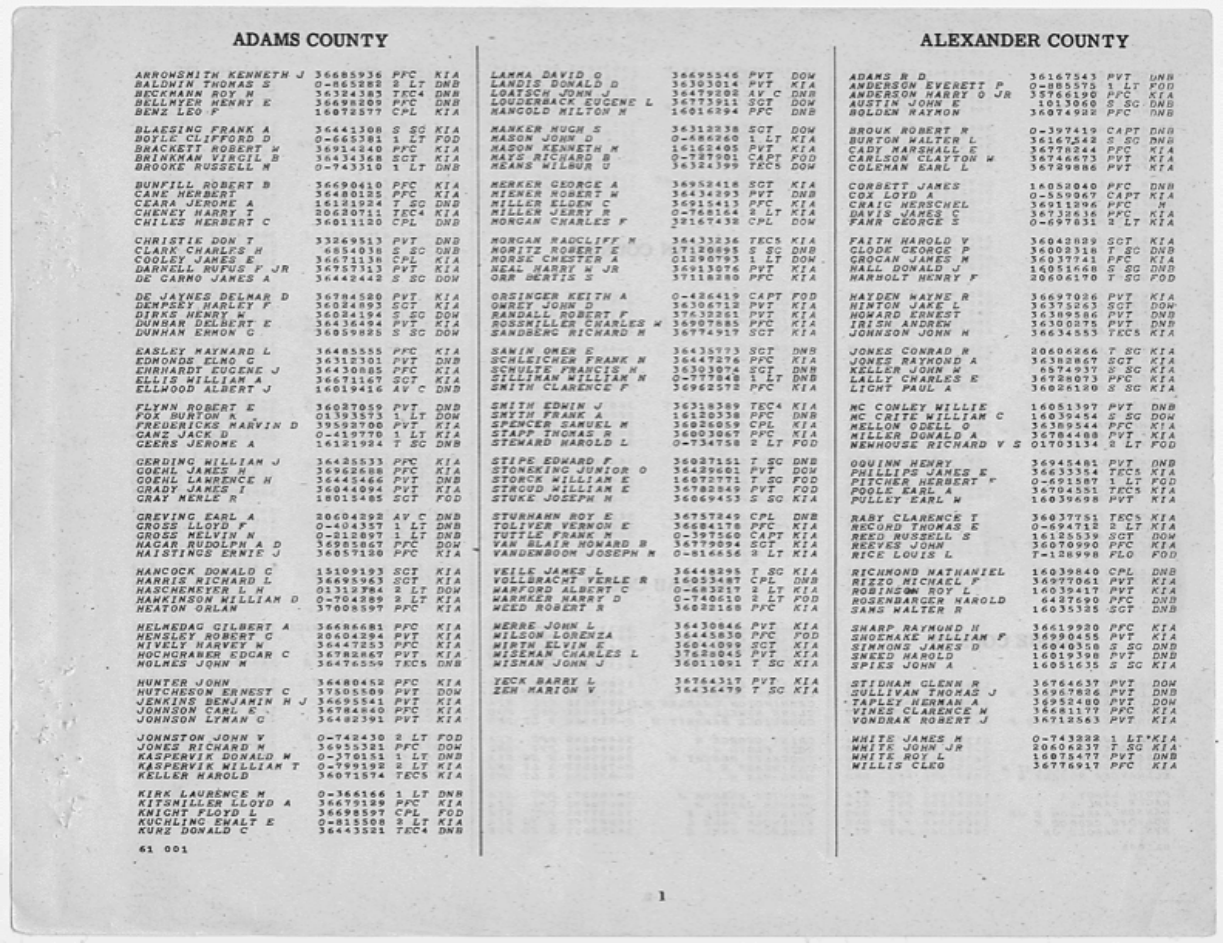
Note: This page reports the county level Army casualties in Illinois during WWII. The figures on this page correspond to a tabulation of the individual casualties listed in the remainder of the booklet by county.

Figure 3A.1. Illinois WWII Army Casualties by County

In addition to the county tabulation page, each state booklet lists the individual Army soldiers who died in the war organized by their county of residence at the time of enlistment. An example from the first page of the Illinois booklet is shown in Figure 3A.2. Each row on the page in Figure 3A.2 corresponds to a soldier. The first column lists the soldier's name (LAST FIRST

MI), followed by the Army Serial Number (ASN), rank, and casualty type. Importantly, the ASN is a unique identifier that can be used to identify the same soldier in other micro-level WWII datasets, such as the Army enlistments dataset and the Army POW dataset.[4] Using the unique ASN corresponding to each soldier in these booklets, we can search the soldier in the WWII Army enlistment database to find their demographic information captured at their time of enlistment. For example, the first casualty listed under Alexander County in Figure 3A.2, R D Adams (36167543), was a Black draftee soldier with three years of high school education, born in 1919, and enlisted in January of 1942, just a month after the U.S. formally entered the war.



ADAMS COUNTY

ARROWSMITH KENNETH J	36885936	PFC	KIA
BALDWIN THOMAS S	O-865882	2 LT	DNB
BECKMANN ROY H	36324385	TEC4	DNB
BELLMYER HENRY E	36698209	PFC	DNB
BENZ LEO F	16072577	CPL	KIA
BLAESING FRANK A	36441308	S SG	KIA
BOYLE CLIFFORD D	O-665381	1 LT	FOD
BRACKETT ROBERT W	36914240	PFC	KIA
BRINKMAN VIRGIL B	36434368	SGT	KIA
BROOKE RUSSELL M	O-743310	1 LT	DNB
BUNFILL ROBERT B	36690410	PFC	KIA
CANE HERBERT	36480135	PFC	KIA
CEARA JEROME A	16121924	T SG	DNB
CHENEY HARRY T	20620711	TEC4	KIA
CHILES HERBERT C	36011130	CPL	DNB
CHRISTIE DON T	33269513	PVT	DNB
CLARK CHARLES H	6854038	S SG	DNB
COOLEY JAMES E	36671138	CPL	KIA
DARNELL RUFUS F JR	36757313	PVT	KIA
DE CARMO JAMES A	36442442	S SG	DOW
DE JAYNES DELMAR D	36784580	PVT	KIA
DEMPSEY HARLEY F	36024893	SGT	KIA
DIRKS HENRY W	36024194	S SG	DOW
DUNBAR DELBERT E	36436494	PVT	KIA
DUNHAM EMMON C	36699385	S SG	DOW
EASLEY MAYNARD L	36485555	PFC	KIA
EDMONDS ELMO C	36312301	PVT	DNB
EHRHARDT EUGENE J	36430885	PFC	KIA
ELLIS WILLIAM A	36671167	SGT	KIA
ELLWOOD ALBERT J	16019416	AV C	DNB
FLYNN ROBERT E	36027059	PVT	DNB
FOX BURTON A	01393573	1 LT	DOW
FREDERICKS MARVIN D	39593700	PVT	KIA
GANZ JACK D	O-412770	1 LT	KIA
GEERS JEROME A	16121924	T SG	DNB
GERDING WILLIAM J	36425533	PFC	KIA
GOEHL JAMES H	36962688	PFC	KIA
GOEHL LAWRENCE H	36445466	PVT	DNB
GRADY JAMES I	36044894	PVT	KIA
GRAY MERLE R	18015485	SGT	FOD
GREVING EARL A	20604292	AV C	DNB
GROSS LLOYD F	O-404357	1 LT	DNB
GROSS MELVIN N	O-212897	1 LT	DNB
HAGAR RUDOLPH A D	36295067	PFC	DOW
HAISTINGS ERNIE J	36057120	PFC	KIA
HANCOCK DONALD C	15109193	SGT	KIA
HARRIS RICHARD L	36695963	SGT	KIA
HASCHEMEYER L H	01312784	2 LT	DOW
HAWKINSON WILLIAM D	O-704289	2 LT	KIA
HEATON ORLAN	37008597	PFC	KIA
HELMEDAG GILBERT A	36686681	PFC	KIA
HENSLEY ROBERT C	20604294	PVT	KIA
HIVELY HARVEY W	36447253	PVT	KIA
HOCHGRABER EDGAR C	16782867	PVT	KIA
HOLMES JOHN M	36476559	TEC5	DNB
HUNTER JOHN	36480452	PFC	KIA
HUTCHESON ERNEST C	37505509	PVT	DOW
JENKINS BENJAMIN H J	36695541	PVT	KIA
JOHNSON CARL E	36784840	PFC	KIA
JOHNSON LYMAN C	36482391	PVT	KIA
JOHNSTON JOHN V	O-742430	2 LT	FOD
JONES RICHARD M	36955321	PFC	DOW
KASPERVIK DONALD W	O-2701551	1 LT	DNB
KASPERVIK WILLIAM T	O-799192	2 LT	KIA
KELLER HAROLD	36071874	TEC5	KIA
KIRK LAURENCE M	O-366166	1 LT	DNB
KITSMILLER LLOYD A	36679129	PFC	KIA
KNIGHT FLOYD L	36698597	CPL	FOD
KUCHLING EMALT E	O-815508	2 LT	KIA
KURZ DONALD C	36443521	TEC4	DNB
LAMMA DAVID O	36695346	PVT	DOW
LANDIS DONALD D	36303014	PVT	KIA
LOATSCH JOHN J	36479208	AV C	DNB
LOUDERBACK EUGENE L	36773911	SGT	DOW
MANCOLD MILTON M	16016894	PFC	DNB
MANKER HUGH S	36312338	SGT	DOW
MASON JOHN D	O-686360	1 LT	KIA
MASON KENNETH M	16162405	PVT	KIA
MAYS RICHARD B	O-787901	CAPT	FOD
MEANS WILBUR U	36321599	TEC5	DOW
MERKER GEORGE A	36952416	SGT	KIA
MIENER NORBERT W	36434393	PVT	DNB
MILLER ELDEN C	36915413	PFC	KIA
MILLER JERRY R	O-768164	2 LT	KIA
MONCAN CHARLES F	32167458	CPL	DOW
MONCAN NADCLIFF M	36433236	TEC5	KIA
MORITZ ROBERT E	37128895	S SG	DNB
MORSE CHESTER A	01290793	1 LT	DOW
NEAL HARRY W JR	36913076	PVT	KIA
ORR BERTIS S	37118280	PFC	KIA
ORSINGER KEITH A	O-426419	CAPT	FOD
OWREY JOHN D	36306712	PVT	KIA
RANDALL ROBERT F	37633261	PVT	KIA
ROSSMILLER CHARLES W	36907685	PFC	KIA
SANDBERG RICHARD M	36774917	SGT	KIA
SAWIN OMER E	36435773	SGT	DNB
SCHLEICHER FRANK N	36447276	PFC	KIA
SCHULTE FRANCIS H	36303074	SGT	DNB
SILLIMAN WILLIAM H	O-777848	1 LT	DNB
SMITH CLARENCE F	36962572	PFC	KIA
SMITH EDWIN J	36318389	TEC4	KIA
SMYTH FRANK A	16120538	PFC	DNB
SPENCER SAMUEL M	36026059	CPL	KIA
STAPP THOMAS R	36023067	PFC	KIA
STEWARD HAROLD L	O-734758	2 LT	FOD
STIPE EDWARD F	36037151	T SG	DNB
STONEKING JUNIOR O	36439601	PVT	DOW
STORCK WILLIAM E	16072771	T SG	FOD
STROUD WILLIAM E	36782849	PVT	FOD
STUKE JOSEPH M	36069453	S SG	KIA
STURMANN ROY E	36757249	CPL	DNB
TOLIVER VERNON E	36684178	PFC	KIA
TUTTLE FRANK M	O-397560	CAPT	KIA
VAN BLAIR HOWARD B	36779894	SGT	KIA
VANDENBOOM JOSEPH M	O-816656	2 LT	KIA
VEILE JAMES L	36448295	T SG	KIA
VOLLBRACHT VERLE R	16053487	CPL	DNB
WARFORD ALBERT C	O-683217	2 LT	KIA
WARNKEN HARRY D	O-740610	2 LT	FOD
WEED ROBERT R	36032168	PFC	KIA
WERRE JOHN L	36430846	PVT	KIA
WILSON LORENZA	36445830	PFC	FOD
WIRTH ELVIN E	36044090	SGT	KIA
WISEMAN CHARLES L	37680845	PVT	KIA
WISMAN JOHN J	36011091	T SG	KIA
YECK BARRY L	36764317	PVT	KIA
ZEH MARION V	36436479	T SG	KIA

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ALEXANDER COUNTY

ADAMS R D	36167543	PVT	DNB
ANDERSON EVERETT P	O-885575	1 LT	FOD
ANDERSON HARRY O JR	35766190	PFC	KIA
AUSTIN JOHN E	1013060	S SG	DNB
BOLDEN RAYMON	36074922	PFC	DNB
BROUK ROBERT R	O-397419	CAPT	DNB
BURTON WALTER L	36167542	S SG	DNB
CADY MARSHALL E	36778244	PFC	KIA
CARLSON CLAYTON W	36746673	PVT	KIA
COLEMAN EARL L	36729886	PVT	KIA
CORBETT JAMES	16052040	PFC	DNB
COX LOYD A	O-559067	CAPT	KIA
CRAIG HERSCHEL	36911296	PFC	M
DAVIS JAMES C	36738636	PFC	KIA
FANN GEORGE	O-697031	1 LT	KIA
FAITH HAROLD V	36042829	SGT	KIA
GLODE GEORGE P	36003316	T SG	DNB
GROGAN JAMES M	36037741	PFC	KIA
HALL DONALD J	16051668	S SG	DNB
HARBOLT HENRY F	20606178	T SG	FOD
HAYDEN WAYNE R	36697026	PVT	KIA
HINTON JAKE L	36375263	SGT	DOW
HOWARD ERNEST	36309586	PVT	DNB
IRISH ANDREW	36300875	PVT	DNB
JACKSON JAMES W	36634345	TEC5	KIA
JONES CONRAD R	20606266	T SG	KIA
JONES RAYMOND A	36388867	SGT	KIA
KELLER JOHN W	6574937	S SG	KIA
LALLY CHARLES E	36728073	PFC	KIA
LICHT PAUL A	36026120	S SG	KIA
MC CONLEY WILLIE	16051397	PVT	DNB
MC CRITE WILLIAM C	16039454	S SG	DOW
MELLON ODELL O	36389544	PFC	KIA
MILLER DONALD A	36784488	PVT	KIA
NEWHOUSE RICHARD V S	01703134	2 LT	FOD
OQUINN HENRY	36945481	PVT	DNB
PHILLIPS JAMES E	36633354	TEC5	KIA
PITCHER HERBERT F	O-691587	1 LT	FOD
POOLE EARL A	36774591	TEC5	KIA
PULLEY EARL W	16039698	PVT	KIA
RABY CLARENCE T	36037751	TEC5	KIA
RECORD THOMAS E	O-694712	2 LT	KIA
REED RUSSELL S	16125539	SGT	DOW
REEVES JOHN	36079090	PFC	KIA
RICE LOUIS L	T-128998	FLO	FOD
RICHMOND NATHANIEL	16039840	CPL	DNB
RIZZO MICHAEL F	36977061	PVT	KIA
ROBINSON ROY L	16039417	PVT	KIA
ROSENBARGER HAROLD	6427690	PFC	DNB
SAMS WALTER R	16035325	SGT	DNB
SHARP RAYMOND H	36619930	PFC	KIA
SHOEMAKE WILLIAM F	36990455	PVT	KIA
SIMMONS JAMES D	16040358	S SG	DNB
SMEED HAROLD	16019398	PVT	DNB
SPIES JOHN A	16051635	S SG	KIA
STIDHAM GLENN R	36764637	PVT	DOW
SULLIVAN THOMAS J	36967826	PVT	DNB
TAPLEY HENMAN A	36952480	PVT	DOW
VINES CLARENCE W	36468177	PFC	KIA
VONDRAK ROBERT J	36712563	PVT	KIA
WHITE JAMES M	O-743282	1 LT	KIA
WHITE JOHN JR	20606237	T SG	KIA
WHITE ROY L	16075477	PVT	DNB
WILLIS CLEO	36776917	PFC	KIA

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Figure 3A.2. Illinois WWII Individual Army Casualties, Adams and Alexander Counties

[4] The ASN can be used to search the WWII army enlistments database on the National Archives website: https://aad.archives.gov/aad/fielded-search.jsp?dt=893&tf=F&cat=WR26&bc=,sl.

The advantage of these individual level casualty lists is that they can be matched with the Army enlistment dataset by the unique ASN identifier. This is exactly what Ferrara (2024) does in the combined WWII Army Enlistments and Casualties dataset, my second source of county level war exposure data.

A major advantage of Ferrara's (2024) contribution with ICPSR 38927 is that it merges the enlistment dataset with the casualty datasets. Therefore, this enables an inference of whether an enlisted soldier died in the war, and importantly, what their enlistment status was. This is relevant for my theory because it enables me to determine the proportion of drafted soldiers from each county that died in the war. Another advantage of ICPSR 38927 is that it makes available Navy casualty data. Unlike the Army enlistment dataset, however, it is not possible to discern the demographic information for each individual sailor or Marine or died. While we know that almost all draftees were sent to the Army, it is not possible to know the race or other socio-demographic information. Therefore, the main takeaway is that while the raw county casualty tabulations from the National Archives enables a straightforward understanding of county level proportional deaths, ICPSR 38927 enables the analysis of coercive intensity, or deaths by enlistment type.

Korean War Casualties

The data on Korean War Casualties comes from the TAGOKOR dataset from the National Archives.[5] Like the WWII Army Enlistments dataset, the Korean War casualty dataset is searchable in an online database maintained by the National Archives Access to Archival Databases system.[6] I use the TAGOKOR dataset instead of the Korean Conflict Casualty File (KCCF) because it

[5] Record Group 407 Records of the [U.S. Army] Adjutant General's Office, Korean War casualty File (TAGOKOR), 1950-53.
[6] https://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=531&cat=GP24&bc=,sl.

includes additional detail on death *type*.[7] Converting the raw individual level Korean War casualty data into a usable county level dataset entailed several steps. First, the raw dataset is processed into a usable dataframe format using the variable codes provided by NARA. Second, the casualties are aggregated to the county and state of residence. The end result is a county-state dataset that includes the following variables:

- **Total war deaths**: Total number of Army soldiers that died in the Korean War.
- **Total KIA**: Total number of Army soldiers that were killed in action in the Korean War.
- **Total DOI**: Total number of Army soldiers that died of injuries in the Korean War.
- **Total DNB**: Total number of Army soldiers that died not in battle during the Korean War.
- **Total MIA**: Total number of Army soldiers determined to be missing in action during the Korean War.

I normalize these data using the 1950 Census to create per capita measures of county proportional deaths.

Vietnam War Casualties

The data on Vietnam War casualties come from the Vietnam Conflict Extract Data File, which is part of the Defense Casualty Analysis System (DCAS) Files. This file is downloadable in raw format from the National Archives.[8] This file, like the WWII Army enlistments and Korean War casualties, is also searchable online through the Access to Archival Databases (AAD) system.[9] An important limitation of the Vietnam casualties file is that its observations are reported at the place level: casualty corresponds to a city and state. To obtain the casualty's county of residence, I matched city-state combinations to counties with a standard county crosswalk. While more

[7] https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1127772.
[8] National Archives Record Group 330, Vietnam Conflict Extract Data File, Defense Casualty Analysis System (DCAS) Extract Files, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/2240992.
[9] https://aad.archives.gov/aad/fielded-search.jsp?dt=2513&tf=F&cat=WR27&bc=,sl.

complex and requiring an additional step compared to the WWII and Korean War datasets, this results in a county level dataset of Vietnam War deaths that can enable future extensions of my approach in this chapter.

A.2 Creating Proportional and Intensity Based Measures of War Exposure

In the Research Design section, I describe how I create the main measures of war exposure I use to operationalize my theory. Table 3A.1 summarizes the main war exposure variables created for the main analyses. Note that Death intensity (%) for WWII is listed but not included in the main analyses. This refers to all deaths as a proportion of all enlisted. Moreover, as noted elsewhere, the Vietnam war variables are included here for reference but excluded in the main analyses. The geographic distribution of these variables are displayed in Figure 3A.3.

Table 3A.1. Summary Statistics of Historical County Level Exposure

War	Variable	N	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Data Source
WWII	Deaths per cap.	3,076	23.34	22.75	9.388	0	238.1	WWII State Honor Lists[a]
	Draftee deaths (%)	3,076	0.722	0.75	0.174	0	1	ICPSR 38927[b]
	Death intensity (%)	3,076	0.047	0.042	0.022	0	0.2	WWII Army Enlistment File[c]
	KIA (% of deaths)	3,076	0.576	0.583	0.109	0	1	NARA State Honor Lists
Korea	Deaths per cap.	3,112	2.118	1.876	1.572	0	15.835	TAGOKOR[d]
	KIA (% of deaths)	3,112	0.727	0.75	0.26	0	1	TAGOKOR
Vietnam	Deaths per cap.	3,140	3.226	2.967	2.117	0	21.67	DCAS[e]
	KIA (% of all deaths)	3,140	0.691	0.71	0.232	0	1	DCAS

Note: Deaths per cap. is calculated as deaths per 10,000 county residents. Draftee deaths (%) is the proportion of dead soldiers who were drafted. Death intensity (%) is the proportion of all soldiers who died. KIA (% of all deaths) is the proportion of all deaths who died in direct combat.

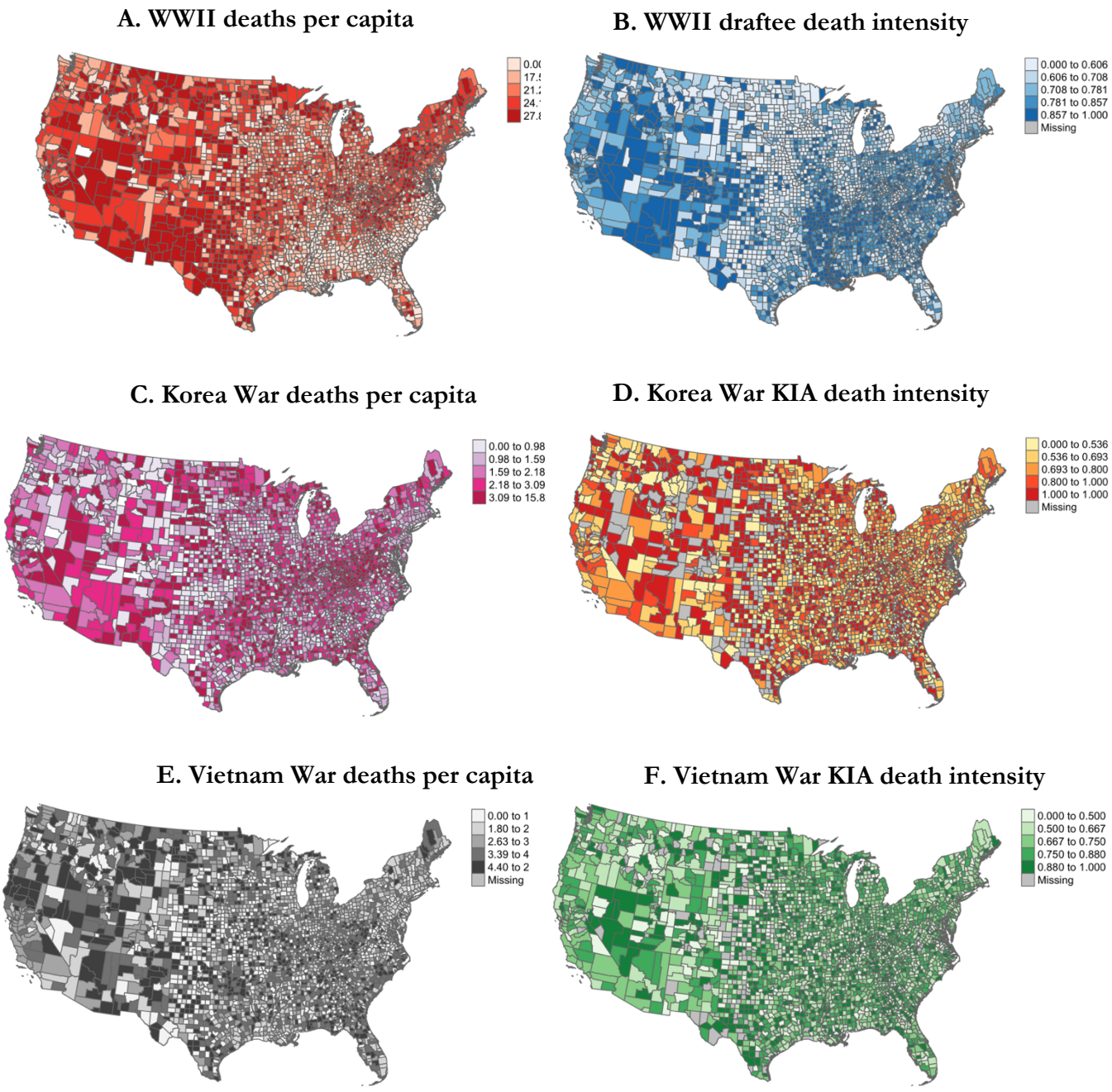
[a] "WWII Army and Army Air Force Casualties" state booklets available from the National Archives.

[b] DS 2: WWII Enlistment Records and Casualties Matched. Draftee deaths were aggregated at the county level and then merged with the dataset of county level casualties created with the NARA state booklets. It is not possible to use DS 1: Army and Air Force Casualties to create a county level dataset of draftee deaths because there are many errors in the assignment of a soldier death to the correct county. Therefore, the Draftee deaths (%) relies on dead soldiers matched to their county of residence at enlistment but this is an undercount due to the matching technique used.

[c] National Archives Record Group 64, Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938 – 1946.

[d] National Archives Record Group 407, Korean Conflict Casualties File (TAGOKOR).

[e] National Archives Record Group 330, Vietnam Conflict Extract Data File, Defense Casualty Analysis System.



Note: Per capita WWII deaths in Panel A are calculated as deaths per 10,000 county residents using the 1940 census. Korean War deaths per capita in Panel B are per 10,000 county residents using the 1950 census. Vietnam War deaths in Panel E are calculated as per 10,000 county residents using the 1970 census.

Figure 3A.3. County War Exposure in WWII, the Korean War, and Vietnam War

B Public Opinion Data Sources and Coding

In this section, I discuss the source and question wordings of the public opinion surveys used in my analyses. Because no surveys asked the WORLD ROLE question before WWII, I collect surveys that asked various questions related to U.S. policy toward the war. From these items, I construct an aggregate measure of support for U.S. interventionism, which I argue is broadly comparable to the affirmative position on the postwar WORLD ROLE question. While I discuss in the main text that this is not a perfect solution, I argue that it is both the best historical data available and it is theoretically sound, given that both sets of questions gauge similar orientations toward global engagement.

I first introduce the sources of the public opinion surveys and then detail the question wording. I then present supplementary regression results that are referenced but not included in the main text.

B.1 Public Opinion Questions and Sources

B.1.1 Pre-WWII

As I write in the main text, I create an index of pre-WWII interventionism to represent a baseline from which to evaluate wartime shifts in public opinion about grand strategy. Because the WORLD ROLE survey question was not fielded until after the U.S. entered the war, I need a measure of prewar beliefs. Therefore, I rely on survey questions fielded before the U.S. entered WWII that offer the closest comparison to the ideas captured in the postwar WORLD ROLE question.

In this section, I introduce the survey questions I use to create my index of pre-WWII interventionism. These questions were aggregated into the "Pre-WWII Interventionism" variable

included as a control in regression models discussed in the main text. The index constructed from these survey items enables my analysis of *change* in post-WWII opinion from this prewar baseline.

Table 3B.1. Pre-WWII Public Opinion Surveys

Topic	Polls	Obs.	Toplines Averages
Enter War (Sept. 1940-Nov. 1941)	6	18,609	Favor: 0.22 Oppose: 0.74
Neutrality (Nov. 1939-Nov. 1941)	6	18,649	Support amendments: 0.51 Oppose amendments: 0.39
Draft (June 1940-Nov. 1941)	6	17,755	Support: 0.45 Oppose: .49
Convoys (Jan. 1941-Sept. 1941)	6	18,396	Support: 0.54 Oppose: 0.37
War Options (May 1940-Nov. 1941)	6	18,491	Keep out: 0.43 Help UK/France: 0.55

Note: Topline Averages are calculated as the mean response for each of the two main opposing response options. The two response options listed in the column map onto the debate over U.S. involvement in WWII, and by extension, it's grand strategy. For example, supporting amendments to the Neutrality Act was equivalent to greater U.S. involvement, whereas opposing the amendments was aimed at limiting the possibility the U.S. could become a belligerent.

Table 3B.1 summarizes the prewar surveys used to create the pre-WWII interventionism index. The questions were selected to be representative of the main issues at stake in debates over U.S. involvement in WWII. For each topic area, I selected polls that ranged the full timeframe of public debate on the war.

Below, I list every pre-WWII poll, the question wording, and response options. These polls are used to create my prewar county level MRP estimate of support for U.S. intervention.

Enter War

1. **September 1940 (AIPO212):** "If you were asked to vote today on the question of the United States entering the war against Germany and Italy would you favor entering the war or staying out of the war?"

   Go in: 17% Stay out: 83% No opinion: 8%

2. **January 1941 (OPOR 806):** "If you were asked to vote today on the question of the United States entering the war against Germany and Italy, how would you vote – to go into the war, or to stay out of the war?"

Go in: 14% Stay out: 81% Don't know: 5%

3. **April 1941 (AIPO 234):** "If you were asked to vote today on the question of the United States entering the war against Germany and Italy, how would you vote – to go into the war, or to stay out of the war?"

Go in: 19% Stay out: 81%

4. **July 1941 (AIPO 241):** "If you were asked to vote today on the question of the United States entering the war now against Germany and Italy, how would you vote – to go into the war now, or to stay out of the war?"

Go in: 27% Stay out: 67% No opinion: 6%

5. **September 1941 (AIPO 247):** "If you were asked to vote today on the question of the United States entering the war now against Germany and Italy, how would you vote – to go into the war now, or to stay out of the war?"

Go in: 28% Stay out: 68% No opinion: 5%

6. **November 1941 (AIPO 252):** "It has been suggested that Congress pass a resolution declaring that a state of war exists between the United States and Germany. Would you favor, or oppose such a resolution at this time?"

Favor: 26% Oppose: 63% No opinion: 11%

Neutrality

1. **November 1939 (AIPO 176):** "Do you think Congress was right or wrong when it changes the Neutrality Law so that England and France or any other nations can buy war materials, including arms and airplanes, in the United States?"

Right: 58% Wrong: 28% Undecided: 10% No opinion: 4%

2. **November 1939 (AIPO 176):** "Do you approve the change which Congress made in the Neutrality Act which permits nations at war to buy arms and airplanes in this country?"

Yes: 62% No: 27% Don't know: 11%

3. **June 1940 (AIPO 197):** "The Neutrality Law prevents American ships from traveling in the war zone in Europe. Should this law be changed so that American ships can carry war supplies to England and France?"

   Yes: 18% No: 75% Undecided: 8%

4. **September 1941 (AIPO 248):** "Should the Neutrality Act be changed to permit American merchant ships with American crews to carry war materials to Britain?"

   Yes: 46% No: 40% No opinion: 14%

5. **October 1941 (AIPO 249):** "Should the Neutrality Act be changed to permit American merchant ships with American crews to carry war materials to Britain?"

   Yes: 51% No: 40% No opinion: 9%

6. **November 1941 (AIPO 254):** "Congress has voted to change the Neutrality Act to permit American merchant ships with American crews to carry war materials to Britain. Do you approve, or disapprove?"

   Approve: 68% Disapprove: 25% No opinion: 7%

Draft

1. **June 1940 (AIPO 199):** "Do you think every able-bodied young man 20 years old should be made to serve in the army or the navy for one year?"

   Yes: 59% No: 35% No opinion: 6%

2. **April 1941 (AIPO 235):** "At present men between the ages of 18 and 21 are not drafted. Do you think the law should be changed so that men between the ages of 18 and 21 would be included in the draft along with those from 21 to 35?"

   Yes: 50% No: 44% No opinion: 6%

3. **July 1941 (AIPO 243):** "The Army has asked Congress to change the law which says drafted men cannot be sent to fight outside of North or South America or this country's possessions. Do you think Congress should give the Army power to send drafted soldiers to any part of the world?"

   Yes: 40% No: 52% No opinion: 8%

4. **August 1941 (AIPO 245):** "The Army has asked Congress to change the law which says drafted men cannot be sent to fight outside of North or South America or this country's possessions. Do you think Congress should give the Army power to send drafted soldiers to any part of the world?"

   Yes: 38% No: 56% No opinion: 6%

5. **October 1941 (AIPO 250):** "The Army has asked Congress to change the law which says drafted men cannot be sent to fight outside of North or South America or this country's possessions. Do you think Congress should give the Army power to send drafted soldiers to any part of the world?"

   Yes: 42% No: 53% No opinion: 5%

6. **November 1941 (AIPO 254):** "The Army has asked Congress to change the law which says drafted men cannot be sent to fight outside of North or South America or this country's possessions. Do you think Congress should give the Army power to send drafted soldiers to any part of the world?"

   Yes: 43% No: 52% No opinion: 5%

Convoys

1. **January 1941 (AIPO 227):** "If American ships and American crews are used to carry war materials to England should these ships be guarded by our Navy while crossing?"

   Yes: 82% No: 12% No opinion: 6%

2. **April 1941 (AIPO 234):** "Should the United States navy be used to guard ships carrying war materials to Britain?"

   Yes: 41% No: 50% No opinion: 9%

3. **June 1941 (AIPO 239):** "Do you think the United States navy should be used to convoy (guard) ships carrying war materials to Britain?"

   Yes: 55% No: 38% No opinion: 7%

4. **August 1941 (AIPO 244):** "Do you think the United States navy should be used to convoy ships carrying war materials to Britain?"

   Yes: 51% No: 40% No opinion: 9%

5. **September 1941 (AIPO 247):** "Do you think the United States navy should be used to convoy ships carrying war materials to Britain?"

   Yes: 60% No: 33% No opinion: 7%

6. **February 1941 (AIPO 230):** "Since the English have lost many ships, they may not be able to come and get the war materials we make for them. If this proves to be the case, should the American ships with American crews be used to carry war materials to England?"

   Yes: 35% Qualified answer: 8% No: 51% No opinion: 6%

War Options

1. **May 1940 (AIPO 196):** "Which of these two things do you think is the more important for the United States to do 1) Try to help England and France win, even at the risk of getting into the war, or 2) Try to keep out of war ourselves?"

   Keep out of war: 60%
   Help England and France win, even at the risk of getting into the war: 36%
   No choice: 5%

2. **August 1940 (AIPO 207):** "Which of these two things do you think is the more important for the United States to try to do: 1) To keep out of war ourselves, or 2) To help England win, even at the risk of getting into the war?"

   Keep out of war ourselves: 50%
   Help England win, even at the risk of getting into the war: 45%
   No choice: 6%

3. **November 1940 (AIPO 224):** "Which of these two things do you think is the more important? 1) That this country keep out of war, or 2) That Germany be defeated?"

   To keep out of war ourselves: 41%
   To help England win, even at the risk of getting into the war: 60%

4. **March 1941 (OPOR 807):** "Which of these two things do you think is more important for the United States to try to do: 1) To keep out of war ourselves, or 2) To help England win, even at the risk of getting into the war?

   To keep out of war ourselves: 32%
   To help England win, even at the risk of getting into the war: 68%

1. **July 1941 (AIPO 241):** "Which of these two things do you think is the more important for the United States to try to do – 1) To keep out of war ourselves, or 2) To help Britain, even at the risk of getting into the war"

   To keep out of war ourselves: 41%
   To help Britain, even at the risk of getting into the war: 55%
   No choice: 4%

2. **November 1941 (AIPO 253):** "Which of these two things do you think is the more important for the United States to try to do – 1) To stay out of war, even at the risk of letting Germany win, or 2) To do everything we can to defeat Germany, even if this means getting into the war ourselves?"

   Keep out of war: 32% Defeat Germany: 68%

B.1.2 Post-WWII

In the Research Design section of the main text, I write that the main dependent variable in this chapter is public opinion about the U.S.'s role in world affairs. I also mention that I supplement this main outcome with additional survey items that are broadly representative of the postwar consensus about U.S. global engagement. Here, I summarize the broad scope of the WORLD ROLE outcome question and provide the specific question wordings of the supplemental survey items used to capture public opinion on specific foreign policy issues.

B.1.2.1 World Role

Table 3B.2. Public Opinion Data Coverage of the WORLD ROLE Question, 1945-1991

Period	Source	Years	Polls	Obs.	Demographics	Geography
Post-WWII	Gallup	1945-1950	6	15,069	✓	State
	NORC	1947-1956	12	18,439	✓[a]	Region
	ANES	1956-1960	3	4,387	✓	County, District
	Gallup	1964	1	1,611	✓	State
Post-Vietnam	ANES	1972-1990	7	14,600	✓	County, District
	NORC-GSS	1973-1991	12	18,047	✓[a]	Region[b]
	CCFR	1974-1986	4	6,191	✓[a]	State
	Gallup	1991	1	1,005	✓[a]	State

Note: Obs. refers to the total number of observations from the pooled surveys. Geography refers to the lowest level of respondent geography captured in the survey. For example, while the Gallup surveys across both periods include state of residence, the ANES started including county and congressional district of residence in 1956. NORC, however, only includes the four main geographic regions and has restricted researchers' access to geographic data since 1973.

[a] Indicates surveys where the value cutoffs for demographic variables are not comparable to other surveys.

[b] The General Social Survey only makes available respondent region of residence. However, state and county of residence are available through the GSS Sensitive Data Files.

B.1.2.2 Postwar Consensus Specific Questions

Table 3B.3. Post-WWII Public Opinion Surveys

Topic	Surveys	Obs.	Toplines Average
Defense Spending (Feb. 1947-Aug. 1950)	6	7,120	Support spending more/raising taxes: 0.61 Oppose: 0.4
Draft/Universal Military Training (June 1947-Sept. 1956)	7	16,954	Support Draft/UMT: 0.75 Oppose: 0.17
Foreign Aid: Early Cold War (Feb. 1947-March 1949)	6	17,136	Support: 0.41 Oppose: 0.42
Strategic Issues (Sept. 1949-Nov. 1952)	5	11,744	Expansive Interests: 0.55 Selective Interests: 0.29
U.S.-Russia Relations (March 1948-Jan. 1949)	5	12,567	Aggressive/ Confrontational: 0.7 Non-Confrontational: 0.22
NATO (Jan. 1949-June 1949)	6	16,572	Support: 0.67 Oppose: 0.1
United Nations (July 1946-March 1955	5	11,288	Support Strengthen: 0.48 Oppose Strengthen: 0.36
Domestic Issues (Sept. 1949-May 1950)	3	5,530	Different questions

Note: Topline Averages are calculated as the mean response for each of the two main opposing response options. Some topics include multiple questions from the same survey. For example, the Foreign Aid Topline Average is derived from nine questions across six surveys. In some cases, I create binary response categories by grouping different response options. This approach is used for the Strategic Issues and U.S.-Russia Relations Topics. The three questions in the Domestic Issues topic are not amenable to creating a single outcome binary. See the question wordings for more information.

Table 3B.3 summarizes the survey questions used to supplement my analysis of the WORLD ROLE question. Below, I detail the full question wording and response option for each of these survey items. I estimate separate MRP models for each topic and, in some cases where aggregation is not possible due to different wordings, I estimate question specific models. Like the pre-WWII questions discussed in Section B.1.1, these postwar questions were selected for their

representativeness of the broader debates on U.S. foreign policy in the early Cold War. Survey questions on the military draft and domestic issue capture the domestic political environment in which political debates over U.S. global engagement were taking shape.

Defense Spending

1. **February 1947 (AIPO 391):** "Do you think Congress should reduce the amount of money that the army and navy have asked for?"

   Should: 34% Should not: 60% No opinion: 6%

2. **January 1949 (AIPO 436):** "Would you be willing to pay more money in taxes to support a larger: Army?

   Yes: 50% No: 41% No opinion: 9%

3. **January 1949 (AIPO 436):** "Would you be willing to pay more money in taxes to support a larger: Navy?

   Yes: 52% No: 39% No opinion: 10%

4. **January 1949 (AIPO 436):** "Would you be willing to pay more money in taxes to support a larger: Air Force?

   Yes: 61% No: 31% No opinion: 8%

5. **July 1950 (AIPO 459):** "In order to help pay the cost of the war, would you (your husband) be willing to pay a tax of about two week's salary per year, in addition to all other taxes that you pay at present?"

   Yes: 47% No: 30% No opinion: 10%

6. **July 1950 (AIPO 459):** "Some people say federal income taxes must be increased immediately to pay for the present war in Korea and to re-arm the United States. Do you agree or disagree?"

   Agree: 51% Disagree: 29% No opinion: 20%

7. **July 1950 (AIPO 459):** "Some people say the United States should spend a great deal more money than we are spending to offset Russian propaganda and build radio stations all around the world to tell our side of the story. Do you agree or disagree?"

   Agree: 46% Disagree: 38%

Draft/Universal Military Training

1. **June 1947 (AIPO 399):** "If a military training bill comes up in Congress this session, would you like to have your Congressman vote for or against it?"

   For: 73% Against: 19% No opinion: 8%

2. **June 1947 (AIPO 399):** "In the future, do you think every physically fit young man (who has not already been in the armed forces) should be required to take military or naval training for one year?"

   Yes: 75% No: 18% No opinion: 7%

3. **December 1947 (AIPO 409):** "How do you, yourself, feel about this--are you for Universal Military Training or are you against it?"

   For: 71% Against: 21% No opinion: 9%

4. **January 1949 (AIPO 436):** "The U.S. (United States) now has the Draft Act to keep our Armed Forces at the strength needed at present. It has been suggested that we have, in addition, Universal Military Training to build up a large trained reserve force. Do you think every able-bodied young man (who has not already been in the Armed Forces) should be required to take military or naval training for one year?"

   Yes: 73% No: 22% No opinion: 5%

5. **July 1950 (AIPO 459):** "In the future, do you think every able-bodied young man (who has not already been in the armed forces) should be required to take military or naval training for one year?"

   Yes: 78% No: 17% No opinion: 5%

6. **March 1951 (AIPO 473):** "After the present emergency (the conflict in Korea) is over, do you think every young man (who has not already been in the Armed Forces) should or should not spend two years in the Armed Forces or in work connected with national defense?"

   Should: 58% Should not: 35% No opinion: 4%

7. **March 1951 (AIPO 473):** "Would you favor or oppose having every young man serve for one year (in the Armed Forces or in work connected with national defense)?"

   Favor: 51% Oppose: 44% No opinion: 2%

8. **September 1956 (AIPO 571):** "Do you think the time has come when this country should do away with the draft or not?"

   Yes, do away: 14% No: 74% No opinion: 12%

9. **October 1956 (AIPO 573):** "Do you think the time has come when this country should do away with the draft or not?"

   Yes, do away: 11% No: 75% No opinion: 14%

Foreign Aid: Early Cold War

1. **China aid. February 1947 (AIPO 391):** "How important do you think it is that the American people contribute money to help China get back on her feet? Is it very important, fairly important, or not so important?"

   Very: 34% Fairly: 29% No so: 28% No opinion: 9%
   Recoded to: Support: 63% Oppose: 28%

2. **Containment: Greece aid. April 1947 (AIPO 394):** "Would you like to see your Congressman vote for or against a bill asking for $250 million to aid Greece?"

   For: 52% Against: 37% No opinion: 11%

3. **Containment: Turkey aid. April 1947 (AIPO 394):** "Would you like to see your Congressman vote for or against a bill asking for $150 million to aid Turkey?"

   For: 40% Against: 45% No opinion: 15%

4. **Loans to Western Europe. September 1947 (AIPO 404):** "Would you favor or oppose giving Western European countries like England, France, Holland, and Norway, a loan totaling about 5 billion dollars a year for 3 or 4 years to improve conditions and help them get business going in their countries?"

   Favor: 32% Oppose: 49% No opinion: 11%

5. **Marshall Plan. September 1947 (AIPO 404):** "What is your opinion of the plan (the Marshall Plan)?"

   Approve: 30% Disapprove: 53% Don't know/No answer: 3%
   Asked of those who heard/read of the Marshall Plan (54%)

6. **Nationalist China. November 1948 (AIPO 433):** "Would you favor or oppose sending Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist Government about $5 billion worth of goods and military supplies in the next year to try to keep China from going Communistic?"

   Favor: 36% Oppose: 44% No opinion: 13%

7. **Nationalist China. January 1949 (AIPO 436):** "Do you think the U.S. (United States) government should or should not continue to help the Chiang Kai-shek (Nationalist) government in its present struggle with opposing forces?"

   Should: 28% Should not: 50% No opinion: 15%

8. **Japan recovery. March 1949 (AIPO 439):** "Do you think the United States should or should not do more to help Japan get back on her feet?"

   Should: 28% Should not: 56% No opinion: 13%

9. **Marshall Plan continuation. March 1949 (AIPO 439):** "Do you think Congress should or should not vote the money required (needed) to continue the Marshall Plan for next year (1950)?"

   Should: 59% Should not: 19% No opinion: 15%

Strategic Issues

1. **Arms for bases. January 1949 (AIPO 436):** "Do you think the U.S. should or should not supply arms and war materials to the Western European nations if they agree to provide us with air bases and any other help which they may be able to give?"

   Should: 61% Should not: 25% No opinion: 15%

2. **Administration of Japan. September 1949 (AIPO 448):** "General Douglas MacArthur says the Japanese have met the terms of surrender and are now entitled to a peace treaty. Do you think the United States should or should not take our troops out of Japan and let her govern herself?"

   Should: 27% Should not: 63% No opinion: 7%

3. **Help Spain to counter Russia. July 1950 (AIPO 459):** "Do you think the United States should or should not give military supplies and economic aid to Spain now if Spain agrees to help us in the event of a war with Russia?"

   Should: 57% Should not: 23% No opinion: 2%

4. **Overextension. August 1950 (AIPO 460):** "Do you think there is a danger that the United States will get involved in a war in Korea and other parts of Asia to the extent that we will not be able to protect ourselves and our allies in Western Europe?"

   Yes: 37% No: 46% No opinion: 17%

5. **Regional priorities. August 1950 (AIPO 460):** "What do you think is more important for the United States to do: A. try to keep the rest of Asia from falling under Russian control, or, B. try to stop Russia from taking over Western Europe?"

   Keep Russia out of Asia: 8%
   Keep Russia out of Western Europe: 31%
   Both equally important: 48%
   No opinion: 13%

   Recoded "Both equally important" as "Expansive interests" and "Keep Russia out of Western Europe" as the "Selective Interests" option.

6. **Withdraw from Europe. November 1952 (AIPO 508):** "Do you think we should continue to give money and send troops to help Europe build up a defense against Russia—or do you think we should withdraw our help and let Europe take care of herself?"

   Continue aid: 52% Withdraw: 31% No opinion: 8%

NATO

1. **January 1949 (AIPO 436):** "What is your opinion of it (The North Atlantic Security Pact)?"

   Approval, good, excellent, necessary: 52%
   Disapproval, no good: 9%
   No opinion/no answer: 34%

2. **January 1949 (AIPO 436):** "Do you think the U.S. (United States) and the Western European nations receiving Marshall Plan aid should join together in a mutual defense pact—that is, agree to come to each other's defense immediately if any of them is attacked?"

   Should: 69% Should not: 17% No opinion: 14%

3. **March 1949 (AIPO 438):** "What is your opinion of it (the North Atlantic Security Pact)?"

   Approval: 63% Disapproval: 8% No opinion/no answer: 26%

4. **March 1949 (AIPO 439):** "What is your opinion of it (The North Atlantic Security Pact)?"

   Approval: 69% Disapproval: 9% No opinion/no answer: 21%

5. **April 1949 (AIPO 440):** "Do you think the U.S. Senate should or should not ratify (approve) the North Atlantic Security Pact?"

   Should: 74% Should not: 11% No opinion: 14%

6. **April 1949 (AIPO 440):** "What is your opinion of it (The North Atlantic Security Pact)?"

   Approve: 75% Disapprove: 8% No opinion: 15%

7. **May 1949 (AIPO 441):** "Do you think the U.S. Senate should or should not ratify (approve) the North Atlantic Security Pact?"

   Should: 67% Should not: 12% No opinion: 21%

8. **June 1949 (AIPO 443):** "Do you think the U.S. Senate should or should not ratify (approve) the North Atlantic Security Pact?"

   Should: 67% Should not: 15% No opinion: 18%

United Nations

1. **July 1946 (AIPO 375):** "Do you think the United Nations organization should be strengthened to make it a world government with power to control the armed forces of all nations, including the United States?"

   Yes: 56% No: 26% Undecided: 18%

2. **December 1947 (AIPO 409):** "Do you think the United Nations organization should be strengthened to make it a world government with power to control the armed forces of all nations, including the United States?"

   Yes: 56% No: 30% No opinion: 14%

3. **March 1951 (AIPO 473):** "Do you think the United Nations organization should be strengthened to make it a world government with power to control the armed forces of all nations, including the United States?"

   Yes: 49% No: 36% No opinion: 15%

4. **July 1953 (AIPO 518):** "Do you think the United Nations organization should be strengthened to make it a world government with power to control the armed forces of all nations, including the United States?"

   Should: 41% Should not: 45% No opinion: 14%

5. **March 1955 (AIPO 545):** "Do you think the United Nations organization should be strengthened to make it a world government with power to control the armed forces of all nations, including the United States?"

   Should: 40% Should not: 42% No opinion: 18%

Domestic Issues

1. **Mobilization plans. May 1950 (AIPO 455):** "It has been suggested that plans should be worked out now for total mobilization of all U.S. citizens—that is, in case of another war, every able-bodied person would be told what war work he would have to do, where he would work, and what wages he would get. Do you think Congress should or should not work out such plans now which could be put into operation immediately if another war should come?"

   Should: 45% Should not: 43% No opinion: 10%

2. **Prohibit strikes in wartime. July 1950 (AIPO 459):** "Should Congress pass a law forbidding strikes in industries that would be important in war time—or should the workers in these industries continue to have the right to go on strike?"

   Forbid strikes: 79% Have right to strike: 15% No opinion: 6%

3. **Statism. September 1949 (AIPO 448):** "Would you like to see the United States go more in the direction of statism or less in the direction of statism?"

   *Asked of those who answered what 'statism' is (37%)
   More: 18% Less: 65% As is: 18%

4. **Welfare state. September 1949 (AIPO 448):** "Would you like to see the United States go more in the direction of a welfare state or less in the direction of a welfare state?"

   Asked of those who had some idea of what the welfare state means (36%)
   More: 22% Less: 43% As is: 13% No opinion: 22%

5. **Welfare state. September 1949 (AIPO 448):** Would you like to see the United States go more in the direction of a welfare state or less in the direction of a welfare state?"

Asked of those who answered what a 'welfare state' means (38%)
More: 26% Less: 53% As is: 14% No opinion: 6%

B.2 Coding and Longitudinal Variable Coverage of WORLD ROLE Question

In this section, I describe how I code the main outcome variable I use in the chapter's main analyses. I also present figures visualizing the temporal coverage of specific individual level variables captured in the surveys include the world role question from WWII through the end of the Cold War. Because there is variation in demographic variable coverage and response options over time, this influences my selection and coding of census data for the MRP poststratification step. These figures further show variation in surveys' inclusion of respondent geographic place of residence, with some surveys such as NORC—which I exclude from the main analyses—capturing only broad region identifiers. While restricted-use microlevel data could address these limitations, the present analyses does not incorporate these.

B.2.1 Coding the WORLD ROLE Response Options

World Role

The primary outcome of interest is public support for the U.S. taking an active role in world affairs. Following prior research on the determinants and trends in public opinion regarding the nation's international orientation (Pollins and Schweller 1999; Kertzer 2013; Fordham 2008; Klingberg 1952), I refer to this as the WORLD ROLE question.

With few exceptions, public opinion about the WORLD ROLE has been measured consistently from WWII to the present using variants of the following question: "Do you think it will be best

for the future of this country if we take an active part in world affairs, or if we stay out of world affairs?" This question represents the longest-running measurement of American public support for international engagement. Typical response options are: "Active part," "Stay out," and variations such as "Don't know" or "No opinion." Sometimes, this prompt is phrased as a statement, asking respondents to agree or disagree, or as a question with Likert-scale options. In all pooled analyses, responses are coded as a binary variable: 1 indicates support for taking an active part, and 0 indicates support for staying out.

The second common variant is from the American National Election Studies (ANES), which poses the issue as a reverse-coded agree/disagree statement: "This country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world." Responses include "Agree," "Disagree," and "Don't know." Because agreeing with this statement implies opposition to active engagement, I reverse-code responses so that "Agree" equals 0 and "Disagree" equals 1, ensuring consistency across question formats.

Slight wording variations appeared in post-WWII surveys, but the core meaning remained consistent. Examples include:

> **May 1950 (Gallup AIPO 455):** "Do you agree with those people who think the United States should take an active part in world affairs--or with those people who think the United States should stay out of world affairs?"
>
> **1952 ANES:** "Some people think that since the end of the last world war this country has gone too far in concerning itself with problems in other parts of the world. How do you feel about this?" While this question taps into attitudes about U.S. global engagement, it is different enough that I exclude it from the pooled ANES results.

The September 1964 Gallup survey includes four statements that measure attitudes similar to those captured by the main WORLD ROLE question.[10] However, like the 1952 ANES question, these statements differ in wording from the primary survey question used elsewhere. Among these

[10] USIISR1964-633POS. Gallup/Potomac Poll # 1964-633POS: National Survey of Attitudes, Hopes, and Fears.

four, the first statement is closest in meaning to the main WORLD ROLE question, so I include it in supplemental analyses. The four statements are presented as follows, each allowing respondents to select "Agree," "Disagree," or "Don't know":

> "The U.S. should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along as best they can on their own."
>
> "Since the U.S. is the most powerful nation in the world, we should go our own way in international matters, not worrying too much about whether other countries agree with us or not?"
>
> "We shouldn't think so much in international terms but concentrate more on our own national problems and building up our strength and prosperity here at home."
>
> "The U.S. should maintain its dominant position as the world's most powerful nation at all costs, even going to the very brink of war if necessary."

For the sake of theoretical consistency and because the last three statements are dissimilar enough from the main WORLD ROLE question, I do not include them in the main results presented in the article. To explore the determinants of support for these statements, in Section C.2.1 I replicate the main models with these questions as the dependent variable to determine if the results are sensitive to the statement wording.

B.2.2 Coding Demographics and Geography

The model results reported in the article control for various individual-level characteristics. Below, I list the demographic and geographic variables included in the main specifications, along with details on their operationalization.

- **Rural**: Due to inconsistencies in place-size coding across surveys, this variable is binary: coded 1 if respondents live in rural areas according to defined population thresholds, and 0 otherwise. Common rural cutoffs include populations of 2,500-10,000, under 5,000, under 2,500, and rural (farm/non-farm). In Equations 1 and 2 in the main text, "Rural"

denotes a population under 2,500. This threshold was chosen to align with the Census coding of rural as places with under 2,500, therefore enabling the poststratification step in MRP.

- **Year**: Numeric year of the survey.
- **Sex (Female)**: Coded 1 for female respondents, 0 for males.
- **Race (Black)**: Coded 1 if the respondent is Black, 0 if White.
- **Occupation (Professional)**: Coded 1 for respondents classified as professionals, reflecting occupations closely tied to global economic and political dynamics, 0 otherwise.
- **Age**: Age groupings differed across surveys. Gallup post-WWII surveys used categories of 21-34, 35-49, and 50+. NORC surveys used varying categories, e.g., 21-29, 30-39, 40-49, etc. ANES surveys generally used 21-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+. Each survey's original age groupings were preserved in the main models. Despite slight variations, the variable consistently measures the effect of increasing age on support for active global engagement.
- **Education**: Educational attainment coding varied slightly across surveys:
    - Gallup/NORC: grade school; some high school; high school graduate; some college or more.
    - ANES: less than high school; high school graduate; some post-high school; college graduate.
    - Chicago Council and ANES: some high school; high school graduate; some college; college graduate or more.

    - Education is operationalized as a 0-3 ordinal scale, with higher values representing higher educational attainment. Across individual level models, higher education consistently correlates positively with support for active global engagement.
- **Party ID**: Not consistently recorded in all surveys. Where explicit party identification was unavailable, responses were imputed based on the respondent's vote in the most recent presidential election. Party ID is coded as Republican = -1, Independent = 0, Democrat = 1. Alternatively, in the pre-WWII and early postwar Gallup surveys, Party ID is coded as 1 = voted for Democratic candidate in most recent presidential election, and 0 otherwise. This variable is only included in individual level models, not the MRP models in Equations 2-4.
- **Region**: Northeast, South, Midwest, West. All surveys in the main analyses recorded respondents' geographic regions.
- **State**: Recorded as a state abbreviation. While most Gallup and ANES surveys recorded the state, NORC post-WWII surveys and the 1974 Chicago Council sample did not.
- **County**: Represented by a unique ID combining the ICPSR county code with the state abbreviation (e.g., WV-390 corresponds to Kanawha County, WV). This identifier is included only in ANES surveys from 1956 onward.

B.2.3 WORLD ROLE Variable Coverage

Figure 3B.1 visualizes the variable coverage for the post-WWII surveys from which the WORLD ROLE questions were obtained. Here I take inspiration from Kertzer's (2013) useful depiction of

variable coverage used to assess the determinants of isolationism during the Cold War.[11] Figure 3B.2 visualizes the variable coverage across the surveys used in the post-Vietnam models.

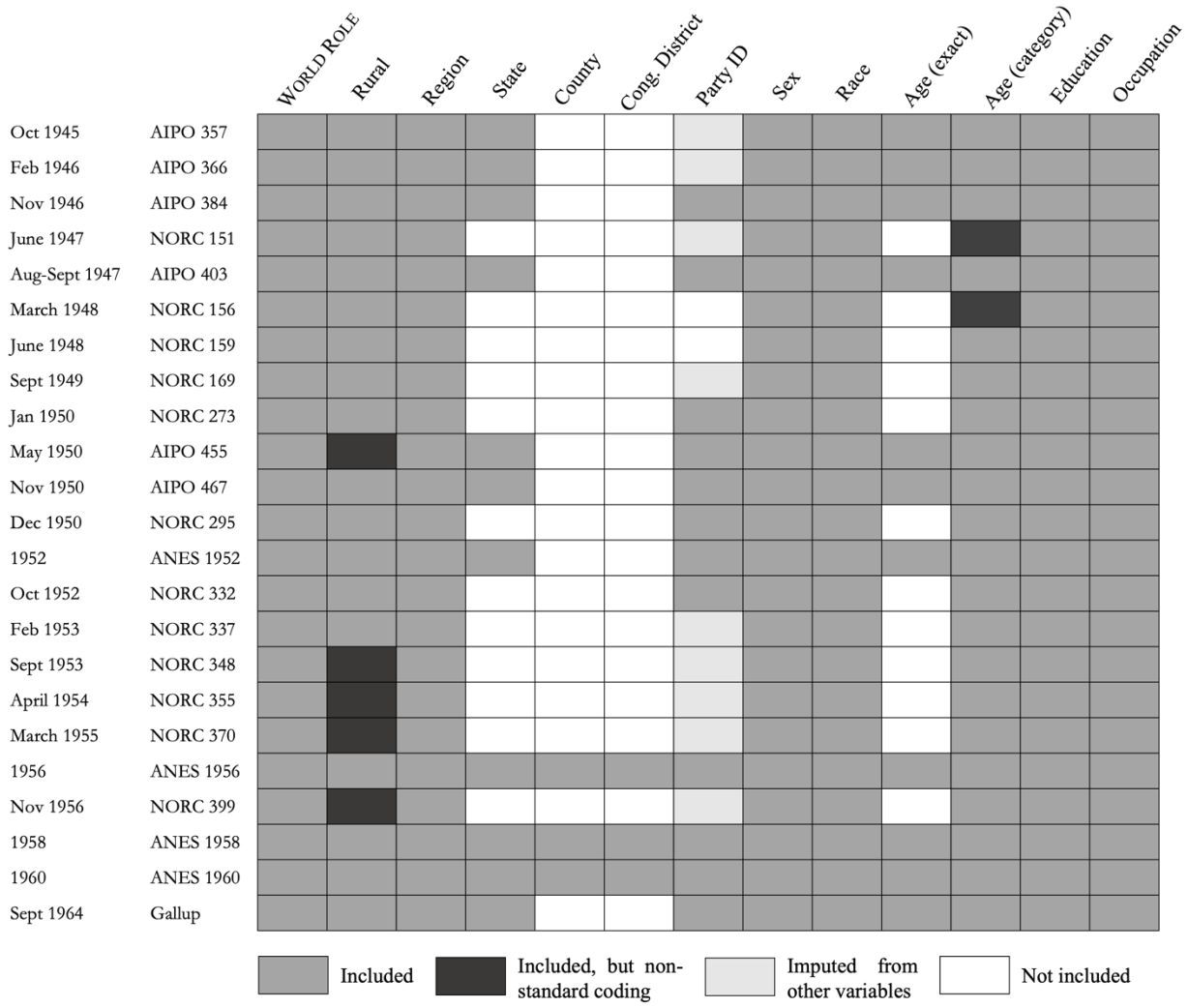


Figure 3B.1. Micro-level Variable Coverage in Surveys Including the World Role Question, 1945-1964

[11] Specifically, the relevant variable coverage figure appears in Figure 2 of Kertzer's (2013) online appendix.

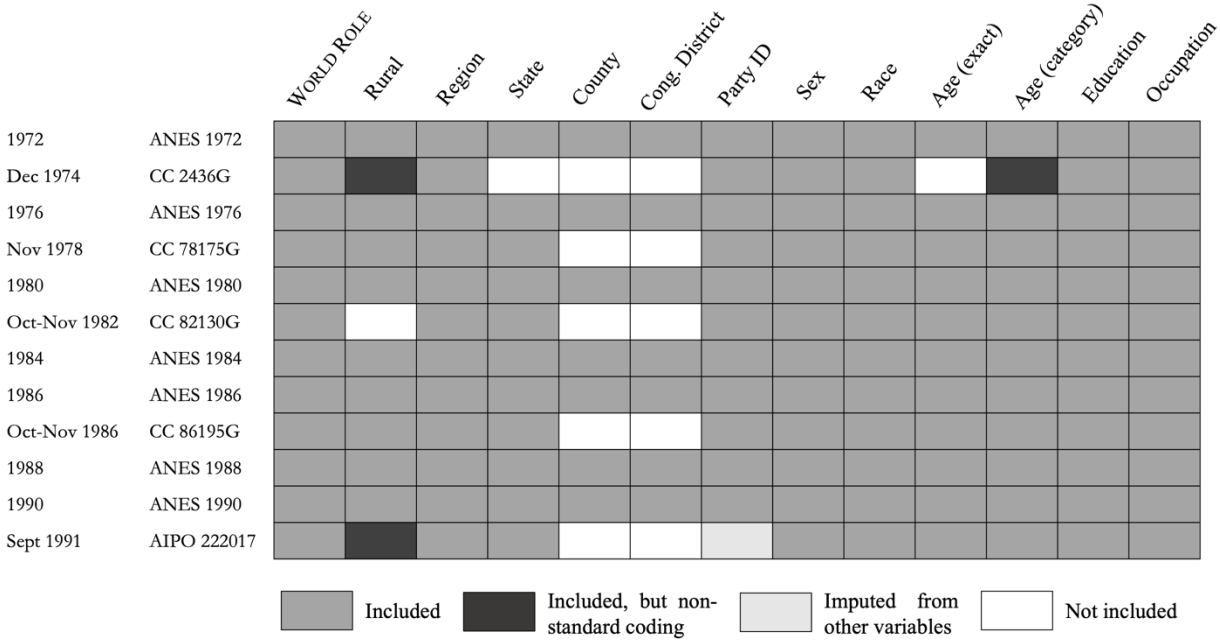


Figure 3B.2. Micro-level Variable Coverage in Surveys Including the WORLD ROLE Question, 1972-1991

C Main Analyses

The main text includes several figures and tables with results that offer tests of my theory. To offer a fuller picture of my analyses, this section provides additional results to supplement the inferences I make in the chapter.

This section presents four types of results. Section C.1 disaggregates the rural-non-rural gap depicted in Figure 3.4 by issue area. This enables identification of which issue areas were characterized by stronger and significant place-based gaps in support across the prewar and postwar periods. Section C.2 provides full regression tables for the individual level and MRP based interaction models discussed in the main text. While this section contains many tables, they are included in support of the most transparent and systematic analyses possible. This section also includes coefficient plots visualizing the main variables of interest. Finally, Section C.3 reports regression results for the South-non-South analyses summarized in the main text.

C.1 Rural-Non-Rural Gaps

The main text reports descriptive evidence of a rural-non-rural gap in the foreign policy items used to create the county MRP estimates. Here, I present them by issue area.

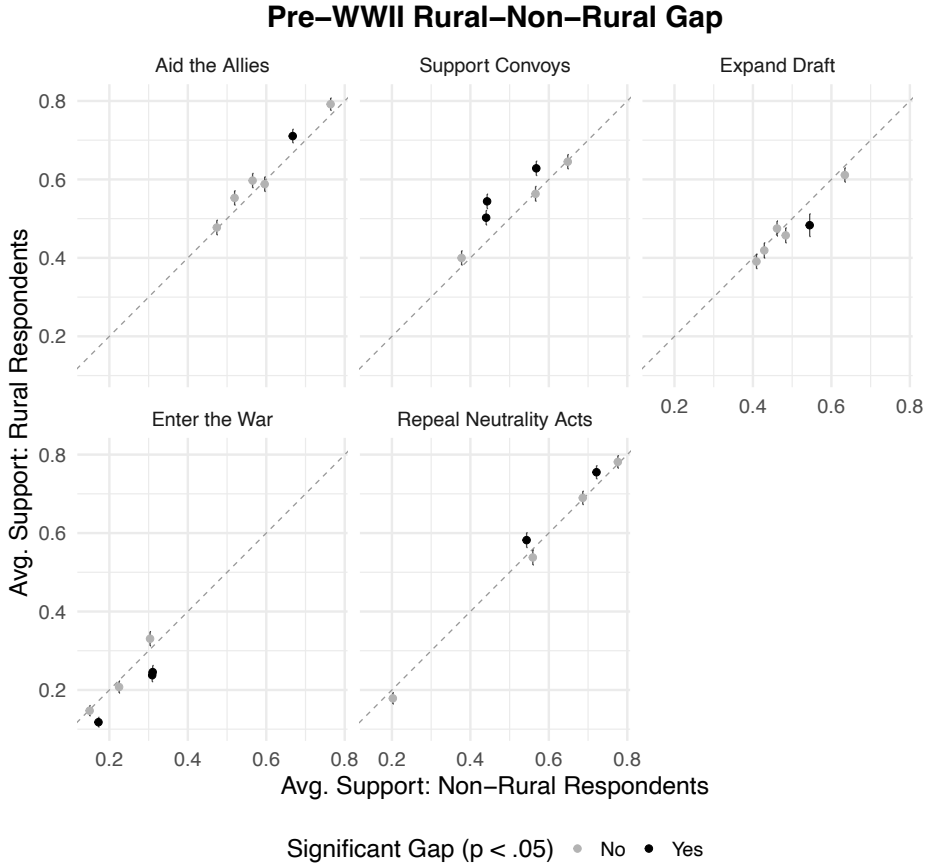


Figure 3C.1. Place-Based Gaps in Support for U.S. Intervention in WWII by Survey Item (1939-1941)

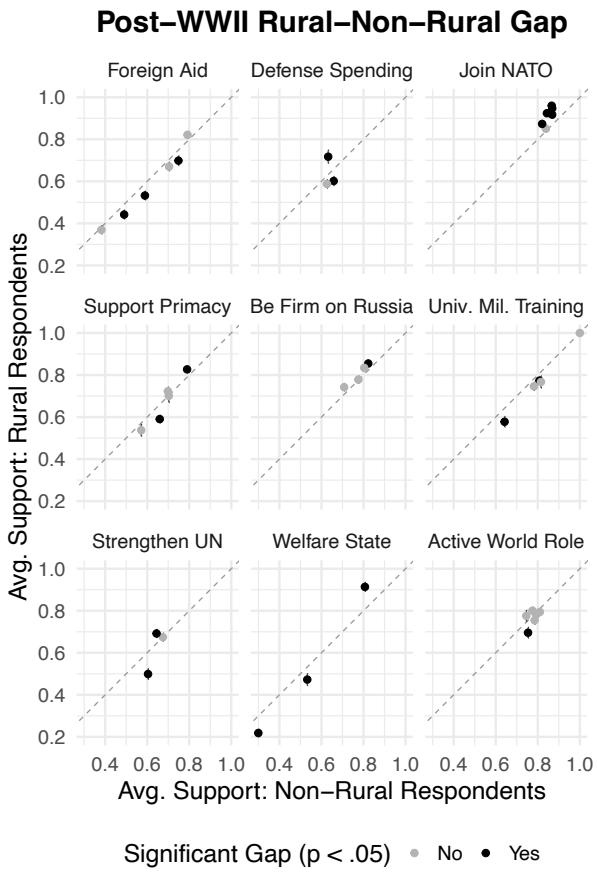


Figure 3C.2. Place-Based Gaps in Support for U.S. Post-WWII Global Engagement, by Survey Item (1945-1950)

C.2 Model Results

To maintain focus, I include most of the full regression results in this section rather than the main text. Throughout the Results section, I discuss several models that I estimate to test my theory's expectation. I include all the fully specified main results in this section.

I first present tables displaying the results of models estimating *individual level* opinion- corresponding to Equation 1. These models offer a baseline to compare with my MRP place based opinion estimates. The remainder of the section then reports results for rural interaction and regional disaggregation models, which are discussed in the main text as key pieces of evidence.

C.2.1 Individual Opinion

Table 3C.1. WWII Deaths per Capita and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, Gallup 1945-1950

	DV: Support Active World Role				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
WWII dead p.c.	0.002	0.002	0.002*	0.001	−0.005
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.010)
Year		−0.010***	−0.005**	−0.005**	−0.005**
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Rural			0.003	−0.001	−0.004
			(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Party ID (Dem)			0.042***	0.041***	0.040***
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Female			−0.037***	−0.037***	−0.038***
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Black			−0.178***	−0.176***	−0.170***
			(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Occup. (Professional)			0.010	0.011	0.010
			(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Age			−0.024***	−0.024***	−0.024***
			(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Education			0.090***	0.090***	0.089***
			(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State
Observations	11,140	11,140	8,125	8,125	8,125
R^2	0.002	0.003	0.088	0.088	0.095

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.2. WWII Draftee Death Intensity and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, Gallup 1945-1950

	DV: Support Active World Role				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
WWII draftee deaths %	-0.160***	-0.160***	-0.067	-0.023	0.814
	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.066)	(0.082)	(1.482)
Year		-0.010***	-0.005**	-0.005**	-0.005**
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Rural			0.003	-0.001	-0.004
			(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Party ID (Dem)			0.041***	0.040***	0.040***
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Female			-0.037***	-0.038***	-0.038***
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Black			-0.175***	-0.176***	-0.170***
			(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Occup. (Professional)			0.010	0.011	0.010
			(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Age			-0.024***	-0.024***	-0.024***
			(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Education			0.090***	0.090***	0.089***
			(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State
Observations	11,140	11,140	8,125	8,125	8,125
R^2	0.002	0.004	0.087	0.088	0.095

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.3. WWII Overall Death Intensity and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, Gallup 1945-1950

	DV: Support Active World Role				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
WWII death intensity	0.004	-0.025	0.427	0.749*	-1.375
	(0.287)	(0.286)	(0.316)	(0.389)	(2.503)
Year		-0.010***	-0.005**	-0.005**	-0.005**
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Rural			0.0002	-0.003	-0.004
			(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Party ID (Dem)			0.042***	0.040***	0.040***
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Female			-0.037***	-0.037***	-0.038***
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Black			-0.176***	-0.175***	-0.170***
			(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Occup. (Professional)			0.009	0.010	0.010
			(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Age			-0.024***	-0.025***	-0.024***
			(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Education			0.090***	0.090***	0.089***
			(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State
Observations	11,140	11,140	8,125	8,125	8,125
R^2	0.001	0.003	0.087	0.088	0.095

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.4. WWII Deaths Fully Specified Models and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, Gallup 1945-1950

	DV: Support Active World Role				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
WWII dead p.c.	0.002	0.002	0.002*	0.001	−0.005
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.010)
Year		−0.010***	−0.005**	−0.005**	−0.005**
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Rural			0.003	−0.001	−0.004
			(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Party ID (Dem)			0.042***	0.041***	0.040***
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Female			−0.037***	−0.037***	−0.038***
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Black			−0.178***	−0.176***	−0.170***
			(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Occup. (Professional)			0.010	0.011	0.010
			(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Age			−0.024***	−0.024***	−0.024***
			(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Education			0.090***	0.090***	0.089***
			(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State
Observations	11,140	11,140	8,125	8,125	8,125
R^2	0.002	0.003	0.088	0.088	0.095

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.5. WWII Deaths per Capita and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, ANES 1956-60

	DV: Support Active World Role					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
WWII deaths p.c.	0.009***	0.009***	0.006***	0.005**	0.004*	−0.004
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.022)
Year		0.017***	0.021***	0.021***	0.020***	0.019***
		(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Rural			−0.073***	−0.068***	−0.064***	−0.041**
			(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.019)
Party ID (Dem)			0.005	0.007	0.012	0.009
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Female			−0.063***	−0.063***	−0.067***	−0.069***
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Black			−0.158***	−0.155***	−0.148***	−0.143***
			(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.031)
Occup. (Professional)			0.014	0.014	0.005	0.004
			(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age			−0.039***	−0.039***	−0.036***	−0.036***
			(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education			0.091***	0.091***	0.091***	0.092***
			(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State	County
Observations	3,570	3,570	3,541	3,541	3,541	3,541
R^2	0.007	0.010	0.107	0.107	0.129	0.151

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.6. WWII Draftee Death Intensity and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, ANES 1956-60

	DV: Support Active World Role					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
WWII draftee deaths %	−0.007	−0.008	0.053	0.051	0.084	0.269
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.052)	(0.058)	(0.092)	(1.405)
Year		0.017***	0.021***	0.021***	0.020***	0.020***
		(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Rural			−0.079***	−0.068***	−0.063***	−0.042**
			(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.019)
Party ID (Dem)			−0.001	0.005	0.010	0.008
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Female			−0.064***	−0.064***	−0.067***	−0.068***
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Black			−0.178***	−0.167***	−0.153***	−0.145***
			(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.031)
Occup. (Professional)			0.011	0.012	0.004	0.004
			(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age			−0.039***	−0.039***	−0.036***	−0.036***
			(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education			0.092***	0.092***	0.091***	0.092***
			(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State	County
Observations	3,556	3,556	3,527	3,527	3,527	3,527
R^2	0.00000	0.004	0.104	0.106	0.129	0.151

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.7. WWII Death Intensity and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, ANES 1956-60

	DV: Support Active World Role					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
WWII death intensity	0.034	0.040	0.046	0.229	-0.503	2.339
	(0.382)	(0.382)	(0.365)	(0.470)	(0.783)	(12.260)
Year		0.017***	0.021***	0.021***	0.019***	0.019***
		(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Rural			-0.078***	-0.069***	-0.062***	-0.041**
			(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.019)
Party ID (Dem)			0.0003	0.006	0.012	0.009
			(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Female			-0.066***	-0.065***	-0.069***	-0.069***
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Black			-0.173***	-0.164***	-0.150***	-0.143***
			(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.031)
Occup. (Professional)			0.013	0.013	0.005	0.004
			(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age			-0.039***	-0.039***	-0.036***	-0.036***
			(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education			0.092***	0.092***	0.091***	0.092***
			(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State	County
Observations	3,570	3,570	3,541	3,541	3,541	3,541
R^2	0.00000	0.004	0.104	0.106	0.129	0.151

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.8. Korean War Deaths per Capita and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, ANES 1956-60

	DV: Support Active World Role					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Korea deaths p.c.	−0.026***	−0.026***	−0.015*	−0.012	−0.020	0.016
	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.083)
Year		0.017***	0.021***	0.021***	0.019***	0.019***
		(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Rural			−0.072***	−0.065***	−0.060***	−0.041**
			(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.019)
Party ID (Dem)			0.0003	0.005	0.012	0.009
			(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Female			−0.067***	−0.066***	−0.070***	−0.069***
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Black			−0.175***	−0.166***	−0.150***	−0.143***
			(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.031)
Occup. (Professional)			0.012	0.013	0.004	0.004
			(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age			−0.039***	−0.039***	−0.036***	−0.036***
			(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education			0.091***	0.091***	0.091***	0.092***
			(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State	County
Observations	3,570	3,570	3,541	3,541	3,541	3,541
R^2	0.003	0.006	0.105	0.106	0.129	0.151

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.9. Korean War KIA Intensity and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, ANES 1956-60

	DV: Support Active World Role					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Korea KIA %	0.056	0.052	0.028	0.028	0.044	−0.047
	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.038)	(0.055)	(0.248)
Year		0.016***	0.020***	0.020***	0.018***	0.018***
		(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Rural			−0.075***	−0.066***	−0.065***	−0.041**
			(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.019)
Party ID (Dem)			0.001	0.007	0.013	0.009
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Female			−0.068***	−0.068***	−0.071***	−0.072***
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Black			−0.172***	−0.163***	−0.148***	−0.143***
			(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.031)
Occup. (Professional)			0.013	0.013	0.004	0.003
			(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age			−0.038***	−0.038***	−0.035***	−0.035***
			(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education			0.091***	0.091***	0.091***	0.092***
			(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State	County
Observations	3,526	3,526	3,497	3,497	3,497	3,497
R^2	0.001	0.004	0.103	0.105	0.128	0.150

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.10. Combined WWII and Korean War per Capita Deaths and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, ANES 1956-60

	DV: Support Active World Role					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
WWII dead p.c.	0.010***	0.010***	0.006***	0.006***	0.005*	−0.001
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.048)
Korea dead p.c.	−0.031***	−0.031***	−0.019**	−0.018**	−0.023*	0.012
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.216)
Year		0.017***	0.021***	0.021***	0.019***	0.019***
		(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Rural			−0.065***	−0.063***	−0.060***	−0.041**
			(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.019)
Party ID (Dem)			0.005	0.006	0.012	0.009
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Female			−0.064***	−0.064***	−0.068***	−0.069***
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Black			−0.158***	−0.157***	−0.147***	−0.143***
			(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.031)
Occup. (Professional)			0.014	0.014	0.005	0.004
			(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age			−0.039***	−0.039***	−0.036***	−0.036***
			(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education			0.090***	0.091***	0.091***	0.092***
			(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State	County
Observations	3,570	3,570	3,541	3,541	3,541	3,541
R^2	0.010	0.014	0.108	0.108	0.130	0.151

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.11. Combined WWII Draftee Death Intensity and Korean War per Capita Deaths and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, ANES 1956-60

	DV: Support Active World Role					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
WWII draftee %	0.011	0.009	0.063	0.063	0.068	0.059
	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.052)	(0.058)	(0.093)	(2.747)
Korea dead p.c.	−0.026***	−0.026***	−0.016**	−0.014	−0.019	0.012
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.199)
Year		0.017***	0.021***	0.021***	0.020***	0.020***
		(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Rural			−0.073***	−0.064***	−0.059***	−0.042**
			(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.019)
Party ID (Dem)			−0.001	0.005	0.010	0.008
			(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Female			−0.065***	−0.065***	−0.068***	−0.068***
			(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Black			−0.181***	−0.170***	−0.153***	−0.145***
			(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.031)
Occup. (Professional)			0.010	0.011	0.004	0.004
			(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age			−0.039***	−0.039***	−0.036***	−0.036***
			(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education			0.091***	0.091***	0.091***	0.092***
			(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	Region	State	County
Observations	3,556	3,556	3,527	3,527	3,527	3,527
R^2	0.003	0.006	0.105	0.107	0.129	0.151

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.12. Combined WWII and Korean War Deaths, Fully Specified, and Individual Support for Taking an Active World Role, ANES 1956-60

	DV: Support Active World Role						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
WWII dead p.c.	0.005*	−0.001					0.054
	(0.003)	(0.048)					(0.057)
Korea deaths p.c.	−0.023*	0.012	−0.019	0.012			0.477
	(0.013)	(0.216)	(0.013)	(0.199)			(0.864)
WWII draftee %			0.068	0.059	0.083	0.158	−0.956
			(0.093)	(2.747)	(0.093)	(1.306)	(4.592)
Korea deaths KIA %					0.046	−0.019	0.604
					(0.055)	(0.271)	(1.196)
Year	0.019***	0.019***	0.020***	0.020***	0.018***	0.018***	0.018***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Rural	−0.060***	−0.041**	−0.059***	−0.042**	−0.065***	−0.042**	−0.042**
	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Party ID (Dem)	0.012	0.009	0.010	0.008	0.012	0.008	0.008
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Female	−0.068***	−0.069***	−0.068***	−0.068***	−0.070***	−0.071***	−0.071***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Black	−0.147***	−0.143***	−0.153***	−0.145***	−0.151***	−0.145***	−0.145***
	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Occupation (Prof.)	0.005	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.003	0.003
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Age	−0.036***	−0.036***	−0.036***	−0.036***	−0.035***	−0.035***	−0.035***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Education	0.091***	0.092***	0.091***	0.092***	0.091***	0.091***	0.091***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Level	State	County	State	County	State	County	County
Surveys	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Observations	3,541	3,541	3,527	3,527	3,483	3,483	3,483
R^2	0.130	0.151	0.129	0.151	0.128	0.150	0.150

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

C.2.2 Rural Interaction Results

Table 3C.13. War Exposure, Rural Interactions (Binary and Continuous), and Post-WWII Change in Support, Gallup 1945-1950

	DV: Post-WWII Change in Opinion (MRP)							
	Model 1 Cont × Cont	Model 2 Cont × Bin	Model 3 Bin × Cont	Model 4 Bin × Bin	Model 5 Cont × Cont	Model 6 Cont × Bin	Model 7 Bin × Cont	Model 8 Bin × Bin
WWII Deaths per 10k (Cont.)	0.001***	0.001***						
	(0.0002)	(0.0001)						
WWII Deaths per 10k (Binary)			0.011***	0.015***				
			(0.003)	(0.002)				
WWII Draftee Death % (Cont.)					−0.057***	−0.046***		
					(0.012)	(0.006)		
WWII Draftee Death % (Binary)							−0.008**	−0.009***
							(0.004)	(0.002)
Rurality (Cont.)	0.015**		0.006*		−0.002		0.012***	
	(0.006)		(0.003)		(0.010)		(0.003)	
Rurality (Binary)		0.008**		0.002		−0.001		0.005***
		(0.003)		(0.002)		(0.005)		(0.002)
Prewar Interventionism (MRP)	−1.126***	−1.130***	−1.124***	−1.128***	−1.123***	−1.127***	−1.125***	−1.129***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Per Capita Deaths × Rurality (Cont × Cont)	−0.0002							
	(0.0002)							
Per Capita Deaths × Rurality (Cont × Bin)		−0.0002						
		(0.0001)						
Per Capita Deaths × Rurality (Bin × Cont)			0.009**					
			(0.004)					
Per Capita Deaths × Rurality (Bin × Bin)				0.006**				
				(0.002)				
Draftee Deaths × Rurality (Cont × Cont)					0.019			
					(0.014)			
Draftee Deaths × Rurality (Cont × Bin)						0.008		
						(0.007)		
Draftee Deaths × Rurality (Bin × Cont)							−0.003	
							(0.005)	
Draftee Deaths × Rurality (Bin × Bin)								−0.002
								(0.002)
Region Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Observations	3,065	3,065	3,065	3,065	3,046	3,046	3,046	3,046
R^2	0.940	0.940	0.940	0.940	0.938	0.938	0.937	0.937
Adjusted R^2	0.940	0.940	0.940	0.940	0.938	0.938	0.937	0.937

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.14. War Exposure, Rural Interactions (Terciles), and Post-WWII Change in Support, Gallup 1945-1950

	DV: Post-WWII Change in Opinion (MRP)	
	Model 1 Deaths per cap.	Model 2 Draftee deaths
Deaths per cap: Mid	0.009***	
	(0.003)	
Deaths per cap: High	0.019***	
	(0.003)	
Draftee deaths: Mid		−0.008***
		(0.002)
Draftee deaths: High		−0.008***
		(0.003)
Rurality: Mid	−0.012***	−0.006**
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Rurality: High	0.007***	0.017***
	(0.003)	(0.002)
Prewar Interventionism (MRP)	−1.118***	−1.127***
	(0.012)	(0.013)
Mid Deaths × Mid Rural	0.014***	
	(0.003)	
High Deaths × Mid Rural	0.009**	
	(0.004)	
Mid Deaths × High Rural	0.008**	
	(0.004)	
High Deaths × High Rural	0.003	
	(0.004)	
Mid Draftee × Mid Rural		0.001
		(0.003)
High Draftee × Mid Rural		−0.002
		(0.004)
Mid Draftee × High Rural		−0.008**
		(0.004)
High Draftee × High Rural		−0.012***
		(0.004)
Constant	0.697***	0.713***
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Region FE	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,065	3,046
R^2	0.944	0.940
Adjusted R^2	0.944	0.940
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.15. WWII Deaths per Capita, Rural Interactions (Terciles), and Post-WWII Change in Support by Region, Gallup 1945-1950

	DV: Postwar Change (MRP)			
	Midwest	South	Northeast	West
Deaths: Mid	−0.003	0.033***	0.003	−0.006
	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.009)	(0.004)
Deaths: High	0.005	0.047***	0.008	−0.006
	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.009)	(0.004)
Rural: Mid	−0.005	−0.009**	0.028**	−0.006
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.014)	(0.004)
Rural: High	0.011***	0.006	0.069**	0.010**
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.027)	(0.005)
Prewar Interventionism	−1.269***	−1.027***	−1.107***	−1.082***
	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.032)	(0.024)
Mid Deaths × Mid Rural	0.004	−0.0003	−0.006	−0.001
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.015)	(0.005)
Mid Deaths × High Rural	0.001	−0.004	−0.015	0.002
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.015)	(0.005)
High Deaths × Mid Rural	0.002	0.007	−0.062**	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.030)	(0.006)
High Deaths × High Rural	0.001	−0.007	−0.047*	0.003
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.028)	(0.005)
Constant	0.764***	0.660***	0.684***	0.763***
	(0.007)	(0.013)	(0.017)	(0.013)
Observations	1,056	1,385	217	407
R^2	0.863	0.737	0.861	0.855
Adjusted R^2	0.862	0.736	0.855	0.852

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.16. WWII Draftee Death Intensity, Rural Interactions (Terciles), and Post-WWII Change in Support by Region, Gallup 1945-1950

	DV: Postwar Change (MRP)			
	Midwest	South	Northeast	West
Draftee: Mid	-0.009^{***}	-0.006	-0.012^{**}	0.001
	(0.002)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.003)
Draftee: High	-0.005^{*}	-0.010	-0.014^{**}	-0.004
	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.003)
Rural: Mid	0.0004	-0.024^{***}	0.017^{**}	0.001
	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.004)
Rural: High	0.015^{***}	0.020^{***}	0.017	0.012^{***}
	(0.002)	(0.006)	(0.015)	(0.003)
Prewar Interventionism	-1.244^{***}	-1.093^{***}	-1.086^{***}	-1.078^{***}
	(0.016)	(0.022)	(0.032)	(0.025)
Mid Draftee × Mid Rural	-0.002	0.008	0.002	-0.005
	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.005)
Mid Draftee × High Rural	-0.008^{*}	0.009	0.006	-0.005
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.013)	(0.004)
High Draftee × Mid Rural	-0.007^{**}	-0.017^{**}	0.008	-0.003
	(0.004)	(0.008)	(0.018)	(0.004)
High Draftee × High Rural	-0.007^{*}	-0.023^{***}	0.008	0.003
	(0.004)	(0.008)	(0.019)	(0.004)
Constant	0.758^{***}	0.733^{***}	0.689^{***}	0.756^{***}
	(0.007)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Observations	1,043	1,383	217	403
R^2	0.870	0.677	0.863	0.858
Adjusted R^2	0.869	0.675	0.857	0.854

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

C.2.3 ANES Interaction Results

Table 3.3 in the main text reports results using the Gallup surveys. In the main text, I describe using the ANES surveys to test the persistence of the WWII effects identified using the Gallup surveys. The key difference is that the pooled Gallup surveys enable a test of whether WWII produced meaningful changes in opinion within five years after the war ended, whereas the ANES surveys capture the war's relationship with opinion a decade later.

Table 3C.17. WWII Exposure and Support for Active World Role, ANES 1956-1960

	DV: Support Active World Role, ANES 1956–1960 (MRP)							
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
WWII Deaths per 10k (cont.)	0.001***				0.001***			
	(0.0002)				(0.0002)			
WWII Deaths per 10k (binary)		0.024***				0.023***		
		(0.003)				(0.003)		
WWII Draftee Death % (cont.)			−0.019**				−0.021**	
			(0.008)				(0.009)	
WWII Draftee Death % (binary)				−0.012***				−0.012***
				(0.003)				(0.003)
Korea Death per 10k (cont.)					0.0003			
					(0.0004)			
Korea Death per 10k (binary)						0.009***		
						(0.003)		
Korea KIA (cont.)							−0.0003	
							(0.006)	
Korea KIA (binary)								−0.006**
								(0.003)
Pre-WWII Interventionism	−0.090***	−0.092***	−0.092***	−0.096***	−0.090***	−0.086***	−0.103***	−0.108***
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,065	3,065	3,046	3,046	3,011	3,011	2,712	2,712
R^2	0.102	0.111	0.092	0.096	0.102	0.112	0.099	0.104
Adj. R^2	0.100	0.110	0.091	0.094	0.100	0.110	0.097	0.102

Note: $^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

Table 3C.18. Separate Interaction Models of WWII and Korean War Exposure and Support for Active World Role, ANES 1956-1960

	DV: Support for Active World Role (ANES 1956-1960 MRP)					
	Model 1 WWII per cap. (Cont.)	Model 2 WWII per cap. (Bin.)	Model 3 Draftee % (Cont.)	Model 4 Draftee % (Bin.)	Model 5 Korea per cap. (Cont.)	Model 6 Korea KIA % (Cont.)
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.001**					
	(0.0005)					
WWII Deaths (Binary)		0.024***				
		(0.008)				
WWII Draftee Death %			0.011			
			(0.026)			
WWII Draftee (Binary)				0.001		
				(0.008)		
Korea Deaths per 10k					0.010***	
					(0.003)	
Korea KIA %						0.020
						(0.020)
Rurality (1950)	−0.096***	−0.093***	−0.090***	−0.094***	−0.081***	−0.080***
	(0.014)	(0.008)	(0.023)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.018)
Prewar Interventionism	−0.230***	−0.230***	−0.231***	−0.231***	−0.225***	−0.244***
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.031)
WWII PC × Rurality	−0.0001					
	(0.001)					
WWII Bin × Rurality		−0.006				
		(0.010)				
Draftee % × Rurality			−0.011			
			(0.031)			
Draftee Bin × Rurality				−0.007		
				(0.010)		
Korea PC × Rurality					−0.009***	
					(0.003)	
Korea KIA × Rurality						−0.024
						(0.024)
Constant	0.751***	0.759***	0.766***	0.772***	0.753***	0.765***
	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.022)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.020)
Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,065	3,065	3,043	3,043	3,011	2,720
R^2	0.191	0.197	0.180	0.181	0.180	0.183
Adjusted R^2	0.190	0.195	0.178	0.179	0.179	0.181

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

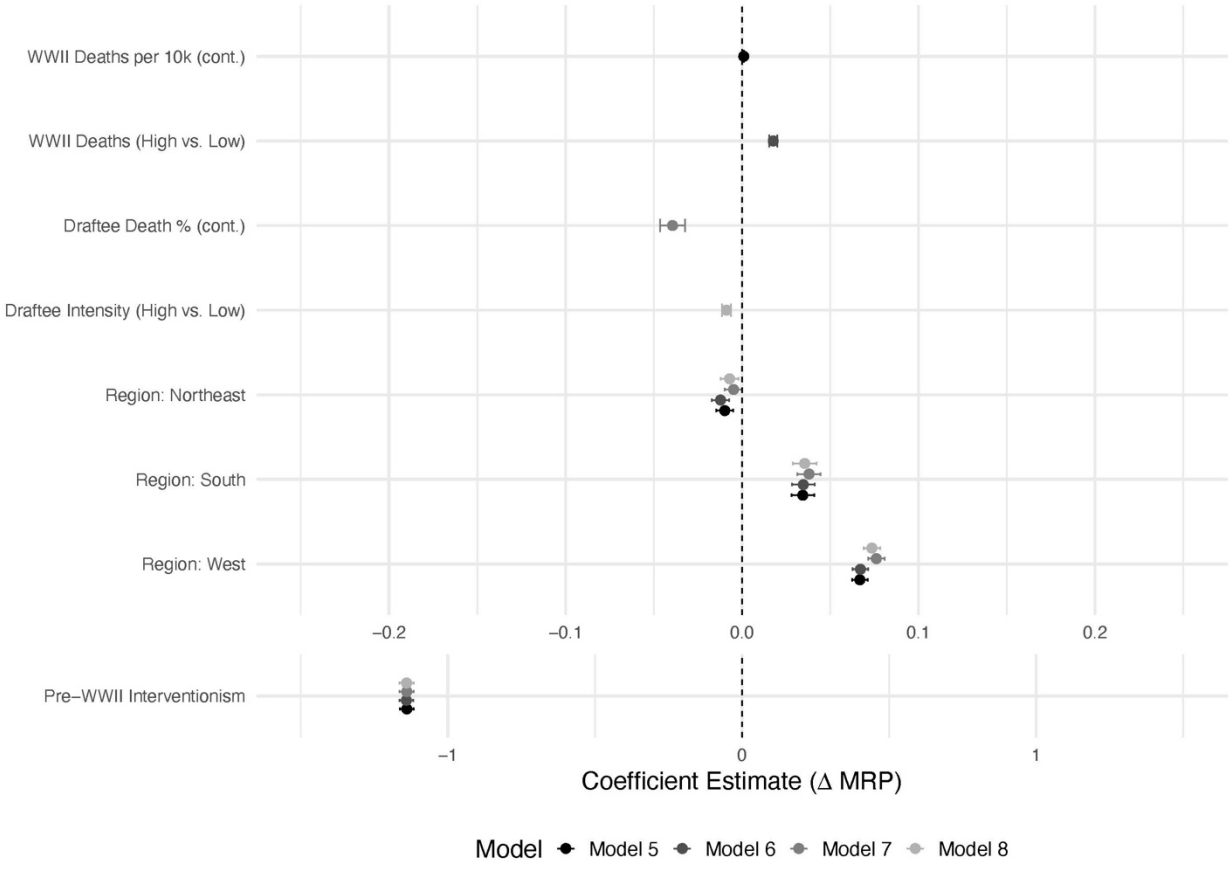
Table 3C.19. Combined Models of WWII and Korean War Exposure and Support for Active World Role, ANES 1956-1960

	DV: Support for Active World Role (ANES 1956-1960 MRP)			
	WWII per cap. (Cont.)	WWII per cap. (Bin.)	Draftee % (Cont.)	Draftee % (Bin.)
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.001			
	(0.0005)			
WWII Deaths (Binary)		0.023***		
		(0.008)		
Draftee Deaths %			0.020	
			(0.028)	
Draftee Deaths (Binary)				0.002
				(0.008)
Rurality (1950)	−0.100***	−0.092***	−0.082***	−0.092***
	(0.014)	(0.008)	(0.025)	(0.008)
Korea Deaths per 10k	0.001			
	(0.0004)			
Korea Deaths (Binary)		0.012***		
		(0.003)		
Korea KIA (Continuous)			0.001	
			(0.005)	
Korea KIA (Binary)				−0.001
				(0.003)
Prewar Interventionism (MRP)	−0.227***	−0.222***	−0.246***	−0.245***
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.031)
WWII per cap. × Rurality	0.0002			
	(0.001)			
WWII Bin × Rurality		−0.007		
		(0.010)		
Draftee % × Rurality			−0.022	
			(0.035)	
Draftee Bin × Rurality				−0.008
				(0.011)
Constant	0.752***	0.751***	0.766***	0.778***
	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.024)	(0.014)
Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	3,011	3,011	2,712	2,712
R^2	0.188	0.196	0.182	0.183
Adjusted R^2	0.186	0.194	0.180	0.180

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

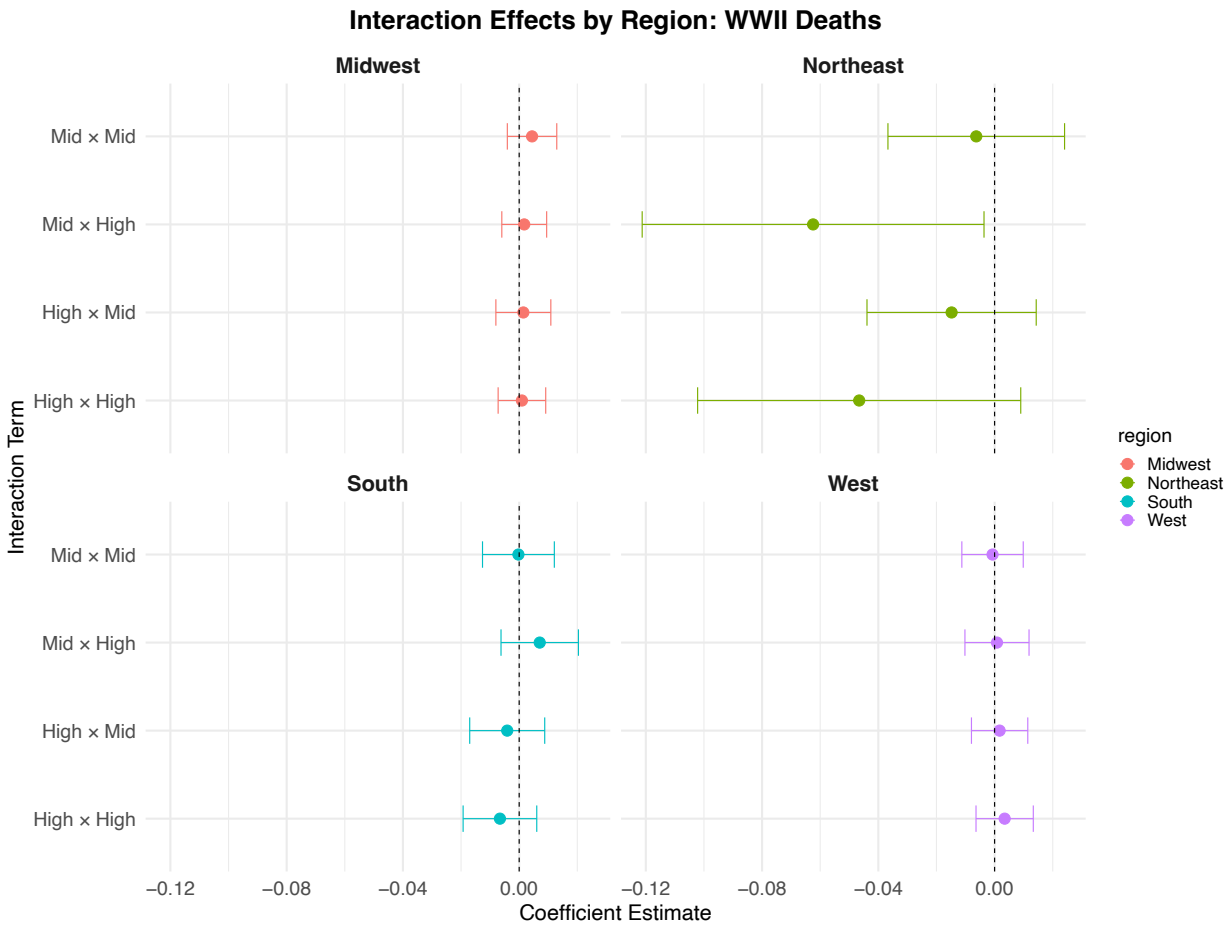
C.2.4 Coefficient Plots

This section presents coefficient plots corresponding to key regression models reported in the main text and in Section C.2.3. While not exhaustive, I include here plots of models that I discuss as offering key tests of the theory. For example, the coefficient plot visualized in Figure 3C.3 corresponds to the model results displayed in Table 3.3 in the main text.



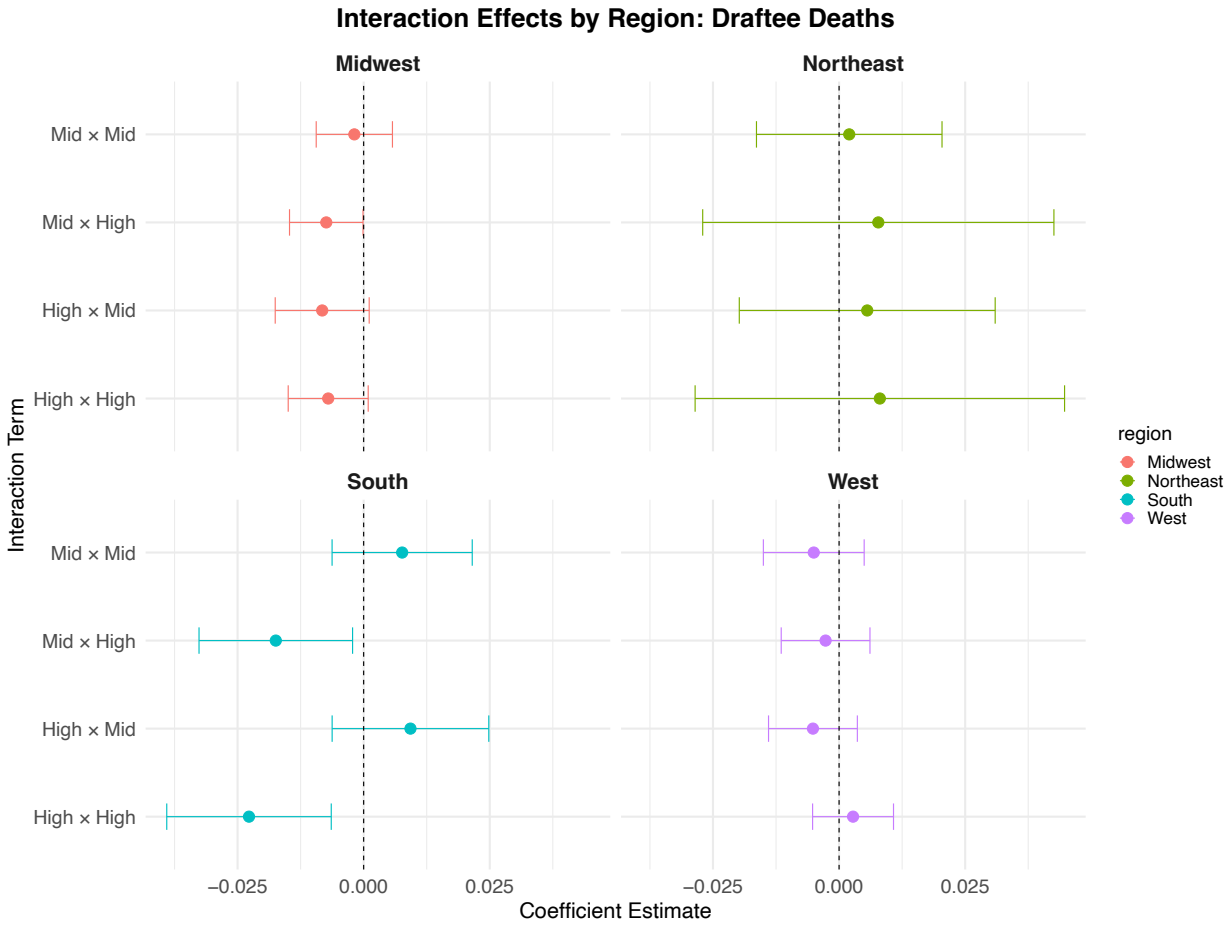
Note: The coefficients visualized in this plot correspond to the results reported in Table 3.3 in the main text.

Figure 3C.3. County WWII Exposure and Postwar Support for Global Engagement, 1945-1950



Note: The coefficients visualized in this plot correspond to the results reported in Table 3C.15.

Figure 3C.4. Interaction Effect Between War Exposure and Rurality Terciles by Region: WWII Deaths per Capita



Note: The coefficients visualized in this plot correspond to the results reported in Table 3C.16.

Figure 3C.5. Interaction Effect Between War Exposure and Rurality Terciles by Region: WWII Draftee Death Intensity

C.3 Southern Distinctiveness

The final phase of my analysis in the main text involves models aimed at exploiting within-polity variation in regime type. In particular, I estimate two sets of models: those with a binary indicator for whether a county was inside or outside the South, and another set that groups counties t varying buffer zone distances from the South-non-South border. Together, these models enable an inference about whether my findings on the relationship between wartime experience and postwar opinion are portable to less democratic contexts. Moreover, these tests help resolve whether observed regional differences are attributable to distinctive regional culture and identity or distinctive political institutions (i.e., regime type).

This section first reports fully specified regression tables for the binary models. I then present results from the buffer zone models.

C.3.1 Model Results: Binary South vs. Non-South

Table 3C.20. Comparing Wartime Effects in South vs. Non-South, Gallup 1945-1950

	DV: Postwar Change in Opinion (MRP)			
	Model 1 WWII per cap.	Model 2 Draftee %	Model 3 WWII per cap. × South	Model 4 Draftee % × South
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.001***		0.0004***	
	(0.0001)		(0.0001)	
Draftee Deaths (%)		−0.023***		−0.009*
		(0.004)		(0.005)
South	−0.027***	−0.034***	−0.069***	0.005
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.008)
Prewar Interventionism (MRP)	−0.927***	−0.901***	−0.907***	−0.915***
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.013)
Rurality (1950)	0.024***	0.024***	0.026***	0.026***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
WWII Deaths × South			0.002***	
			(0.0001)	
Draftee Deaths × South				−0.049***
				(0.009)
Constant	0.599***	0.632***	0.608***	0.627***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Observations	3,065	3,046	3,065	3,046
R^2	0.922	0.915	0.925	0.916
Adjusted R^2	0.921	0.915	0.925	0.916

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.21. Comparing Wartime Effects in South vs. Non-South, ANES 1956-1960

	DV: Postwar Change in Opinion (MRP)			
	Model 1 WWII per cap.	Model 2 Draftee %	Model 3 WWII per cap. × South	Model 4 Draftee % × South
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.001***		0.001***	
	(0.0002)		(0.0002)	
Draftee Deaths (%)		0.007		0.043***
		(0.009)		(0.011)
South	0.039***	0.031***	0.033***	0.128***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.010)	(0.017)
Prewar Interventionism (MRP)	−0.257***	−0.252***	−0.254***	−0.282***
	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.027)
Rurality (1950)	−0.107***	−0.108***	−0.107***	−0.104***
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Korea Deaths per 10k	0.001		0.001	
	(0.0004)		(0.0004)	
Korea KIA %		0.001		−0.00003
		(0.006)		(0.005)
WWII Deaths × South			0.0002	
			(0.0003)	
Draftee Deaths × South				−0.122***
				(0.020)
Constant	0.773***	0.791***	0.774***	0.777***
	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.014)
Observations	3,011	2,712	3,011	2,712
R^2	0.159	0.154	0.160	0.165
Adjusted R^2	0.158	0.152	0.158	0.163
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.22. Wartime Experience and Local Opinion at Different South-Non-South Buffer Zone Thresholds, Gallup 1945-1950

	Postwar Change in Opinion (MRP), Gallup 1945-1950					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	25 mi	50 mi	100 mi	25 mi	50 mi	100 mi
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.002	0.002**	0.001***			
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)			
Draftee Death % (cont.)				−0.022	−0.062*	−0.037
				(0.056)	(0.036)	(0.026)
Buffer (South vs Non-South)	0.038	0.029	0.004	−0.062	−0.090**	−0.061**
	(0.042)	(0.021)	(0.014)	(0.069)	(0.041)	(0.028)
Pre-WWII Interventionism	−1.172***	−1.159***	−1.103***	−1.155***	−1.157***	−1.102***
	(0.076)	(0.043)	(0.031)	(0.074)	(0.043)	(0.031)
Rural % (1950)	−0.021	−0.013	0.004	−0.020	−0.015	0.004
	(0.022)	(0.013)	(0.009)	(0.023)	(0.014)	(0.010)
WWII Deaths per 10k × Buffer	−0.001	−0.001	−0.001			
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)			
Draftee Death % × Buffer				0.082	0.110**	0.062*
				(0.083)	(0.050)	(0.035)
Constant	0.739***	0.733***	0.699***	0.791***	0.823***	0.759***
	(0.051)	(0.030)	(0.021)	(0.060)	(0.042)	(0.028)
Observations	74	202	402	74	201	400
R^2	0.807	0.826	0.818	0.802	0.823	0.812
Adjusted R^2	0.792	0.821	0.816	0.787	0.818	0.810

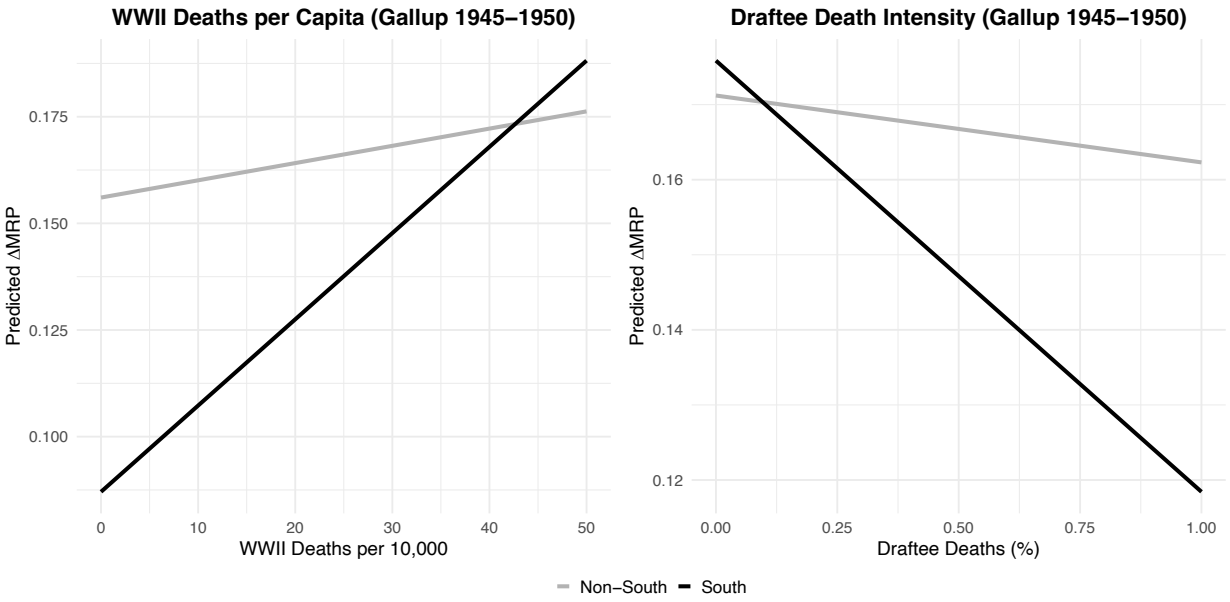
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3C.23. Wartime Experience and Local Opinion at Different South-Non-South Buffer Zone Thresholds, ANES 1956-1960

	Support Active World Role, ANES 1956-1960					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	25 mi	50 mi	100 mi	25 mi	50 mi	100 mi
WWII Deaths per 10k	−0.004*	−0.002	−0.0001			
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)			
Draftee Death % (cont.)				0.019	−0.096	−0.035
				(0.101)	(0.070)	(0.049)
Buffer (South vs Non-South)	−0.105	−0.097**	−0.077***	−0.156	−0.331***	−0.246***
	(0.071)	(0.041)	(0.029)	(0.128)	(0.080)	(0.054)
Korean War Deaths per 10k	−0.005	−0.005*	−0.003			
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.002)			
Korea War KIA %				−0.010	0.020	0.025*
				(0.033)	(0.021)	(0.014)
Pre-WWII Interventionism	0.038	0.168**	0.139**	0.013	0.122	0.126**
	(0.129)	(0.085)	(0.061)	(0.132)	(0.082)	(0.059)
Rural % (1950)	−0.090**	−0.057**	−0.074***	−0.109***	−0.082***	−0.083***
	(0.037)	(0.026)	(0.018)	(0.041)	(0.028)	(0.019)
WWII Deaths per 10k × Buffer	0.002	0.001	−0.001			
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.001)			
Draftee Death % × Buffer				0.091	0.307***	0.195***
				(0.155)	(0.099)	(0.068)
Constant	0.835***	0.665***	0.656***	0.738***	0.717***	0.667***
	(0.086)	(0.060)	(0.042)	(0.108)	(0.083)	(0.054)
Observations	73	201	401	70	189	380
R^2	0.449	0.314	0.308	0.364	0.319	0.322
Adjusted R^2	0.399	0.293	0.298	0.303	0.297	0.311

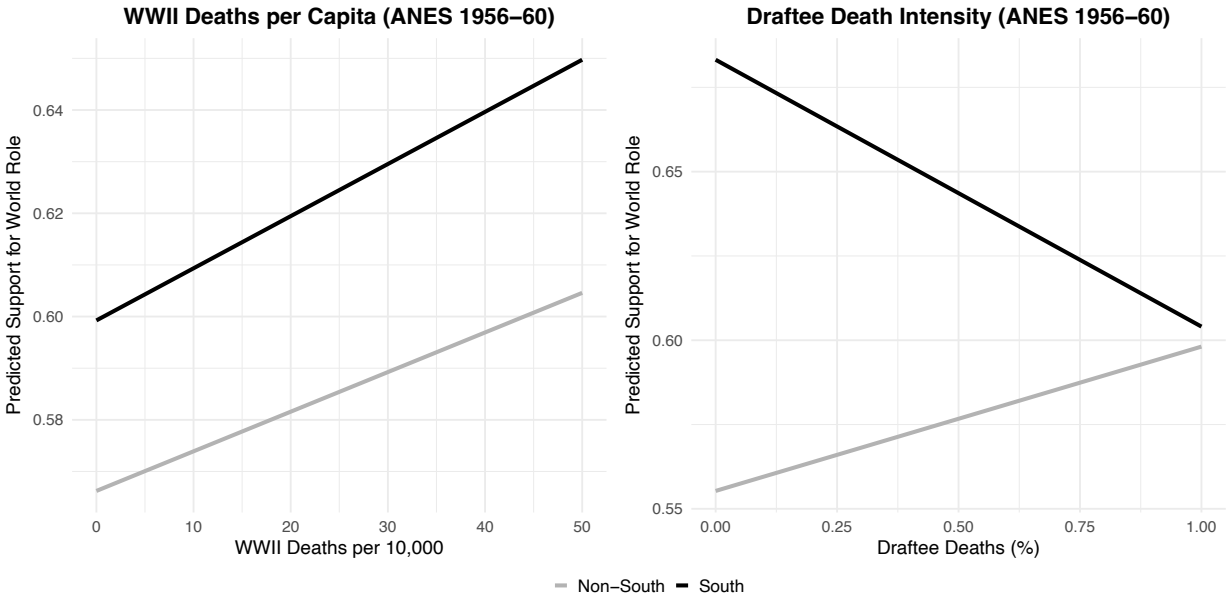
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

C.3.2 Visualizing Coefficients and Predicted Support



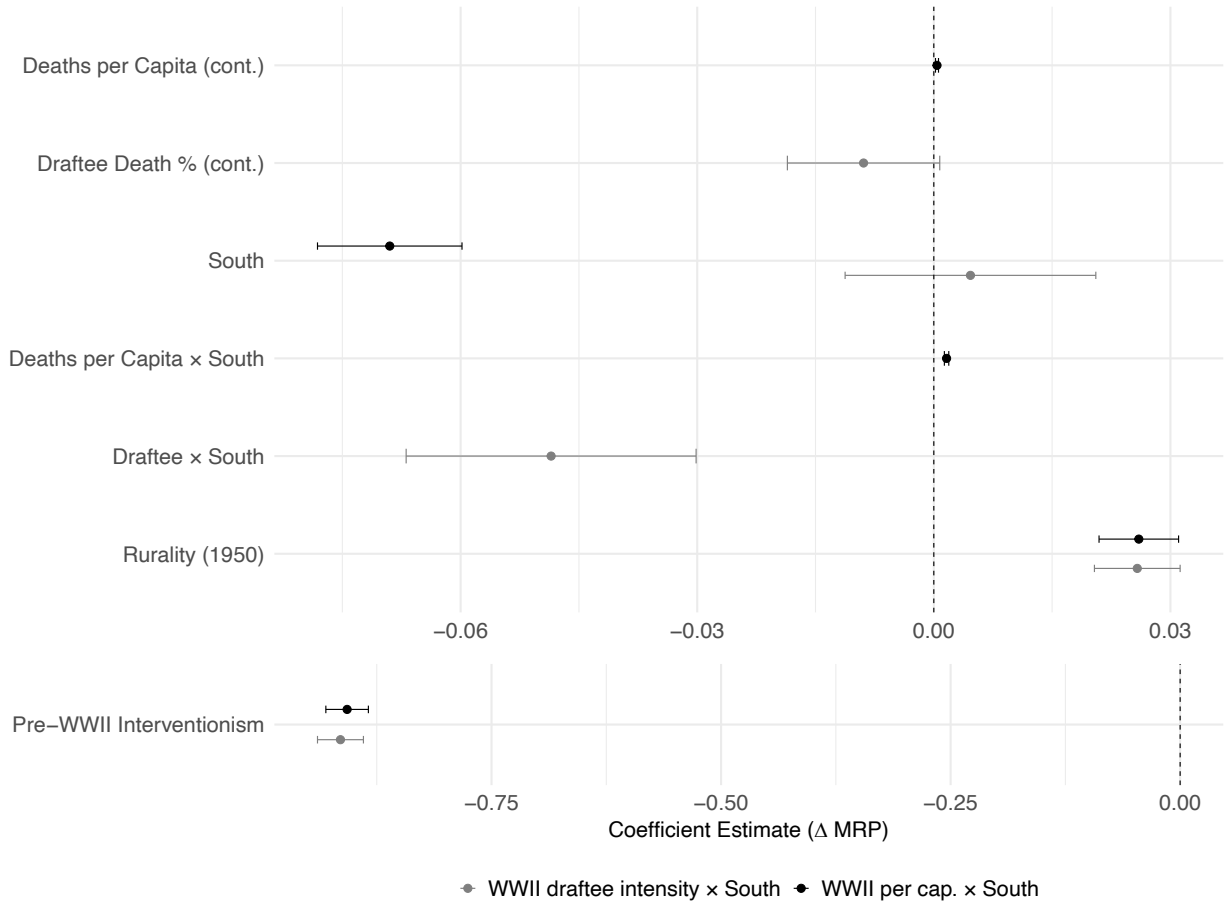
Note: The predicted slopes visualized in this plot correspond to the results reported in Table 3C.20.

Figure 3C.6. War Exposure and Change in Postwar Opinion in South vs. Non-South Counties, Gallup 1945-1950



Note: The predicted slopes visualized in this plot correspond to the results reported in Table 3C.21.

Figure 3C.7. War Exposure and Change in Postwar Opinion in South vs. Non-South Counties, ANES 1956-1960



Note: The coefficients visualized in this plot correspond to the results reported in Table 3C.20.

Figure 3C.8. County WWII Exposure and Postwar Support for Global Engagement in South vs. Non-South, Gallup 1945-1950

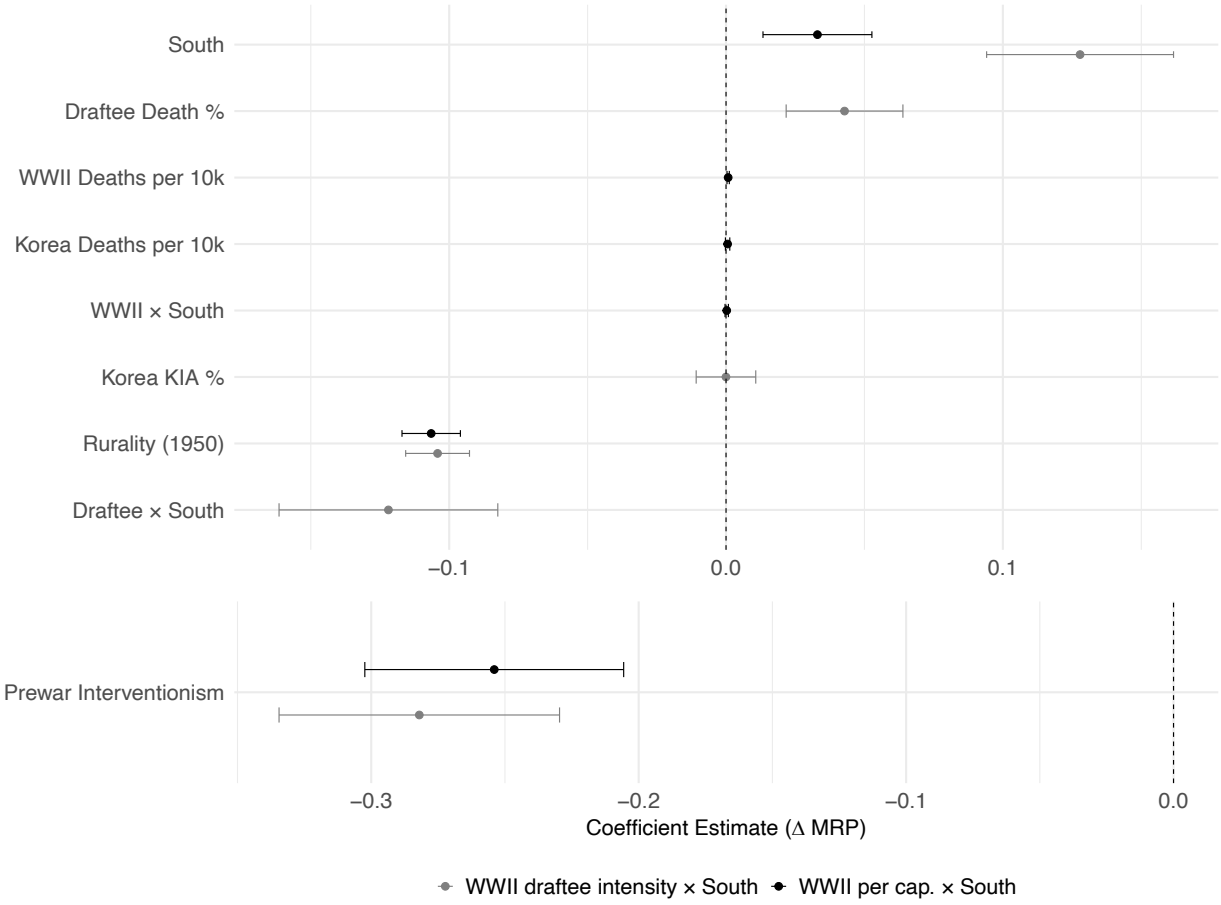


Figure 3C.9. County WWII and Korean War Exposure and Postwar Support for Global Engagement in South vs. Non-South, ANES 1956-1960

D MRP Estimation

D.1 Poststratification: Census Data

I use multilevel regression and post-stratification (MRP) to create county-level estimates of support for an active WORLD ROLE, in addition to the issue specific foreign policy items in the early Cold War. As I discuss in the main text, creating reliable MRP estimates requires accurate data on the proportion of residents within each geographic-demographic subgroup captured in the national-level response model. The national multi-level model, depicted with Equation 2 in the main text, controls for key demographic variables such as sex, race, education, occupation, and age. Post-stratifying the results of this opinion model to subnational geographic units—depicted in Equations 3-4—requires precise population proportions matching each demographic combination for every geographic area. Applications of MRP to subnational opinion in the U.S. typically rely on Census data (Caughey and Warshaw 2019).

I use U.S. Census data from IPUMS to construct poststratification tables reflecting the proportions of residents in each geographic-demographic subgroup.[12] Creating these tables is straightforward for the earliest Cold War surveys (Gallup and ANES), due to the availability of the complete-count 1940 and 1950 Census. For later surveys, however, I would have to rely on either 1% or 5% Census samples. Additionally, since these later samples often lack county-level demographic variables—such as the rural status missing in the 1980 five-percent sample—I supplement the data using county-level population estimates from NHGIS to differentiate rural/urban strata. While my main analyses uses only the 1940 and 1950 full count Census, I

[12] https://usa.ipums.org/usa/index.shtml.

discuss these later Census here as a preview of what extending my analyses forward in time would entail.

Table 3D.1 illustrates the first ten rows for Illinois in the 1950 poststratification table using the 100% count 1950 Census. When constructing poststratification tables for each survey period, it is essential that demographic variable categories match those used in the surveys. For example, the Age variable might have six categories in one table and three categories in another, depending on the survey's specific age response option cutoffs.

Table 3D.1. Example of Illinois Counties in Poststratification Table Using 1950 100% Census

State	County	Place	Sex	Race	Occ.	Education (4)	Age (6)	Num.
Illinois	Adams	Urban	Male	White	Non-professional	Less than HS	21-24	941
Illinois	Adams	Urban	Male	White	Non-professional	Less than HS	25-34	2,149
Illinois	Adams	Urban	Male	White	Non-professional	Less than HS	35-44	2,013
Illinois	Adams	Urban	Male	White	Non-professional	Less than HS	45-54	2,087
Illinois	Adams	Urban	Male	White	Non-professional	Less than HS	55-64	2,591
Illinois	Adams	Urban	Male	White	Non-professional	Less than HS	65+	2,201
Illinois	Adams	Urban	Male	White	Non-professional	Some HS	21-24	46
Illinois	Adams	Urban	Male	White	Non-professional	Some HS	25-34	125
Illinois	Adams	Urban	Male	White	Non-professional	Some HS	35-44	58
Illinois	Adams	Urban	Male	White	Non-professional	Some HS	45-54	35

Figure 3D.1 shows the Census samples I use to create poststratification tables for survey periods across the post-WWII era. All relevant demographic variables from public opinion surveys are available in the full-count 1940 and 1950 Censuses. However, different surveys sometimes use different age categorizations. For instance, Gallup surveys from 1950 categorize age as 21-35, 35-49, and 50+, whereas ANES surveys use finer distinctions (21-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+). Consequently, I create distinct poststratification tables tailored to each survey period.

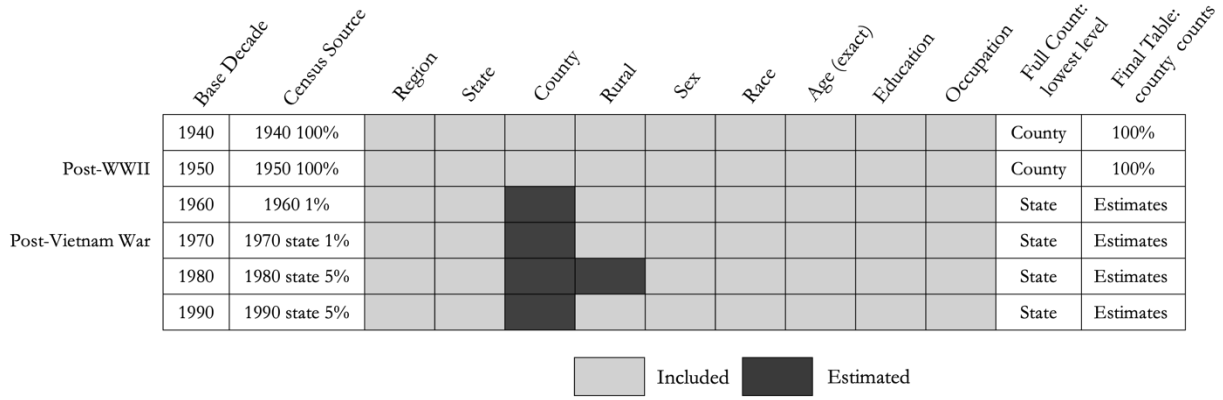


Figure 3D.1. Census Samples for Poststratification Tables

Later Census samples sometimes lack detailed demographic data at lower geographic levels. For instance, the 1960 1% sample provides necessary demographic variables at the state level but not at the county level. In such cases, I estimate counts for geographic-demographic subgroups using the following method:

1. Download the relevant 1% or 5% Census sample for the decade, determining demographic proportions at the state level.
2. Obtain county-level rural/urban population data from NHGIS for the same decade.
3. Calculate each county's proportion of the state population and multiply this by the demographic counts from the state-level Census sample.

For example, suppose the 1970 1% Census sample indicates Illinois has 1,000 white, high-school-educated urban males aged 25-29 with professional occupations. If Cook County accounts for 20% of Illinois's population, my initial estimate for this subgroup is 1,000 * 0.2 = 200. However, since county estimates must accurately reflect urban/rural divisions, if Cook County is 80% urban and 20% rural, I adjust the figure accordingly—estimating 160 individuals in urban areas and 40 in rural areas of Cook County. While not perfect, this method offers one possible

solution to ensuring alignment between the response options captured in historical surveys and available Census samples.

E Historiography

I write in the main text that the American experience in WWII is characterized by competing historical interpretations. Accounts in the "WWII as watershed" school of thought portray the war as a critical juncture in public support for global engagement, causing a fundamental shift in the public's willingness to support a drastic expansion in the U.S.'s grand strategy and the costs necessary to sustain it. In other words, it was the war that did the work in fostering the "postwar bipartisan foreign policy consensus." A revisionist historiography questions the extent to which such a transformation occurred, proposing instead that the war reaffirmed prewar trends, and its effects were at most uneven across the country. Below, I include an abridged sample of quotes representing these conventional and revisionist interpretations of WWII's effect on the public mood about the nationals' foreign policy orientation.

E.1 WWII as Watershed

Below are representative quotes of the watershed thesis interpretation. Key claims are bolded.

> "..Pearl Harbor **redefined for most Americans** both the nature of international relations...It quite **literally changed the way Americans thought about time and space**, with attendant implications for the way they thought about their own vulnerability." (Stuart 2009, 2)

> "But the wartime experience was nonetheless transformative for the country. Even more so than during World War I, all Americans learned what it was like to live through a full-scale military mobilization. **The citizenry lost any lingering sense** that the country could really **separate itself from the rest of the world**." (Zelizer 2010, 54)

> "Over years of emergency that did not end in 1945 militarism took on its own life, providing **'memories, models, and metaphors that shaped broad areas of national life'** from the late 1930s onward." (Sparrow 2011, 7)

> "[WWII] resulted in the transformation of the dominant American ideas about effective foreign policy." (Legro 2000, 271)

"The shift toward internationalism reflected the **unique experiences** of a generation of Americans who had lived through the Great Depression, World War II, and the beginning of the Cold War. **These experiences produced a common belief in the importance of remaining engaged in international affairs**, especially in Europe, and that U.S. security and economic well-being were irrevocably linked to events abroad." (Busby and Monten 2008, 454)

"Although the importance of the **stakes had become clear to most of the public** even before the war, it **may actually have increased over the course of the war**." (Larson 1996, 14-15)

"the way **people perceive freedom and security** as well as the **public good** changed as a result of World War II." (Hart 2013)

"By 1944, the lesson that not even the United States could insulate itself against being dragged into war, together with FDR's painstaking politicking, had **thoroughly discredited isolationism**." (Ruggie 1997, 101)

"[the wartime effort] **reordered social relationships and cultural meanings…**In the process they **remade themselves** through everyday exertions. It was this fluid environment, as much as the crusade against fascism, that **permanently bent private lives** and capital to **public purposes** and fostered a fusion of corporate and New Deal liberalisms with exceptionalist nationalism." (Sparrow 2011, 7)

"In a special section of the Washington Post in the summer of 1995 devoted to 'Remembering World War II,' Haynes Johnson wrote that 'Socially, politically, economically, militarily, culturally, racially, sexually, demographically, even mythologically, World War II was the crucible that forged modern America.'" (Jeffries 1996, 2)

"**Much of the U.S. desire to stay engaged in world affairs emanated out of the war**…In short, the war changed America's position in, **and view of, the world**. A widespread consensus developed that authoritarianism had to be confronted lest a Hitler-like figure be allowed to emerge again." (Saldin 2010, 141-142)

"From the founding era until Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor – with notable detours during the Spanish-American War and World War I – isolationism was to America's **national identity and sense of purpose what internationalism has been since World War II**…for much of America's history prior to the 1940s, isolationism was the only game in town and its adherent ruled the roost." (Kupchan 2020, 18)

"World War II was such a cataclysmic event that it **completely reshuffled the American political landscape**." (Saldin 2010, 135)

E.2 Revisionism

Below are representative quotes of the revisionist thesis interpretation. Key claims are bolded.

> "Wartime Americans tended to visualize the postwar era as a more prosperous version of prewar America; they wanted good times, not hard times, **but most wanted no radical alterations in the fabric of national life**. They wanted changes in personal circumstance and opportunity, not in broad social patterns and norms." (Jeffries 1996, 4)

> "Like most Americans, they were deeply patriotic, and they had served because it was their duty. Many had fought bravely. **But most of them, polls suggested, had not cherished idealistic notions about destroying fascism or building a brave new world**." (Patterson 1996)

> "Gabriel Almond's *The American People and Foreign Policy* (1950), the most important and systematic analysis of survey data on the topic to that point, reinforced the conclusion that despite the dramatic events of the previous decade -- including World War II, the start of the nuclear era, the nation's emergence as a world leader, and the onset of the Cold War -- many Americans remained remarkably uninformed about even the most elementary aspects of international affairs." (Holsti 2009, 26)

> "Although Pearl Harbor created a unified resolve to win the war, it did not end the need for making political decisions, nor did it end political controversy. The unity of Congress, in the sense that all members agreed on policy, began and ended with Pearl Harbor. There was agreement on the issue that the war must be won, but there was no agreement on what policy should be followed in winning the war." (Young 1958, 12)"

> "Although they would become staunch, unflinching patriots in pursuit of victory after the attack and following the declaration of war on the United States by Germany and Italy, **their enthusiasm for international affairs and foreign policy that could drag the nation into war ran cold**." (Hart 2008)

> "Americans preferred to remember the propaganda version of a noble war fought for democracy and freedom by innocent people forced to defend themselves against a vicious enemy, a war fought overseas by decent men while on the home front everyone contributed, a war in which Americans played the starring role and the Allies had bit parts, and a war that delivered a better life. **This version ignored the skepticism expressed by people during the war years so it could present the conversion to internationalism as complete and whole-hearted. Americans, it proclaimed, had embraced their role as leader of the Free World and keeper of the peace.**" (Brewer 2009, 140)

> "As Dean Acheson later admitted, 'Bipartisanship was a magnificent fraud,' although a useful one. 'It's a great myth that ought to be fostered.'" (Rathbun 2011, 2)

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX FOR CHAPTER 4

Local Legacies of War and the Postwar Consensus in Congress

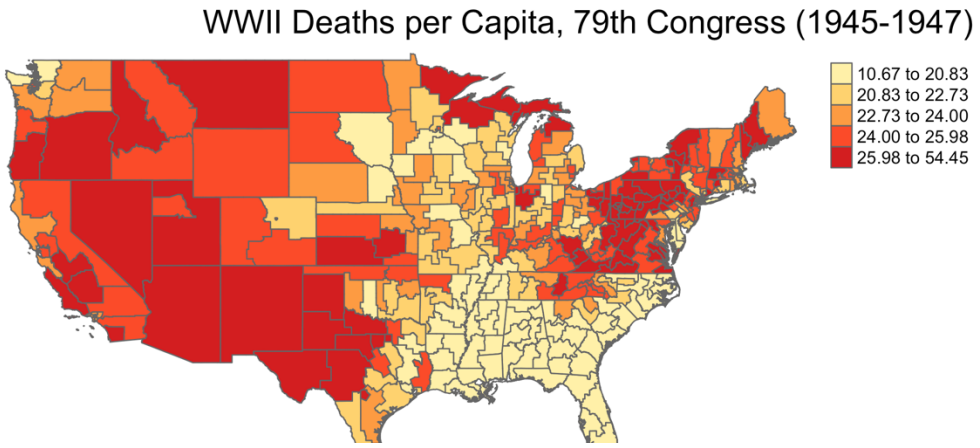
A Congressional District Descriptives

This section presents the congressional district data used in this chapter's analyses. As discussed in the main text, a key explanatory variable is congressional district war exposure. These data are aggregated from the county level war deaths discussed in Chapter 3. Because these district data are derived from the underlying county data, the spatial distribution of war exposure—proportional and coercive deaths—resembles the county level patterns from Chapter 3.

In the main text, I note that redistricting can change the underlying distribution of war exposure. To illustrate this, Figure 4A.2 shows how district level WWII deaths per capita in Illinois changed between the 79th Congress (1945-1947) and the 84th Congress (1955-1957). For example, there is a clear difference in the southeastern part of the state, where counties with higher per capita death were reallocated into a single, more consolidated district a decade later. This example demonstrates how the district war exposure measure can change over time with redistricting.

A.1 District War Exposure

A. WWII Deaths per Capita



B. WWII Draftee Death Intensity

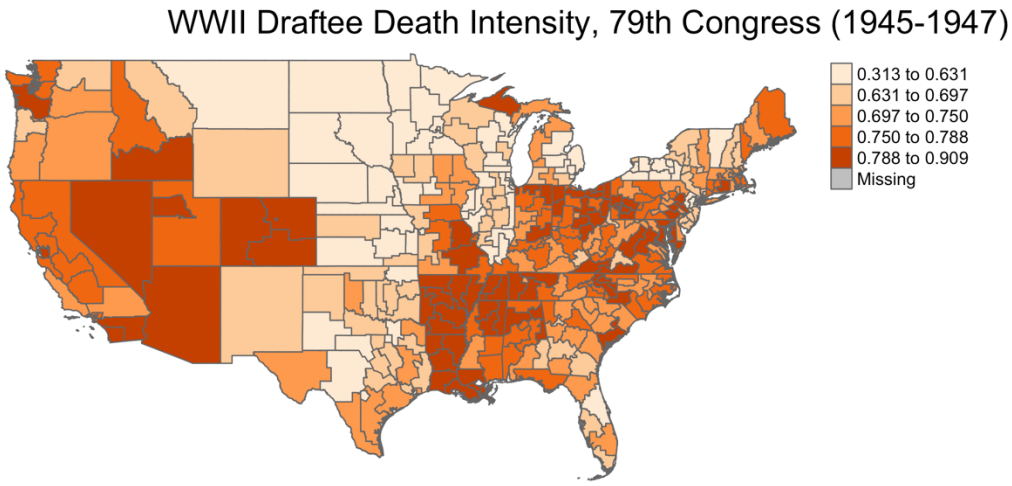


Figure 4A.1. WWII Exposure by Congressional District, 1941-1945
Note: Uses district boundaries from 79th Congress, 1945-1947, the end of the war.

To account for this, I created a dataset of district level war exposure for each Congress. However, for analytical consistency and comparability, the main analyses discussed in the chapter draw on a single district reference year, the district boundaries at the end of WWII (79th Congress). As I discuss in the text, while this approach does have limitations, it remains an efficient and tractable solution given the structure and availability of historical data.

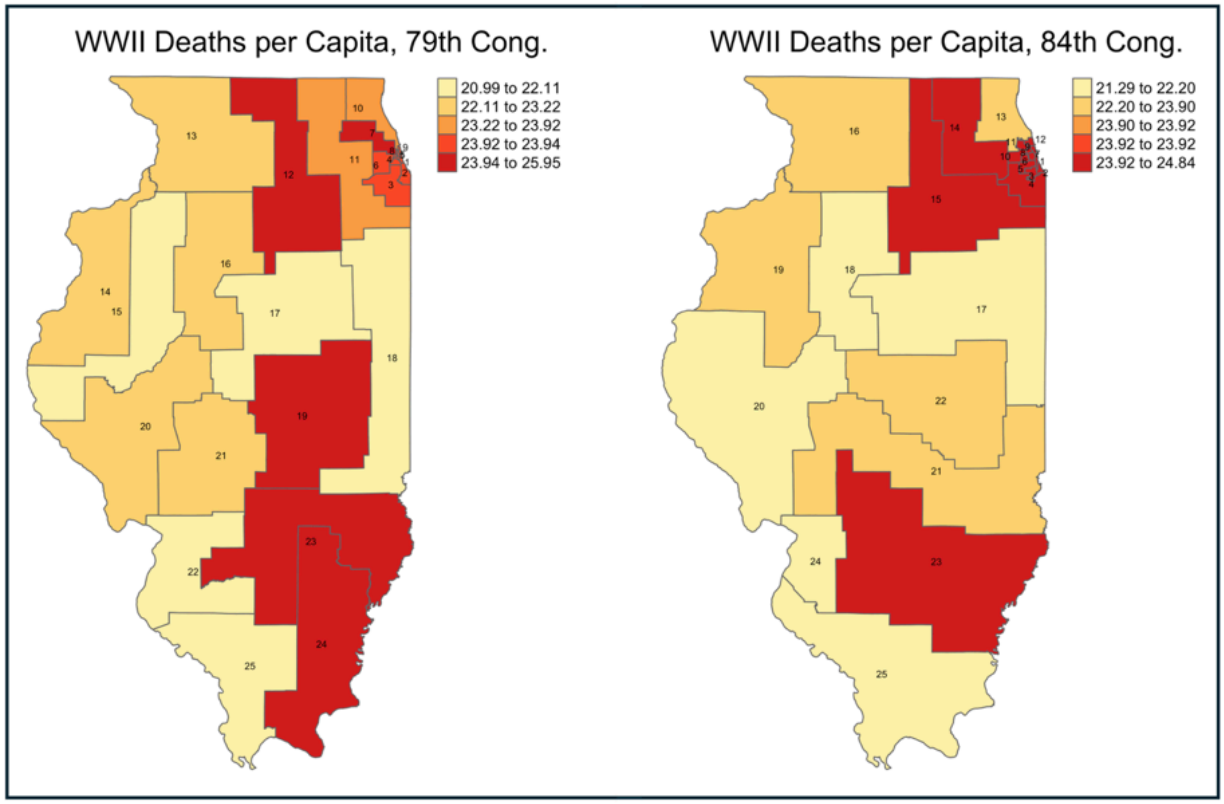


Figure 4A.2. Change in District WWII Exposure from Redistricting, 79th and 84th Congresses in Illinois

Figure 4.2 in the main text visualizes the national bivariate relationship between district war exposure and its score on the *Postwar Consensus Index*. I write in the main text that the patterns mask nontrivial regional heterogeneity, which is depicted in Figure 4A.3.

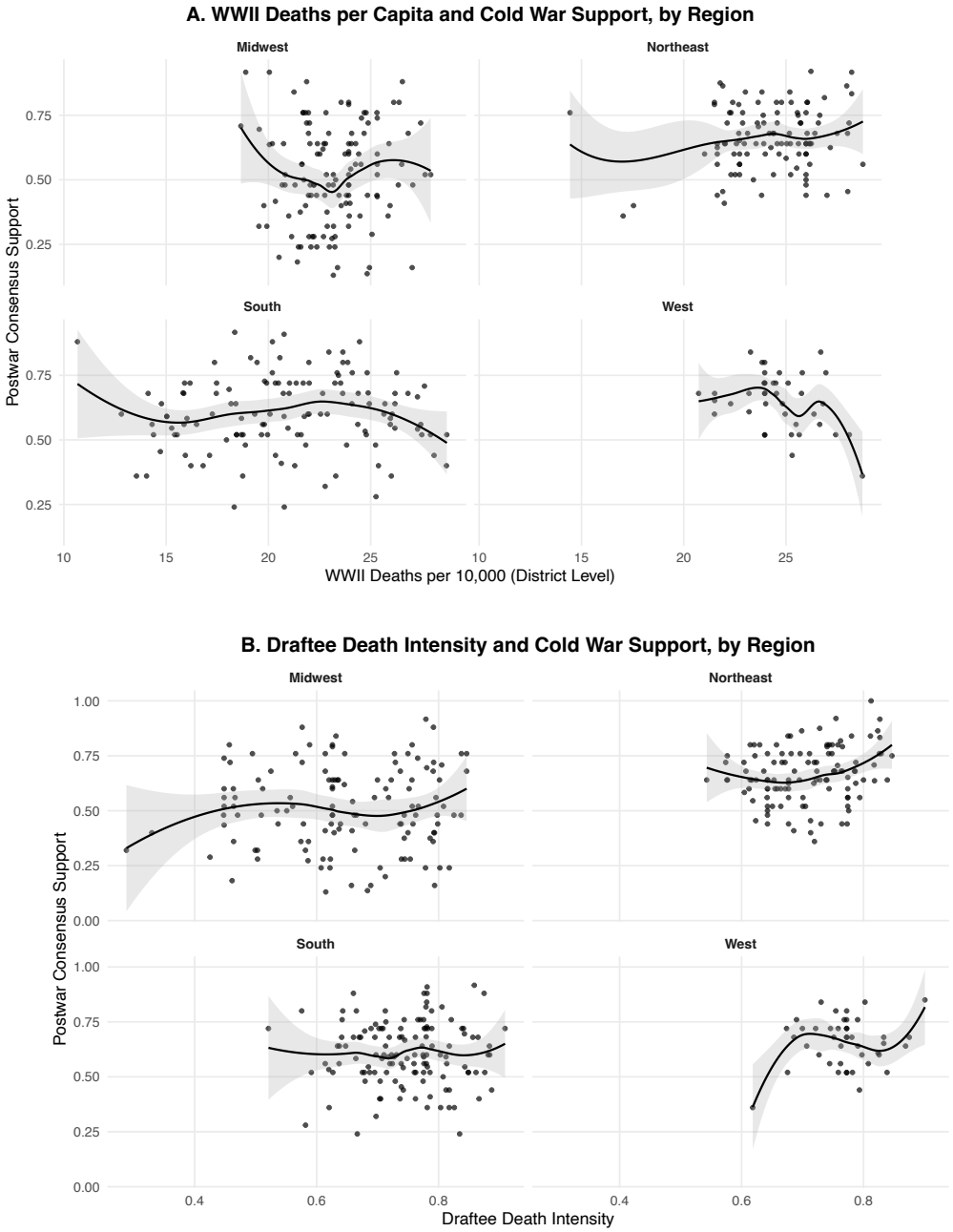


Figure 4A.3. District War Exposure and Support for the Postwar Consensus, by Region
Note: Each point represents a congressional district. WWII deaths per capita is Panel A is trimmed to exclude the top 5% of outlier districts for visualization purposes. District boundaries reflect the 76th Congress (1939–1941).

In Panel A of Figure 4.2 (WWII deaths per capita), the overall national trend is slightly negative. However, Figure 4.A3 shows fluctuation across regions. The Northeast, for example, has a modestly positive slope, whereas the trend in the other regions is more consistent with the baseline national relationship. Looking at draftee deaths in Panel B, there is further regional variation but all are generally aligned with the baseline national trend. Notably, the South stands out as nearly flat, indicating that draftee intensity had little association with lawmaker support for the postwar consensus.

A.2 District Descriptive: War Exposure by Party, Rurality, Region

Table 4A.1. District Level WWII Exposure by Party and Region, 79th Congress (1945-1947)

	Deaths per capita		**Draftee intensity**	
	Democrat	Republican	Democrat	Republican
Northeast	23.72	25.17	.724	.7
South	22.17	25.43	.749	.707
Midwest	23.79	23.11	.647	.645
West	26.41	24.72	.772	.751

Table 4A.2. Determinants of Congressional District War Exposure

	DV: District War Exposure	
	Deaths per cap.	Draftee death intensity
Prewar Pro-Interventionism	0.212	−0.015
	(0.830)	(0.019)
Democratic-Strong	1.324*	−0.010
	(0.778)	(0.017)
Democratic-Controlled	0.400	−0.062***
	(0.664)	(0.015)
Republican-Strong	0.074	−0.011
	(0.719)	(0.016)
Northeast	1.836***	0.082***
	(0.558)	(0.013)
South	−1.560**	0.068***
	(0.684)	(0.015)
West	2.027***	0.116***
	(0.698)	(0.016)
Rurality	1.824**	0.076***
	(0.857)	(0.020)
Observations	437	433
R^2	0.105	0.254
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Below, Figure 4A.4 visualizes the distribution of each measure of war exposure by party and region. These plots enable a straightforward descriptive inference about whether any party-region combination was disproportionately impacted by wartime sacrifice. The party corresponds to the representative serving at the end of the war, in the 79th Congress.

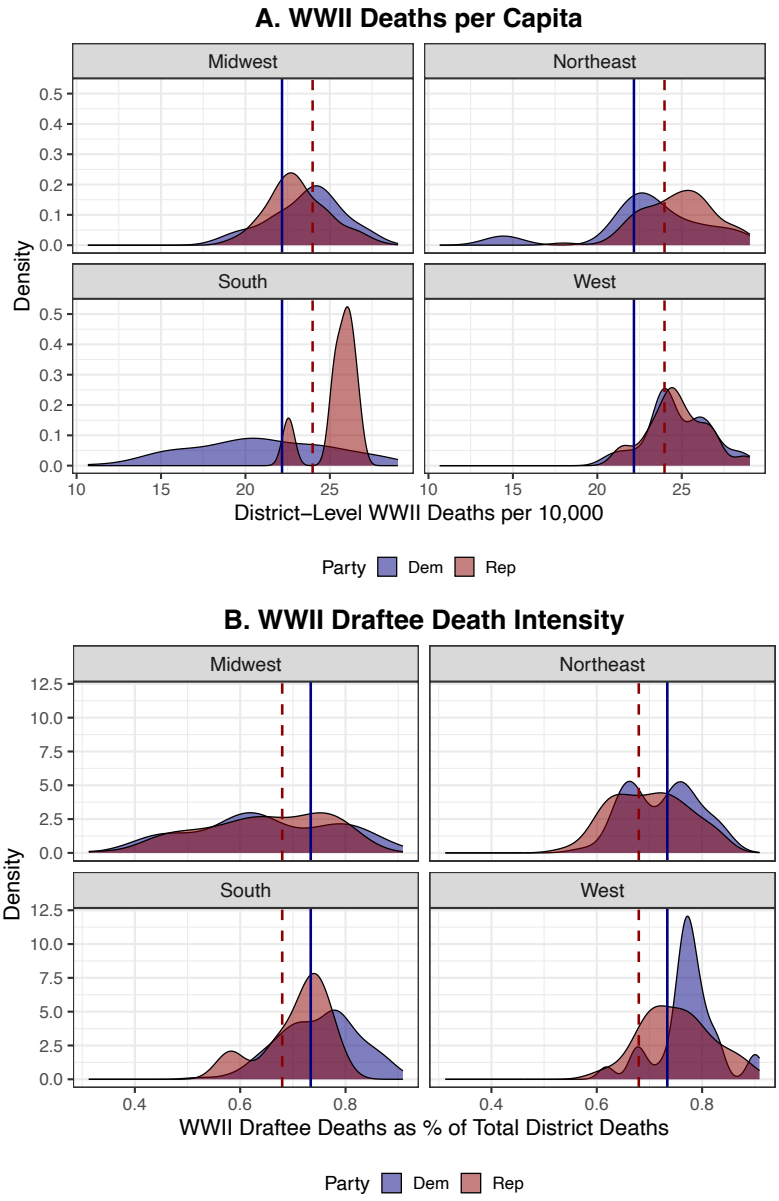


Figure 4A.4. WWII Exposure by Party and District

Note: Each panel visualizes district war exposure for districts represented by the same MC for the entire war. The solid blue line vertical indicates the average war exposure in Democratic districts. The dashed red line indicates the average war exposure in Republican districts. WWII deaths per capita is trimmed to the 95th percentile to minimize outliers.

B Member of Congress Descriptives

Table 4B.1. Summary Statistics of House Cohorts

Category	Variable	WWII House	Wartime Entrants	Postwar Entrants
Partisanship	Number MCs	261	184	716
	Democrats	142	95	389
	Republicans	117	88	326
Region	South	94	42	190
	Midwest	79	53	216
	Northeast	66	61	192
	West	22	28	118
Ideology	Avg. Nominate 1	0.015	-0.028	-0.046
	Avg. Nominate 2	0.137	-0.069	0.059
Tenure	Avg. Year Entered	1933	1942	1953
	Avg. Years Served	20	10	11

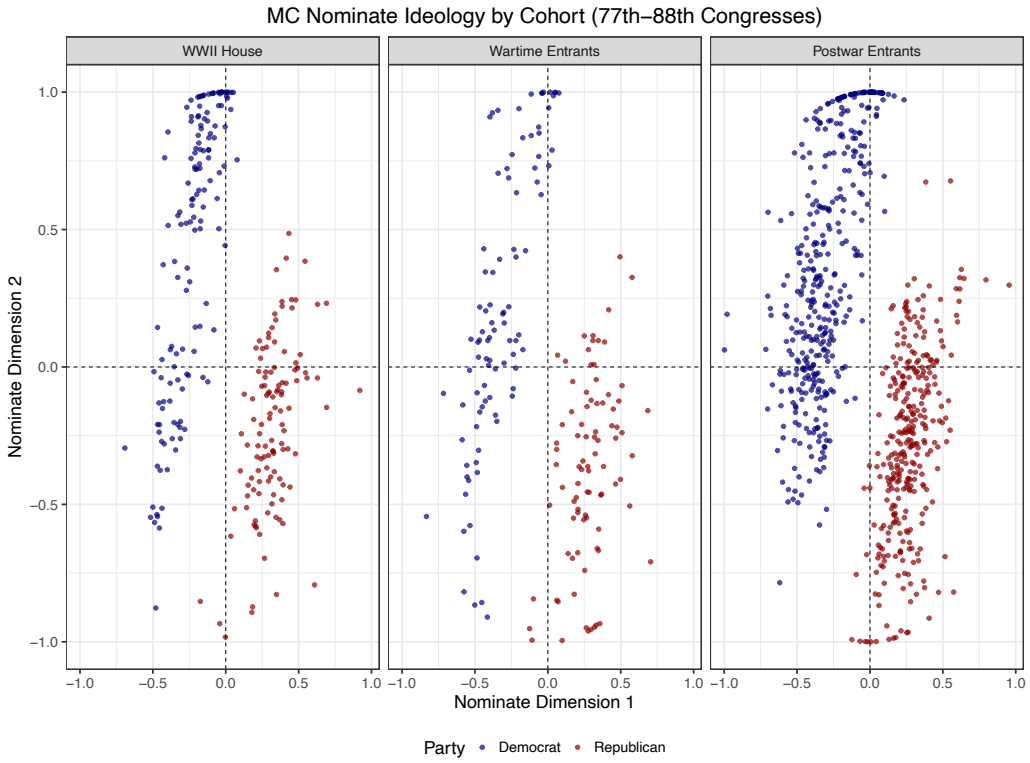


Figure 4B.1. Ideological Spread of House Cohort

C Elections Analysis

As noted in the main text, I include a supplementary analysis of election outcomes in this appendix. My analyses here focus on two questions: (1) To what extent did local war exposure shape election outcomes? And (2) Were elections where the electoral connection is strongest, e.g. House races, influenced more than presidential elections?

I write in the main text that analyzing the war's impact on postwar elections helps identify whether postwar shifts in congressional behavior reflect within-MC updating or turnover. This analysis also helps investigate a key claim in watershed accounts of postwar change: that noninterventionist lawmakers were punished after the war. I refer to this at the "purge" hypothesis. Evaluating this claim is central to understanding the historical and theoretical importance of this case for the domestic political foundations of the U.S. led postwar order.

I structure this analysis in two parts. First, I present regression models estimating the relationship between county war exposure and election outcomes. Keeping with the chapter's focus on the House of Representatives, the primary outcome of interest here is county level Democratic vote share in House elections. I supplement this with Democratic presidential vote share to assess whether local war exposure translated into broader national electoral consequences for the incumbent wartime party. This approach also enables a theoretically informed comparison between local and national electoral responses to war.

Second, I conduct a more focused analysis of the purge hypothesis. To do this, I estimate whether county war exposure predicts the tenure of MCs who voted on the legislation used to create the *Pre-WWII Interventionism Index*. Put directly, were lawmakers who voted against U.S. involvement in WWII before Pearl Harbor punished by their constituents in proportion to their district's wartime sacrifice? If the purge hypothesis is correct, we should see a negative relationship

between local war exposure and MC tenure; noninterventionist MCs representing counties with higher war exposure should be voted out. However, a null or positive relationship would challenge the idea that noninterventionists were punished, raising questions about the mechanism of mass and elite transformation attributed in watershed accounts to the war.

The Local Electoral Legacies of WWII. In this section, I report results from models estimating the relationship between the two measures of county WWII exposure and Democratic vote share in House and presidential elections from 1946 to 1964. I estimate separate models for each measure of war exposure to test my theoretical expectation about different types of wartime experience translating into different postwar political behaviors. For each set of models, I add increasingly more precise levels of geographic controls. Model 1 includes no geographic fixed effects and therefore represents the baseline effect of county war exposure on election outcomes across all counties nationally. I then add geographic region fixed effects for the four main census regions, followed by states. I include state rather than county fixed effects because county war exposure is static over time. Including county fixed effects would absorb all variation between the election outcome and war exposure. I also include election year fixed effects in all models after Model 1.

Table 4C.1 displays the results of linear models estimating the relationship between WWII deaths per capita and Democratic vote share in House elections. Across all models, the coefficient for WWII deaths per capita is negative and statistically significant. Substantively, this means counties with higher relative war deaths voted for the Democratic candidate in House elections at lower rates in the decades after WWII. This suggests a type of electoral blowback against the incumbent wartime party, the Democrats.

Table 4C.1. WWII Deaths per Capita and House Democratic Party Vote Share, 1946-1964

	DV: House Democratic Party Vote Share			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
WWII deaths per cap.	-0.576^{***}	-0.576^{***}	-0.245^{***}	-0.118^{***}
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.012)	(0.011)
Election Year FE	X	✓	✓	✓
Geographic FE	X	X	Region	State
Num. Elections	10	10	10	10
Observations	29,902	29,902	29,902	29,902
R^2	0.036	0.037	0.541	0.682
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

How does this compare to *presidential* elections? Table 4C.2 reports the same models, instead using presidential Democratic vote share as the dependent variable. The key difference is that three of the four models have statistically insignificant coefficients, including Model 4 with state fixed effects. Only Model 3 has a coefficient that is positive and statistically significant, indicating that counties with higher proportional deaths expressed greater support for Democratic presidential candidates. However, that the coefficient becomes null when including a more fine-grained geographic specification in Model 4 suggests the relationship is attenuated after accounting for intra-regional variation.

Table 4C.2. WWII Deaths per Capita and Presidential Democratic Party Vote Share, 1946-1964

	DV: Democratic Party Presidential Vote Share			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
WWII deaths per cap.	0.007	0.006	0.061^{***}	0.011
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.013)
Election Year FE	X	✓	✓	✓
Geographic FE	X	X	Region	State
Num. Elections	5	5	5	5
Observations	15,290	15,290	15,290	15,290
R^2	0.00001	0.013	0.067	0.337
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

In which elections were these relationships strongest? Figure 4C.1 plots the coefficient estimates for WWII deaths per capita for each election year in the postwar era, 1946 to 1964, for the House (top panel) and presidential (bottom panel) elections.[1]

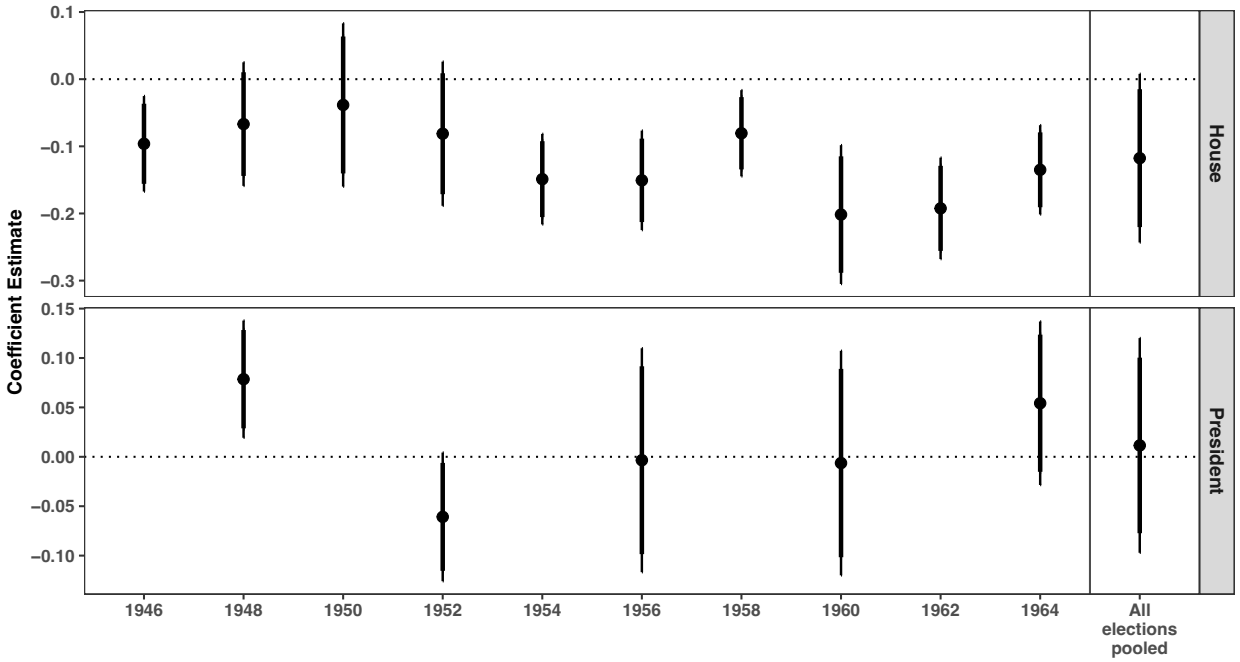


Figure 4C.1. WWII Deaths per Capita and Democratic Vote Share in House and Presidential Elections, 1946-1964

Note: Estimated coefficients from regressions of the Democratic vote share on county level WWII casualties per 10k residents. Results are reported for separate models for each election. Each model includes state fixed effects. The vertical lines indicate 95% (thin) and 90% (thick) confidence intervals based on heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors (clustered by state in the pooled models). Unit of observation is the county.

In the first midterm election after WWII (1946), county level per capita deaths had a negative and statistically significant relationship with Democratic vote share in House races. This finding affirms historical accounts of early postwar Republican gains, what is thought to be a reaction to Democratic dominance during the war. This also aligns with recent scholarship showing that war deaths can provoke an anti-incumbent electoral reaction, even after *victorious* wars (Getmansky and Weiss 2023; Roberts and Burda 2018). Conversely, the bottom panel shows that

[1] The figure is inspired by De Juan et al.'s (2024) study of the electoral effects of local German WWI deaths and nationalist vote share in the interwar period.

in the first postwar presidential election (1948), the opposite occurred: higher county per capita war deaths predicted greater support for incumbent Democratic President Truman.

In the top panel, the rightmost coefficient estimate—for all pooled postwar House elections—indicates that counties with higher proportional WWII deaths experienced slight but statistically meaningful declines in support for Democratic candidates. For example, based on the coefficient estimate of -0.118 (Model 4 in Table 4C.1), a one standard deviation increase in deaths per capita is associated with around 0.71 percentage point decrease in Democratic support across the entire period.[2] Although quite small, this effect is estimated precisely across all postwar House elections before the Vietnam War, and is noteworthy when compared to the lack of significant effect in presidential elections. The divergence in pooled estimates between House and presidential elections—as shown in Tables 4C.1 and 4C.2—suggests the role of local electoral accountability. A takeaway from 4C.1 is that House elections, where the electoral connection is arguably strongest, were more responsive to the spatial distribution and concentration of wartime sacrifice.

How do the results look when estimating the electoral effects of draftee death intensity instead? Table 4C.3 reports results from the same House models, replacing deaths per capita with county draftee death intensity. Table 4C.4 does the same for presidential vote share.

The most striking difference compared to Tables 4C.1 and 4C.2 is the reversal in the direction of coefficients. While deaths per capita predicted lower Democratic party vote share in House elections (Table 4C.1), counties with higher draftee death intensity supported Democratic candidates in both House and presidential elections at statistically significant higher rates.

[2] This is based on the standard deviation of WWII deaths per capita of approximately 6 deaths per 10,000 county residents. Therefore, the effect of a one standard deviation increase = $6 \times (-0.118) = -0.708$.

Table 4C.3. WWII Draftee Death Intensity and House Democratic Party Vote Share, 1946-1964

	DV: House Democratic Party Vote Share			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
WWII draftee deaths (%) total	35.377***	35.419***	8.293***	2.697***
	(0.874)	(0.873)	(0.646)	(0.620)
Election Year FE	X	✓	✓	✓
Geographic FE	X	X	Region	State
Num. Elections	10	10	10	10
Observations	29,688	29,688	29,688	29,688
R^2	0.052	0.053	0.537	0.681
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4C.4. WWII Draftee Death Intensity and Presidential Democratic Party Vote Share, 1946-1964

	DV: House Democratic Party Vote Share			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
WWII draftee deaths (%) total	6.242***	6.251***	−0.104	2.520***
	(0.790)	(0.785)	(0.811)	(0.790)
Election Year FE	X	✓	✓	✓
Geographic FE	X	X	Region	State
Num. Elections	5	5	5	5
Observations	15,178	15,178	15,178	15,178
R^2	0.004	0.017	0.066	0.338
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

What accounts for this puzzling discrepancy, especially given earlier public opinion findings aligned with my theoretical expectations of political blowback to coercive wartime sacrifices?

One interpretation consistent with the dissertation's theoretical intuition is that voters did indeed draw meaningful distinctions between types of sacrifice. Voters in counties with high per capita deaths may have viewed the war in negative terms, associating local losses with general wartime hardships or mismanagement by the incumbent party, following a retrospective voting logic (Getmansky and Weiss 2023). The result is voting against candidates associated with the

wartime leader. On the other hand, voters in counties with high coercive intensity may instead have formed deeper psychological investment in its outcome and the political leaders associated with it. While this cuts against my theoretical prediction of backlash to state-imposed coercion, it suggests that voters may not always assign negative culpability to leaders who imposed sacrifices on their community. Instead, voters in these communities might regard that party as more invested, committed, and better positioned to redress those coercive experiences. According to this logic, coercion might reinforce loyalty rather than undermine it (Rozenas, Talibova and Zhukov 2024).

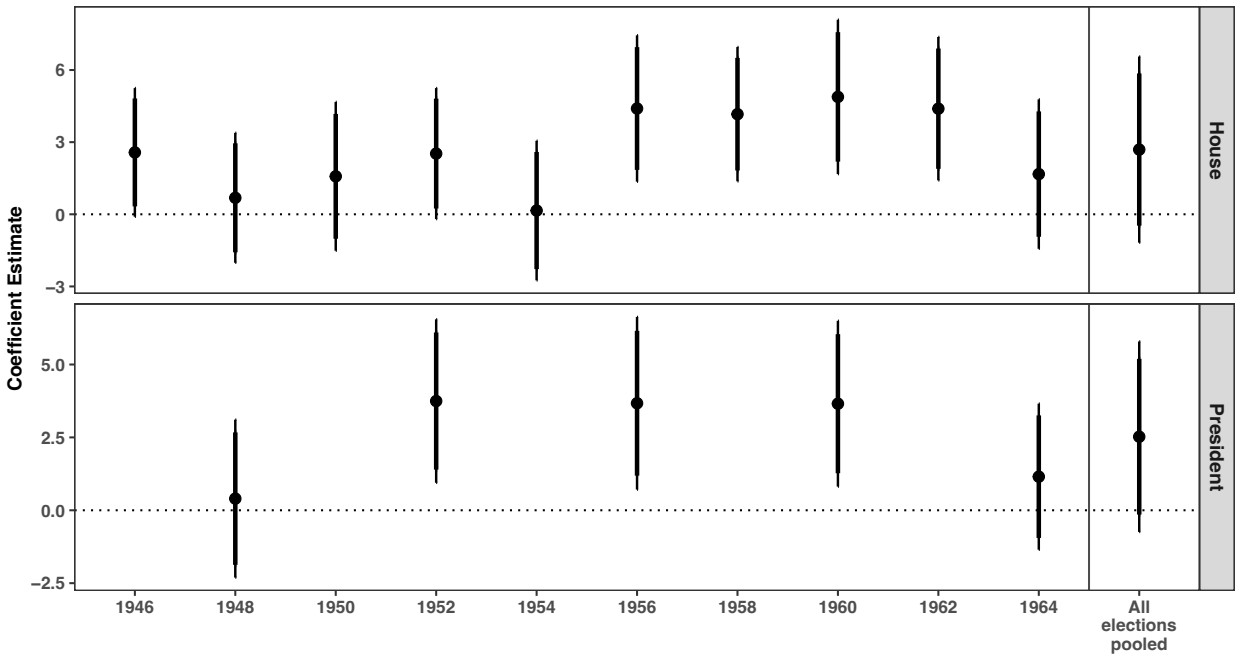


Figure 4C.2. WWII Draftee Death Intensity and Democratic Vote Share in House and Presidential Elections, 1946-1964

Note: Estimated coefficients from regressions of the Democratic vote share on county level WWII casualties per 10k residents, controlling for election year and state fixed effects. The vertical lines indicate 95% (thin) and 90% (thick) confidence intervals. Robust standard errors are clustered by state. Unit of observation is the county.

As an initial attempt to understand this pattern, I again visualize in Figure 4C.2 the coefficient estimates for the draftee death intensity models. Similar to the patterns observed with per capita deaths in Figure 4C.1, the most noticeable effects in House races cluster in the 1950s. Presidential election models from 1952 through 1960 are also positive and statistically significant.

This may suggest that counties' wartime sacrifice become intertwined with other salient political cleavages at the time, such as class or region, that resonated in Democratic campaigns.

Another interpretation, rooted in geography, is that these results could reflect underlying patterns where counties with high draftee death intensity have already been aligned with the Democratic party for different reasons. This would mean the coefficients are due less to the wartime experience and more to preexisting political trends. To explore this possibility, I disaggregate coefficient point estimates by U.S. census region.

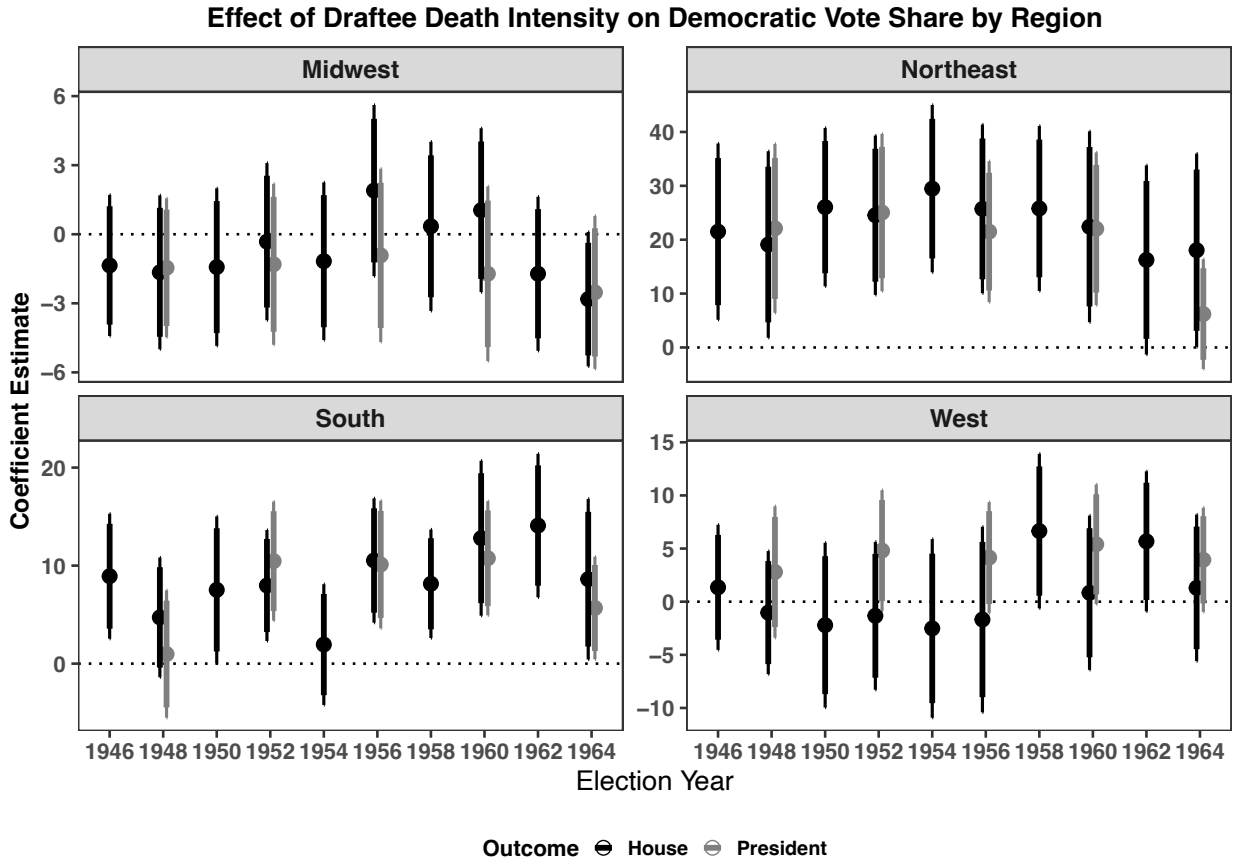


Figure 4C.3. WWII Draftee Death Intensity and Democratic Vote Share by Region, 1946-1964

Figure 4C.3 reveals clear regional clustering. The most striking pattern is that most of the positive effect of WWII draftee death intensity on House and presidential Democratic vote share seems to be driven by counties in the South and Northeast. This difference is especially pronounced

compared to the Midwest panel, where virtually all the coefficient point estimates are statistically insignificant, and a similar pattern obtains in the West. Moreover, in both the Northeast and South, the House and presidential point estimates mirror each other on the y-axis, indicating a shared electoral effect. That is, voters in counties with high draftee death intensity consistently voted for Democrats in both federal elections.

It is important to clarify the difference in y-axis ranges across the four geographic panels in Figure 4C.3. For example, the y-axis for the Midwest ranges from -6 to 6, but 0 to 40 for the Northeast. This scale is not representing the predicted shift in Democratic party vote share per se, but the range in the magnitude and precision of the coefficient estimates. The independent variable, draftee death intensity, is scaled from 0 to 1, indicating the proportion of dead soldiers that were drafted. Most counties fall within the range of 0.67 to 0.8.[3] Based on these scales, a coefficient of 20 means that a 0.1 increase in draftee death intensity corresponds to a two-percentage point increase in Democratic party vote share. For example, while the y-axis scale for the Northeast may seem unreasonably high, the standard deviation of draftee death intensity here is around 0.1, meaning that modest shifts in draftee deaths have meaningful electoral impacts. Alternatively, the Midwest has much smaller statistically insignificant estimates, and a much higher standard deviate around 0.2.

I posit two main takeaways from this analysis. First, the regional clustering suggests the positive impact of coercive wartime experience on electoral trends is not universal. It likely indicates how coercive sacrifice was interpreted through regional partisan dynamics, such as places that already had strong Democratic party support. Second, despite these regional dynamics, the results show that, on average, coercive sacrifice was positively associated with later support for

[3] The breakdown in regional medians is as follows: Northeast (0.72); South (0.78); Midwest (0.67); West (0.8).

Democratic candidates. Geographically uneven wartime sacrifices, and variation in coercive intensity, did not necessarily leave a lasting negative and alienating mentality toward the political leaders responsible for that war experience. This is a notable finding that contributes to scholarly understanding of questions about partisan realignment and debates on the political legacies of war and violence. Notably, it contrasts with a sizeable literature in historical political economy on the enduring, alienating effects of state repression and exposure to violence (Rozenas et al. 2017).

Finally, I speculate that these findings may reflect a positive valence associated with WWII. While the "Good War" moniker was not assigned until several decades later, it has generally been viewed as morally just and successful, standing in stark contrast to the more ambiguous Korean War. During this period of economic growth and new international influence, communal memories of coercive wartime sacrifice may have been subsumed by more positive national memories.

These patterns set up the second and theoretically important question. Having established that war exposure shaped postwar electoral trends, I next examine whether prewar noninterventionists were punished electorally for their prewar beliefs. As I discuss in the main text, local war exposure translated into postwar ideological change and support for the consensus. But as I also find, the cohort with the smallest change in ideology was the WWII House. I address this puzzle and its broader stakes in the following analysis.

Evaluating the "Purge Hypothesis": District War Exposure and the Postwar Tenure of Noninterventionist MCs. Were MCs from high death districts more likely to be voted out of office? Watershed accounts would expect that noninterventionist MCs—those opposed to U.S. involvement in WWII—would be replaced during or after the war. The logic is that a high degree of local war deaths would lead voters to associate their community's sacrifice with the perceived folly of their MC's prewar "isolationism."

Table 4C.5 reports coefficients from linear regression models estimating the tenure of MCs who voted on key prewar legislation related to U.S. involvement in WWII. The dependent variable is the number of years an MC served in Congress after the U.S. formally entered the war. The main explanatory variables include: (1) the MC's *Prewar Interventionism* score, (2) their district's WWII exposure, (3) district rurality, and (4) party-region fixed effects. Because the purge hypothesis emphasizes war exposure, I focus on these coefficients for simplicity.

Models 1 and 2 include all MCs who cast at least one vote on prewar legislation related to U.S. policy toward WWII, with the average MC making five of the six votes included in the *Prewar Interventionism Index*. Models 3 and 4 restrict the sample to only those MCs who cast all six votes. Moreover, in all four models, the sample includes only MCs who *lost an election* after Pearl Harbor. To explore whether the results differ when including MCs who departed for non-electoral reasons—e.g., death, retirement, etc.—I widen the sample in the models in Table 4C.6 to all MCs who departed after the U.S. entered the war.

Table 4C.5. District War Exposure and the Electoral Tenure of Prewar Noninterventionists

	DV: Post-Pearl Harbor Tenure			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Prewar Pro-Interventionism	0.595	0.596	3.071	3.934
	(2.374)	(2.376)	(3.658)	(3.665)
WWII deaths per cap.	−0.186		−0.340	
	(0.221)		(0.304)	
WWII draftee death intensity		5.265		17.467
		(6.846)		(11.501)
Departure Reason	Lost Election	Lost Election	Lost Election	Lost Election
FE	Party-Region	Party-Region	Party-Region	Party-Region
All Six Prewar Votes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	174	173	81	81
R^2	0.094	0.096	0.138	0.151

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The results in Table 4C.5 do not support the purge hypothesis. In none of the four models is the coefficient for either Prewar Interventionism or district war exposure statistically significant. This means that MCs who took non-interventionist positions were no more likely to suffer electoral

defeat than pro-interventionist MCs, even in districts with high wartime losses. This result holds for both MCs who voted on some (Models 1 and 2) and all prewar votes (Models 3 and 4).

Table 4C.6. District War Exposure and MC Turnover

	DV: Post-Pearl Harbor Tenure			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Prewar Pro-Interventionism	1.864	1.504	2.815	2.901
	(1.728)	(1.760)	(2.295)	(2.301)
WWII deaths per cap.	−0.296***		0.014	
	(0.102)		(0.171)	
WWII draftee death intensity		5.752		5.161
		(5.110)		(7.255)
Departure Reason	Lost Election	Lost Election	Lost Election	Lost Election
FE	Party-Region	Party-Region	Party-Region	Party-Region
All Six Prewar Votes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	454	449	243	242
R^2	0.087	0.075	0.106	0.107
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

To expand the sample to all MCs who left office after the U.S. entered the war, Table 4C.6 reports results from same models with this broadened sample. The results of Table 4C.6 offer more nuanced interpretations of the purge hypothesis. One notable finding is the negative and statistically significant coefficient of -0.296 ($p<0.01$) for WWII deaths per capita in Model 1. Substantively, this means that MCs from districts with higher proportional war deaths had a shorter time in office after the U.S. formally entered WWII than MCs from districts with less proportional war deaths.

I posit two interpretations of this result. First, because the sample in Table 4C.6 includes MCs who left office for *all* reasons, this might reflect voluntary departures by MCs who anticipated electoral vulnerability. Second, the fact that the coefficient becomes non-significant in Model 3—when the sample is restricted to MCs who cast all six prewar votes—suggests some underlying difference between lawmakers present for all six votes. These MCs may have had more secure electoral bases and therefore their decision to stay in office, and their electoral prospects, may have

been less influenced by war exposure. Some lawmakers may have been insulated from wartime pressures.

The second main finding is the lack of statistically significant coefficient for Prewar Pro-Interventionism across all four models. This indicates prewar positions were not a key determinant of MCs' subsequent tenure. In this way, the findings echo wartime observations of continuity in congressional views: "Positions on foreign policy assumed before Pearl Harbor were rarely disavowed, either by the electorate or by its representatives…" (Young 1958, 168-169).

A bottom line from the results in Table 4C.5 and 4C.6 is that it is doubtful MCs were systematically punished for their prewar positions. Instead, these results align with patterns of cohort based ideological change, discussed in the main text, which show that ideological shifts were most notable among Wartime and Postwar Entrants, not among the WWII House. Consequently, these tenure results reflect the broader argument and findings in the main text that postwar changes in the elite politics of grand strategy are attributed more to replacement than within-MC updating from a prewar noninterventionist baseline.

D Congressional Roll Call Indices

In this section, I detail the key votes I used to assess district and MC support for the *Pre-WWII Interventionism* and *Postwar Consensus* indices.

D.1 Pre-WWII Interventionism

Table 4D.1 features six House votes on key legislation pertaining to U.S. intervention in WWII. Importantly, these votes are identified by historians of the period and IR scholars as representative of key strategic questions about U.S. intervention. In a history of the noninterventionist America First Committee, Ruth Sarles (2003, 137) writes that "The votes on the two measures *that can be considered real tests of opinion on the fundamental issue* show that between passage of the Lend-Lease Act in January 1941 and final action on the neutrality act, the noninterventionist ranks gained twenty-nine members in the House. In the Senate, six men were added to the noninterventionist bloc during the same period." In addition to Lend-Lease and the repeal of the 1939 Neutrality Act, the four remaining key votes captured views on domestic preparations for war and aid to allied belligerents.

An important qualification relates to what is not included in the list. As legislative scholars observe, that a vote is allowed to occur is itself the product of an intensely political process (Bateman and Lapinski 2016). Therefore, what is prevented from seeing the light of day might bias inferences drawn from votes allowed to occur. An example from the prewar period is the issue of navy convoys. Following the February 1941 passage of Lend-Lease, the Roosevelt Administration grew concerned over how to protect the naval convoys en route from the U.S. to England. The eventual solution was to protect merchant convoys with armed U.S. navy ships, although this was controversial due to the potential to involve the U.S. as a belligerent. Roosevelt

could have sought legislative approval but intentionally opted to pursue a unilateral policy. "President Roosevelt had decided at least as early as April 10, 1941, not to seek Congressional authorization for convoying. He feared he would be defeated in a vote on the question. Instead, President Roosevelt ordered naval 'patrols' designed to render the maximum aid to Britain against Axis raiders short of actual convoys" (Doenecke 1990, 157). Another example was Roosevelt's September 1940 executive order transferring fifty destroyers to Great Britian in exchange for eight military bases. Due to their deliberately unilateral method of adoption, it is plausible to assume these would have failed House passage, although likely still receiving close to full support from Southern Democrats. Notwithstanding these examples, the six votes selected are representative of the broad strategic questions over U.S. intervention.

All but the Ludlow Amendment and Pittman Act corresponded to support for preparation for and greater involvement in the war. An affirmative "Yea" vote for the Ludlow Amendment would have required a national referendum before Congress could declare war. Non-interventionists saw this as a method to curtail what they saw as Roosevelt's efforts to gradually get the nation into the war. A "Nay" vote therefore corresponded to the pro-intervention position. The Pittman Act corresponds to the repeal, or more accurately allowing the expiration of, the 1937 Neutrality Act. A "Nay" vote aligns with the pro-intervention position because the Pittman Act was intended to reauthorize the 1937 Neutrality Act which forbid the U.S. from selling or making available armaments to belligerents, including the Allies. The new policy of "Cash and Carry" allowed the U.S. to sell arms to Allies if they transported them.[4]

[4] "In acceding to Roosevelt's request and thereby authorizing 'cash and carry' exports of munitions to belligerents, Congress acted in full awareness that such a move would aid the Allies, who still controlled the Atlantic sea lanes" (Doenecke 1990, 2).

Table 4D.1. Pre-WWII Votes and Party-Region Breakdown

Date	Bill	Subject	Issue	Vote	Pro-Intervention Position	Party Split		Democrat				Republican			
						Democrat	Republican	NE	S	MW	W	NE	S	MW	W
1/10/1938	HR4782	Ludlow Amendment	Declaration of war	188-209	Nay	0.572	0.241	0.613	0.718	0.382	0.447	0.276	0.5	0.142	0.4
11/2/1939	HJR306	Pittman Act (Cash and Carry)	Military aid	181-243	Nay	0.849	0.128	0.795	0.936	0.722	0.8	0.214	0.2	0.025	0.25
9/14/1940	S4164	Selective Training and Service Act of 1940	Draft	233-124	Yea	0.72	0.277	0.78	0.857	0.433	0.551	0.542	0	0.037	0.416
2/8/1941	HR1776	Lend-Lease Act	Foreign aid	260-165	Yea	0.89	0.149	0.87	0.984	0.775	0.714	0.344	0	0.023	0.133
8/12/1941	HJR222	Amending the Draft	Draft	203-202	Yea	0.677	0.13	0.508	0.922	0.367	0.464	0.271	0	0.012	0.266
11/13/1941	HJR237	Repealing 1939 Neutrality Act	Military aid	212-194	Yea	0.72	0.135	0.576	0.834	0.673	0.576	0.305	0	0.023	0.133

Note: Party Split represents proportion of each party voting the pro-intervention position. For example, 57.2% of Democrats voted the Pro-Intervention position of "Nay" on the Ludlow Amendment, meaning they did not support requiring a national referendum before a Congressional declaration of war. Those voting "Present" are coded as not voting the pro-intervention position. The regional breakdown represents the proportion of each party from the four main regions that voted the pro-intervention position. Roughly 83 percent of Southern Democrats voted to repeal the 1939 Neutrality Act, whereas roughly two percent of Midwestern Republicans did.

D.2 Postwar Consensus

Table 4D.2. Roll Call Votes Comprising the *Postwar Consensus Index*, 1945-1964

Date	Bill	Subject	Issue	Vote	CWC Position	Party Split		Democrat				Republican			
						Democrat	Republican	NE	S	MW	W	NE	S	MW	W
12/18/1945	S1580	United Nations Participation Act of 1945	International organization	343-15	Yea	0.795	0.787	0.673	0.786	0.916	0.892	0.873	0.428	0.744	0.809
5/9/1947	HR2616	Greek and Turkish Assistance Act of 1947	Foreign aid	287-108	Yea	0.855	0.524	0.866	0.867	0.789	0.823	0.666	0.5	0.383	0.645
3/31/1948	S2202	Marshall Plan	Foreign aid	329-74	Yea	0.849	0.702	0.896	0.816	0.85	1	0.91	0.692	0.477	0.906
4/2/1948	S2202	Marshall Plan	Foreign aid	318-75	Yea	0.811	0.685	0.827	0.791	0.75	1	0.853	0.692	0.486	0.906
6/18/1948	HR6771	Defense Bill	Defense spending	283-130	Yea	0.783	0.567	0.551	0.883	0.631	0.647	0.797	0.571	0.354	0.656
6/19/1948	S2655	Selective Service Act of 1948	Draft	259-136	Yea	0.735	0.506	0.448	0.85	0.526	0.647	0.741	0.357	0.29	0.656
3/7/1949	HR2663	Administration of CIA	National security	348-4	Yea	0.801	0.802	0.589	0.881	0.872	0.708	0.65	1	0.921	0.769
8/18/1949	HR5895	Mutual Defense Act of 1949	Military aid	238-122	Yea	0.791	0.302	0.759	0.763	0.6	0.666	0.476	0.571	0.144	0.269
1/19/1950	HR5330	Aid to Korea	Foreign aid	191-192	Yea	0.651	0.123	0.763	0.503	0.796	0.84	0.241	0	0.039	0.12
3/31/1950	HR7797	Amending Marshall Act	Foreign aid	150-220	Nay	0.88	0.309	0.982	0.778	1	0.92	0.438	0.143	0.2	0.36
8/17/1951	HR5113	Mutual Security Act of 1951	Military aid	186-177	Yea	0.16	0.748	0.02	0.285	0	0.045	0.691	0.9	0.777	0.74
3/11/1952	HRE539	Investigate Katyn Forest Massacre	Human rights	206-155	Yea	0.419	0.532	0.66	0.22	0.647	0.636	0.551	0.5	0.484	0.666
6/28/1956	HR9852	Amend Defense Production Act of 1950	Defense industry	200-197	Yea	0.584	0.321	0.109	0.86	0.409	0.4	0.118	0.538	0.452	0.324
7/11/1956	HR12130	Mutual Security Act of 1957	Military aid	284-120	Yea	0.692	0.613	0.913	0.504	0.864	0.95	0.809	0.615	0.405	0.729
1/30/1957	HJRE117	Support Eisenhower Mid East Doctrine	Foreign aid	355-61	Yea	0.806	0.835	0.909	0.771	0.783	0.84	0.943	0.812	0.699	0.967
4/10/1957	SJRE72	Amend UK-US Loan Agreement of 1945	Foreign aid	218-167	Yea	0.57	0.425	0.659	0.508	0.696	0.48	0.543	0.625	0.205	0.645
7/19/1957	S2130	Mutual Security Act of 1957	Military aid	181-227	Nay	0.557	0.61	0.977	0.28	0.756	0.769	0.886	0.625	0.361	0.645
6/29/1960	HR11001	Int'l Development Association Act of 1960	Foreign aid	249-158	Yea	0.585	0.559	0.847	0.393	0.621	0.758	0.745	0.4	0.435	0.52
8/31/1961	S1983	Foreign Assistance Act of 1961	Foreign aid	260-132	Yea	0.694	0.448	0.929	0.508	0.784	0.848	0.746	0.091	0.244	0.538
9/19/1961	HR9118	Arms Control and Disarmament Act of 1961	Arms control	290-54	Yea	0.746	0.551	0.786	0.702	0.82	0.727	0.678	0.818	0.474	0.384
9/23/1961	HR9118	Arms Control and Disarmament Act of 1961	Arms control	253-50	Yea	0.684	0.431	0.732	0.628	0.72	0.758	0.458	0.818	0.397	0.307
7/12/1962	HR11921	Foreign Assistance Act of 1962	Foreign aid	250-164	Yea	0.681	0.413	0.926	0.447	0.863	0.879	0.746	0.182	0.256	0.23
12/16/1963	HR9499	Foreign Assistance Act of 1963	Foreign aid	218-169	Yea	0.256	0.853	0.113	0.431	0.106	0.122	0.778	0.882	0.885	0.896
2/26/1964	HR9022	Fund Int'l Development Association	Foreign aid	208-189	Yea	0.273	0.779	0	0.5	0.17	0.098	0.63	0.875	0.833	0.862
7/1/1964	HR11812	Reduce economic aid funds	Foreign aid	198-208	Nay	0.787	0.196	1	0.6	0.844	0.976	0.352	0.059	0.115	0.206

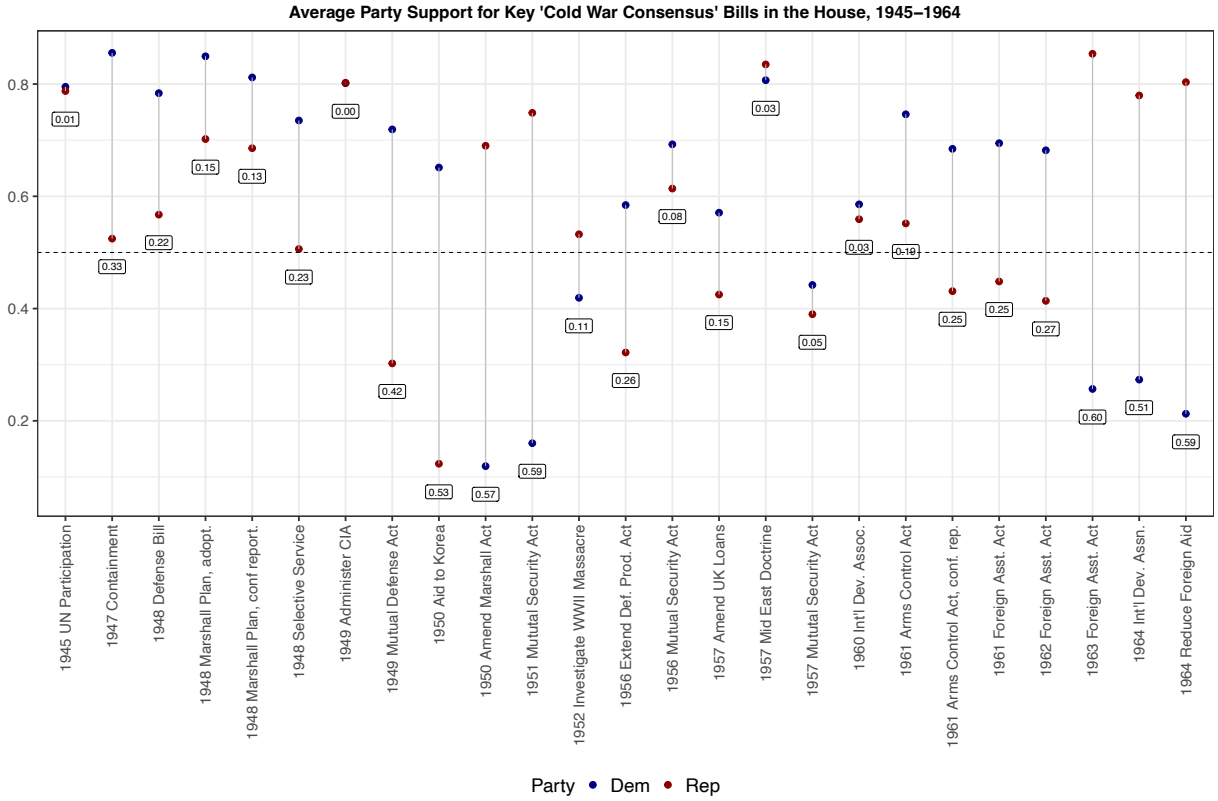
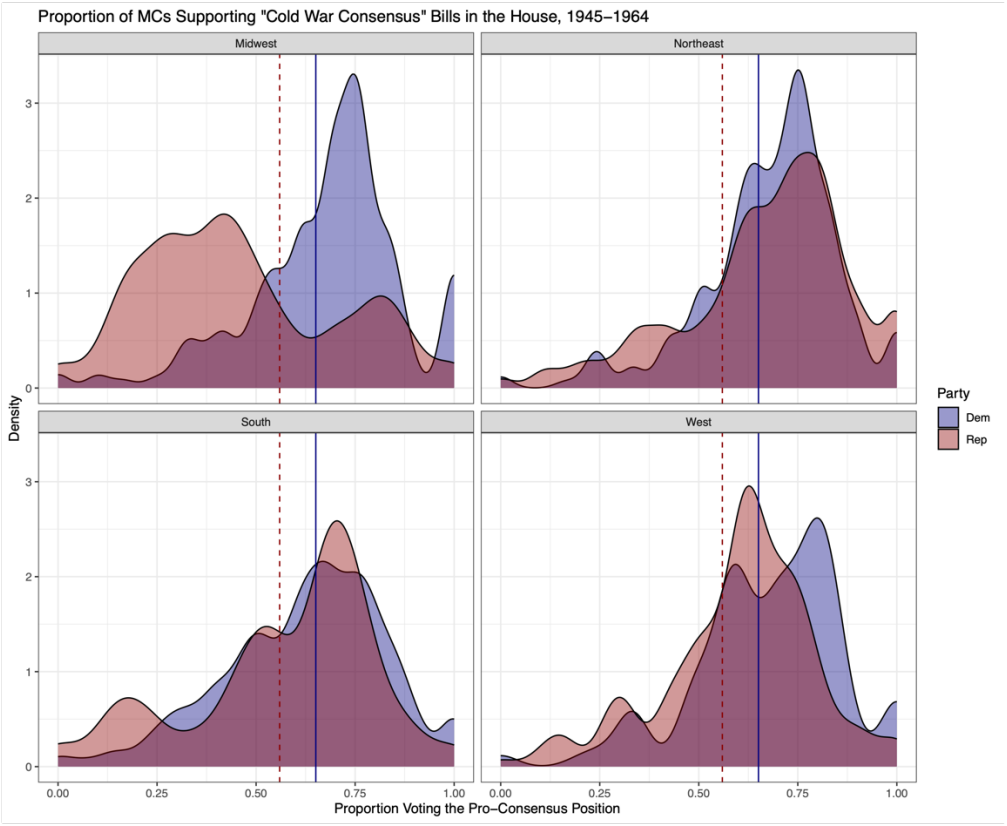


Figure 4D.1. Average Support for the Postwar Consensus Votes by Party, 1945-1964



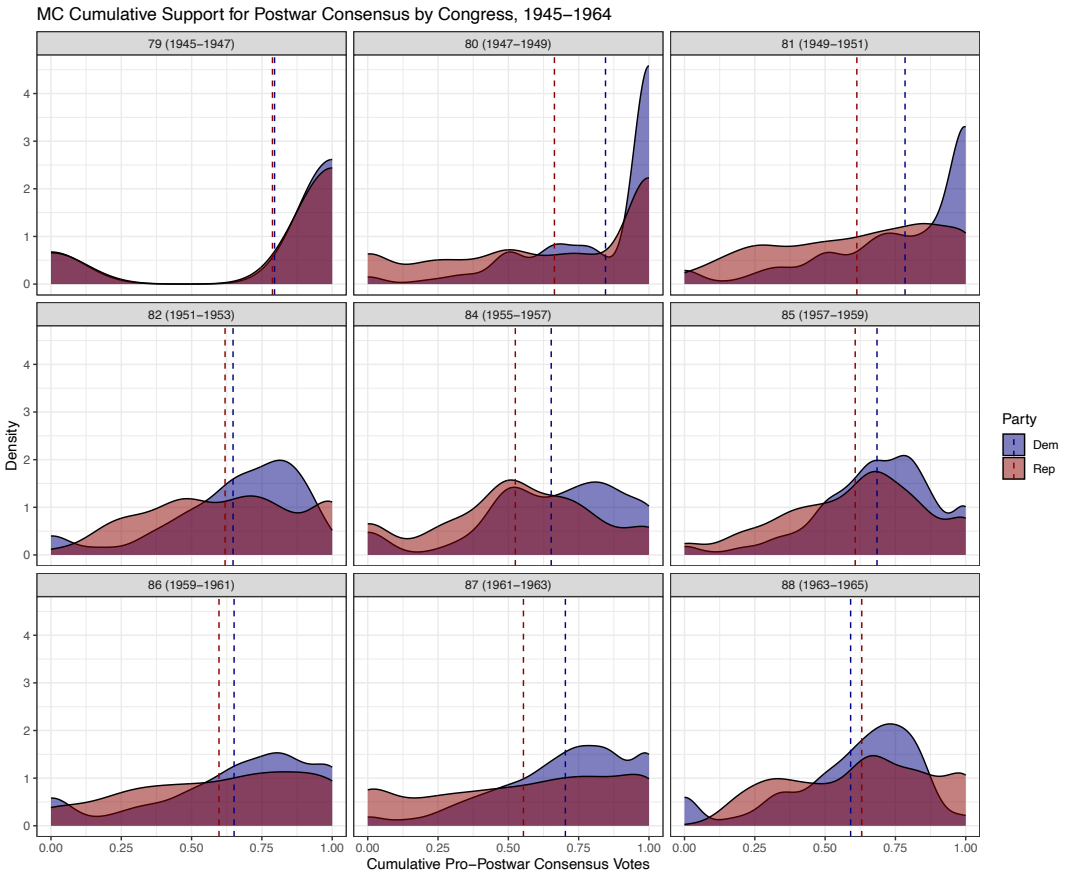
Note: The vertical lines reflect the average proportion of pro-CWC votes by party. The red dashed line shows that, out of all the CWC related votes taken by a Republican MC, the average Republican MC voted the pro-CWC position on 56% of the votes. The blue line shows that the average Democratic MC voted in favor of the CWC position on 65% of their votes.

Figure 4D.2. MC Support for the Cold War Consensus, by Party-Region, 1945-1964

Figure 4D.2 suggests there was considerable regional variation among MC support for the postwar consensus. A clear takeaway is that Midwest Republicans in the upper left panel voted on average for the postwar consensus at lower proportions than Republicans in the other three regions.

To understand how partisan support for the postwar consensus evolved over time, Figure 4D.3 depicts MCs' cumulative *Postwar Consensus* score by Congress. In each panel, the vertical dashed line visualizes the average *Postwar Consensus* score by party for that Congress. Consider the top middle panel for the 80th Congress (1947-1949). The high blue tail on the right-hand side indicates that most of the Democratic MCs in that Congress had voted the *Postwar Consensus*

position on all eight votes up to that point.[207] An overall interpretation of Figure 4D.3 is that there does not appear to be a major reconfiguration of partisan support for the postwar consensus in the pre-Vietnam War period. Alternatively, what we see by the 82nd Congress (1951-1953) is an equilibrium distribution where the average Republican and Democrat MC has a *Postwar Consensus* position of slightly more than 0.5, and the spread for each party has normalized. An alternative account of increasing support for the postwar consensus would instead display one or both parties becoming increasingly concentrated on the right-hand side of the distribution.



Note: The dashed vertical lines indicate the average proportion of pro-postwar consensus votes made by MCs in each party up to and including that Congress.

Figure 4D.3. Support for the Postwar Consensus by Party, Congress, 1945-1964

[207] This includes those MCs in the 79th Congress who had voted on the first two votes of the postwar era, and those MCs who entered in the 80th Congress and had only voted on the six votes that Congress.

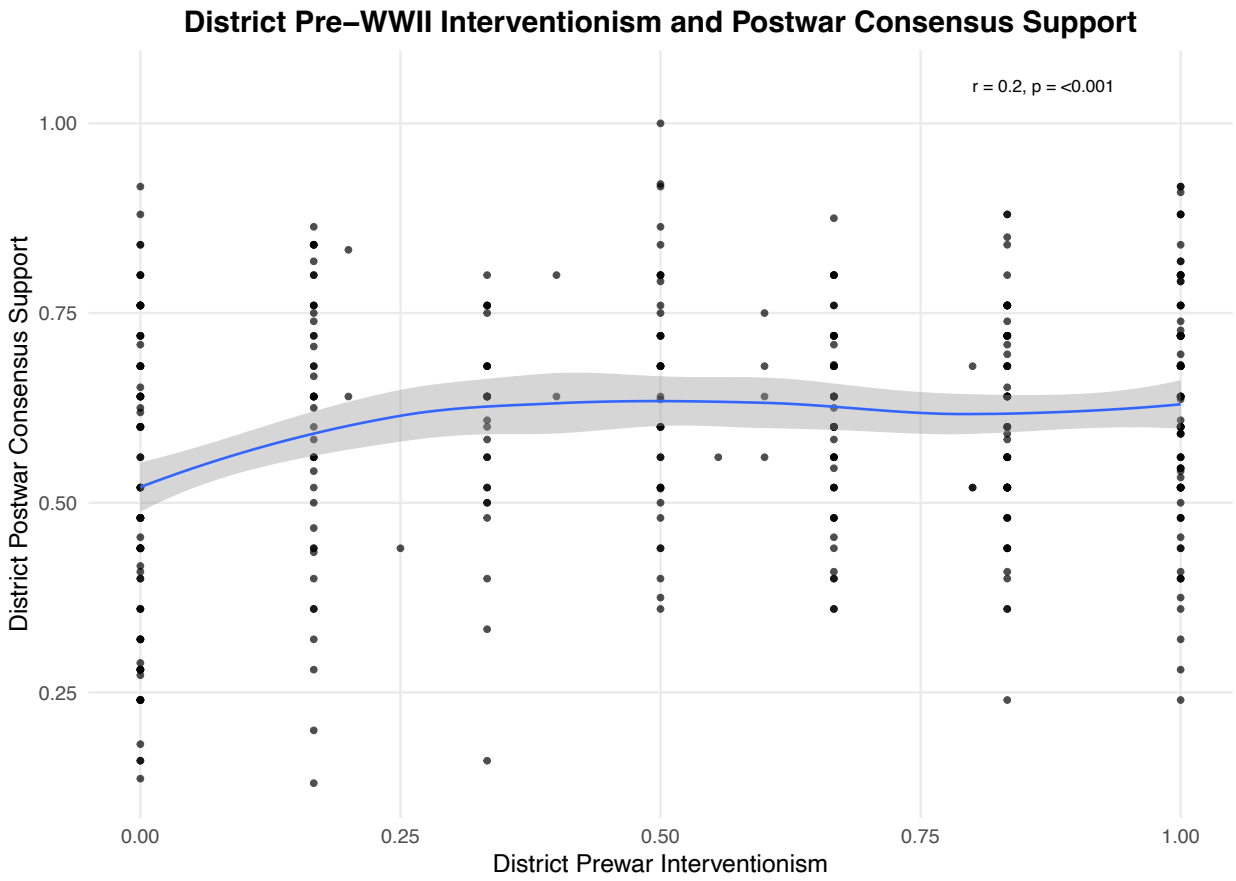


Figure 4D.4. District Pre-WWII Interventionism and Support for the Postwar Consensus

E Regression Results

In this section I present regression results discussed in the main text.

E.1 Ideological Change by Cohort

Table 4E.1. Ideological Change Among Members of the WWII House

	ΔNP1		ΔNP2	
	Per capita	Draftees	Per capita	Draftees
WWII Deaths per 10k	−0.005**		0.008**	
	(0.002)		(0.004)	
Draftee Death Intensity		0.089		0.023
		(0.087)		(0.156)
Rurality (1940)	0.008	0.0004	−0.008	−0.007
	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.068)	(0.069)
Prewar Interventionism	0.013	0.018	−0.233***	−0.237***
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.063)	(0.063)
Party: Republican	0.020	0.019	−0.276***	−0.270***
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.046)	(0.047)
Region: Midwest	0.022	0.005	0.014	0.029
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.044)	(0.045)
Region: South	0.003	0.001	−0.074	−0.084
	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.056)	(0.058)
Region: West	−0.015	−0.037	−0.024	−0.010
	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.056)	(0.060)
Constant	0.093	−0.077	0.131	0.298***
	(0.058)	(0.064)	(0.103)	(0.114)
Observations	252	252	252	252
R^2	0.030	0.014	0.160	0.146
Adjusted R^2	0.002	−0.014	0.136	0.121

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Reference categories: Democrat, Northeast.

Table 4E.2. Ideological Change Among Wartime Entrants

	ΔNP1		ΔNP2	
	Per capita	Draftees	Per capita	Draftees
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.012		−0.002	
	(0.009)		(0.011)	
Draftee Death Intensity		0.219		−0.356
		(0.527)		(0.597)
Rurality (1940)	0.007	0.025	−0.059	−0.027
	(0.189)	(0.196)	(0.216)	(0.222)
Prewar Interventionism	0.200	0.192	−0.533***	−0.514***
	(0.123)	(0.128)	(0.141)	(0.145)
Party: Republican	0.459***	0.467***	−0.298***	−0.314***
	(0.087)	(0.090)	(0.099)	(0.102)
Region: Midwest	−0.094	−0.093	−0.148	−0.118
	(0.101)	(0.112)	(0.116)	(0.127)
Region: South	0.098	0.075	−0.129	−0.110
	(0.165)	(0.168)	(0.189)	(0.190)
Region: West	−0.157	−0.163	−0.387**	−0.349**
	(0.134)	(0.147)	(0.154)	(0.167)
Constant	−0.495**	−0.378	0.497*	0.669*
	(0.232)	(0.338)	(0.265)	(0.383)
Observations	86	86	86	86
R^2	0.346	0.335	0.298	0.301
Adjusted R^2	0.287	0.275	0.235	0.238

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Reference categories: Democrat, Northeast.

Table 4E.3. Ideological Change Among Postwar Entrants

	ΔNP1		ΔNP2	
	Per capita	Draftees	Per capita	Draftees
WWII Deaths per 10k	−0.002		0.008	
	(0.005)		(0.005)	
Draftee Death Intensity		0.392**		−0.080
		(0.177)		(0.208)
Rurality (1940)	−0.183***	−0.218***	0.087	0.110
	(0.068)	(0.069)	(0.080)	(0.081)
Prewar Interventionism	0.199***	0.198***	−0.229***	−0.231***
	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.061)	(0.061)
Party: Republican	0.488***	0.486***	−0.343***	−0.339***
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.038)	(0.038)
Region: Midwest	0.015	−0.019	−0.010	0.014
	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.048)	(0.049)
Region: South	0.217***	0.186***	−0.096	−0.088
	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.064)	(0.066)
Region: West	0.078	0.026	0.060	0.087
	(0.053)	(0.056)	(0.062)	(0.066)
Constant	−0.274**	−0.555***	0.047	0.283**
	(0.112)	(0.117)	(0.131)	(0.137)
Observations	527	527	527	527
R^2	0.321	0.327	0.159	0.155
Adjusted R^2	0.312	0.318	0.148	0.144

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Reference categories: Democrat, Northeast.

E.2 District Level Support for the Postwar Consensus

Table 4E.4. District War Exposure and Support for the Postwar Consensus

	Continuous		**Binned**	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.006***			
	(0.002)			
Draftee Death Intensity		0.163**		
		(0.083)		
Rurality (%)	−0.126***	−0.129***		
	(0.034)	(0.035)		
WWII Deaths per 10k (high)			0.028*	
			(0.015)	
Draftee Death Intensity (high)				0.039**
				(0.015)
Rurality: High			−0.082***	−0.087***
			(0.017)	(0.017)
District Party Majority: GOP	−0.035*	−0.031*	−0.035**	−0.036**
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Region: Northeast	0.110***	0.109***	0.111***	0.113***
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.019)
Region: South	0.109***	0.088***	0.101***	0.090***
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Region: West	0.124***	0.112***	0.120***	0.110***
	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.028)
Constant	0.463***	0.486***	0.566***	0.568***
	(0.046)	(0.056)	(0.020)	(0.019)
Observations	409	409	409	409
R^2	0.202	0.191	0.215	0.221
Adjusted R^2	0.190	0.179	0.203	0.209
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4E.5. District War Exposure, Rurality, and Support for the Postwar Consensus

	Continuous Interaction		**Binned Interaction**	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.006			
	(0.005)			
Draftee Death Intensity		0.170		
		(0.146)		
Rurality (%)	−0.110	−0.118		
	(0.156)	(0.190)		
WWII Deaths per 10k (high)			0.027	
			(0.021)	
Draftee Death Intensity (high)				0.059***
				(0.021)
Rurality: High			−0.084***	−0.067***
			(0.023)	(0.022)
District Party Majority: GOP	−0.035*	−0.031*	−0.035**	−0.038**
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Region: Northeast	0.110***	0.109***	0.111***	0.117***
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Region: South	0.109***	0.088***	0.101***	0.092***
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Region: West	0.124***	0.112***	0.119***	0.109***
	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.028)
Deaths x Rural	−0.001			
	(0.007)			
Draftee x Rural		−0.015		
		(0.267)		
Deaths (high) x Rurality (high)			0.002	
			(0.030)	
Draftee (high) x Rurality (high)				−0.040
				(0.029)
Constant	0.451***	0.481***	0.567***	0.558***
	(0.119)	(0.099)	(0.023)	(0.020)
Observations	409	409	409	409
R^2	0.202	0.191	0.215	0.225
Adjusted R^2	0.188	0.177	0.201	0.211

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

E.3 District Level Support for the Postwar Consensus

Table 4E.6. Democratic Responsiveness and District War Exposure

	Continuous		**Binned**	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
District MRP Support	−0.713***	−0.297	−0.581**	−0.362
	(0.271)	(0.281)	(0.261)	(0.264)
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.007***			
	(0.002)			
Draftee Death Intensity		0.157*		
		(0.085)		
Rurality (1940)	−0.147***	−0.138***		
	(0.032)	(0.034)		
WWII Deaths: High			0.033**	
			(0.015)	
Draftee Intensity: High				0.034**
				(0.015)
Rurality: High			−0.088***	−0.089***
			(0.017)	(0.017)
Region: Northeast	0.097***	0.109***	0.103***	0.114***
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Region: South	0.145***	0.114***	0.131***	0.118***
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Region: West	0.168***	0.139***	0.160***	0.147***
	(0.030)	(0.035)	(0.031)	(0.032)
Constant	0.886***	0.665***	0.922***	0.780***
	(0.168)	(0.203)	(0.168)	(0.172)
Observations	420	416	420	416
R^2	0.214	0.193	0.218	0.219
Adjusted R^2	0.202	0.181	0.207	0.207
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4E.7. Democratic Responsiveness, Rurality, and District War Exposure

	Continuous Interaction		**Binned Interaction**	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.007***			
	(0.002)			
Draftee Death Intensity		0.154*		
		(0.085)		
War Exposure: High			0.031**	
			(0.015)	
Draftee Intensity: High				0.037**
				(0.015)
District MRP Support	−1.186**	−0.789	−1.113***	−0.934***
	(0.472)	(0.498)	(0.352)	(0.357)
Rurality (1940)	−0.764	−0.758		
	(0.505)	(0.519)		
Rurality: High			−0.729**	−0.770***
			(0.287)	(0.288)
Region: Northeast	0.094***	0.105***	0.096***	0.105***
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Region: South	0.146***	0.116***	0.138***	0.125***
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Region: West	0.173***	0.146***	0.168***	0.153***
	(0.031)	(0.035)	(0.031)	(0.032)
MRP Support × Rurality	0.951	0.956		
	(0.777)	(0.799)		
MRP Support × Rurality (high)			0.972**	1.034**
			(0.434)	(0.436)
Constant	1.194***	0.983***	1.268***	1.151***
	(0.302)	(0.335)	(0.228)	(0.232)
Observations	420	416	420	416
R^2	0.217	0.196	0.228	0.229
Adjusted R^2	0.203	0.182	0.215	0.216

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

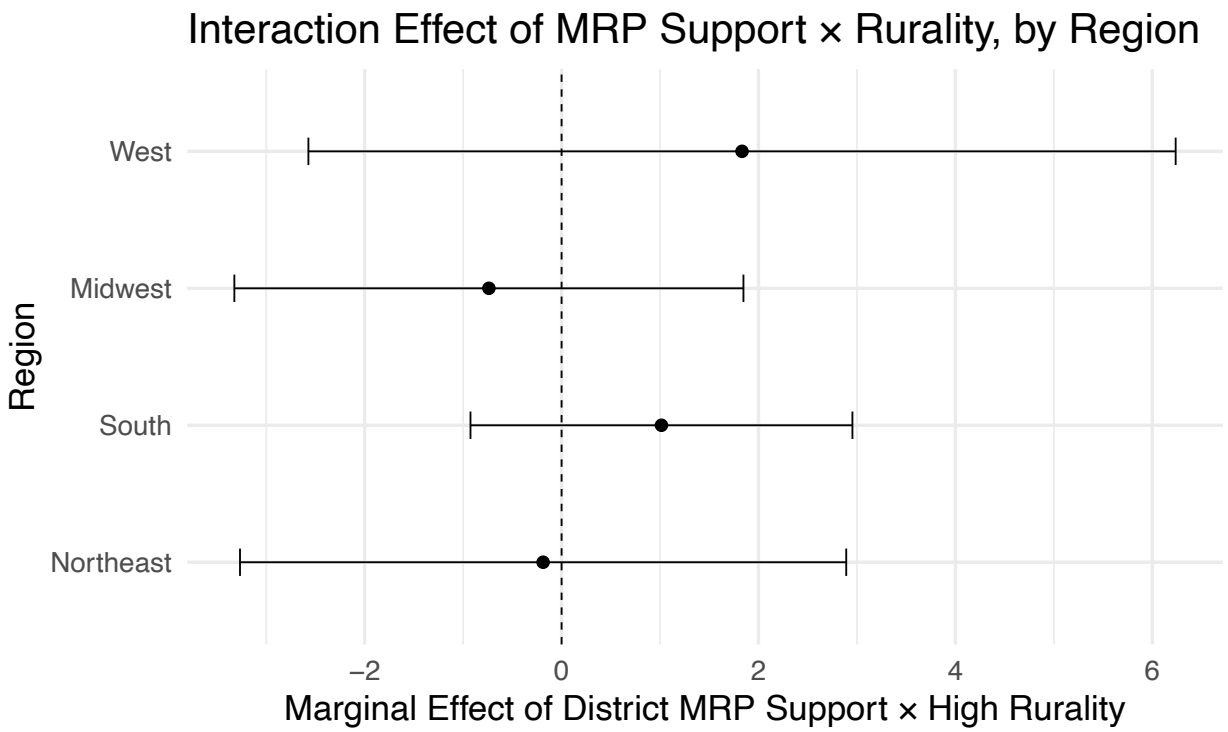


Figure 4E.1. Interaction Effect of Democratic Responsiveness and Rurality, by Region

E.4 War and Democratic Responsiveness in the South

Table 4E.8. War Exposure and Support for the Postwar Consensus in the American South

	Continuous Interaction		**Binned Interaction**	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
WWII Deaths per 10k	0.013***			
	(0.004)			
Draftee Death Intensity		0.362***		
		(0.088)		
Deaths: High			0.059***	
			(0.018)	
Draftee Intensity: High				0.066***
				(0.018)
South	0.261**	0.169	0.068***	0.056**
	(0.105)	(0.147)	(0.026)	(0.028)
District Majority Party: Republican	−0.037**	−0.032*	−0.041**	−0.044**
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Rurality (1940)	−0.190***	−0.185***		
	(0.033)	(0.034)		
WWII Deaths × South	−0.008*			
	(0.004)			
Draftee Intensity × South		−0.181		
		(0.200)		
Rurality: High			−0.107***	−0.112***
			(0.017)	(0.017)
High Deaths × South			−0.038	
			(0.034)	
High Draftee Deaths × South				−0.042
				(0.033)
Constant	0.362***	0.430***	0.625***	0.631***
	(0.090)	(0.063)	(0.019)	(0.016)
Observations	413	409	413	409
R^2	0.143	0.131	0.151	0.150
Adjusted R^2	0.132	0.120	0.140	0.140

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4E.9. Democratic Responsiveness and Rurality in the American South

	All Districts		Subsample Models	
	Continuous Rurality	Binned Rurality	South Only	Non-South Only
District MRP Support	−0.149	−0.163	−0.513	−0.410
	(0.287)	(0.278)	(0.902)	(0.347)
South	−0.297	−0.283		
	(0.326)	(0.318)		
District Majority Party: Republican	−0.038**	−0.046**	−0.020	−0.047**
	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.049)	(0.020)
Rurality (1940)	−0.175***			
	(0.035)			
Rurality: High		−0.108***	−0.760	−0.778*
		(0.018)	(0.663)	(0.405)
District MRP Support × South	0.526	0.491		
	(0.491)	(0.480)		
District MRP Support × Rural (high)			1.040	0.995
			(0.991)	(0.615)
Constant	0.777***	0.768***	1.012*	0.931***
	(0.183)	(0.178)	(0.605)	(0.222)
Observations	413	413	131	282
R^2	0.105	0.130	0.050	0.173
Adjusted R^2	0.094	0.119	0.020	0.161

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

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