

Serving to Run:
Veterans and the March to Elected Office

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Abstract

Military experience has long held political relevance. However, over the last 50 years, the share of veterans serving in public office has steadily declined. This trend and the simultaneous rise in polarization motivate efforts to recruit and elect more veteran candidates. Proponents argue that values and skills associated with military service are vital to improving government. Despite a historical tradition and these more recent appeals, few studies consider the effect of military experience on electoral behavior.

This dissertation follows the trajectory of veteran candidates in electoral politics: why they run, how they campaign, and how they govern. I consider the factors that motivate or deter veterans from emerging as candidates for elective office, the effect that their military experience has on voters, and the extent to which veteran elected officials differ when they are on the job. I argue that prior military experience influences the political behavior of veterans and knowledge of this background can be a meaningful cue for the electorate. The goal of this research is to provide a comprehensive empirical evaluation of how military experience influences electoral politics.

First, I explore political ambition among veterans (Chapter 2). I consider how norms and institutional arrangements associated with contemporary military service may reinforce or diminish political ambition. Drawing on data from two original survey studies comparing veterans with civilians, I find that veterans are highly interested in seeking elective office. In examining why this is the case, I find that veterans consider themselves particularly qualified to run and are susceptible to recruitment efforts. The

results also indicate that politically ambitious veterans differ in terms of Basic Human Values (Schwartz 1992), such that these veterans prioritize self-enhancement over more selfless goals. In light of these findings, I consider the implications for both political recruitment efforts and civil-military relations. Overall, this essay establishes veterans as another group of “eligible potential candidates,” previously omitted from research on candidate emergence.

Next, I turn to the campaign trail (Chapter 3). Once veterans decide to run, they often highlight their military experience, yet little is known about the political consequences of this signaling. I explore how evidence of a candidate’s military background influences perceptions of the candidate’s ideology. I expect voters perceive veteran candidates to be more conservative, which ultimately influences assessments of favorability. I evaluate this expectation relative to another powerful cue that steers ideological perceptions in the opposite direction: race. Drawing on Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) data from four U.S. House elections (2014-2020) and an original survey experiment embedded in the 2020 CCES, I find that voters tend to view veterans as more conservative and Black candidates as more liberal. Consequently, voters favor the candidate whose ideological stereotype coincides with their own political viewpoint. Black candidates enjoy an electoral advantage, especially among liberal voters, while veterans are supported by conservatives but punished by liberals. The findings from this study present military experience as a powerful ideological heuristic in electoral politics, informing voters’ evaluations.

Based on the results of the first two empirical chapters, it appears that veterans are politically ambitious, motivated by their self-perceived qualifications and goals for personal achievement. In elections, despite claims to “put politics aside,” a military background has an ideological connotation that candidates can deploy strategically. The final chapter examines the extent to which these findings relate to veterans’ performance in office (Chapter 4). Returning to the veteran narrative that suggests electing more veterans will help reduce dysfunction and gridlock, I explore the legislative behavior of veterans serving in Congress. Are veteran lawmakers more effective than those without military experience? Are they more bipartisan? Drawing on House data from the 104th to 116th congresses (1995-2021), I examine the extent to which military experience influences a lawmaker’s capacity to advance legislation and engage in bipartisan behavior. I find that veteran lawmakers are more effective when it comes to moving consequential bills through the lawmaking process. Additionally, veterans appear more willing to collaborate with members of the opposite party, particularly during recent congresses. Taken together, these findings offer encouraging support for the veteran narrative.

Overall, this dissertation offers an empirical response to the growing interest surrounding veterans in electoral politics. I test several popular claims and assumptions about how military experience influences political behavior. While veterans likely consider running for office to advance personal goals and their military service is likely to be used for political gain, I find evidence that veterans govern in a manner that most

consider normatively desirable. I consider the implications of these findings on the efforts to recruit and elect more veterans as well as the consequences for American civil-military relations norms. This research argues that future work on candidate emergence and electoral politics must not overlook the effects of military experience.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Linda Marie Amoroso, who devoted her life to seeing her children succeed. She always regretted not getting the chance to complete her college degree. This dissertation, this degree, and all of my accomplishments in life are to her credit.

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1. Introduction

“I was one of the first women to serve my entire Navy career on combatant ships, deployed six times.” Standing in the command-and-control bridge of a naval vessel, Elaine Luria peers through a set of binoculars. “When this is your office,” she adds, “your only option is to work together—Congress could learn a thing or two at sea” (Luria 2018b). Before launching her 2018 bid to represent Virginia’s 2nd congressional district, Luria served for 20 years as a Navy surface warfare officer. She graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy, trained as a nuclear power engineer, and deployed in support of the War on Terror. Just before retirement, Luria commanded an amphibious assault unit of over 400 sailors (Luria 2020). At the end of her first campaign announcement, Luria said she was running, “Because it will take leaders from way outside Washington to bring a sea change to Congress” (Luria 2018b).¹

Elaine Luria is certainly not the first to highlight her military service on the campaign trail. Since the nation’s founding, countless veterans have returned home to continue their service in public office. However, Luria’s emergence as a candidate comes at a time when the share of veterans serving in office is at a historic low. As late as 1971, 39 states were governed by veterans and more than 70 percent of Congress had military experience. Today, veterans lead only 7 state governments and comprise 17 percent of

¹ From “Elaine Luria for Congress: Sea Change.” Published August 8, 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkB3KIFYwa4>

Congress (Burgess 2016; Schaeffer 2021). Luria is part of a growing movement of veterans and political elites hoping to reverse this trend.

The movement is built upon a compelling narrative. Over the past 50 years, as the number of veterans serving in public office declined, American politics got ugly. Citizens and elected officials are increasingly divided and government appears more dysfunctional than ever before (e.g., Mason 2018; Citrin and Stoker 2018; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Binder 2014; Lee 2016). Seizing on the public's high regard for the military while citing these two simultaneous trends, concerned veterans and political elites believe electing more veterans will reduce the polarization and gridlock (e.g., Barcott and Wood 2017; Mullen and Ackerman 2018; Connolly 2019; Garfinkel 2021).² They highlight how serving in the military fosters the values and skills needed to combat the problems in contemporary politics. Veteran candidates consider themselves uniquely capable of “putting partisan politics aside,” “finding common ground,” and “working together to get the job done.”³ Echoing this narrative, Elaine Luria said, “People in the Navy come from a variety of backgrounds and have different points of view, but we worked together to accomplish the mission at hand. I am proud to take that same approach to Congress” (Luria 2019).⁴ Veterans sound like they are the answer to all of

² For example, With Honor is a political action committee founded in 2017 that is at the forefront of this movement. The organization supports veteran candidates for Congress that commit to a pledge to “put principles before politics.” “For too long,” their website explains, “gridlock and partisan bickering have plagued Congress, putting a halt on progress at the expense of the American people. Now a new generation of veterans has stepped up to serve again, committed to putting their country before party politics” (For more information see <https://withhonor.org/>).

³ These are all quotes from a recent press release introducing the members of the For Country Caucus. The bipartisan caucus is comprised of military veterans serving in Congress, committed to “working together in a nonpartisan way to create a more productive government.” The selected quotes (in order) are from caucus members Conor Lamb (D-PA-17), Mariannette Miller Meeks (R-IA-2), and Jim Baird (R-IN-04) (For Country Caucus 2021).

⁴ Quoted from Elaine Luria's statement on joining the House's bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus (Luria 2019).

our political woes, suggesting military experience can be the one thing that transcends the vitriol in Washington. But do these claims stand up to empirical scrutiny?

This dissertation follows the political journey of veteran candidates like Elaine Luria: why they run, how they campaign, and how they govern. I explore the burgeoning narrative that surrounds recent veteran candidates, examining the relevance and consistency of these claims from candidate emergence to governing performance. Despite the historical prevalence of veterans in American politics and the recent efforts to elect more, surprisingly few scholars have investigated the effects of military experience on elite political behavior.⁵ To address this shortage, I adopt the approach of others who explore the salience of traits and social identities in electoral politics (e.g., Hutchings and Valentino 2004; Burden 2007; Lawless and Fox 2010; Carnes 2018; Clifford, Kirkland, and Simas 2019). I consider the factors that motivate or deter veterans' interest in seeking office, the messages and strategies they employ on the campaign trail, and the extent to which veteran elected officials differ when it comes to legislative behavior.

Generally, I argue that prior military experience influences the political behavior of veterans, and knowledge of this background can be a meaningful cue for the electorate. In the pages that follow, I draw on original survey studies, interviews with veterans, experimental evidence, and observational data collected on elections and Congress to examine the political consequences of military service. My findings provide compelling

⁵ Notable examples of recent scholarship addressing this topic include the work by Teigen (2012, 2018); Lupton (2017; 2021); Urben (2010, 2014); Cormack (2018); and Richardson (2018). Throughout the dissertation I discuss how my work fills particular gaps within this relatively small body of literature.

evidence that military experience matters in electoral politics, but in ways that are not entirely consistent with the veteran narrative. While the results indicate that veteran elected officials perform in ways that most voters consider to be normatively desirable, their path to office, like many who run without military experience, is highly politicized.

Chapter 2: Serving to Run: Political Ambition among Military Veterans

On January 6, 2022, exactly one year after Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol, Elaine Luria announced that she would seek reelection. In her statement, she wrote, “Throughout my two decades in uniform and now in my second term in Congress, I take my oath seriously. Today, I know that my continued service is not a choice, but a duty to our nation and our values as Americans” (Luria 2022). Like Luria, many veterans running for office say their decision to enter “the trenches” of electoral politics was informed by the values they learned in the military. Values of “duty to country,” “honor,” and “selfless service,” draw volunteers to put on the uniform and are considered central to the military’s moral-ethical standards (e.g., Bachman et al. 2000; Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal 2006; Mattox 2013). While remembering a violent day in the history of American politics and facing a divisive political climate, Luria remains committed to public service because of her military values and experience. Can the same be said for other veterans?

In the first empirical chapter, I explore political ambition among veterans. A growing body of work finds that a combination of innate characteristics and socializing experiences strongly influence citizens’ attitudes about seeking elected office (e.g., Dynes, Hassell, and Miles 2019; Clifford, Kirkland, and Simas 2019; Fox and Lawless

2005; Lawless 2012). Despite the long tradition of veteran officeholders, this literature on candidate emergence has neglected to consider the impact of military experience on the decision to run. How do veterans compare to other Americans when it comes to interest in seeking office and, to the extent that they are interested, what about their military experience influences this relative ambition? In addressing these questions, I consider two possibilities. On the one hand, the decline in veterans seeking elective office might be because the military's values and institutional structure are incompatible with the conditions of contemporary politics. Running for office requires resources, name recognition, and a tolerance for partisan tactics. Thus, the military's norms and professional requirements might act as a barrier to entry. On the other hand, serving in the military might be the best preparation for politics. As the veteran narrative purports, values and skills cultivated during military service might lead veterans to see elected public service as a calling they are uniquely prepared to answer.

I investigate these competing possibilities using two original survey studies designed to measure political ambition among veterans and compare their attitudes to those of other Americans without military experience. The first study surveys a nationally representative group of 1,574 adults that includes an oversample of veterans (971 civilians, 603 veterans). The second study supplements the comparative approach by developing a sample of veteran "eligible candidates." For this, I recruited veterans that I consider to be well-positioned to run for office, similar to the approach taken by other scholars measuring political ambition among potential candidates (e.g., Maisel and Stone 1997; Fox and Lawless 2005). Looking to the common characteristics shared by veteran

candidates and officeholders, I find that most are college-educated and served as commissioned officers. Thus, I targeted veteran organizations and professional networks comprised of members that share these backgrounds. This strategy yielded a sample of 780 veteran eligible candidates, 17 of which I interviewed to gather additional details regarding their thoughts on running for office. Participants in both studies completed an identical online survey instrument that included questions about military and other professional experiences, political participation, and interest in seeking elected office. To address the competing expectations regarding political ambition among veterans, as well as the contemporary veteran narrative, the survey also included a measure of Basic Human Values (Schwartz 1992) and several questions about electoral qualifications and recruitment (Fox and Lawless 2005).

The findings indicate that veterans express high levels of political ambition. When compared to the average American citizen as well as a subset of civilian respondents considered well-positioned to seek office (college-educated, employed), veterans are more likely to have considered running for office. In exploring why they are politically ambitious, I find that veterans score particularly high on the usual “strategic considerations” that influence attitudes among other potential candidates (Fox and Lawless 2005). Veterans see their military experience as relevant preparation for politics and they are often the target of recruitment efforts. However, when it comes to measures of values, the results are surprising. Veterans differ from the public when it comes to values, and only among veterans does this values orientation predict interest in seeking office. While the narrative suggests that veteran candidates run based on a sense of duty

to others and selflessness, I find that politically ambitious veterans are mostly motivated by a commitment to traditions, achieving personal success, and seeking power.

These results establish veterans as another group of eligible potential candidates, previously omitted from the research on candidate emergence. They offer encouraging news to those looking to recruit more veterans to run for office. However, when it comes to the claims that veteran candidates offer voters something uniquely different in terms of values, my findings offer little support. Politically ambitious veterans seem to align with the classical characterization of the “political type...power seekers, searching out the power institutions of the society” (Laswell 1948, 20).

Chapter 3: Selective Service: Voters’ Perceptions of Military Experience and Race in Elections

In Luria’s first bid to represent Virginia’s 2nd congressional district, she challenged the one-term Republican incumbent and fellow Navy veteran, Scott Taylor. In 2016, Taylor handily won the seat by a 23-point margin, so initial prospects for a Luria victory appeared slim. Unsurprisingly, both of their military records were front and center as they sought to represent a district that is home to more than 87,000 veterans and includes Norfolk, the world’s largest naval base (Finley 2018). Both candidates ran a series of competitive ads featuring photos of their time in uniform. One ad supporting Luria’s campaign featured her former Navy commander, who opened with:

“I’m a lifelong Republican and proud conservative, but this November I’m about to do something I’ve never done before. I’m supporting a Democrat for Congress. But calling Elaine Luria a Democrat misses the point. She’s an outstanding

commanding officer, a mother, and a tenacious leader who puts her country above her party.”⁶

On November 6, 2018, Luria flipped the Republican district, narrowly defeating Taylor by just over two points. Her win in Virginia was considered crucial to Democrats securing the majority in the House (Best and Teigen 2018; Haslett 2018). Heading into the 2022 election, Luria is running against yet another veteran opponent, Republican and former Navy helicopter pilot Jen Kiggans. The race is considered a target for Republicans who, inspired by key wins among Democrat veterans in 2018, are looking to candidates with military experience to flip competitive districts (Mutnick 2021; Gonzales 2022). How does a veteran candidate’s military experience influence voters’ perceptions?

In the second empirical chapter, I explore how voters consider evidence of a candidate’s military background. Unsurprisingly, prior work examining veterans in electoral politics often focuses on how military experience speaks to competence on issues of national security (e.g., Teigen 2012; McDermott and Panagopoulos 2015; Hardy et al. 2019). Most of these studies also conclude that veteran candidates do not enjoy the universal electoral advantage that the veteran narrative builds upon (e.g., Teigen 2017). But Luria and Kiggans’ veteran showdown suggests that military experience means something to voters, beyond defense policy expertise. Thus, I investigate the political content of military experience cues in elections. Specifically, I look to the literature on stereotypes in public opinion to develop expectations about the beliefs and traits that are

⁶ Quote is of a statement offered by Captain (Ret.) Mike Ott. Taken from the ad “Elaine for Congress – Commodore.” Published on October 28, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfvUCUKISJU> (Luria 2018a)

associated with a candidate's military background. I argue that, all else equal, voters perceive veterans to be more conservative and this can ultimately influence favorability. To test this expectation, I pit the veteran cue up against another powerful ideological heuristic that works in the opposite direction: race (McDermott 1998; Lerman and Sadin 2014).

Drawing on observational data from four U.S. House elections (2014-2020) and an original candidate evaluation experiment embedded in the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), I find evidence supporting my expectations. Even while controlling for other factors likely to influence candidate assessments, such as party, voters perceive Black candidates to be more liberal and veteran candidates to be more conservative. Moreover, the experimental results indicate that voters' favorability of a candidate coincides with this ideological stereotyping. I find that Black candidates generally enjoy an electoral advantage, particularly among voters identifying as liberal, while veterans are favored by conservatives but punished by liberals. These results are consistent with work that questions the widespread electoral appeal of veteran candidates and goes further by establishing military experience as another politically-charged heuristic.

Veteran candidates like Elaine Luria and Jen Kiggans are strategic in emphasizing their military record, especially as it relates to their gender, another powerful cue likely to influence ideological perceptions among voters (e.g., Lawless 2004; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009; Anzia and Bernhard 2022). In a competitive district like theirs, getting

support from those on the opposite side of the spectrum is key. Thus, references to military experience are made with apparent ideological and political intent.

Chapter 4: Deployed to the Hill: How Military Experience Influences Legislative Behavior in Congress

On the campaign trail, Luria repeated a consistent message: she would bring to Washington the same “mission-driven approach” she learned during her time in the military. In a recent statement she wrote, “As a twenty-year Navy veteran, I know that we must transcend partisan politics to find meaningful solutions.”⁷ On many accounts, Luria is living up to her promises. Upon arrival to Capitol Hill, she was assigned to the influential Committees on Armed Services and Veterans’ Affairs. Despite being a freshman in the 116th Congress, Luria outperformed many of her more seasoned colleagues on measures of legislative productivity. She sponsored 19 pieces of legislation, four of which became law, including a bipartisan bill that increases payments of disability compensation for veterans and their families (Volden 2021; Ress 2020). Compared to other members of the House, Luria ranked in the top 10 percent on measures of bipartisanship and was among the top 10 most effective Democratic lawmakers (The Lugar Center 2021; Volden 2021). Does military experience influence legislative behavior?

The findings from the first two empirical chapters offer little in terms of validating a veteran narrative that suggests military experience makes for a different kind

⁷ Excerpted from Luria’s comments regarding her membership on the For Country Caucus (For Country Caucus 2021).

of elected official. Veterans who consider running for office appear no more selfless than any other politician. Military experience does not carry the extensive appeal it is assumed to have and is likely employed as a strategic signal. In the last empirical chapter, I look to see if there is support for the veteran narrative on Capitol Hill. Specifically, I focus on the claims that veterans elected to Congress are more productive and bipartisan lawmakers. The scant research examining the effects of military experience on legislative behavior often focuses on policy preferences. Again, unsurprisingly, this work finds that veteran lawmakers differ from their nonveteran colleagues when it comes to military-related policies (e.g., Lupton 2017; 2021; Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019). However, the veteran narrative is less about expertise on national security and more about work ethic and cooperation. Thus, I investigate the extent to which military experience influences legislative effectiveness and bipartisanship.

The literature on legislative behavior demonstrates how members' identities and traits can influence both preferences and performance in Congress (e.g. Payne 1980; Swers 2002; Burden 2007; Volden, Wiseman and Wittmer 2013; Anzia and Berry 2011). Drawing on these works and studies on civil-military relations, I hypothesize that if veteran lawmakers uniquely value duty, teamwork, and selfless service, I should see these principles manifest in their legislative productivity and cooperation. I test these expectations using three data sources: Legislative Effectiveness Scores calculated by the Center for Effective Lawmaking (Volden and Wiseman 2014); bipartisan cosponsorship data compiled by Fowler (2006) and updated by Harbridge-Yong, Volden, and Wiseman

(2020); and Lugar Bipartisan Index Scores developed by the Lugar Center.⁸ I combine these measures with an original data set that captures various details regarding military experience among members of the House of Representatives. Altogether, I examine the comparative legislative behavior of veterans serving in the House during the 104th to 116th Congresses (1995-2021).

My findings indicate that veteran lawmakers are more effective, specifically when it comes to moving consequential bills through the legislative process. Relative to their proportion in Congress, veterans introduce and achieve legislative success on more bills considered substantive and significant to public policy than members without military experience. I also find that veterans are more bipartisan, willing to cooperate on legislation with members of the opposite party. This difference is particularly apparent for the Lugar Bipartisan Index, which captures performance in more recent congresses (2013-2020) and the “intensity” with which members attract bipartisan cosponsors.

Veterans who enter the trenches of electoral politics may do so because they are motivated by perceptions of qualifications and a desire for personal success. These veterans may exploit their military service credentials to gain favor with particular portions of the electorate. However, the last empirical chapter finds that, once in office, veterans are capable of living up to the contemporary narrative. This suggests that veterans may not be revising the way we think about candidate emergence or

⁸ Legislative Effectiveness data from 1973-2020 are publicly available at <https://thelawmakers.org/data-download>. Lugar Bipartisan Index data from 2013-2020 are publicly available at <https://www.thelugarcenter.org/ourwork-Bipartisan-Index.html>

campaigning, but they appear to have the right skills to channel ambition and politics effectively within the confines of government institutions like Congress.

Conclusion

In the following three chapters I introduce and study several more veterans like Elaine Luria. In greater detail, I explore how their stories and experiences offer cautious support for the veteran claims defining an emerging movement. Overall, the distinctive effects of military experience live up to admirable political expectations where they matter most: when it comes to building cross-partisan teams to accomplish the mission in office. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I briefly summarize the findings and discuss their implications. I primarily focus on what these results mean for those interested in recruiting and electing more veterans and the state of civil-military relations in America. For veterans' proponents in the electoral arena, it is clear that veterans are interested in running for office and their time in service can be used strategically to win over certain portions of the electorate. Moreover, veterans' performance in Congress offers additional leverage for the arguments that electing more lawmakers with military experience normatively benefits public policy. However, for the growing number of scholars and policymakers concerned about the politicization of the military, these findings are less encouraging. While the military's tradition of remaining "above politics" serves as a slogan for many veteran candidates, these candidates' unavoidable association with ideology and divisive campaigning puts the military institution's norms at further

risk. In light of these collective findings and proposed implications, I offer several additional questions for the future study of military experience and electoral politics.

2. Serving to Run: Political Ambition Among Military Veterans

Since the nation's founding, military service experience has held political relevance. Beginning with General George Washington's unanimous election to the presidency, all but fifteen commanders-in-chief previously served in the military (Teigen 2018). As recently as 1971, thirty-nine state governors and more than 70 percent of those serving in Congress were veterans (Desilver 2013). However, in the last fifty years, the share of veterans serving in public office has steadily declined. Today, only seven governors and 17 percent of Congress have military experience (Shane 2020). This downward trend upsets some political elites who believe military experience is vital to good governance (e.g., Barcott and Wood 2017; Mullen and Ackerman 2018; Connolly 2019; Garfinkel 2021). As a result, those sharing these concerns have launched efforts committed to one goal: encourage more veterans to run for office.⁹

Former presidential candidate and retired Army General Wesley Clark recently claimed that veterans run for office "because they believe Washington is broken. What's more, they know the same sense of duty, commitment to results, and the integrity and discipline they have been trained to live by, make them uniquely well-positioned to fix it" (Clark 2018). After the 2018 midterm elections, elites and the media credited several veteran candidates for helping the Democrats regain control of the House of Representatives. In the run-up to the 2022 midterm elections, the Republican party is

⁹ For example, With Honor and New Politics are bipartisan PACs that recruit, train, and fund veteran candidates for office. For more information on these organizations see <https://withhonor.org/about-us/> and <https://www.newpolitics.org/about>

looking to its veteran candidates to deliver a similar victory (Mutnick 2021). On both sides of the aisle, veterans are viewed as attractive potential candidates, committed to public service, full of experience, and respected by the electorate. In an era of severe polarization and dysfunction, electing more veterans is expected to be part of the solution.

Beyond these assumptions and some anecdotes, the limited research on veterans and representation suggests that military experience actually matters for public policy. There is evidence that veteran elected officials exhibit greater caution and constraint when it comes to defense policy (e.g., Gelpi and Feaver 2002; Lupton 2017) and that veteran lawmakers work harder to represent their communities, especially other veterans (e.g., Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019).¹⁰ The increasingly popular claims and these empirical findings suggest that veterans possess skills and values considered normatively desirable in an elected representative.

Despite the appeal of veteran officeholders and the recent efforts to reverse an emergent decline, very little is known about political ambition among veterans and *why* some eventually run for office.¹¹ A growing body of work demonstrates that innate characteristics combine with lifetime socialization to inform citizens' interest in political office (e.g., Dynes, Hassell, and Miles 2019; Clifford, Kirkland, and Simas 2019; Fox

¹⁰ See also Chapter 4 of this dissertation, where I find suggestive evidence that veterans serving in the House of Representatives are more effective and bipartisan than their nonveteran colleagues.

¹¹ Recent and notable exceptions include work by Richardson (2018) and Urben (2010) who measure political participation and interest in seeking office among active-duty servicemembers. While the insights from these previous studies are valuable, this paper is the first to consider political ambition of veterans, no longer serving in the military. Teigen (2012; 2018), McDermott and Panagopoulos (2015), Hardy et al. 2019) examine veterans in electoral politics, however, this work mostly focuses on *when* and *how* veterans run for office—not the *why*.

and Lawless 2005; Lawless 2012). In the military context, volunteering to serve reflects particular values and personality traits (e.g., Jackson et al. 2012; Miles and Haider-Markel 2019; Helmus et al. 2018) and socializing experiences connected to service can leave a lasting impression on veterans (e.g., Janowitz 1960; Teigen 2006; Leal and Teigen 2018). Yet, across all of the literature on candidate emergence, military experience and its potential influence on political ambition has largely been ignored.

In this paper, I fill the gap by examining the extent to which military service affects interest in running for office. Drawing upon existing literature on how psychology, socialization, and political context can influence officeseeking considerations, I present two competing expectations. On the one hand, contemporary military service could make engagement in electoral politics especially challenging and unappealing—contributing to the observed decline among veteran officeholders.¹² It is possible that institutional features and values-based norms associated with the military turn veterans away from a complex and divisive political arena. On the other hand, military experience might propel veterans toward running for office. The reasons for joining the military and the professional socialization associated with uniformed service could align with a heightened desire for continued service as an elected official.

I test these expectations using two original survey studies, one national survey administered with an oversample of veterans and a second survey administered to

¹² To be clear, it is possible that the decline among veteran officeholders is due the fact that there are just fewer veterans living in American society—7 percent according to U.S. Census data (Vespa 2020). The advent of a numerically smaller, all-volunteer force and the absence of major war over the last 50 years likely contributes to this decline.

veterans likely to engage in politics. My empirical analysis focuses on two central questions: First, how do veterans compare on measures of political ambition? Second, to the extent that veterans are interested in running for office, what are the social and psychological factors that influence their relative ambition? For the latter question, I examine how veterans' "strategic considerations" (Fox and Lawless 2005, 644) and innate personal values affect their interest in elective office.

The findings indicate that veterans are more politically ambitious than most Americans and that having military experience seems to exert an independent and positive effect on considering a run for office. In exploring why this is the case, I find that veterans, like other potential candidates, consider themselves particularly qualified to run for office and are susceptible to encouragement from their communities and pivotal electoral gatekeepers. When it comes to measures of basic human values (Schwartz 1992), the results suggest that politically ambitious veterans differ from citizens without military experience, but not in the ways one might expect. I find that veterans interested in running for office value power and achievement, goals that are more self-enhancing than selfless. Taken together, this paper represents the first empirical evaluation of political ambition among citizens with military experience and establishes veterans as another group of "eligible potential candidates," previously omitted from the research on candidate emergence.¹³

¹³ "Eligible potential candidates" are a subset of Americans considered in the literature to be well-positioned for seeking elective office (Fox and Lawless 2005, 644). Citizens often included in this group have backgrounds similar to most political candidates and elected officials: college-educated, employed, lawyers, political activists, educators, and business people.

2.1 Who “Enters the Trenches?” – Literature on Candidate Emergence

“No degree of civic duty or sense of obligation would lead a sane person to enter the trenches.”¹⁴ At first glance this appears to be the response from someone asked to charge into battle. Instead, it is actually a response to the question: would you ever run for office? In today’s increasingly hostile political climate, most Americans, like the individual quoted here, avoid even the thought of entering a political contest. This reality makes the decision to run for office made by the considerably small portion of society all the more compelling. Why would anyone, not just veterans, want to enter the “trenches?”

In answering this question, much of the early research on political ambition offered rational choice explanations: Potential candidates decide to run for office after considering available political opportunities (Schlesinger 1966; Black 1972; Rhode 1979). Under this framework, ambition is less about candidates’ attributes and more about the openings and political circumstances that make a run viable (e.g., Levine and Hyde 1977; Stone and Maisel 2003). A retiring incumbent, prospects for financial support, or the partisan composition of the electorate all represent structural opportunities likely to influence interest in seeking office (e.g., Kazee 1994; Maestas et al. 2006). A common feature among these earlier studies is that they begin with the “eligible” candidate, assumed to be interested in running for office but waiting for the right political moment.

¹⁴ Response from an eligible candidate interviewed by Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox as part of their Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study (Lawless 2012, p. 4)

More recent work on candidate emergence expands upon this framework, looking to factors that influence political ambition before an individual even considers the political opportunity structure. Drawing inspiration from Harold Lasswell's characterization of a "political type" (1948), this research explores the extent to which attitudinal dispositions and personal experiences shape interest in seeking office. Fox and Lawless (2005, 645) introduce the concept of "nascent ambition," which precedes the more "expressive ambition" examined in much of the early rational choice work. They show that demographic characteristics, familial and professional experiences, and political attitudes can all affect interest in running for office. White men, individuals with politicized upbringings, and those well-resourced to engage in politics are most likely to consider a candidacy (Lawless and Fox 2010; Lawless 2012). Extending this work, authors devote particular attention to socially-induced barriers in candidate emergence. These studies reveal that minorities, especially women of color (e.g., Shah 2014; Silva and Skulley 2019), and working-class Americans (Carnes 2018) are often discouraged from launching an electoral bid because they lack the required financial and political support. Taken together, the work on "nascent ambition" offers a clearer picture of who emerges as a candidate, highlighting the importance of how social factors condition attitudes toward seeking elective office.

Despite these advances, scholars studying political psychology are interested in yet an even earlier antecedent in the path toward candidacy. These studies consider the role of personality in regulating political ambition. After all, the "political type" is thought to be a power-seeking citizen who possesses personality and character traits that

are distinct from the wider public (Lasswell 1948; Fishel 1971). Psychological qualities and predispositions combine with social experiences to influence one's life course. If most work on candidate emergence starts with "eligible" candidates who are well situated to someday pursue elective office (e.g., Fox and Lawless 2005, 648), it is possible that there are deeper factors influencing entry and endurance in this particular pool.¹⁵ Additionally, given the challenging and competitive nature of political life, certain personalities may be particularly attracted to or turned off by electoral politics.

Recent work on personality traits and political ambition offer evidence supporting these intuitions. One study employing the Big Five personality framework finds that the politically ambitious express higher levels of openness and extraversion and lower levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness (Dynes, Hassell, and Miles 2019). Others find that possessing traits seen as desirable among voters, such as the capacity for empathy (Clifford, Kirkland, and Simas 2019) and prioritizing basic values of selflessness (Weinberg 2020), are indeed associated with greater political ambition. This psychological perspective offers a deeper understanding of why certain people develop an interest in elective office in the first place.

How likely are veterans to "enter the trenches" of politics? I expect military experience appropriately fits within extant models of candidate emergence, particularly influencing levels of "nascent" political ambition. The literature suggests that both

¹⁵ The Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study (Fox and Lawless 2005) draws upon a national sample of "eligible candidates." These respondents come from four professional backgrounds that tend to yield the highest proportion of political candidates: law, business, education, and political activism.

psychology and socializing experiences can play a role in shaping attitudes toward running for office. Thus, I consider both domains when examining levels of political ambition among veterans. Military service is a profession built upon institutions and norms that indoctrinate and train members to execute national defense policy. As such, volunteering to serve in the military often reflects a set of traits and goals that are distinct from other members of the public (e.g., Franke 2001; Jackson et al. 2012; Miles and Haider-Markel 2019; Helmus et al. 2018).¹⁶ Scholars have long considered the military to be a unique vocation that calls upon certain Americans and subsequently affects their lifetime socialization (e.g., Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960; Jennings and Markus 1976; Moskos 1976). Veterans' combination of traits and experiences have the potential to deter interest in electoral politics or lead them right into the political arena.

2.2 A Trench Too Far: Why Veterans Might Retreat from Electoral Politics

The professionalism of the American military relies upon strong norms when it comes to politics. Service members are educated to view themselves as subordinate to the nation's civilian authority and that they must remain "above politics" and "partisan neutral" while executing their duties (Huntington 1957, 84; Janowitz 1960, 234; Brooks 2020). More than these traditional norms, the Department of Defense regulates political expression among its members, prohibiting many activities such as speaking at partisan events, volunteering for a political campaign, or fundraising on behalf of a party

¹⁶ Since 1973, when the military transitioned to the All-Volunteer Force, entrance into the service has been voluntary.

organization.¹⁷ Even when considering the activities that are approved by the military, studies find that servicemembers tend to be less politically active than the wider public (e.g., Dempsey 2010; Urben 2014).¹⁸ Once out of the military, veterans' political engagement is not formally limited, but they do face considerable challenges as they transition into civilian communities (e.g., Zogas 2017). For many, their service required multiple relocations and they often settle in unfamiliar towns or cities in pursuit of employment opportunities (Bailey 2011). This can make getting involved in the political community difficult. Collectively, structural aspects of military service amount to an institutionally-induced socialization away from engagement in electoral politics.

All of this presents an additional barrier to what is already a complex and partisan electoral environment. More than ever, launching a successful political campaign requires experience, professional staffs, a network of donors, and sufficient exposure. Without partisan connections or support from influential political elites, these resources are virtually unattainable. The research on candidate emergence demonstrates that the consideration of these factors affects attitudes toward running for office (e.g., Maestas et al. 2006; Lawless 2012). If serving in the military makes it inappropriate or impractical to enter the partisan political community, it is possible that veterans will be less likely to

¹⁷ The political activities that are approved and prohibited by the Department of Defense are outlined in Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 1344.10, *Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces*, published February 19, 2008.

¹⁸ Additionally, Richardson (2018) and Urben (2010) ask active-duty officers about their interest in seeking elective office in the future and find that these respondents express less interest than civilian eligible candidates with comparable professional experiences. It is possible that measures of participation among active-duty servicemembers are influenced by the military's political norms, such that respondents answer in ways that comport with regulations.

consider running for elective office.¹⁹ Comments from a young Army veteran who recently left active-duty echo this scenario:

“I follow what is going on in politics, but even if I wanted to get involved, I wouldn’t know where to begin. I just moved to Denver after law school, I don’t come from a well-connected family, and I don’t feel like I know enough of the people or the issues in this city to even think about running.”²⁰

Looking beyond how structural aspects of military service complicate participation in electoral politics, veterans might be less interested based on principle. To many, politics can be ugly. Partisanship is increasingly divisive, socially segregating citizens such that they view members of the opposite party with resentment (Mason 2018). Campaigns routinely engage in negative advertising to win votes (Fowler and Ridout 2012), and elected officials seem to prioritize confrontation over compromise (Lee 2016). Moreover, these unpleasant features of the political environment can deter interest in running for office (e.g., Fox and Lawless 2011; Lawless and Fox 2015; Shames 2017). The modern political climate is often described as self-interested, dishonest, and uncivil (see Citrin and Stoker 2018), all characteristics that do not comport with the creeds guiding military service.

Values such as “selfless service,” “duty,” “respect,” and “honor” are ubiquitous in the military and central to its moral-ethical standards (e.g., Mattox 2013). The majority of citizens who volunteer do so out of a sense of “civic duty” or a desire to serve others

¹⁹ Recent comments from Norm Bonnyman, the co-founder of Veterans Campaign (<http://www.veteranscampaign.org/>) which helps educate veterans on how to run for office, highlight the challenges veterans face: “While they have the discipline, while they have the drive, while they have the leadership traits that a lot of folks are interested in seeing in their elected officials, those barriers to entry are very high” (Frame and O’Brien 2018).

²⁰ Anonymous interview conducted in August 2021 with an Army veteran who served for four years as an intelligence officer. After leaving active duty, the interviewee attended law school and works as an attorney in Denver, Colorado.

(Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal 2006; Bachman et al. 2000). Thus, it is possible that veterans are turned off by electoral politics, viewing it as a path that is inconsistent with their core values. Recent trends among veterans are suggestive of this point. Many veterans interested in continuing their service and improving public policy are turning to the numerous nonprofit advocacy organizations that have emerged over the last two decades of war (Steinhauer 2019).²¹ Unlike the political arena, this avenue is not marred by partisan conflict. As a young Marine Corps veteran recently described, “The challenge of wading into politics seems too big.” Pointing to the state of politics in America today he continued, “The paranoia, the anger, the polarization of the country—that’s a hell of a tall order to get involved with.”²² Based on this discussion, it is possible that veterans express lower levels of political ambition than Americans without military experience and that these considerations are because military service restrains political involvement and promotes values incompatible with contemporary electoral politics.

2.3 Veterans “Enter the Trenches:” Why Veterans Might Charge into the Political Arena

While the decline among veterans serving in elective office has some concerned, veterans are still numerically overrepresented in government.²³ This, combined with a

²¹ These organizations include Team Red, White, and Blue (<https://www.teamrwb.org/>), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (<https://iava.org/>), The Mission Continues (<https://www.missioncontinues.org/>), and Team Rubicon (<https://teamrubiconusa.org/>). These new veteran service organizations join older advocacy groups such as Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion to comprise what some consider “The Sea of Goodwill,” offering support and resources for veterans and their families (Kuzminski and Carter 2015). These groups engage in diverse activities that include fundraising for support grants, lobbying Congress, helping with disaster relief, and building veteran social networks.

²² Anonymous interview conducted in August 2021 with a Marine Corps veteran who served for four years as an Artillery officer. After leaving active duty, the interviewee attended law school and works as an attorney in Virginia.

²³ 17 percent of those serving in Congress are veterans, while 7 percent of the American population has prior military experience (U.S. Census data, Vespa 2020). Interestingly though, while veterans are somewhat overrepresented in

long history of veterans emerging as candidates in America suggests that military service might actually encourage higher levels of political ambition. Despite the military's tradition of remaining above politics, recent evidence suggests that these norms are weakening or that military service does little to hinder political participation (e.g., Liebert and Golby 2017; Leal and Teigen 2018; Urban 2017; Lythgoe 2022). In the last few decades, veterans and military servicemembers are increasingly identifying as partisans and generally lean more toward the Republican Party when compared to the civilian public (e.g., Dempsey 20; Lythgoe 2022).²⁴ Moreover, research on political participation reveals that veterans remain engaged citizens, voting in federal elections at rates higher than Americans without military experience (Teigen 2006; Leal and Teigen 2018). When it comes to discourse, military elites, both in and out of uniform, are vocal on political issues, particularly on social media (Brooks 2020; Urban 2017; Robinson 2018). These recent empirical findings suggest that veterans are a politically active subgroup. As with other eligible potential candidates, this heightened activity might be associated with greater political ambition among veterans.

Beyond veterans' individual engagement, there is anecdotal evidence that they are highly sought after within the political community. Contemporary media reports seem to indicate that elites from both parties are actively recruiting veterans to run for office (e.g.,

today's government, conditions are drastically different than 50 years ago. In 1970 when more than 70 percent of Congress had military experience, only 13.6 percent of the population had served in the military (U.S. Census 1973).

²⁴ It is important to note that there are differences between officer and enlisted servicemembers and veterans. While most studies focus on political attitudes and behaviors of officers (e.g., Hoslti 2001; Urban 2010), Dempsey (2010) does find that enlisted servicemembers express affiliations and attitudes that come closer to mirroring the wider American public.

Merica and Grayer 2018; Mutnick 2021). The public overwhelmingly trusts the military and this trust is expected to translate into votes. Additionally, over the last decade, several political organizations and fundraising efforts have surfaced dedicated to recruiting, training, and electing veteran candidates (e.g., Gergen 2018; Alemany 2020). These efforts matter. Research shows that political ambition receives a boost with the right level of encouragement. When eligible candidates receive suggestions that they should run for office from family, friends, and coworkers, interest in seeking office grows. This encouragement is especially influential when it comes from “electoral gatekeepers” such as party leaders, elected officials, or other elites considered knowledgeable and well-resourced in politics (Fox and Lawless 2005; Fox and Lawless 2011; Lawless 2012, 155). Armed with public appeal and relevant experience, it is possible that veterans are heavily encouraged to run and that these suggestions positively influence interest in elective office.

Like those who are recruiting candidates with military experience, veterans might see themselves as particularly qualified for office. When asked why he launched his campaign for Congress, a retired Air Force colonel said: “I was in roles where I could observe and influence instruments of national power...this reinforced a desire for public service and a belief that ‘I could do this,’ because I had already met all the people who were doing it.”²⁵ Previous studies find that citizens working in professions requiring knowledge of and engagement with government are more likely to consider running for

²⁵ Anonymous interview conducted in August 2021 with a retired Air Force colonel who ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination in a 2014 U.S. House election. The interviewee served for 27 years in the Air Force.

office (e.g., Lawless 2012). These individuals perceive themselves as qualified for elective positions because their careers afforded the relevant credentials and political shrewdness required to serve in public office. It is possible that veterans, like lawyers and political activists, represent “eligible potential candidates” (Fox and Lawless 2005, 644). They serve within the nation’s largest bureaucracy, trusted with vital resources and tasked to carry out national security policy. Experiences in the military and servicemembers’ associated proximity to government could inform “strategic considerations” about running for office (Fox and Lawless 2005, 645), such that veterans will view themselves as particularly qualified.

Deeper than perceptions of electoral fitness, it is possible that veterans are motivated to run for office because of what they value. Instead of observing the contentious political environment as incompatible with military values, veterans might enter the political arena so that they can fix what is broken.²⁶ Citizens who join the military do so, in part, because they see it as their duty and express higher levels of political efficacy (Bachman et al. 2000; Teigen 2006)—characteristics that are associated with increased political participation (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Anderson 2010). This values orientation could be central to veterans’ interest in seeking office. Comments from a retired Marine Corps veteran running for Congress are suggestive of

²⁶ There are countless examples of veterans running for office that make this claim. A recent article highlights the frequency of this narrative in campaign ads published by female veteran candidates (Gaudiano 2018).

this expectation: “I entered the race,” he said “not out of ego, but because public service is just in my DNA.”²⁷

Outside of the veteran case, a recent study in the United Kingdom finds that certain basic values are associated with political ambition (Weinberg 2020). The author finds that when it comes to basic human values (Schwartz 1992), candidates and elected Members of Parliament differ from the wider British public.²⁸ Specifically, officeholders ascribe greater importance to values such as benevolence, universalism, and power. The politically ambitious appear to value the ability to help others while also enhancing their own status in society. Although there is little research on the measurement of basic values among veterans and military servicemembers, I expect that the orientation of their values is noticeably different from the average American citizen.²⁹ Moreover, it is possible that these differences influence political ambition, such that veterans interested in running for office especially prioritize values related to selflessness and a sense of duty to others. Taken together, this discussion leads to the alternative expectation: it is possible that military service is associated with higher levels of political ambition. Veterans, guided by military values, may see their service experience as the best preparation for winning in the electoral “trenches.”

²⁷ Anonymous interview conducted in August 2021 with a retired Marine colonel who is running for the Democratic nomination in a 2022 U.S. House election. The interviewee served for 28 years in the Marine Corps.

²⁸ For a review of the numerous studies that incorporate the Basic Human Values framework see Sandy et al. (2016).

²⁹ Some notable exceptions include research on military academy cadets conducted by Stevens, Rosa, and Gardner (1994) and Priest and Beach (1998). However, these studies do not employ the Schwartz Basic Value framework. Undergraduate research by Holland (2014) measures the values orientation of a limited number of ROTC and civilian college students, finding little difference in terms of basic human values.

2.4 Studying Veteran Political Ambition: Two Samples

I test these competing expectations and explore political ambition among veterans using an online survey instrument administered to two distinct samples in August of 2021. The first sample consists of 1,574 American adults recruited by Lucid Marketplace to mirror the general public.³⁰ To enable meaningful comparisons between veterans and civilians, the recruitment strategy incorporated an oversample of approximately 500 respondents with prior military experience. In the end, this national comparative sample includes 971 civilian and 603 veteran respondents.³¹

Beyond comparing veterans with other Americans on measures of political ambition, I am interested in uncovering the social and psychological factors that may influence veterans' relative interest in seeking office. Among veterans, who is politically ambitious? To this end, I supplement the comparative sample with one that targeted veteran "eligible candidates." For this sample, I recruited veterans who could be considered well-positioned to run for office, similar to the way researchers have surveyed other potential candidates like lawyers or political activists (e.g., Fox and Lawless 2005; Maisel and Stone 1997).³² In recruiting participants, I considered the characteristics that

³⁰ Lucid aggregates respondents into valid, online convenience samples that have been shown to match well with U.S. Census demographics (Coppock and McClellan 2019).

³¹ This sampling approach follows previous work measuring nascent political ambition among the American public (e.g., Fox and Lawless 2014; Clifford, Kirkland, and Simas 2019). For detailed descriptive statistics on the Comparative Sample, see Appendix 2.A, Table A.1.

³² Previous studies that examine interest in seeking office among active-duty servicemembers take a similar approach, sampling predominantly officers serving in educational-related assignments (Urban 2010; Richardson 2018). However, the present study's overall research design differs from these previous approaches in that I focus on veterans in comparison to civilians. As the discussion regarding the military's political norms suggests, active-duty officers might be less willing to express interest in seeking office while still serving. I expect that surveying veterans, who are now members of the public no longer constrained by military regulations, might be more willing to share their true intentions regarding political participation.

might make some veterans more eligible than others. A review of the current cohort of veterans serving in Congress reveals that the majority served as commissioned officers and completed undergraduate education.³³ Thus, I recruited survey participants from various professional veteran organizations and networks comprised of predominantly college-educated and officer members. The targeted organizations included overtly political groups, such as bipartisan political action committees (PACs) dedicated to supporting veteran candidates, and groups without any explicit link to electoral politics, such as veteran benefits associations.³⁴ The resulting sample of veteran eligible candidates includes 780 respondents, 98 of whom ran for an elective office (12.6 percent).³⁵

Participants from the two samples completed an identical online survey instrument that included questions intended to measure political ambition among veterans. Critical to understanding the factors that influence expressed interest in running for office, respondents were asked details about the extent of their military experience, completed an inventory of their basic values (Schwartz et al. 2001), and provided information on their attitudes and experiences relating to political participation. The

³³ Commissioned officers are leaders within their respective services. During or after completing four years of undergraduate education, they attend special training to serve as an officer. Enlisted members, who constitute the majority of military personnel, are not required to attain a college degree and these men and women perform the tasks associated with maintaining the organization. For those members of Congress who were enlisted, all eventually completed an undergraduate degree. The majority of veteran members of Congress hold advanced degrees.

³⁴ For a detailed list of the targeted organizations, recruitment method, and participation rates, see Appendix 2.A, Table A.2. The goal is to generate a sample that reflects veteran eligible candidates and mirrors the cohort of veterans currently serving in state and national offices. Thus, this sample is not nationally representative.

³⁵ Incorporating veterans who already expressed some political ambition by joining pro-veteran PACs ensures that I have a group of ambitious veterans upon which I can draw comparisons when measuring nascent ambition in the veteran only pool. For detailed descriptive statistics on the Veteran Eligible Candidate Sample, see Appendix 2.A, Table A.1.

survey instrument also asked respondents to provide basic demographic information on their age, gender, education and other occupational experiences, as well as their political and ideological preferences.³⁶

2.5 Veterans and Political Ambition

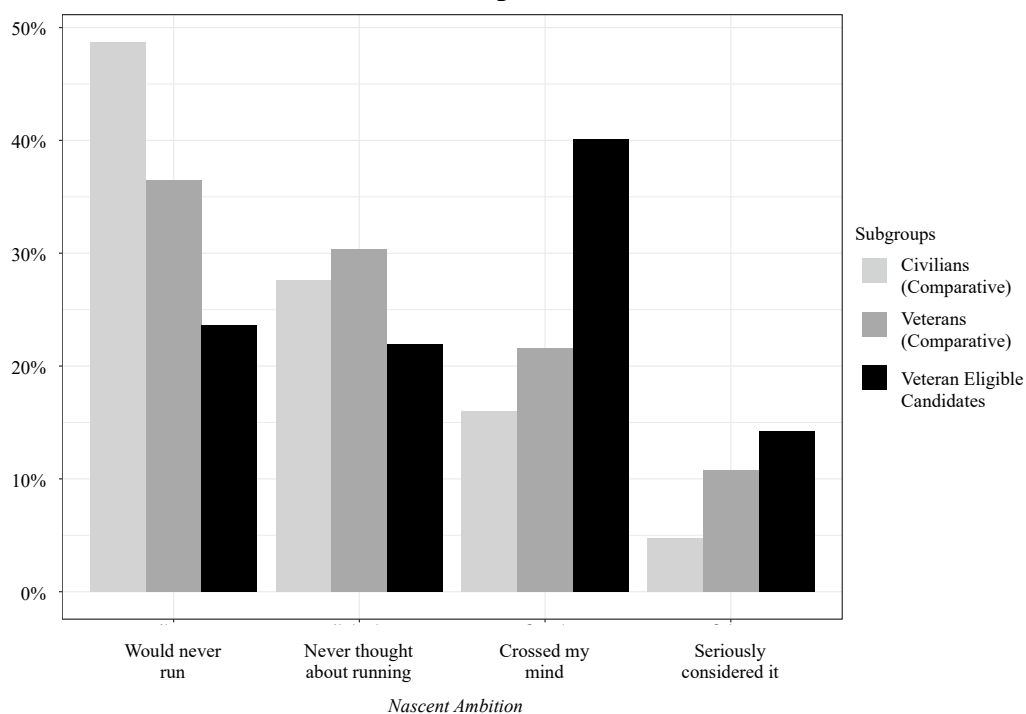
How do veterans compare on measures of political ambition? To test the competing expectations, the primary dependent variable relies on respondents' answers to the survey question: "Have you ever thought about running for office in the future?" The main independent variable is a binary indicator of whether or not a respondent served in the military.³⁷ For a preliminary comparison, I plot the responses to this political ambition question across three key subgroups drawn from the data: average American civilians from the comparative sample, veterans from the comparative sample, and the veteran eligible candidates from the targeted sample (see Figure 2.1).

At first glance, veterans appear to be more interested in running for office than civilians. Within the comparative sample, approximately one third (32.5 percent) of the veteran respondents express some interest in running for office. When compared to Americans without military experience, where only 20 percent indicate some level of interest, veterans are more likely to have thought about running for office and twice as likely to have seriously considered a candidacy ($p < 0.01$).

³⁶ The survey instrument is modeled after those employed by Fox and Lawless (2005) and Weinberg (2020). The survey also solicited participants for a follow-on, virtual interview. Comments from veteran candidates included in this paper draw from these follow-on interviews.

³⁷ The "veteran" variable describes respondents with any amount of military experience, including in active-duty, reserves, or National Guard, in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, including the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Space Force, and Coast Guard, and at any rank, officer or enlisted. It is important to note that not all military experience is the same.

**Figure 2.1: Nascent Political Ambition among Samples:
Veterans Compared to Civilians**



Notes: Bars represent the proportion of affirmative responses within the specified samples. For nascent ambition, respondents were asked “Have you ever thought about running for office sometime in the future?” Sample sizes: for the comparative sample, Civilians = 971 and Veterans = 603; for the Veteran Eligible Candidates = 780. In the comparative sample, veterans are statistically different from civilians in all categories of ambition except “Never thought about running” ($p < 0.05$).

Looking to the veterans considered eligible for public office, more than half (54.4 percent) report some interest in seeking elective office.³⁸ To see how this compares to other eligible candidates, Table 2.1 displays the results from the veterans surveyed in the two samples relative to results from the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study conducted by Fox and Lawless in 2001 (Lawless 2012, 107). Their study measured political

³⁸ The results regarding nascent ambition among veterans differ from those in similar studies of active-duty military personnel conducted by Richardson (2018) and Urben (2010). Richardson found that 36 percent of active-duty Naval officers ($n = 181$) expressed interest in running for office (2018, 122). Urben found that 28 percent of active-duty Army officers ($n = 4,248$) considered running for office. In comparison to these active-duty officer samples, veteran eligible candidates (a comparable group) appear to be twice as likely to consider running for office.

ambition among Americans who shared professional backgrounds in common with likely candidates and elected officials. Up until this point, previous work on political ambition has not considered military service as a pre-political, professional experience. Most tend to focus on the most recent career field from which candidates emerge, though it is often the case that military service precedes entry into other professions.³⁹ The comparisons in Table 2.1 suggest that veterans, particularly those in the targeted sample, rival other eligible candidates like political activists and lawyers, on measures of nascent political ambition.

Table 2.1: Nascent Political Ambition among Eligible Candidates: By Profession

<i>Have you ever thought about running for office?</i>	Veterans (Comparative Sample)	Veteran Eligible Candidates	<i>Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study (2001)</i>				
			<i>Overall Sample</i>	<i>Political Activists</i>	<i>Lawyers</i>	<i>Business Leaders</i>	<i>Educators</i>
Yes, I have seriously considered it.	11%	14%	15%	26%	17%	8%	8%
Yes, it has crossed my mind.	22%	40%	37%	45%	41%	26%	32%
N	603	780	3,626	814	1,128	657	925

Notes: Table compares results from the survey administered to veterans in the national comparative sample and to veteran eligible candidates in the targeted veteran sample in 2021 with the results from the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study conducted by Fox and Lawless in 2001. Values reported by Lawless (2012, 107).

³⁹ Of the 75 veterans serving in the 117th Congress, only 26 (35 percent) served in the military until retirement (20 years or more). However, even some of these retired veterans went on to pursue second careers. For example, Congresswoman Mariannette Miller-Meeks of Iowa served for 24 years in the U.S. Army Reserve. But she is also a licensed physician who operated a private ophthalmology practice prior to running for office for the first time (<https://millermeeks.house.gov/about>).

When it comes to expressive political ambition, a bivariate analysis of the data suggests that veterans are more likely to run for office. In the comparative sample, less than 4 percent of those surveyed indicated that they previously ran for an elective position.⁴⁰ Despite this low figure, more than half of those who ran had military experience (33 veterans ran) and of the 30 respondents who won their elections, 21 were veterans. In the veteran eligible candidate pool, a little over 12 percent of the veterans surveyed indicated that they ran for office in the past. This figure is comparable to the findings in the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study, in which approximately 10 percent of the eligible candidate sample reported having sought an elective office (Lawless 2012, 35).⁴¹ The rare nature of expressive ambition makes it challenging to go much further in examining the relationship between military service and declared candidacy. However, when considering the more expansive concept of nascent political ambition, the results thus far suggest that military service is associated with greater interest in public office.

Moving beyond a bivariate analysis, I next examine the impact of military service on nascent ambition while also considering a range of other factors that may be influencing this relationship. Prior work modeling citizens' interest in seeking office demonstrates the predictive power of several key political and sociodemographic

⁴⁰ 62 respondents indicated that they ran for an elective office and 30 indicated that they won. These offices were mostly at the state and local level (e.g., Judge, District Attorney, Mayor, Town Council, or School Board). Responses to expressive ambition questions were screened for exaggeration based on author judgment and respondents' performance on embedded attention checks.

⁴¹ 98 veteran eligible candidates indicated that they ran for elective office, 54 indicated that they won. These offices were mostly at the state and local level, although there were several respondents who reported having run for federal office (e.g., U.S. House of Representatives, Senate). Lawless (2012, 36) reports 10.2 percent of participants in the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study ran for office.

variables. First, and as referenced in Table 2.1, other professional backgrounds, such as law and business, tend to yield political hopefuls. If there is something unique about the professional experiences related to military service, I should see this relationship endure after controlling for these other occupations. Second, previous studies find that political ambition is strongly influenced by “strategic considerations” (e.g., Fox and Lawless 2010; Lawless 2012). Eligible candidates are more likely to consider running for office when they see themselves as particularly qualified, and when they know that others in the political community agree. Encouragement and recruitment (or lack of these efforts) play an important role in influencing political ambition (e.g., Matthews 1984; Lawless 2012; Maisel and Stone 2014). Consistent with the earlier discussion, service in the military might increase the salience of these factors. I look to see if military experience exerts an independent effect on political ambition, above and beyond these strong predictive variables.

Third, political engagement matters, and previous studies offer mixed results when it comes to the political activity of veterans (e.g., Leal and Teigen 2018; but also, Dempsey 2010). It is possible that the nascent ambition among veterans observed in the bivariate analysis is just a reflection of greater political engagement. If veterans are more likely to think about running, then this behavior should be distinct from other forms of political activity. Lastly, the collective work on candidate emergence points to how race, gender, age, and socio-economic status can influence considering a run (e.g., Shah 2014; Lawless and Fox 2010; Lawless 2012; Carnes 2018). Lifetime socialization and systemic barriers within the political arena can make particular individuals more or less interested

in seeking office. Again, if military service uniquely influences political ambition, it should do so even when accounting for these other demographic factors.

Focusing on the comparative sample, I examine the effect of military service on nascent political ambition within this multivariate context by estimating a series of binomial logistic regressions.⁴² Table 2.2 presents the results from this analysis, where the dependent variable is whether a respondent ever considered running for office.⁴³ First, in comparing veterans to the general public (2A), the results indicate that military service experience has an independent and significant impact on nascent political ambition. In substantive terms, even when controlling for strategic considerations and political engagement, veterans are 9.5 percent more likely to consider running for office than Americans without military experience ($p < 0.001$).⁴⁴ Among those surveyed, working in a pre-political profession such as law or business does not appear to predict interest in seeking office.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, perceptions of one's qualifications, encouragement from electoral gatekeepers and community members, as well as increased levels of political participation are positively associated with nascent ambition.⁴⁶ Similar to previous studies, the results also indicate that women are less likely to consider running

⁴² For detailed descriptions of covariate measures, see Appendix 2.A, Table A.3.

⁴³ This combines those who answered "Yes, it has crossed my mind" and "Yes, I have seriously considered it."

⁴⁴ This substantive effect is based on comparing the predicted probability of considering a candidacy, setting all other variables included in the model to their means and modes. The predicted probability of considering a run for office is 0.682 for civilians and 0.777 for veterans.

⁴⁵ The pre-political profession variable is a binary variable that indicates professional experience in one of the following fields: law or criminal justice, business, education, government (not military) or political activism, or healthcare.

⁴⁶ For detailed descriptions of the covariates included in the model, see Appendix 2.A, Table A.3.

for office. However, military service still exerts significant influence above and beyond these factors.

Although it is informative to initially see how veterans compare to the average American citizen, it is important to explore how veterans compare to other eligible candidates. Interest in seeking elective office is relatively rare, so comparisons with the general public may lead to findings that overstate the impact of military service. Therefore, I subset the comparative sample to include veterans and only the civilian respondents who would be considered “potential candidates”—those who are college educated and are either employed or retired.⁴⁷ This yields a sample of 1,035 respondents (603 veterans and 432 civilian eligible candidates). Comparisons to these eligible candidates provide more challenging tests of the expectations regarding political ambition among veterans. If military experience uniquely influences interest in running for office, I should see this effect emerge from comparisons within this subset.

⁴⁷ This subset approach is similar to the approach followed in previous work relying on a national survey (Lawless and Fox 2018). The original sampling approach does not recruit based on factors that make a civilian more or less eligible, so this approach serves as a proxy for the more targeted “eligibility pools” examined in previous work (e.g., Fox and Lawless 2005). I include individuals who are retired to get a sense for Americans’ lifetime history of considering elective office. Retired Americans may not run in the future, but it is possible that they have thought about running over the course of their career. Appendix 2.A, Table A.1 reports descriptive statistics for the respondents included in this subset. For an overview of how the politically ambitious compare to the general public see the Pew Research Center’s 2014 Report (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/03/who-runs-for-office-a-profile-of-the-2/>).

**Table 2.2: Veterans and Considering a Run for Office:
Impact of Military Service, Professional Backgrounds, Political Engagement, and
Demographics on Nascent Ambition**

<i>Dependent Variable: Considered Running for Office</i>	<i>Comparative Sample</i>	
	Model 2A: Veterans & General Public	Model 2B: Veterans & Civilian Eligible Candidates
Veteran	0.47*** (0.17)	0.48** (0.20)
Pre-Political Profession	-0.32** (0.16)	-0.47** (0.19)
<i>Strategic Considerations</i>		
Self-Perceived Qualifications	1.22*** (0.16)	1.04*** (0.19)
Suggested to Run by Electoral Gatekeeper	1.33*** (0.21)	1.38*** (0.25)
Suggested to Run by Community	1.43*** (0.15)	1.36*** (0.18)
<i>Political Engagement</i>		
Political Interest	0.38*** (0.10)	0.33** (0.13)
Political Participation	0.23*** (0.05)	0.22*** (0.06)
<i>Demographics</i>		
Female	-0.28* (0.17)	-0.29 (0.21)
Black	0.10 (0.23)	0.20 (0.29)
Latinx	-0.14 (0.22)	-0.23 (0.28)
Age	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Income	-0.00*** (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)
Education	-0.00 (0.00)	0.02 (0.06)
Constant	-1.92*** (0.40)	-1.65*** (0.62)
N	1,574	1,010
Cox & Snell R ²	0.30	0.32
Percent Correctly Predicted	75.6%	73.8%
AIC	1248.4	860.4

*Notes: Estimates from logistic regression model. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.
Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

The results support this expectation (2B). Similar to the findings based on the full sample, when compared to potential civilian candidates, military experience has an independent and significant effect on nascent political ambition. When compared to civilian eligible candidates, having military experience increases the likelihood of considering a candidacy by 8 percentage points ($p < 0.01$).⁴⁸

Taken together, the results presented in this section suggest that veterans are a subgroup of the population that is likely more interested in seeking elective office. Among veterans considered *a priori* to be eligible candidates (targeted sample), reported levels of nascent ambition are comparable to results from similar studies focusing on other pre-political backgrounds. In the comparative multivariate analysis, where veterans were not sampled based on their eligibility for elective office, I find strong support for the expectation that veterans express higher levels of political ambition. These findings are consistent when compared to both the general public and citizens considered eligible for electoral politics. This suggests that, all else equal, joining and serving in the military is associated with greater interest in electoral politics. Given these findings, I further explore the sociopolitical and psychological factors that might contribute to veterans' heightened interest in running for office. In the next two sections, I look to uncover *why* and *how* military service might influence political ambition.

⁴⁸ Based on comparing the predicted probability of considering a candidacy, setting all other variables included in the model to their means and modes. The predicted probability of considering a run for office is 0.734 for eligible civilian candidates and 0.815 for veterans.

2.6 Why Veterans Run: More Qualified? More Attractive?

Consistent with prior work on candidate emergence, the results so far demonstrate that strategic considerations remain strong predictors of nascent political ambition among veterans. However, it is possible that military experience also exerts an impact on these factors. Do veterans consider themselves particularly qualified for elective office, and does this experience garner more encouragement from others? A veteran who ran for the U.S. Senate in 2020 certainly thinks so.

“Being a veteran means that you have common sense and that you are grounded. I have proven that I can sacrifice...I ran because I think I’m better than any of these idiots in office who have never had skin in the game. This isn’t about arrogance; it’s about duty.”⁴⁹

Motivated by claims like this, I explore whether military service exerts an additional, indirect effect on political ambition by way of influencing these critical strategic considerations. First, to get a sense for how veterans view their qualifications, I ask respondents, regardless of their interest in electoral politics, to indicate how qualified they are to run for public office (Table 2.3). More than 70 percent of veterans in the comparative sample and 95 percent of veteran eligible candidates from the targeted sample see themselves as at least “somewhat qualified” to run for office.⁵⁰ Among the subset of civilian eligible candidates, only about half (51.4 percent) expressed similar attitudes.

⁴⁹ Drawn from an anonymous interview conducted in August 2021 with a retired Marine lieutenant colonel who ran for seats in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate. The interviewee served for 20 years in the Marine Corps.

⁵⁰ Compared to similar analysis of eligible candidates with other professional backgrounds, veterans in both samples meet or exceed reported levels of perceived qualification. Lawless (2012, 119) reports that 89 percent of lawyers and 86 percent of political activists in the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study consider themselves at least “somewhat qualified.”

Table 2.3: Perceptions of Qualifications to Seek Elected Office

<i>How qualified are you to run for public office?</i>	<i>Comparative Sample</i>		
	Civilian Eligible Candidates	Veterans	Veteran Eligible Candidates
Very qualified	11%	17%	32%
Qualified	16%	26%	39%
Somewhat qualified	24%	28%	24%
Not at all qualified	49%	29%	5%
N	431	601	779

Notes: Table compares perceptions of qualifications among participants in the comparative sample and the veteran eligible candidate pool. Based on data from the comparative study, veterans are statistically different civilians when it comes to all four response options ($p < 0.01$). Differences in total observations are due to respondents not answering the qualification question.

I also ask veteran respondents in both samples to indicate the extent to which their military experience is relevant in assessing their preparedness for public office.⁵¹ More than 60 percent (61.3 percent) of veterans in the comparative study and 88 percent of veteran eligible candidates answered that their military experience, in particular, makes them more qualified to run for office. When asked what about their experience inspires this heightened sense of qualification, the majority of veterans indicate that the military instilled a “sense of duty,” “work-ethic,” and capacity for “teamwork.”⁵² Veterans think they are qualified to run for office because their military experience equips them with qualities most consider desirable among elected representatives: duty-bound, hardworking, and team-oriented. In addition to these qualities, familiarity with how the

⁵¹ The exact wording of the question is “Do you think your military experience makes you more or less qualified to run for elective office?” Respondents can choose between “More,” “Less,” and “Military experience does not matter.”

⁵² These responses were based on the question “What, if anything, about your military experience has been influential in your consideration to run and serve in elective office?” Respondents could choose multiple responses from a list developed based on common rhetoric associated with veterans in politics and military service in general. Appendix 2.B, Figure B.1 plots the responses to this question from both samples.

government operates and expertise in defense policy rank high among the credentials veterans considered most important in terms of electoral qualifications. These results suggest that military service may be unique in informing self-assessments of qualifications.

To test this further, I estimate a series of binomial logistic regression models where the dependent variable is whether respondents perceive themselves to be qualified for an electoral bid (Table 2.4). In addition to the controls incorporated in earlier analyses, I dissect the veteran variable to explore whether certain aspects of military service impact perceptions of qualifications. Based on results from the comparative sample (4A), veterans are more likely than civilian eligible candidates to consider themselves qualified to run for office ($p < 0.01$). This effect is significant even when controlling for whether a respondent has received encouragement to launch such a run. In substantive terms, military experience boosts self-perceptions of qualifications by 14.5 percent.⁵³

It is possible that certain experiences in the military contribute to this sense of electoral fitness. Thus, I consider whether being an officer, time in service, and combat experience particularly influence perceptions of qualifications.⁵⁴ Among the veterans in

⁵³ Based on comparing the predicted probability of considering oneself qualified, setting all other variables included in the model to their means and modes. The predicted probability of considering oneself qualified is 0.717 for eligible civilian candidates and 0.862 for veterans.

⁵⁴ For a detailed description of these military experience variables see Appendix 2.A, Table A.3.

the comparative sample (4B), I find that serving as an officer increases the likelihood that veterans consider themselves qualified by 6 percent ($p < 0.05$).⁵⁵

Table 2.4: Veterans and Self-Assessed Qualifications for Elected Office

<i>Dependent Variable: Qualified</i>	Comparative Sample		Comparative & Targeted
	Model 4A: Veterans & Civilian Eligible Candidates	Model 4B: Veterans	Model 4C: All Veterans
Veteran	0.91** (0.18)		
Officer		0.56** (0.26)	0.43** (0.17)
Length of Service		0.02 (0.08)	0.07 (0.06)
Deployed to Combat		0.13 (0.22)	-0.04 (0.14)
Pre-Political Profession	0.01 (0.16)	0.11 (0.21)	-0.02 (0.14)
<i>Strategic Considerations</i>			
Suggested to Run by Electoral Gatekeeper	1.68*** (0.25)	1.52*** (0.33)	1.55*** (0.21)
Suggested to Run by Community	0.84*** (0.17)	0.99*** (0.22)	0.85*** (0.14)
<i>Political Engagement</i>	✓	✓	✓
<i>Demographics</i>	✓	✓	✓
Constant	-3.78*** (0.57)	-2.38*** (0.71)	-3.17*** (0.52)
N	1,010	579	1,324
Cox & Snell R ²	0.24	0.23	0.24
Percent Correctly Predicted	65.7%	63.1%	63.5%
AIC	1070.4	668.5	1467.0

*Notes: Estimates from logistic regression model. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Estimations include controls for political engagement and demographics. For full results see Appendix 2.B, Table B.1. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

This result is not surprising, especially when considering that the majority of veterans serving in Congress were once officers.⁵⁶ Military officers are leaders within

⁵⁵ Based on comparing the predicted probability of considering oneself qualified, setting all other variables included in the model to their means and modes. The predicted probability of considering oneself qualified is 0.846 for enlisted veterans and 0.906 for officer veterans.

⁵⁶ 25 percent of the veterans serving in the current congress were enlisted.

their assigned organizations, are required to have at least a bachelor's degree, and receive specialized training on how to manage military resources and operations. These characteristics and skills align with those of other professions that commonly yield electoral candidates (e.g., law, business). What is surprising is that no other type of military experience measured exerts a significant impact on perceptions of qualifications. Time spent in the military and combat experience do not influence whether veterans see themselves as qualified for public office. These results are consistent when measuring the military experience variables among a pooled sample of all veterans surveyed in the study (4C).⁵⁷ Only being an officer is predictive of self-assessed qualifications among this larger sample of veterans. Overall, these findings indicate that military experience, and in particular, serving as an officer, positively influence views on qualifications for elective office.

In the candidate emergence process, the perceptions of one's own qualifications are important, but so too are the views of others. A veteran candidate running for the U.S. Senate recently emphasized how he would not be a candidate without the persistent encouragement from others. He said:

“A friend of mine who was the chief of staff for a senator who just got elected asked me ‘have you ever considered running?’ ...I said ‘no way’ and told him all the reasons why I shouldn't run. He came back with ‘well, none of those reasons are good enough; I want to introduce you to some people.’”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ To explore the impact of specific military experiences and to determine of which veterans view themselves as qualified, I pool all of the veterans surveyed in the study. The resulting sample consists of 1,382 respondents. See Appendix 2.A, Table A.1 for descriptive statistics on this sample.

⁵⁸ Drawn from an anonymous interview conducted in August 2021 with a former Army captain who is running for U.S. Senate in 2022. The interviewee served for 7 years in the U.S. Army.

This veteran's experience also implies that the source of encouragement matters when seriously considering a run for office. Campaigns require resources, so suggestions from those considered well-equipped to offer support are likely to carry more weight. Moreover, popular reports seem to indicate that veterans are increasingly subject to this sort of electoral encouragement (e.g., Merica and Grayer 2018; Mutnick 2021). I explore this claim empirically, examining the extent to which veterans are the targets of electoral recruitment.

I ask respondents whether they had ever received the suggestion to run for office and from whom they received encouragement.⁵⁹ Among those in the veteran eligible candidate sample, approximately 70 percent of respondents received some suggestion to run for office. In the comparative sample, a little less than half of the veterans surveyed (46.6 percent) indicated that they were encouraged to run. Compared to only 39 percent of the civilian eligible candidates providing a similar answer, veterans are more likely the subject of electoral encouragement ($p < 0.05$). In both samples, the majority of these suggestions came from outside of the family. Electoral gatekeepers and members of the respondents' community, including co-workers, friends, and fellow servicemembers, were most likely to be the source of encouragement.

I further examine this relationship in the multivariate context by estimating several binomial logistic regressions where the dependent variable is whether respondents received the suggestion to run for office from members of their community or an

⁵⁹ The exact wording of the question was "Regardless of your interest in running for office, have any of the following individuals ever suggested that you should run for office? (Select all that apply)."

electoral gatekeeper (Table 2.5).⁶⁰ Based on results from the comparative sample (5A & 5B), veterans are more likely than civilian eligible candidates to receive this encouragement. Specifically, having military experience amounts to a 6-percentage point boost in the likelihood that a respondent receives a suggestion to run for office from a community member (5A).⁶¹ When it comes to electoral gatekeepers, veterans are 7.6 percent more likely to receive this electoral encouragement (5B).⁶²

I also explore whether veterans with particular experiences are subjected to electoral encouragement. I find that officers are more likely the target of these suggestions (5C & 5D), but only among the veterans in the comparative sample. When looking at recruitment across all the veterans surveyed in the study (5E & 5F), having combat experience is the only particular military experience that boosts the likelihood that a veteran receives encouragement from the community (8.5 percentage points).⁶³ These differing results from the models could be attributed to the variation in experiences across the two veteran samples.⁶⁴ At the very least, these findings suggest that some particular aspects of military service, like serving as an officer or deploying, might appear especially attractive to those who think veterans should run for office.

⁶⁰ A community member includes anyone outside of the respondent's family, specifically coworkers, friends, or other servicemembers. An electoral gatekeeper includes officials from a political party or other elected officials.

⁶¹ Based on comparing the predicted probability of receiving the suggestion to run for office by a member of the community, setting all other variables included in the model to their means and modes. The predicted probability of receiving this suggestion is 0.111 for civilian eligible candidates and 0.172 for veterans.

⁶² The predicted probability of receiving a suggestion from an electoral gatekeeper is 0.189 for civilian eligible candidates and 0.265 for veterans.

⁶³ The predicted probability of receiving a suggestion from a community member is 0.439 for veterans without combat experience and 0.524 for veterans with combat experience.

⁶⁴ For example, in the comparative sample, officer and deployed veterans are the minority (19 and 32 percent, respectively). In the pooled sample of all veterans, these proportions are closer to 50 percent. See Appendix 2.A, Table A.1 for full descriptive statistics.

Table 2.5: Encouraging Veterans to Run for Office: Impact of Military Service on Recruitment by the Community and Electoral Gatekeepers

<i>Dependent Variable: Suggested to Run</i>	Comparative Sample				Comparative & Targeted	
	Model 5A: Community Suggests (Full)	Model 5B: Gatekeeper Suggests (Full)	Model 5C: Community Suggests (Veterans)	Model 5D: Gatekeeper Suggests (Veterans)	Model 5E: Community Suggests (Veterans)	Model 5F: Gatekeeper Suggests (Veterans)
Veteran	0.43** (0.17)	0.51** (0.23)				
Officer			0.43** (0.25)	0.62** (0.30)	0.04 (0.17)	0.22 (0.20)
Length of Service			0.08 (0.09)	0.03 (0.12)	0.03 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.08)
Deployed to Combat			0.20 (0.21)	0.30 (0.30)	0.34** (0.13)	0.21 (0.16)
Pre-Political Profession	-0.02 (0.16)	0.13 (0.21)	-0.24 (0.21)	0.16 (0.28)	0.08 (0.13)	0.20 (0.16)
<i>Political Engagement</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Demographics</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	-1.09** (0.51)	-1.89*** (0.71)	-0.48 (0.67)	-1.42 (0.91)	-0.62 (0.49)	-1.86*** (0.61)
N	1,010	1,010	579	579	1,324	1,324
Cox & Snell R ²	0.12	0.10	0.13	0.12	0.20	0.13
Percent Correctly Predicted	63.6%	80.5%	62.8%	79.4%	60.3%	72.1%
AIC	1120.6	686.2	667.1	419.3	1563.4	1191.4

Notes: Estimates from logistic regression model. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Estimations include controls for political engagement and demographics. For full results see Appendix 2.B, Table B.2..

*Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

The literature on candidate emergence demonstrates that strategic considerations, specifically self-perceived qualifications and recruitment, strongly predict whether a citizen considers running for office. I find that this remains true among veterans. While military experience exerts an independent impact on considering a candidacy, qualifications and encouragement matter. However, I also find that military experience can affect these strategic considerations, such that when compared to civilian eligible candidates, veterans are more likely to see themselves as qualified and are more likely to be encouraged to run. Taken together, these findings suggest that veterans are more ambitious than other eligible candidates, and that this heightened interest could be due to the perception that military experience is particularly valuable preparation for electoral politics.

2.7 Why Veterans Run: Values?

What about veterans and their values? Central to the theoretical discussion in this paper is the notion that military values could play a role in influencing political ambition. Veterans may be more likely to think about running for office because there is something innately different about those who volunteer for and serve in the military. Thus, I compare the values orientations among veterans and civilian eligible candidates and investigate the extent to which particular values predict interest in seeking elective office. With this approach, I test the one veteran candidate's claim that public service is just in his "DNA." Following recent work assessing values among candidates for parliament in the United Kingdom (Weinberg 2020), I included in the survey instrument a battery of questions measuring Schwartz's Basic Human Values (1992). Schwartz's framework is

used across cultures to help explain many psychological and social behaviors (e.g., Sandy et al. 2016).¹ In political science, scholars use Schwartz's Basic Values to help explain a range of phenomena including political values (Caprara et al. 2006), voting behavior (Schwartz, Caprara, and Vecchione 2010), and partisan affiliation (DeSante 2012).

Schwartz's taxonomy is comprised of ten values, organized in a circular continuum.² These ten values are generalized into four dimensions based on their similarity or disagreement with other values in the framework. Openness to change, which describes goals such as adventure, independence, and gratification, is considered opposite to conservation, or valuing obedience, humility, and order. Self-transcendence, or prioritizing equity and helping others, is considered opposite to self-enhancement, or valuing prestige and personal success.

In the context of the military, values such as "selfless service" and commitment to one's "duty" would likely correspond with higher scores on values relating to self-transcendence, which include universalism and benevolence. These same values align with the principles that are normatively desirable among elected representatives (i.e., serving the needs of constituents, promoting the general welfare), and recent work finds that the politically ambitious score especially high on these dimensions (Weinberg 2020). Thus, to the extent that veterans differ from other eligible candidates on measures of

¹ Recent analysis considers the construct to be distinct from the Big Five personality inventory which is often criticized for yielding contradictory results in political science research (e.g., Parks-Leduc et al. 2015; Gerber et al. 2011).

² See Appendix 2.C, Figure C.1

basic values, I expect that politically ambitious veterans score higher on values related to self-transcendence.

I measure respondents' basic values orientation using the Twenty Item Values Inventory, a shortened version of Schwartz's original 40-item Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ, Schwartz et al. 2001).³ For each value, respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which the portrait of a hypothetical person is like them. For example, valuing universalism is represented as "S/He thinks it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. S/He believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life."⁴ To correct for individual differences among respondents, scores for each value are centered on the respondent's mean score for all items included in the scale.⁵ Higher values indicate greater importance assigned to a particular value.

I first examine whether veterans and civilian eligible candidates differ in terms of basic values, focusing on results from the comparative sample. I estimate a binomial logistic regression where the dependent variable is whether a respondent served in the military and the independent variables are the centered mean scores for each value (Figure 2.2).⁶ The results suggest that, before even considering political ambition, there

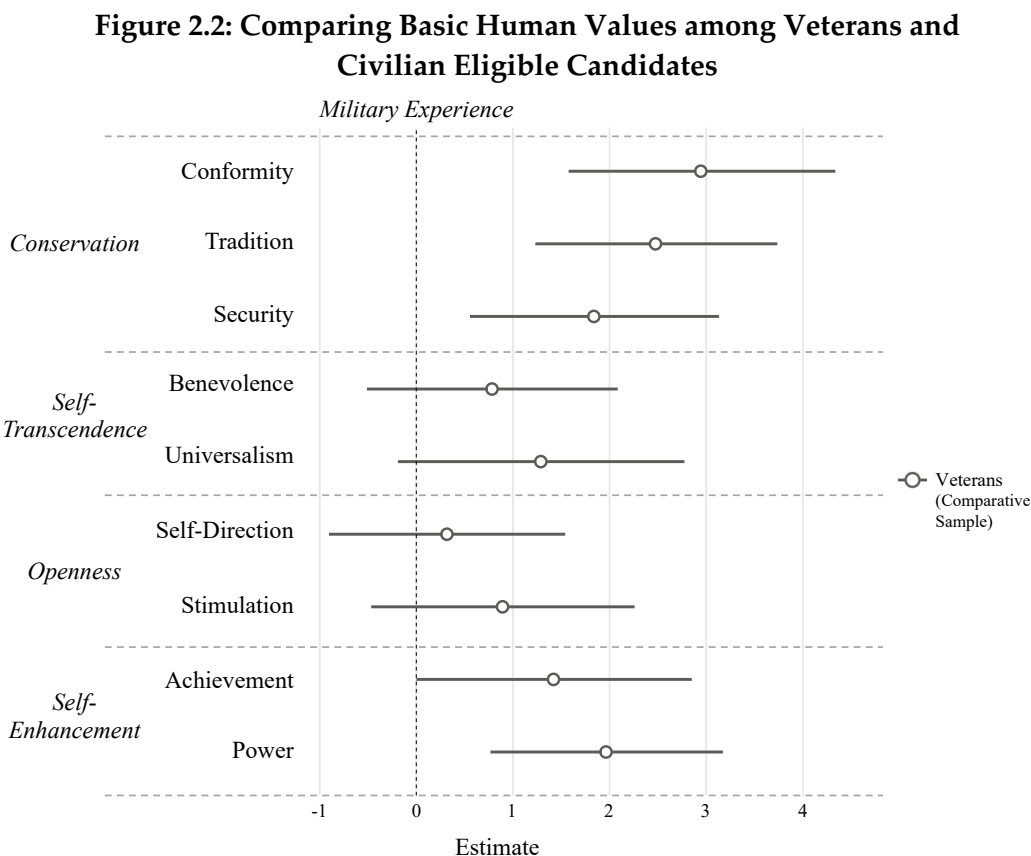
³ Respondents assess two different portraits for each value, for a total of twenty questions. The full Twenty Item Values Inventory is included in Appendix 2.C. Sandy et al. (2016) demonstrate that this shortened version is capable of capturing results consistent with the 40-item PVQ.

⁴ Responses are measured on a 6-point Likert scale ("Not like me at all" to "Very much like me." Respondents only see portraits that correspond to their gender, based on their response to the gender question at the start of the survey.

⁵ For ease of interpretation, the centered mean scores for the basic values are rescaled such that they range from 0-1.

⁶ Based on the ipsative nature of the Basic Human Values index, I drop the value "hedonism" because of multicollinearity. This approach follows the practices employed by other scholars measuring basic values (e.g., Weinberg 2020; Rudnev 2021). Hedonism, which is conceived as contributing to both self-enhancement and openness to change dimensions, is not theoretically relevant to the questions of this paper and of the 10 values, hedonism is considered the least reliable metric (Spini 2003).

are clear differences between veterans and civilian eligible candidates when it comes to basic values.⁷ Veterans assign more weight to conservation values such as conformity, tradition and security ($p < 0.01$). This is not especially surprising when considering how much the military emphasizes discipline, following orders, and hierarchy.



Notes: Plot displays estimates from a binomial logistic regression model where the dependent variable is whether the respondent served in the military. Coefficients are based on centered mean scores and the error bars reflect 95% confidence intervals. All centered mean scores for the basic values have been rescaled to 0-1 to support interpretation. These results hold even when controlling for demographic controls. See Appendix 2.D, Table D.1 for full results.

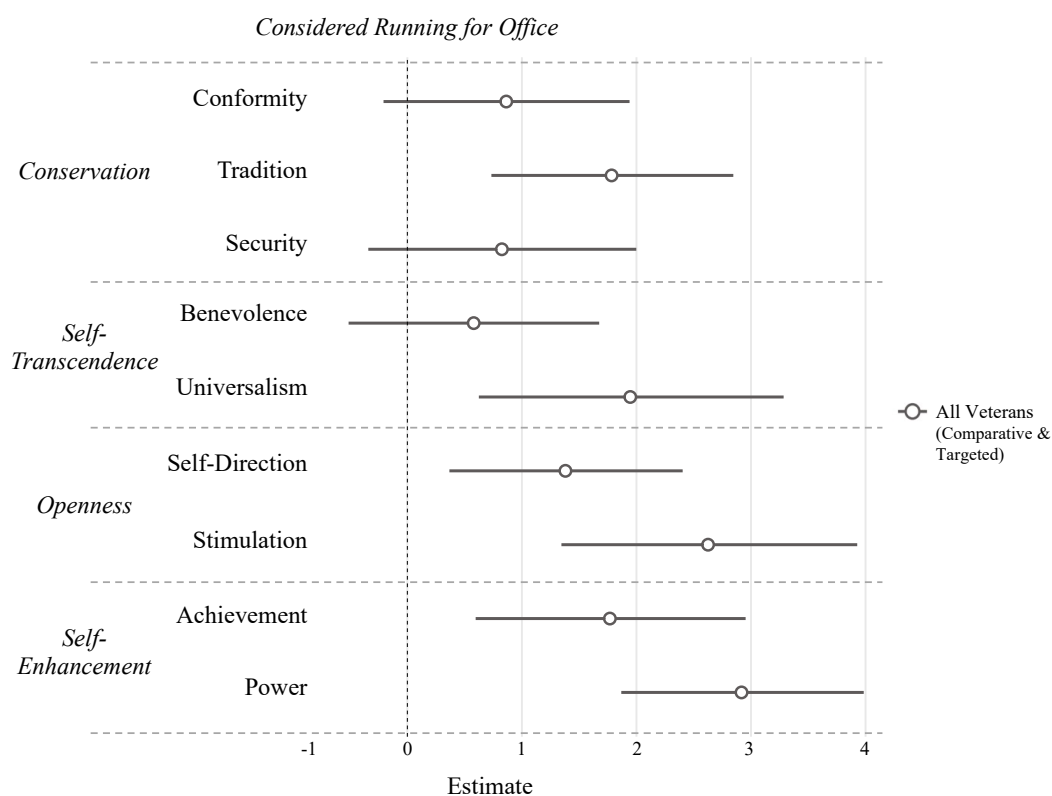
⁷ Due to the nature of the research design, I am only capturing value preferences of veterans—citizens who already chose to serve in the military or those who completed their service. Therefore, this analysis captures a combination of pre-military values that possibly contribute to volunteering and post-military values that reflect the socializing impact of service.

In addition, veterans prioritize self-enhancement values, including achievement and power ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that veterans, more so than civilian eligible candidates, seek opportunities to demonstrate authority and are motivated by achieving personal success. This is largely consistent with classic and popular assessments that the politically ambitious are “power seekers” in society (Laswell 1948, 20; also, Weinberg 2020). However, when these results are combined with those for the self-transcendence values, the picture of veteran values is surprising. Veterans are no more likely than civilian eligible candidates to prioritize altruistic principles such as benevolence and universalism. Before even considering interest in seeking elective office, respondents with military experience are particularly motivated by conservation and self-enhancement, but not values related to self-transcendence.

To what extent do these differences in values predict nascent political ambition? I explore this question by estimating a series of binomial logistic regressions, where the dependent variable is whether a respondent considered running for office. I first look to the pooled sample of all veterans surveyed to determine which values among veterans are associated with political ambition (Figure 2.3). The results from this analysis indicate that veterans interested in running for office value tradition, as well as the values associated with openness and self-enhancement. I also find that among all of the veterans, valuing universalism is positively associated with considering a candidacy. While these results from the pooled sample offer some support that politically ambitious veterans prioritize the tolerance and equity of others, the dominant values predicting interest in running for

office among this larger sample of veterans are those that relate to self-enhancement, self-direction, and stimulation.

Figure 2.3: Basic Human Values and Nascent Political Ambition among All Veterans (Pooled Sample)



Notes: Plot displays estimates from a binomial logistic regression model where the dependent variable is whether the respondent considered running for office. Coefficients are based on centered mean scores and the error bars reflect 95% confidence intervals. All centered mean scores for the basic values have been rescaled to 0-1 to support interpretation. These results are based on estimations that include controls for demographic controls. See Appendix 2.D, Table D.2 (Model D.2) for full results.

To see how veterans compare to civilian eligible candidates on values and political ambition, I return to the comparative sample. I estimate three models focusing on different subsets of the data: veterans, civilian eligible candidates, and the full sample. First, among the veterans in the comparative sample (3A), I find that valuing tradition,

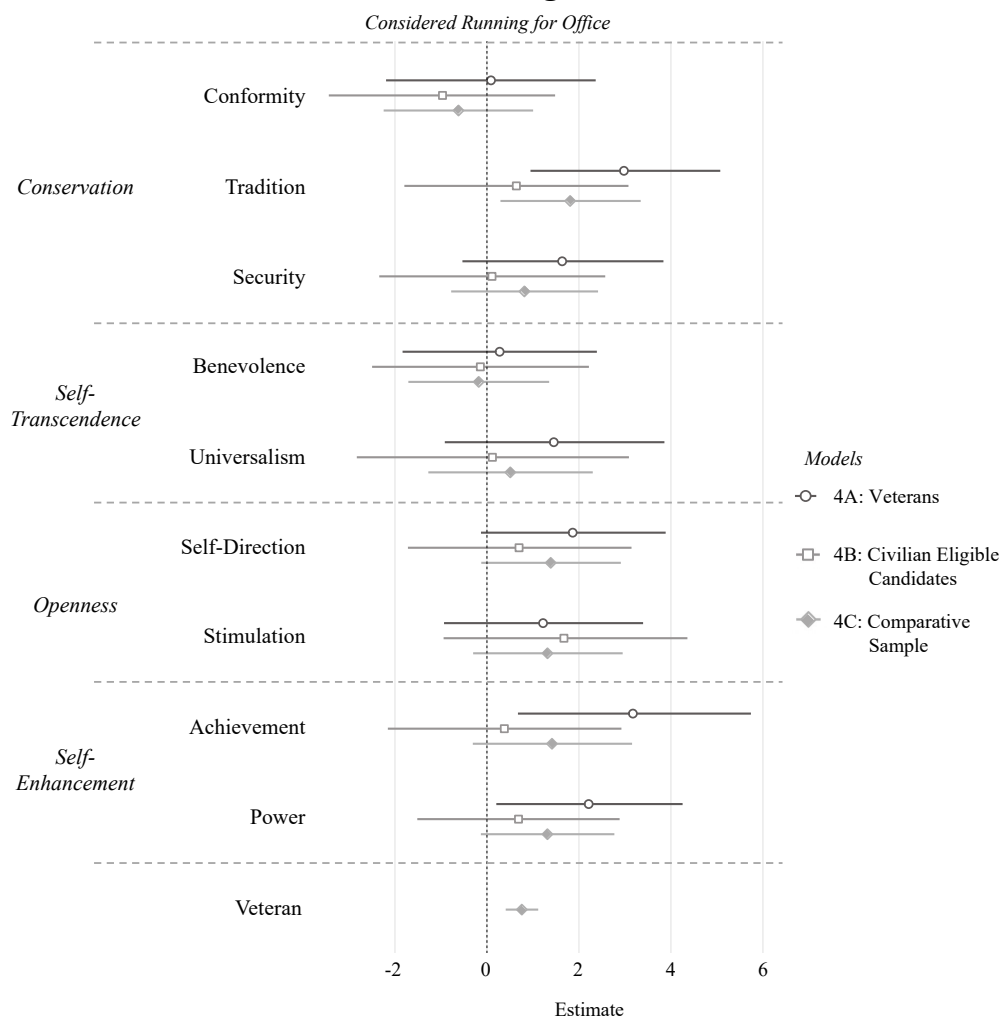
achievement, and power are positively associated with considering a candidacy ($p < 0.05$). Veterans interested in running for office are particularly motivated by goals related to self-enhancement, not self-transcendence.

Second, when measuring values among the civilian eligible candidates (4B), the results indicate that none of these basic values significantly predict nascent political ambition.⁸ Lastly, I analyze the full comparative sample (4C), while including a control for military experience. I find that valuing tradition continues to predict interest in running for office and that military experience has an independent effect on nascent political ambition, above and beyond measures of the basic values. Interestingly, when comparing the results from the veteran subset (4A) and the full comparative sample (4C), the veteran variable in the full model appears to eclipse the effects related to values of achievement and power that were significant in the veteran subset. This suggests that to the extent veterans are more politically ambitious than civilian eligible candidates, this difference is dependent on the prioritization of self-enhancing values such as power and achievement.⁹

⁸ In supplemental analysis, I estimate this model based on the responses from the sample of all civilians surveyed (not just eligible civilian candidates). The results indicate that only valuing security and stimulation are positively associated with considering a candidacy ($p < 0.05$).

⁹ This analysis is akin to an interaction between veteran status and power or achievement values in the full comparative model. In supplemental models I include this interaction for just these two variables and find that the interaction term is significant (See Appendix 2.D, Table D.3). This suggests that political ambition among veterans is dependent on valuing power and achievement.

Figure 2.4: Basic Human Values and Nascent Political Ambition among Veterans and Civilian Eligible Candidates



Notes: Plot displays estimates from a binomial logistic regression model where the dependent variable is whether the respondent considered running for office. Coefficients are based on centered mean scores and the error bars reflect 95% confidence intervals. All centered mean scores for the basic values have been rescaled to 0-1 to support interpretation. These results are based on estimations that include controls for demographic controls. See Appendix 2.D, Table D.2 for full results.

Overall, the results from these value-based analyses reveal three key findings.

First, and without considering interest in seeking elective office, veterans appear to be motivated by a different set of values when compared to civilian eligible candidates. This suggests that joining the military and subsequent socialization within the service reflect a

unique orientation toward basic values. Second, while veterans' values may differ, there is little evidence suggesting that they attribute greater importance to those values that are normatively associated with military service and quality representation. Veterans prioritize conservation values which may indicate a commitment to discipline, traditions, and institutional structure. However, veterans are no different than civilians when it comes to valuing selfless goals pertaining to social justice and advancing the welfare of others. Third, these patterns endure when considering nascent political ambition among veterans. The same values of tradition and self-enhancement that distinguish veterans from civilians significantly inform the considerations among the veterans most interested in running for office.¹⁰ If military experience influences political ambition, the findings suggest that selfless service is not the dominant value motivating this ambition.

2.8 Discussion and Conclusions

In an ad launching his campaign to represent Georgia's 14th Congressional District, Democrat and Army veteran Marcus Flowers said, "I witnessed firsthand the damage done by extremism, radicalism, and disinformation, and I won't stand by while people in Washington take us down the same path." He went on to explain that "The Army core values teach honor, personal courage, and selfless service. That's what I'll

¹⁰ It is possible that a certain values orientation contributes to self-perceptions of qualifications for elective office, thus exerting an indirect effect on considering a run. To test this possibility, I also estimate models where the dependent variable is whether respondents perceive themselves to be qualified for office (See Appendix D.2, Table D.4). Among veterans in the comparative sample, none of the values are predictive of self-perceived qualifications for office. Among veterans from the targeted sample, only valuing power is positively associated with seeing oneself as qualified ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that the observed relationship between veterans' values and considering a run for office is independent of self-perceptions regarding qualifications.

bring to Congress. I hope you'll join me on my next mission.”¹¹ If Washington is broken and electing experienced and principled veterans is part of the solution, the research on candidate emergence offers little in terms of understanding political ambition among veterans. In the face of concerns about how so few veterans are running for and serving in elective office, what really motivates candidates like Marcus Flowers? Do their experiences and public appeal make them seem well qualified to represent their fellow Americans, or does their unique sense of civic values compel them to enter the trenches?

Despite many parallels between military service and elected service, this is the first study to explore the extent to which today's veterans are interested in the contemporary political arena. Relying on surveys measuring political ambition among veterans and civilians, I find strong evidence that experience in the military corresponds with greater interest in seeking elective office. Compared to civilians, veterans are not turned off by the thought of electoral politics. When compared to average Americans without military experience as well as civilians seen as eligible to pursue elective office, veterans are 8 percent more likely to have considered running. The evidence suggests veterans constitute another subgroup of “eligible potential candidates,” thus far overlooked in scholarship on political ambition.

To further investigate the factors that underlie these differences in ambition, I consider how military experience might also influence crucial strategic considerations, such as self-assessments of qualifications and electoral recruitment. Eligible and potential

¹¹ “Marcus Flowers for Congress” (February 28, 2021, <https://youtu.be/QAoaX1VYvQE>).

candidates for public office frequently have experience adjacent to government, consider themselves uniquely qualified, and are often subject to encouragement from others. I find that veterans meet these criteria and that serving in the military has a significant independent effect on these factors. When compared to civilian eligible candidates, veterans – particularly those who served as officers – are more likely to consider themselves qualified to run for office. The evidence also suggests that others agree. Citizens with military experience are more likely than civilian eligible candidates to be the target of encouragement from the community and electoral gatekeepers. Not only does military service have a positive and independent effect on considering a run for office, experience in the military influences the key strategic considerations that motivate nascent political ambition. If military service alone does not influence a veteran's decision to run for office, suggestions from well-resourced political elites might help to stir the interest.

As Marcus Flowers and many other veterans running for office explain, military values inform their orientation to politics. I find evidence that suggests veterans do prioritize values differently from their civilian peers, but not in a way that comports with the “selfless service” narrative. Americans with military experience are more motivated by values related to social conservation, such as conformity and tradition, and self-enhancement, such as power and personal achievement. These same differences mostly endure when considering those veterans interested in seeking elective office. While prioritizing tradition might speak to veterans' discipline and commitment to institutions, the collective results suggest that politically ambitious veterans are not a more admirable

“political type.” It’s likely that the veterans who emerge as candidates are more self-interested than selfless. Trust in politicians and legislative institutions is staggeringly low, and veterans, armed with their values, are expected to remedy the public’s concerns (e.g., Barcott and Wood 2017; Mullen and Ackerman 2018). It is possible that veterans’ appreciation for conformity and tradition, combined with a desire to achieve personal success constitute the right mixture of values that enable ambitious people to get results in government institutions. However, if the hope is that veteran candidates would be somehow less self-serving or power-seeking than any other politician, the findings presented here offer little support.

Given these findings, future work on political ambition should further examine the extent to which military service experience eases or fortifies barriers within the candidate emergence process. In particular, there is extensive research on the gender gap in political ambition (e.g., Lawless and Fox 2010). The political arena is traditionally a male-dominated enterprise that rewards confidence and self-promotion, qualities that are often culturally discouraged among women. In light of these conditions, women are less likely to consider themselves qualified and less likely to be recruited to run for office. The military is perhaps the most masculine of American institutions, but over the past fifty years it has grown increasingly diverse as more women join the ranks (Council on Foreign Relations Report 2020). It is possible that women with military experience are well-positioned to reduce the gap. The results from recent congressional elections are suggestive of this possibility, where female veteran candidates ran in record numbers, and

wins by veterans Chrissy Houlihan, Elaine Luria, and Mikie Sherrill were considered consequential for the Democrats' victory in 2018 (Best and Teigen 2018).

Moreover, the results presented in this study offer empirical support to those most committed to getting more veterans to run for office. While previous literature demonstrates that recruitment and perceptions of fitness influence the extent to which Americans think about running for office, this study suggests that veterans are particularly susceptible to these considerations. The decline in veterans running for office does not appear to be due to a lack of interest among veterans, but interest alone will not lead to an electoral bid. Like other eligible candidates, veterans need to believe their experience is valuable to politics and they need recruiters to help make this case.

Finally, when considering the research on American civil-military relations, these findings are informative, but not very encouraging to those concerned about the erosion of political norms. While the nation has a rich history of veterans serving honorably in elected positions and offering critical policy perspective, military service has become increasingly politicized (Brooks 2020; Golby 2021). The results of the survey suggest that veterans do not seem to be turned off by the nature of the political arena, and they view their service as preparation for this sort of participation. Furthermore, the evidence pertaining to values do not allay concerns by showing that politically ambitious veterans are somehow drawn to politics for normatively better or more honorable reasons. As more veterans emerge as candidates in this highly polarized electoral environment, the military will have to work much harder at preserving the democratic, nonpartisan norms that are central to its institutional legitimacy.

2.A Appendix: Veteran Political Ambition Survey Sample

Table A.1: Demographic and Political Profile of Survey Respondents

	Full Comparative Sample (Lucid)	Comparative Sample			Veterans Only Sample	
		Civilian Eligible Candidates + Veterans	Civilian Eligible Candidates	Veterans	Veterans (Targeted)	Veterans Pooled (Comparative + Targeted)
Veterans	38.3%	58.2%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Civilians	61.7%	41.8%	100.0%			
Gender						
Women	48.8%	36.3%	43.4%	21.7%	12.6%	16.6%
Men	51.2%	63.7%	56.6%	77.9%	87.4%	83.4%
Party Affiliation						
Democrat	33.9%	34.1%	38.3%	31.0%	21.2%	25.5%
Republican	33.2%	35.1%	31.1%	37.8%	40.3%	39.3%
Independent	29.7%	29.3%	29.0%	29.4%	31.9%	30.8%
Political Ideology						
Liberal	22.8%	23.5%	26.0%	21.7%	11.0%	15.7%
Conservative	31.2%	35.4%	29.9%	39.1%	39.5%	39.4%
Moderate	45.9%	41.0%	43.9%	38.8%	49.2%	44.8%
Race						
White	73.4%	75.7%	75.6%	75.5%	88.2%	82.9%
Black	11.0%	9.7%	10.2%	9.3%	2.2%	5.3%
Latinx	10.4%	9.6%	8.6%	10.3%	3.8%	6.7%
Other	5.3%	5.0%	5.6%	4.6%	5.8%	5.2%
Education						
No College	29.8%	14.2%		24.4%	0.4%	13.1%
Associate's	25.3%	27.4%	25.5%	28.7%	6.8%	5.6%
Bachelor's	29.9%	37.0%	53.6%	25.0%	22.1%	23.4%
Graduate	14.6%	21.0%	20.9%	21.1%	69.4%	48.3%
Income						
Less than \$50,000	56.5%	46.0%	49.4%	43.4%	3.7%	21.1%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	18.0%	20.2%	20.6%	19.7%	9.1%	13.8%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	9.8%	12.8%	12.8%	12.8%	15.0%	14.1%
\$100,000 - \$199,999	12.3%	16.4%	14.4%	17.7%	49.2%	35.5%
\$200,000 or more	2.0%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	18.7%	11.8%
Unemployed	22.3%	8.3%		9.8%	5.9%	7.7%
Employed	50.4%	53.5%	75.6%	42.8%	41.2%	41.8%
Retired	27.3%	37.9%	24.4%	47.4%	52.9%	50.6%
Age	49.6	54.3	47.8	58.9	60.3	59.7
Military Experience						
Active				79.8%	76.0%	77.8%
Deployed				31.8%	63.1%	49.6%
Officer				19.2%	85.0%	56.4%
Enlisted				77.1%	14.4%	41.8%
Under 4 Years				46.1%	4.5%	22.7%
4 – 10 Years				28.7%	16.4%	21.9%
10 – 20 Years				10.8%	15.4%	13.4%
More than 20 Years				13.8%	63.7%	41.9%
N	1,574	1,035	432	603	780	1,382

Table A.2: Sampling Strategy for Veteran Eligible Candidates (Targeted Sample)

<i>Veteran Organization</i>	<i>Method of Recruitment</i>	<i>Participation</i>
<p><i>Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)</i></p> <p>A nonprofit and nonpartisan professional association that advocates on behalf of active-duty, retired and former commissioned officers from all branches of the military. It is the largest military officer association.</p>	<p>A description of the study and the survey link were embedded in the organization's bi-weekly newsletter. See figure A1 below.</p>	<p>MOAA claims to have approximately 350,000 members. Around 150,000 received the bi-weekly newsletter. 621 members on the association's email list completed the survey (0.4%). According to the organization, this level of participation is higher than average.</p>
<p><i>Service2School</i></p> <p>A nonprofit organization that provides free undergraduate and graduate school admissions mentorship to veterans and active-duty servicemembers. The sample includes enlisted and officer applicants and their mentors.</p>	<p>A brief description of the study and the survey link were published on the organization's social media accounts. See figure A2 below for a rendering of the recruitment post.</p>	<p>Service2School has approximately 5,700 social media followers which includes mentors and their mentees. 57 members (all active-duty or veterans) completed the survey (1.0%).</p>
<p><i>New Politics</i></p> <p>A bipartisan political action committee and professional organization that recruits, trains, and advises candidates with public service backgrounds. The organization includes military veteran members both interested and currently serving in elective office.</p>	<p>A description of the study and the survey link were published in a monthly email sent to the group's membership list. See figure A3 below for a copy of the email.</p>	<p>New Politics has approximately 800 veterans in its membership pool. 102 members completed the survey (12.8%).</p>

Figure A.1: Recruitment Article for the Military Officer's Association of America

MOAA
Military Officers Association of America

JOIN Login

News & Info Advocacy Events Member Benefits Resources About MOAA

I am a Selected [VIEW MY RESOURCES](#)

Home >> Army Officer Needs Your Help for His Veterans and Politics Survey

GDIT
CAREERS
Transition to a new kind of impact. [APPLY NOW](#)

Army Officer Needs Your Help for His Veterans and Politics Survey

By: **Tony Lombardo**
JULY 06, 2021

(bamlou/Getty Images)

Capt. Joe Amoroso, USA, graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 2012. A decade later, after service in the 82nd Airborne and a deployment to Iraq, he will return to West Point as an instructor of American Politics.

But first this MOAA member is wrapping up his Ph.D. at the University of Virginia and could use your help for his thesis.

Amoroso is surveying veterans on political engagement and participation. All veterans are invited to participate. Survey questions will explore voter behavior, perceptions of government, and running for office.

Visit this link to complete this nonpartisan survey:
https://virginia.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3eXOYH6srFuLnUi

NEVER STOP SERVING
MOAA
New Episodes Weekly
Hosted by
Olivia Nunn
Lt. Col. Olivia Nunn, USA (Ret.)

**YOU'VE SERVED US,
NOW LET US SERVE YOU!**

PREMIER SENIOR LIVING IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

[LEARN MORE](#)

Figure A.2: Recruitment Social Media Post for Service2School



Figure A.3: Recruitment Email for New Politics

E-Mail:

Dear <First Name>,

We are writing to request your participation in the Political Values and Participation Survey administered by researchers at the University of Virginia. The survey and associated study measures political values and participation among the American public. In particular, this research is focused on how military and public service experience impacts levels of political engagement.

New Politics has partnered with the team from UVA to encourage participation among members of the New Politics community. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and all of your responses are anonymous. None of the responses will be connected to personal information. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey can be accessed through this link: <<LINK TO SURVEY>>

Thank you in advance for providing this very important feedback.

This research project is approved by the University of Virginia's Institutional Review Board (UVA IRB-SBS 4413).

Table A.3: Description of Variables Used in Analyses

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>	
		<i>Comparative</i>	<i>All Vets</i>
Veteran (<i>Dependent and Independent Variable</i>)	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the respondent has any amount of experience in the military. Based on response to question: “Are you serving or have you ever served in the U.S. military? Please select the choice that best describes the extent of your military service:”	0.383 (0.486)	
Nascent Political Ambition – Considered Running for Office (<i>Dependent Variable</i>)	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that running for office has crossed the respondent’s mind or the respondent has seriously considered running for office. 0 indicates the respondent has no interest or has not thought about running for office. Based on responses to the question: “Have you ever thought about running for office sometime in the future?”	0.252 (0.434)	0.448 (0.497)
Qualified (<i>Dependent Variable</i>)	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent considers him or herself at least “somewhat qualified” to run for office. Based on responses to the question: “Overall, how qualified do you feel you are to run for public office?”	0.290 (0.454)	0.586 (0.493)
Self-Assessed Qualification	Continuous variable – 4-point Likert from “very qualified” to “not qualified at all.” Based on responses to the question: “Overall, how qualified do you feel you are to run for public office?”	1.924 (1.038)	2.684 (1.014)
Encouraged to Run by Community (<i>Dependent and Independent Variable</i>)	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent received encouragement from a co-worker, classmate, associate, friend, acquaintance, or fellow servicemember. At least one of these options was selected. Based on responses to the question: “Regardless of your interest in running for office, have any of the following individuals ever suggested that you should run for office? (Select all that apply)”	0.253 (0.435)	0.464 (0.499)
Encouraged to Run by Electoral Gatekeeper	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent received encouragement from an elected official or an official from a political party. At least one of these options was selected. Based on responses to the question: “Regardless of your interest in running for office, have any of the following individuals ever suggested that you should run for office? (Select all that apply)”	0.106 (0.308)	0.209 (0.407)

Table A.3: Description of Variables Used in Analyses (Continued)

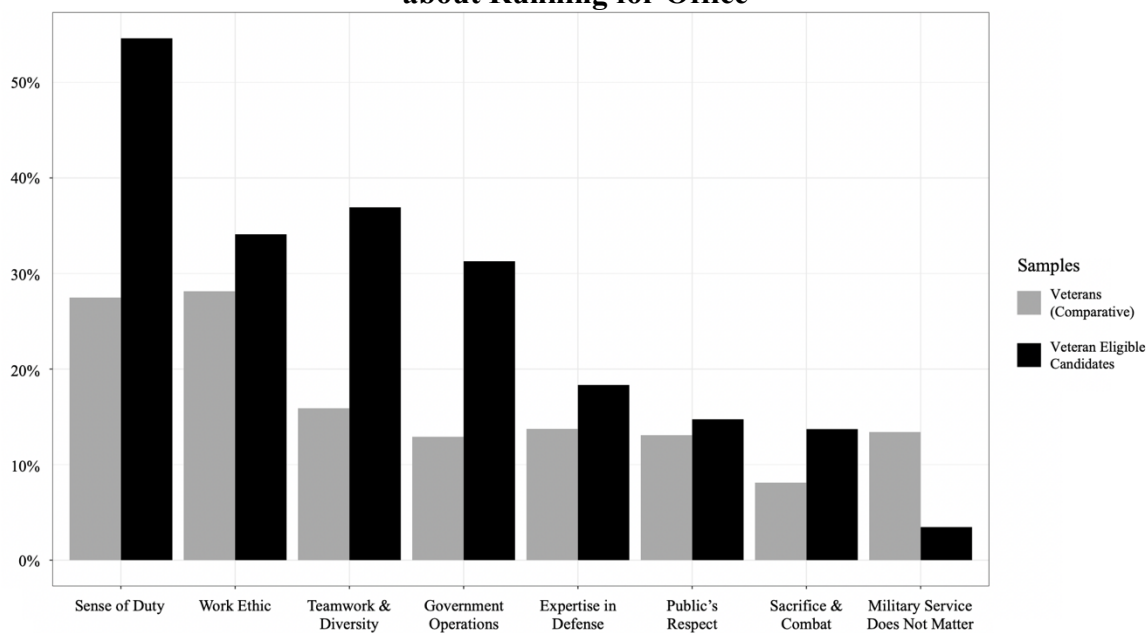
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>	
		<i>Comparative</i>	<i>All Vets</i>
Pre-Political Professions	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent’s occupation was listed as finance, insurance; government; healthcare, social services; law, criminal justice; real estate and development; research, academics, education. Based on the response to the question: “Which of the following industries most closely matches the one in which you are employed?”	0.329 (0.470)	0.504 (0.500)
Political Interest	Continuous variable – 4-point Likert from “most of the time” to “hardly at all.” Based on the response to the question: “Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time. Others aren’t that interested. Would you say that you follow what’s going on in government and public affairs?”	3.164 (0.921)	3.637 (0.655)
Political Participation	Continuous variable – 9-point count of political activities in which the respondent has participated. 0 indicates that the respondent did not participate in any political activities, 9 indicates the respondent participated in all listed activities. Based on the response to the question: “Many people do not engage in political or community activities. Others are very involved. As a private citizen, in which of the following activities, if any, have you engaged in the past year? (Select all that apply).” Activities includes: voted in 2020 general election; voted in primary; joined or paid dues to a political interest group; contacted an elected official; contributed money to a political campaign; volunteered for a political candidate; volunteered on a community project; attended a city council meeting or government proceeding; attended a political rally or social event.	2.150 (1.471)	4.473 (2.819)
Female	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent is a woman. 0 indicates the respondent is a man.	0.488 (0.500)	0.166 (0.373)
Black	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent identifies as “Black” as their primary race. 0 indicates the respondent identifies with any other race.	0.110 (0.313)	0.053 (0.224)

Table A.3: Description of Variables Used in Analyses (Continued)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>	
		<i>Comparative</i>	<i>All Vets</i>
Latinx	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent identifies as “Hispanic or Latinx” as their primary race. 0 indicates the respondent identifies with any other race.	0.104 (0.305)	0.067 (0.249)
Age	Continuous variable – ranges from 18 to 95.	49.614 (18.085)	59.699 (17.191)
Income	Continuous variable – 6-point Likert from “Under \$25,000” to “Over \$200,000.” Based on responses to the question: “Please indicate the answer that includes your entire household income before taxes.”	2.172 (1.636)	3.952 (1.510)
Officer	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent served as an officer in the military. Officers require a degree and complete specialized training to receive their commission. Officers serve as leaders in their organizations. 0 indicates the respondent served as an enlisted member.	0.074 (0.262)	0.564 (0.496)
Length of Service	Continuous variable – 5-point Likert from “Less than 2 years” to “More than 20 years.”	2.800 (1.203)	3.692 (1.313)
Deployed to Combat	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent “deployed in support of combat operations.”	0.319 (0.467)	0.496 (0.500)

2.B Appendix: Supplemental Analyses – Strategic Considerations

Figure B.1: How Military Experience Influences Considerations about Running for Office



Notes: Bars represent the proportion of veterans who selected the corresponding response as one of the reasons military experience influences considerations about seeking elective office. Respondents were asked “What, if anything, about your military experience has been influential in your consideration to run and serve in elective office?” Respondents could choose multiple responses. Sample sizes: Veterans in comparative sample = 603; Veteran Eligible Candidates = 780.

Table B.1: Veterans and Considering a Run for Office: Impact of Military Service, Professional Backgrounds, Political Engagement, and Demographics on Nascent Ambition

<i>Dependent Variable: Qualified</i>	Comparative Sample		Comparative & Targeted
	Model B.1.A: Veterans & Civilian Eligible Candidates	Model B.1.B: Veterans	Model B.1.C: All Veterans
Veteran	0.91** (0.18)		
Officer		0.56** (0.26)	0.43** (0.17)
Length of Service		0.02 (0.08)	0.07 (0.06)
Deployed to Combat		0.13 (0.22)	-0.04 (0.14)
Pre-Political Profession	0.01 (0.16)	0.11 (0.21)	-0.02 (0.14)
<i>Strategic Considerations</i>			
Suggested to Run by Electoral Gatekeeper	1.68*** (0.25)	1.52*** (0.33)	1.55*** (0.21)
Suggested to Run by Community	0.84*** (0.17)	0.99*** (0.22)	0.85*** (0.14)
<i>Political Engagement</i>			
Political Interest	0.63** (0.12)	0.50*** (0.15)	0.45*** (0.11)
Political Participation	0.14*** (0.05)	0.09 (0.07)	0.03 (0.03)
<i>Demographics</i>			
Female	-0.40** (0.19)	-0.29 (0.28)	-0.36* (0.19)
Black	0.27 (0.26)	-0.09 (0.34)	0.08 (0.29)
Latinx	0.12 (0.26)	0.24 (0.33)	0.46* (0.27)
Age	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.01** (0.00)
Income	0.02* (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)	0.04 (0.06)
Education	0.14*** (0.05)	0.13** (0.06)	0.22*** (0.06)
Constant	-3.78*** (0.57)	-2.38*** (0.71)	-3.17*** (0.52)
N	1,010	579	1,324
Cox & Snell R ²	0.24	0.23	0.24
Percent Correctly Predicted	65.7%	63.1%	63.5%
AIC	1070.4	668.5	1467.0

*Notes: Estimates from logistic regression model. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

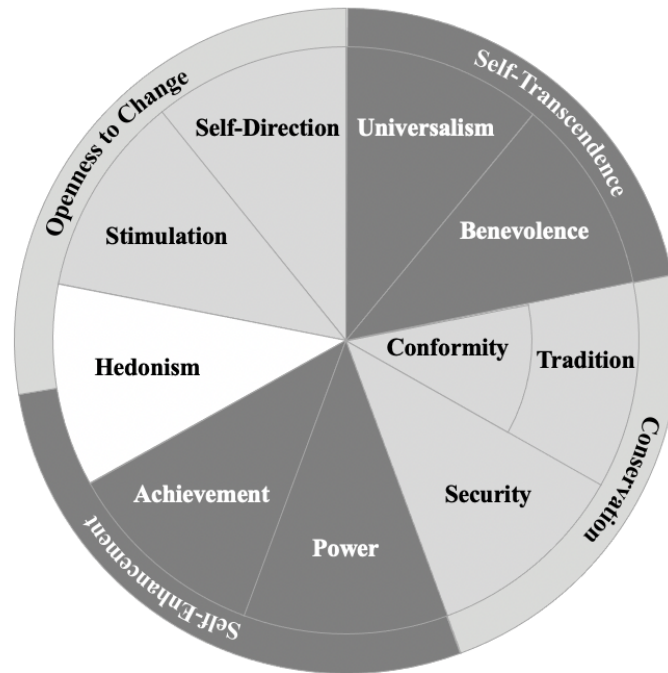
Table B.2: Encouraging Veterans to Run for Office: Impact of Military Service on Recruitment by the Community and Electoral Gatekeepers

<i>Dependent Variable: Suggested to Run</i>	Comparative Sample				Comparative & Targeted	
	Model C.2.A: Community Suggests (Full)	Model C.2.B: Gatekeeper Suggests (Full)	Model C.2.C: Community Suggests (Veterans)	Model C.2.D: Gatekeeper Suggests (Veterans)	Model C.2.E: Community Suggests (Veterans)	Model C.2.F: Gatekeeper Suggests (Veterans)
Veteran	0.43** (0.17)	0.51** (0.23)				
Officer			0.43** (0.25)	0.62** (0.30)	0.04 (0.17)	0.22 (0.20)
Length of Service			0.08 (0.09)	0.03 (0.12)	0.03 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.08)
Deployed to Combat			0.20 (0.21)	0.30 (0.30)	0.34** (0.13)	0.21 (0.16)
Pre-Political Profession	-0.02 (0.16)	0.13 (0.21)	-0.24 (0.21)	0.16 (0.28)	0.08 (0.13)	0.20 (0.16)
<i>Political Engagement</i>						
Political Interest	0.22** (0.10)	0.14 (0.15)	0.18 (0.14)	0.06 (0.20)	0.23** (0.11)	0.05 (0.14)
Political Participation	0.33*** (0.05)	0.27*** (0.06)	0.31*** (0.07)	0.22*** (0.08)	0.27*** (0.03)	0.30*** (0.03)
<i>Demographics</i>						
Female	-0.34** (0.18)	-0.41* (0.25)	-0.21 (0.27)	0.48 (0.33)	-0.05 (0.18)	0.44** (0.21)
Black	-0.16 (0.26)	0.02 (0.33)	-0.19 (0.34)	-0.20 (0.45)	0.06 (0.29)	0.13 (0.36)
Latinx	0.18 (0.24)	0.72*** (0.28)	-0.10 (0.32)	0.78** (0.34)	0.02 (0.25)	0.64** (0.27)
Age	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)
Income	0.01 (0.01)	0.03* (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.07 (0.06)	0.09 (0.07)
Education	0.05 (0.05)	0.05 (0.07)	0.04 (0.06)	0.06 (0.08)	0.01 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.06)
Constant	-1.09** (0.51)	-1.89*** (0.71)	-0.48 (0.67)	-1.42 (0.91)	-0.62 (0.49)	-1.86*** (0.61)
N	1,010	1,010	579	579	1,324	1,324
Cox & Snell R ²	0.12	0.10	0.13	0.12	0.20	0.13
Percent Correctly Predicted	63.6%	80.5%	62.8%	79.4%	60.3%	72.1%
AIC	1120.6	686.2	667.1	419.3	1563.4	1191.4

Notes: Estimates from logistic regression model. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

2.C Appendix: Schwartz's Basic Human Values Framework

Figure C.1: Schwartz's Basic Human Values Framework



Dimensions	Values	Motivational Goals
<i>Self-Transcendence</i>	<i>Universalism</i>	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, equity, social justice
	<i>Benevolence</i>	Helpfulness, friendship, enhancing the welfare of others
<i>Self-Enhancement</i>	<i>Achievement</i>	Personal success through demonstrating competence, ambition
	<i>Power</i>	Social status, prestige, control over people or resources, authority and wealth
<i>Openness to Change</i>	<i>Hedonism</i>	Seeking pleasure, gratification, and enjoyment
	<i>Stimulation</i>	Adventure and risks, excitement and challenge in life
	<i>Self-Direction</i>	Independence, creativity and freedom
<i>Conservation</i>	<i>Conformity</i>	Obedience, self-discipline, honoring elders and authority, restraint
	<i>Tradition</i>	Respect and commitment of traditional customs and ideas, humility, devotedness
	<i>Security</i>	Orderliness, safety, and stability of society and relationships

Note: Diagram and associated descriptions adapted by author based on Schwartz (1992).

Schwartz's Twenty Item Values Inventory

Shortened Version of the 40-Item Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ, Schwartz et al. 2001; Sandy et al. 2017)

We would like to ask you a little about your personal and professional values. Below, we briefly describe some hypothetical people. Please read each description and think about how much each person is or is not like you. Select the option that shows how much the person in the description is like you.

Respondents must choose one of six options ranging from “Not like me at all” to “Very much like me.”

1. S/He believes s/he should always show respect for her/his parents and to older people. It is important to her/him to be obedient.
2. Religious belief is important to her/him. S/He tries hard to do what her/his religion requires.
3. It's very important to her/him to help the people around her/him. S/He wants to care for their well-being.
4. S/He thinks it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. S/He believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life.
5. S/He thinks it's important to be interested in things. S/He likes to be curious and to try to understand all sorts of things.
6. S/He likes to take risks. S/He is always looking for adventures.
7. S/He seeks every chance s/he can to have fun. It is important to her/him to do things that give her/him pleasure.
8. Getting ahead in life is important to her/him. S/He strives to do better than others.
9. S/He always wants to be the one who makes the decisions. S/He likes to be the leader.
10. It is important to her/him that things be organized and clean. S/He really does not like things to be a mess.
11. It is important to her/him to always behave properly. S/He wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong.
12. S/He thinks it is best to do things in traditional ways. It is important to her/him to keep up the customs s/he has learned.
13. It is important to her/him to respond to the needs of others. S/He tries to support those s/he knows.
14. S/He believes all the worlds' people should live in harmony. Promoting peace among all groups in the world is important to her/him.
15. Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to her/him. S/He likes to do things in her/his own original way.
16. S/He thinks it is important to do lots of different things in life. S/He always looks for new things to try.
17. S/He really wants to enjoy life. Having a good time is very important to her/him.
18. Being very successful is important to her/him. S/He likes to impress other people.
19. It is important to her/him to be in charge and tell others what to do. S/He wants people to do what s/he says.
20. Having a stable government is important to her/him. S/He is concerned that the social order be protected.

2.D Appendix: Supplemental Analyses – Values

Table D.1: Comparing Basic Human Values among Veterans and Civilian Eligible Candidates

<i>Dependent Variable: Military Experience</i>	Comparative Sample	
	D.1.A	D.1.B (With Controls)
Conformity	2.94*** (0.70)	2.56*** (0.80)
Tradition	2.48*** (0.64)	2.54*** (0.75)
Security	1.84*** (0.66)	1.74** (0.77)
Benevolence	0.78 (0.66)	0.84 (0.77)
Universalism	1.29 (0.76)	1.58 (0.89)
Self-Direction	0.32 (0.62)	0.76 (0.73)
Stimulation	0.89 (0.69)	2.16*** (0.82)
Achievement	1.42* (0.72)	2.69*** (0.83)
Power	1.96*** (0.61)	2.81*** (0.72)
<i>Demographics</i>		
Female		-1.22*** (0.17)
Black		-0.01 (0.26)
Latinx		0.48* (0.26)
Age		0.03*** (0.01)
Income		0.02 (0.01)
Education		-0.50*** (0.06)
Constant	-7.39*** (2.44)	-8.26*** (2.81)
N	1,032	1,010
Cox & Snell R ²	0.06	0.27
Percent Correctly Predicted	54.5%	64.8%
AIC	1354.9	1093.3

*Notes: Estimates based on a binomial logistic regression model. Coefficients are based on centered mean. All centered mean scores for the basic values have been rescaled to 0-1 to support interpretation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Table D.2: Basic Human Values and Nascent Political Ambition among Veterans and Civilian Eligible Candidate

<i>Dependent Variable: Considered Running for Office</i>	<i>Comparative Sample</i>				
	Model D.2: All Veterans	Model D.2.A: Veterans	Model D.2.B: Civilian Eligible Candidates	Model D.2.C: Full Comparative	Model D.2.D: All Civilians (Not Included in Figure 4)
Conformity	0.86 (0.55)	0.09 (1.16)	-0.97 (1.25)	-0.62 (0.83)	-0.57 (0.88)
Tradition	1.78*** (0.54)	2.98*** (1.05)	0.64 (1.24)	1.81** (0.78)	1.21 (0.88)
Security	0.83 (0.60)	1.64 (1.11)	0.11 (1.25)	0.81 (0.81)	1.55* (0.89)
Benevolence	0.58 (0.56)	0.28 (1.08)	-0.14 (1.20)	-0.18 (0.78)	0.30 (0.86)
Universalism	1.95** (0.68)	1.45 (1.22)	0.12 (1.50)	0.51 (0.91)	0.40 (1.07)
Self-Direction	1.38** (0.52)	1.86* (1.02)	0.70 (1.24)	1.39* (0.75)	1.06 (0.89)
Stimulation	2.63*** (0.66)	1.22 (1.10)	1.67 (1.35)	1.32 (0.83)	2.12** (0.99)
Achievement	1.77*** (0.60)	3.17** (1.29)	0.38 (1.29)	1.41 (0.88)	1.19 (0.94)
Power	2.92*** (0.54)	2.21** (1.03)	0.69 (1.12)	1.32* (0.74)	1.42 (0.81)
Veteran				0.76*** (0.18)	
<i>Demographics</i>					
Female	-0.59*** (0.18)	-0.76*** (0.28)	-0.61** (0.25)	-0.66*** (0.18)	-0.56*** (0.18)
Black	-0.17 (0.29)	-0.34 (0.36)	0.55 (0.37)	0.08 (0.25)	0.27 (0.25)
Latinx	0.39 (0.27)	0.41 (0.33)	-0.47 (0.45)	0.14 (0.25)	-0.01 (0.26)
Age	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)
Income	0.08 (0.05)	0.03 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02* (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Education	0.19*** (0.06)	0.08 (0.06)	0.06 (0.12)	0.08 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.00)
Constant	-7.05*** (1.88)	-6.64* (4.00)	-1.74 (4.71)	-3.77 (2.94)	-5.13 (3.47)
N	1,323	579	431	1,010	968
Cox & Snell R ²	0.19	0.22	0.10	0.16	0.08
Percent Correctly Predicted	60.3%	66.9%	66.6%	66.0%	70.1%
AIC	1569.6	616.7	468.4	1074.1	931.1

*Notes: Estimates based on a binomial logistic regression model. Coefficients are based on centered mean. All centered mean scores for the basic values have been rescaled to 0-1 to support interpretation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Table D.3: Basic Human Values and Nascent Political Ambition in the Comparative Sample: Interacting Military Experience with Self-Enhancement Values

<i>Dependent Variable: Considered Running for Office</i>	Comparative Sample	
	Model D.3.A: Full Comparative	Model D.3.B: Full Comparative
Conformity	-0.55 (0.83)	-0.61 (0.83)
Tradition	1.91** (0.78)	1.87** (0.78)
Security	0.92 (0.82)	0.86 (1.81)
Benevolence	0.00 (0.79)	-0.18 (0.78)
Universalism	0.67 (0.92)	0.65 (0.92)
Self-Direction	1.47* (0.78)	1.36 (0.77)
Stimulation	1.35 (0.83)	1.33 (0.83)
Achievement	0.37 (0.99)	1.45 (1.88)
Power	1.37* (0.74)	0.49 (0.88)
Veteran	-0.54 (0.60)	-0.10 (0.54)
Veteran x Achievement	2.39** (1.05)	
Veteran x Power		1.59* (0.93)
<i>Demographics</i>		
Female	-0.68*** (0.19)	-0.67** (0.19)
Black	0.09 (0.26)	0.08 (0.25)
Latinx	0.12 (0.25)	0.12 (0.25)
Age	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Income	0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Education	0.08 (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)
Constant	-3.58 (2.95)	-3.51 (2.95)
N	1,010	1,010
Cox & Snell R ²	0.16	0.16
Percent Correctly Predicted	66.2%	66.1%
AIC	1070.9	1073.2

*Notes: Estimates based on a binomial logistic regression model. Coefficients are based on centered mean. All centered mean scores for the basic values have been rescaled to 0-1 to support interpretation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Table D.4: Basic Human Values and Self-Perceptions of Qualifications for Elected Office among Veterans

<i>Dependent Variable: Self-Perceptions of Qualifications</i>	Model D.4.A: Veterans (Comparative)	Model D.4.B: All Veterans
Conformity	-0.89 (1.04)	0.05 (0.55)
Tradition	0.57 (0.91)	0.53 (0.53)
Security	-1.66 (1.00)	-0.82 (0.59)
Benevolence	-1.20 (0.97)	-0.19 (0.56)
Universalism	-1.43 (1.08)	-0.61 (0.67)
Self-Direction	0.01 (0.89)	0.73 (0.51)
Stimulation	-1.24 (0.99)	0.61 (0.64)
Achievement	0.42 (1.13)	0.15 (0.60)
Power	1.49 (0.91)	2.74*** (0.54)
<i>Demographics</i>		
Female	-0.31 (0.26)	-0.41** (0.18)
Black	-0.17 (0.34)	0.13 (0.28)
Latinx	0.39 (0.32)	0.47* (0.27)
Age	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.01* (0.00)
Income	0.03* (0.02)	0.17*** (0.05)
Education	0.20*** (0.06)	0.31*** (0.05)
Constant	1.95 (3.52)	-3.00 (1.85)
N	579	1,323
Cox & Snell R ²	0.17	0.17
Percent Correctly Predicted	59.5%	60.1%
AIC	716.3	1580.0

*Notes: Estimates based on a binomial logistic regression model. Coefficients are based on centered mean. All centered mean scores for the basic values have been rescaled to 0-1 to support interpretation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

3. Selective Service: Voters' Perceptions of Military Experience and Race in Elections

I'll never forget what it felt like running across the field and up the ridgeline toward the sound of gunfire. On the other side of that ridge three of our Marines were in a firefight. We were racing to get there faster because they needed us to have their backs. We knew they would have done the same for us. It is just what Marines do. Unfortunately, after coming home from Afghanistan and Iraq, I learned that you can't say the same about our leaders in Washington.

- Representative Jared Golden (D-ME-2)¹

Maine's 2nd congressional district is one of the most rural areas in the country.

The sprawling wilderness region accounts for nearly 80 percent of the state's land mass and is known for being the only district in New England that leans Republican (Martin 2018). Congressman Jared Golden represents the district, and he is a Democrat. In 2018, Golden defeated the two-term Republican incumbent in a close upset that helped Democrats regain control of the House (Bradner 2018). In 2020, Golden won again and this time, by 6 points. So how does a Democrat like Golden represent such a district that voted for Donald Trump in both 2016 and 2020?

To many observers, Golden's military experience has something to do with it (e.g., Pathé 2017; Sharp 2018). He was born and raised in Maine, and after high school he enlisted in the Marine Corps. Golden deployed to both Afghanistan and Iraq and his experiences in combat were a focal point throughout his campaigns. In several television ads, he is pictured in his military uniform holding his rifle. In one such ad, Golden talks about prioritizing constituents over special interests and being a "straight shooter," while

¹ "Jared Golden for Congress – He's Got Your Back." Television Ad published August 24, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVKcHMCh1EQ>

he shoots practice targets in a field.² He often highlights his willingness to go against other Democrats, crediting his military experience for teaching him to “put politics aside” and “get things done” (Golden 2018). Speaking about Golden’s record in Congress, Republican Senator Susan Collins said “Anyone who’s been shot at in Iraq and Afghanistan is not going to be intimidated by the Democratic leadership.”³

Congressman Golden’s success in rural Maine is just one of many recent cases where veteran candidates are highlighting their military experience to win in competitive districts (Teigen 2017).⁴ For example, after losing in 2020, Republican Wesley Hunt is running again to represent the 7th congressional district in Texas. Long considered a Republican stronghold, the suburban Houston district elected a Democrat in 2018. Texas Republicans believe Hunt, a Black Army veteran, is the party’s best hope for flipping the seat. Referencing critical gains made by Democrat veterans like Golden, Hunt said his campaign “took a page out of the Democrats’ playbook... [Republicans] did a very good job of finding a candidate that has the appeal of not being an extremist in a district like this” (Hunt 2021). Similar to Golden, Hunt is emphasizing his time in uniform, describing how service is part of his family’s legacy: “From slavery to West Point in just five generations—that’s our story, but it also America’s story” (Hunt 2020).

² “Bullseye.” Television Ad published September 9, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNDW_unJc6I

³ Senator Susan Collins is quoted in a recent Politico article profiling Jared Golden (Ferris 2021).

⁴ Other recent examples include: Democrat Elaine Luria who won in Virginia’s 2nd district (R+1); Democrat Mikie Sherrill who won in New Jersey’s 11th district (EVEN); Republican Lee Zeldin who represents New York’s 1st district (D+2); Democrat Conor Lamb who represents Pennsylvania’s 17th district (R+2); Republican Peter Meijer who represents Michigan’s 3rd district (D+1); Republican Don Bacon who represents Nebraska’s 2nd district (R+1); Democrat Max Rose who in 2018 won in New York’s 11th district (R+7) (District Partisan Voting Indices based on data from The Cook Political Report 2020-2022, <https://www.cookpolitical.com/>)

These are not a new tactics. Throughout history, veterans running for office have touted their military credentials on the campaign trail. However, since 1970 the share of veterans serving in Congress has steadily declined, raising concerns that this trend is somehow related to the simultaneous rise in polarization and gridlock (e.g., Shane 2020; Mullen and Ackerman 2018). Seizing upon the public's high regard for the military, a movement has emerged dedicated to electing more veterans so that they can fix Congress.⁵ Veterans and their supporters reference military values such as duty, teamwork, and selfless service as essential to achieving greater bipartisanship and legislative progress (Clark 2018; Gergen 2018). In addition, national party leaders have taken notice of the presumed military appeal, looking to veteran candidates as key to winning in marginal districts and the House majority in 2022 (Merica and Grayer 2018; Mutnick 2021). While Golden seeks to hold on to more conservative voters in a district that voted for Trump twice, Hunt talks about his race and military service to win over liberal and minority voters in a district that Hillary Clinton won by two points (Hunt 2021; Wilkins and Handler 2020).⁶

In this paper, I test the premise of these veteran campaign strategies. I explore the extent to which evidence of a candidate's military experience serves as an informative cue for voters. In particular, I examine whether a military background influences the

⁵ For example, With Honor and New Politics are bipartisan PACs that recruit, train, and fund veteran candidates for office. For more information on these organizations see <https://withhonor.org/about-us/> and <https://www.newpolitics.org/about>

⁶ The strategic emphasis of experiences not stereotypically aligned with particular ideologies is similar to the process of "trait trespassing" examined by Hayes (2005). He shows that candidates of one party can express traits stereotypically "owned" by the opposite party to gain an electoral advantage.

public's perceptions of ideology, above and beyond other politically relevant cues. Drawing upon literature from public opinion and civil-military relations scholarship, I expect that military service leads voters to view veteran candidates as more conservative and that this stereotype can ultimately influence favorability. Inspired especially by Wesley Hunt's campaign, I evaluate these expectations relative to another powerful cue that steers perceptions of ideology in the opposite direction: race. Relying on observational data from four U.S. House election cycles (2014-2020) and an original survey experiment embedded in the 2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), I find consistent evidence supporting these expectations. Voters tend to view Black candidates as more liberal and veterans as more conservative. Moreover, the experimental results suggest that voters favor the candidate whose ideological stereotype coincides with their own political viewpoint. I find strong evidence that Black candidates enjoy an electoral advantage, particularly among liberal voters, while veteran candidates are favored by conservatives, but penalized by liberals. The findings from this study present military experience as another powerful heuristic in electoral politics, helping voters determine ideological congruence and, consequently, for whom to vote.

3.1 Stereotypes in Electoral Politics

Generally, we know that most Americans put limited thought into their consideration of political matters. In elections, the field largely agrees that most citizens lack substantive policy information when they head into the voting booth (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954, 308; Campbell et al. 1960, 170). This is especially true of congressional elections, where studies find that voters pay little attention to the

campaigns and are unable to distinguish the issue preferences among competing candidates (e.g., Abramowitz 1980; Jacobson 2004; Hayes and Lawless 2015). However, while voters are not policy experts, they often make rational and reasoned choices, given what they know about the campaign. This amounts to an evaluation based on the combination of readily available information and prior attitudes or experiences (Popkin 1991). To simplify their judgement of candidates, citizens routinely rely on social and political stereotypes.

Partisanship, demographic characteristics, social class, and professional experiences are all strongly associated with politically relevant assumptions (e.g., Rahn 1993; Goggin and Theodoridis 2017; Dolan 2004; Lawless 2015; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Carnes and Lupu 2016). Citizens are most often directed to these stereotypes by accompanying heuristics: labels or cues that provide convenient informational shortcuts that reduce the complexity of judgement decisions (e.g., Downs 1957; Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Conover and Feldman 1989; Popkin 1991). This process can lead voters to infer meaningful information about a candidate's beliefs and traits (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Fiske and Taylor, 1991). Belief stereotypes describe inferences that can be made about a candidate's likely stance on policy issues or her general political preferences (e.g., Koch 2002). Trait stereotypes lead to assumptions about the candidate's character or competence and often correspond with appeal among voters (e.g., Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986; Miller 1990).

Party identification remains the dominant cue informing stereotypes about a candidate's beliefs and, to a growing extent, traits (e.g., Conover and Feldman 1989;

Rahn 1993; Rothschild, et al. 2018; Hayes 2005). Americans increasingly view the political world through a partisan lens, and knowledge of a candidate's party can yield reasonable expectations about the candidate's ideology and issue positions. However, when a candidate's party identity is ambiguous or not readily apparent, voters turn to other informational shortcuts (Kirkland and Coppock 2017; Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstein 2020). In real world elections, citizens must often negotiate the relevance of multiple stereotypes, considering how a candidate's combination of identities matters for their decision. Thus, party, gender, race, and professional background can all interact to shape distinct evaluations of candidates (e.g., Hayes 2011; Jacobsmeier 2015; McDermott 2005).

Like these other politically relevant cues, I argue that evidence of a candidate's military experience is associated with stereotypes that can influence perceptions among voters. Despite a long tradition of veterans running for office, research on the effects of military experience in elections is scarce and offers mixed results. In one experimental study, Teigen (2012) finds some evidence that a candidate's military background matters when it comes to assessing competence on issues of defense and national security policy. A similar study finds that the effect of veteran cues is conditional on party affiliation, demonstrating that service in combat increases the favorability of Democratic candidates but not Republicans (McDermott and Panagopoulos 2015). Finally, a more recent study interacts cues of a candidate's gender, partisanship, and military experience and finds that veteran candidates consistently outperformed nonveterans regardless of partisanship and that female veteran candidates enjoy electoral advantages only among Republican women

(Hardy et al. 2019). While the sum of this existing research demonstrates that military experience has some marginal effects on candidate evaluations of competence and expertise, it leaves open a more basic question: is a veteran candidate perceived to hold distinct political beliefs?

3.2 Belief Stereotypes: Perceptions of Ideology

Belief stereotypes are assumptions about how others see the world, and political ideology is often the subject of these assumptions. To be clear, most Americans are largely “innocent” to the issue content of particular ideologies (e.g., Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017). However, ideological identification still remains a common sorting mechanism that is valuable in terms of connecting stereotypes to politics. Like partisanship, other identities and social characteristics are associated with ideological labels. From these cues, voters can infer the particular issue preferences of a candidate (Conover and Feldman 1989). A convention in this regard is that Black candidates are considered to be ideologically liberal and are overwhelmingly associated with the Democratic party (e.g., McDermott 1998; Lerman and Sadin 2014; Fulton and Gershon 2018; White and Laird 2020). Today, political identities remain heavily divided along racial lines. A candidate’s race can be a powerful heuristic, and among some voters, an explicit rationale (Mason 2018; Lerman and Sadin 2016).⁷

The military is similarly associated with particular belief stereotypes, although these assumptions have received far less scrutiny. Despite the institution’s canonical

⁷ For recent reviews of the expansive literature on racial cues in electoral politics, see Block (2019) and Stephens-Dougan (2021).

norm of political neutrality, popular conventions associate members of the military with ideological conservatism and identification with the Republican Party (Holsti 1998; Dempsey 2010; Urban 2010; Liebert and Golby 2017). This stereotype is somewhat grounded in reality. When compared to the civilian population, members of the active-duty military and veterans are more likely to self-identify as conservative or Republican (Dempsey 2010; Gallup 2009). In 2019, 60 percent of American veterans identified as “leaning-Republican,” compared to 44 percent of the general public (Pew 2019). Additionally, in the lead-up to the 2020 presidential election, the majority of veteran voters (54 percent) supported President Trump (Shane 2020).

Elite rhetoric is also reinforcing political perceptions of the military. President Trump routinely portrayed the military as a political ally and retired military officials have become increasingly vocal on partisan issues (Brooks 2020; Robinson 2017). This appears to have consequences for the public’s views of the military as an institution. Recent work finds that ideology and partisanship are correlated with reported levels of trust in the military. Conservative Republicans were 30 percent more likely than liberal Democrats to express high confidence in the military (Burbach 2019). These differences suggest that the public is viewing the military more and more through a particularly partisan lens, prompting many to warn of the democratic consequences associated with a politicized military (e.g., Brooks 2020; Golby 2021).

The scarce research on veteran stereotypes in candidate evaluations suggests that the impact of military experience is conditional on other politically relevant factors. To build upon this existing work, I examine the extent to which a candidate’s military

service signals particular ideological assumptions among voters. If military service is associated with conservatism and Blacks are viewed as correspondingly liberal, interacting these two identities within the context of elections presents an opportunity to test the nature of these opposite assumptions. So, what is the political belief stereotype of a Black veteran like Wesley Hunt? Limited survey research conducted in the active-duty Army finds that Black soldiers are more likely to identify as liberal than conservative (Dempsey 2010, 78). However, little is known about how others perceive the ideological positions of Black veterans. Recent work on conflicting ideological cues in elections offers some leverage on this question. One study finds that voters still rely on assumptions about race even when evaluating a Black candidate that supports conservative or counter-stereotypical policies (Jones 2014). This research suggests that race is still a powerful indicator of political attitudes, above and beyond the assumptions associated with military service.

Overall, when it comes to ideological belief stereotypes associated with race and military service, I expect these cues work in opposite directions in the minds of voters. When it comes to the combination of these stereotypes among Black veterans, I expect these cues to moderate each other. In other words, if positioned on a common ideological spectrum, Black candidates without military service would be considered the most liberal, Black veterans would be slightly less liberal, and White veterans would be seen as the most conservative.

H1: On average, voters will perceive Black veteran candidates to be more liberal than White veteran candidates, but more conservative than Black nonveteran candidates.

3.3 Stereotypes and Favorability

In addition to evaluations based on beliefs and political preferences, voters often consider a candidate's qualifications and ability to do the job. Integrity, competence, and credibility are all common traits that the public looks for in an elected representative (Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986; Funk 1999; Glasgow and Alvarez 2000). However, there is no easy way to measure these qualities in a candidate, so again, voters turn to stereotypes. When it comes to explaining the link between favorability and stereotypes, scholars often rely on social identity theory (SIT, Tajfel 1981). It describes the process by which individuals inherently value similarities with their social in-group, while emphasizing their differences relative to the out-groups.

Race is considered a strong, subjective group identity that can translate into both negative affect toward those in the out-group as well as political cohesion among those in the in-group (Banks 2014, Jardina 2019).⁸ In particular, negative trait stereotypes associated with Black Americans persist, and they are largely informed by what is considered a modern form of racism or racial resentment (Kinder and Sanders 1996). Research shows that symbolic racism, rooted in dangerous stereotypes about Blacks' independence and work ethic, significantly impacts citizens' assessment of competence and ultimately their vote choice (e.g., Sigelman et al. 1995; Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstein 2020, but also Schneider and Bos 2011). A consistent pattern that emerges from the literature on race in elections is that voters tend to view candidates of

⁸ For recent reviews of the expansive literature on the political consequences of race see Hutchings and Valentino (2004) and Huddy and Feldman (2009).

the same race more favorably (Terkildsen, 1993; Reeves, 1997; Tesler and Sears 2010; Petrow, Transue, and Vercellotti 2017).

When it comes to the military, the American public mostly associates positive trait stereotypes. Over the last five decades, institutional confidence in the military has steadily increased, consistently maintaining 70 percent approval since 2001 (Gallup 2020).⁹ The advent of the all-volunteer force and nearly twenty years of intense conflict have promoted a culture in which Americans view military service with reverence (Schake and Mattis 2016). This appreciation, in part, fuels the growing efforts to recruit and elect more veterans for elective office (Barcott and Wood 2017). Veteran candidates emphasize how socialized military values will guide their approach to governing, hoping the public's trust in the military will translate into votes.¹⁰

Moving beyond how trait-based stereotypes can influence perceptions of candidate quality, voters also assess favorability based on assumptions about a candidate's politics. Recent work finds that voters support candidates whose beliefs are perceived to be most similar to their own (e.g., Rogowski and Tucker 2017; Jacobsmeier 2014), and these perceptions are often correct, such that voters manage to select candidates who share similar ideological preferences (Shor and Rogowski 2018; Carson and Williamson 2018). In the context of race, since Black and minority candidates are

⁹ Moreover, the public mostly distinguishes between trust in the military organization and support for the troops. A recent poll demonstrates that more than 90 percent of Americans expressed "pride" in the soldiers who volunteer to serve in the military (Pew Research Center 2011).

¹⁰ A survey conducted in 2005 found that, when compared to civilian leaders in Congress, business, and local government, military leaders were rated higher on measures of leadership, integrity, and competence (McDermott and Panagopoulos, 2015)—all traits that are considered consequential among voters (Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986, Miller 1990).

often stereotyped as being more liberal (Hutchings and Valentino 2004; Sigelman et al. 1995; Lerman and Sadin 2016), liberal voters are often more likely to support non-White candidates (e.g., McDermott 1998; Jones 2014).

With respect to military experience, there is considerably less research on how ideological assumptions influence favorability. Despite broad support for the military and veterans, some are growing increasingly concerned about the politicization of the military (e.g., Golby 2021; Brooks 2020). As such, touting military credentials may not have the wide appeal expected by veteran candidates and pro-veteran campaign groups. As one political consultant with more than thirty years of experience said, “a military background is a synonym for conservative, so I advise candidates to highlight their service strategically.”¹¹ Therefore, given the belief stereotypes associated with the military, I expect veteran candidates to be viewed more favorably among conservatives.

Taken together, the discussion on stereotypes and favorability leads to an interesting dichotomy. On the one hand, I expect veterans to have an advantage among conservatives and a possible disadvantage among liberals. On the other hand, I expect Black candidates to enjoy an advantage among liberals but suffer an electoral penalty among conservatives. I also generally expect candidate support to fall along racial lines. How then do voters evaluate the Black veteran candidate? The literature on racial priming finds that certain cues have the capacity to reduce racial stereotyping and potential prejudice. In particular, when Blacks are portrayed positively, in ways that run

¹¹ Anonymous Interview conducted in 2021

counter to the negative stereotypes connected to resentment, respondents express less racialized opinions (Nelson and Kinder 1996; Valentino et al. 2002). A recent study finds that Black Republican candidates who emphasize counter-stereotypical messages are viewed favorably among voters who would otherwise not support a Black candidate (Karpowitz et al. 2020; but also see Stephens-Dougan 2016). Like other counter-stereotypical cues, the military's positive trait and conservative belief stereotypes could dampen any racial predispositions among some voters.¹² In the race for Texas's 7th congressional district, Wesley Hunt encountered this dynamic particularly when it came to perceptions of his political beliefs:

“Even in the Republican primary, the assumption for me was that I’m a [liberal], but being in the military puts me on par with the White Republican that’s running... some Republican voters would think, “oh, he’s a Black Republican...but wait, he’s a veteran...so he is one of us” (Hunt 2021).

Conversely, while it is possible that ideological associations with the military could outweigh expectations based on race, this could work against Black veteran candidates running for office, particularly among liberal voters. After Wesley Hunt ran the television ad detailing his family's path from “slavery to West Point,” his campaign received strong reactions from elites in the district. “I got a lot of push-back from the Black community,” Hunt said, “and I got the most heat from Democrats” (Hunt 2021). In this instance, and apart from Hunt being a Republican, emphasizing military service was

¹² It is important to highlight that throughout history, Blacks have looked to military service as a chance to serve their country and achieve equality (Ellison, 1992). Black Americans have fought and died in the defense of the nation, hoping that their service would lead to personal freedom and recognition of their full citizenship (Burk 1995). As racial norms improved in civilian life, the military also became a distinct path for socioeconomic mobility among Blacks (Bailey 2017; Westheider 2017). Black veterans returning from war drew upon their demonstrated sacrifices as inspiration and legitimacy to fight discrimination at home (Parker 2009).

not helpful in attracting moderate or liberal-leaning voters. Any potential benefit based on Hunt's race (and associated assumptions) was countered by the conservative associations with the military.

Overall, the discussion on stereotypes and favorability leads to the expectation that support for a candidate parallels his or her assumed ideological placement and subsequent congruence with voters' preferences. Black and more liberal voters are more likely to support Black candidates. Black veteran candidates are expected to receive less support from these voters, but increased support from conservatives. White veterans will be considered most favorable among conservative voters.

H2: Ideological stereotypes based on race and military experience will influence candidate favorability, such that voters offer more favorable assessments of candidates that they perceive to be most similar socially and ideologically.

To test these expectations, I rely on two studies. The first uses observational data to examine the public's ideological perceptions of real-world candidates running for the House of Representatives. Here, I focus on testing the expectations associated with the first hypothesis by examining voters' assumptions about veteran and Black candidates. However, the noise of real-world campaigns makes it difficult to determine the extent to which voters rely on particular cues and thus measure the impact of these cues on evaluations. Therefore, the second study relies on a randomized experiment where I manipulate a candidate's military experience and race. Here, I focus on how these experimental manipulations effect both perceptions of ideology and candidate favorability.

3.4 Study 1: Ideological Perceptions in Congressional Elections 2014-2020

In this first study, I combine observational data from the four Cooperative Congressional Election Studies conducted from 2014 to 2020 with data on U.S. House candidates' military service experience. Every two years the CCES asks a nationally representative sample of more than 60,000 American adults to evaluate the House candidates running in their districts. For this first study, the dependent variable is a respondent's perception of each major party candidate's political ideology. The response is measured as a seven-category variable ranging from one, very liberal, to seven, very conservative.¹³ On average, each candidate's perceived ideology is evaluated 74 times. The key independent variables include the candidate's military experience and race. To identify veteran candidates, I rely on data compiled by the nonpartisan organization Veterans Campaign.¹⁴ For each election cycle, Veterans Campaign identifies all major-party congressional candidates with military experience, including their branch of military service (e.g., Army, Navy, Air National Guard, etc.). I use these data to generate a binary indicator for whether candidates evaluated on the CCES had any amount of military experience.¹⁵ A candidate's race, along with other key demographics of interest

¹³ The exact wording of the question is "How would you rate each of the following individuals and groups?" and respondents are given a list of names which includes the candidates running for the House seat in their congressional district. Response options range from "Very Liberal" to "Very Conservative."

¹⁴ In addition to training veterans on how to run for public office, the group conducts research on how the military community participates in electoral politics. For more information on the organization see <http://www.veteranscampaign.org/>. While Veterans Campaign is a valuable source of information on veterans running for Congress each year, their data did not include the military status for every candidate considered in the CCES surveys. For those candidates not listed in Veterans Campaign resources, the author checked for military experience in biographical information featured on candidates' official, archived campaign websites.

¹⁵ Generally, congressional candidates suffer from low levels of name recognition and voters are not well-informed when it comes to candidates' backgrounds (e.g., Zaller 1992; Dalager 1996; Hayes and Lawless 2015). Therefore, it is unlikely that voters would understand details about a candidates' military experience beyond whether he or she served

are measured in the CCES for the more than 800 House candidates running in each cycle. For my analysis of race, I include a binary indicator for whether the candidate identifies as Black. Overall, approximately 20 percent of the major-party candidates for each election cycle had a military background and around 10 percent were Black (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Number of Major-Party Candidates with Military Experience or Identifying as Black, Compared to the Total Number of U.S. House Candidates

	2014	2016	2018	2020
Veteran Candidates	20.2%	16.9%	18.4%	19.9%
Black Candidates	10.3%	10.3%	10.5%	13.5%
Black Veterans	2.0%	1.8%	1.7%	2.0%
Average # of Evals. per Candidate	71	72	81	73
Total Candidates	803	822	833	851

Looking to these evaluations of real-world candidates, I focus on the empirical expectations regarding voters' perceptions of candidates' ideology. On the CCES, respondents are asked to place each of the House candidates running in their district along the ideological spectrum. This can be a somewhat daunting task, especially if participants know nothing about the candidates or are unaware of who is even running in the congressional contest. Given this challenge and what we know about voter knowledge in low information elections, I limit the observational analyses to evaluations of major-party candidates. Under this framework, the unit of analysis is an evaluation of a

or not. If military service has any influence on perceptions of ideology, I should see this impact emerge from the basic measure of whether a candidate is a veteran or not.

candidate and each respondent has the chance to evaluate at most two congressional candidates.¹⁶

A preliminary look at the data suggests that there are differences in the way voters perceive the ideology of veteran and Black congressional candidates. The mean ideological score attributed to a congressional candidate across the four cycles is 4.1, or “middle of the road” on the seven-point ideology scale. For veterans, the mean score is more conservative at 4.7 ($p < 0.001$) and for Black candidates the mean is more liberal at 3.1 ($p < 0.001$). Black veteran candidates are given a mean ideological evaluation of 3.5, which is more liberal than all veterans, but closer to moderate than Black candidates without military experience. While this offers some suggestive support for my expectations, these differences do not account for the range of other factors that likely influence voters’ perceptions of these candidates.

The literature on candidate stereotypes and congressional elections highlights the importance of many of these other variables that can exert an impact on candidate evaluations. We know that voters often make inferences about candidates’ ideology and policy preferences based on their party affiliation (Feldman and Conover 1983; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Today, a candidate’s partisanship is arguably the most influential heuristic in low-information elections. Research also demonstrates that gender is associated with ideological stereotypes, such that women are generally considered to be

¹⁶ It is possible that candidates run unopposed and thus a respondent would only evaluate one candidate. Additionally, respondents are not required to evaluate both candidates. Respondents may decline to answer any question on the CCES so it is possible that some respondent choose to evaluate only one candidate or none at all.

more liberal than men (e.g., Koch 2002; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). Lastly, incumbents also enjoy an advantage in the information game, since voters are more likely to know the politics of those defending their seat (e.g., Jacobson 2004).¹⁷ In addition to candidate-centered factors, I also consider a range of respondent-specific variables likely to influence their evaluations of the candidates. These variables include the respondents' partisan identification, ideology, interest and knowledge of politics, race, gender, income, and education.¹⁸ In my analysis I look to see if military experience and race exert an impact on perceived ideology, above and beyond these other powerful predictors.¹⁹ Finally, to account for environmental differences occurring between election cycles, I conduct separate analyses for each of the four election years.

To examine the impact of a candidate's military experience and race within this multivariate context I estimate an ordinary least squares regression for each election year. The dependent variable is a candidate's perceived ideology, measured on the seven-point scale where higher values indicate a more conservative assessment. Additionally, for each of the models I interact military experience with race to determine if assessments of

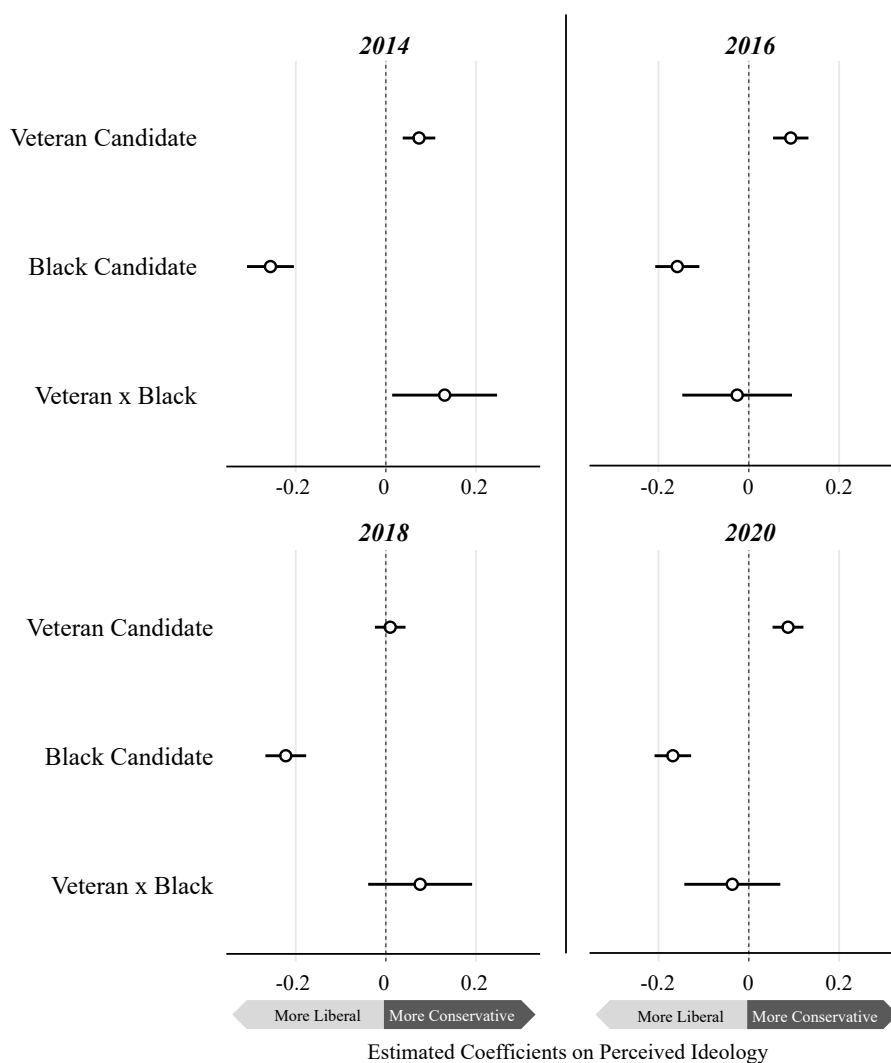
¹⁷ Another factor likely influencing the extent to which voters know about candidates' traits and beliefs is campaign spending. In general, the more candidates spend, particularly on advertising, the more voters know about the candidate, subsequently influencing electoral evaluations (e.g., Schuster 2020). In supplemental analyses (Appendix 3.A, Table A.3), I also include controls for campaign spending, but only for the 2014 and 2016 election cycles due to data accessibility. In the future I plan to include these controls for all of the election cycles, but it is important to note that including campaign spending in estimations for 2014 and 2016 does not influence the overall findings.

¹⁸ See Appendix 3.A, Table A.1 for a full description of these control variables and how they are measured in the observational study.

¹⁹ This list of possible candidate-related confounding variables is likely incomplete. In particular, I would like to be able to measure the extent to which military service or race is featured in the candidates' messaging. For example, it is possible that some veteran candidates do not mention their military service and any effect observed for this variable is capturing something else about the candidate or their election. At this stage, I am unable to control for this possibility, but I plan to focus on exploring the content of veteran campaign advertising in future work. For the purposes of this study, I address this potential blind spot in study 2, where I control the particular race and veteran cues to which the voters are exposed.

political ideology of veteran candidates is moderated by a candidates' race. Figure 3.1 plots the results from these regressions, depicting the coefficient estimates for the variables of interest and their interaction.²⁰

Figure 3.1: Estimated Effects of Military Experience and Race on Perceptions of Ideology for U.S. House Candidates, 2014-2020 Congressional Elections



Note: Figure plots the coefficients for ordinary least squares regressions estimated for each congressional election. Model results reflect the inclusion of control variables. Confidence bars denote 95% confidence intervals. See Appendix 3.A, Table A.1 for detailed results along with the full list of controls included in the model.

²⁰ See Appendix 3.A, Table A.1 for full model results.

Overall, the results indicate that candidates with military experience are perceived to be slightly more conservative ($p < 0.001$ for all years except 2018), while Black candidates are perceived to be slightly more liberal ($p < 0.001$). Only for the 2014 election cycle is the interaction between military experience and race significant. The marginal effect of military experience is greater among Black candidates than among non-Black candidates. This result suggests that for that year, perceiving a Black candidate to be slightly more conservative partially depended on the candidate's military experience.²¹ Substantively, the effects of military experience and race on perceptions of ideology are rather small. For example, in 2016, being a veteran candidate amounted to a 0.1-point change toward a more conservative ideological assessment, while being a Black candidate led to a 0.16-point change in the direction of a more liberal assessment. Unsurprisingly, a candidate's party affiliation is the strongest predictor of ideological perceptions among voters. Whether a candidate is a Republican amounts to an ideological assessment that is 2 to 3 points higher or more conservative. Taken together, these findings offer modest support for the expectations regarding ideological perceptions of veteran and Black congressional candidates. Above and beyond factors likely to influence how voters might process information about a candidate's ideology, military experience and race exert significant, independent impacts on these perceptions. On average, Black candidates are assumed to be slightly more liberal and veteran candidates are assumed to be slightly more conservative.

²¹ See Appendix 3.A, Figure A.1 for the marginal effects plots based on the 2014 model estimation.

3.5 Study 2: Ideological Perceptions in a Candidate Evaluation Experiment

Analysis of real-world congressional elections provides an externally valid test of my expectations regarding the ideological stereotypes of veteran and Black candidates. However, the test is limited in that, even with controlling for possible confounders, I cannot be sure of the extent to which veteran and racial cues are triggering these perceptions among voters. To overcome this limitation, I designed an original candidate evaluation experiment in the 2020 CCES. The survey experiment was administered online to a nationally representative sample of 1,000 American adults. From the original sample, 849 participants received the treatment.²²

The experiment employs a 2x2 between-subject factorial design. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of four treatment conditions in which they viewed a digital campaign flyer for Scott Harris, a hypothetical candidate running for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2020. The flyer depicted a candidate who was either Black or White, and either a veteran or not.²³ Across all four experimental conditions, the flyer provided identical information in the form of a narrative about the candidate's approach to representing constituents and details of his professional and educational background. The flyer made no explicit reference to the candidate's ideology or partisanship. To

²² See the Appendix 3.B, Table B2 for descriptive statistics on the sample.

²³ The candidate's partisanship and other information about political preferences were omitted from the treatments to isolate the impact of race and military experience on evaluations. The one-candidate design of the experiment prevents the respondent from answering evaluative questions on a hypothetical candidate comparatively. Prior research has shown that even on anonymous survey experiments, when comparing two candidates of a different race, respondents anticipate that their answers will be evaluated by researchers and submit to social desirability pressures (e.g., Krupnikov, Piston, and Bauer 2016). The experiment's random assignment allows for inferences across the sample generally as if voters were considering these candidates simultaneously.

manipulate the candidate's race, I changed only the photos featured in the ads. To manipulate veteran status, I included photos of the candidate in uniform and references to previous military experience throughout the narrative.²⁴ A respondent's assignment to one of the four treatment groups is the key independent variable for this study. My analysis also relies on several measures of the respondents' political and demographic characteristics gathered from the CCES common content data.

To test the empirical expectations of this study, the experimental analysis centers on two dependent variables: respondents' perceived ideology of the candidate and assessed favorability of the candidate. After viewing the flyer for one randomly assigned candidate condition, I first asked the respondents to rate "Scott Harris's likely political viewpoint" on the same seven-category ideology scale used for the observational analysis. Second, to measure candidate favorability, I asked respondents to provide a rating of the candidate based on a 100-point feeling thermometer, whereby zero represents a "cold" or unfavorable feeling and 100 represents a "warm" or favorable feeling.

For this experimental study, I first focus on the results regarding the ideological assessments of the hypothetical candidate. Of the 849 respondents exposed to a campaign flyer for Scott Harris, 679 provided an answer for the ideology question. Table 3.2 lists the number of respondents who received each treatment and offered their perception. The table also reports the mean ideological assessment offered for each of the experimental

²⁴ See Figures A1 and A2 in the Appendix for renderings of the campaign flyers.

conditions. A quick glance at the table offers some indications of a relationship between a candidate's military experience and race on ideological assumptions. The mean ideology score for the White veteran candidate is the most conservative among the experimental conditions, while the score for the Black nonveteran is the most liberal.

Table 3.2: Number of Respondents Assigned to Each Experimental Treatment Condition with Mean Candidate Ideology Ratings

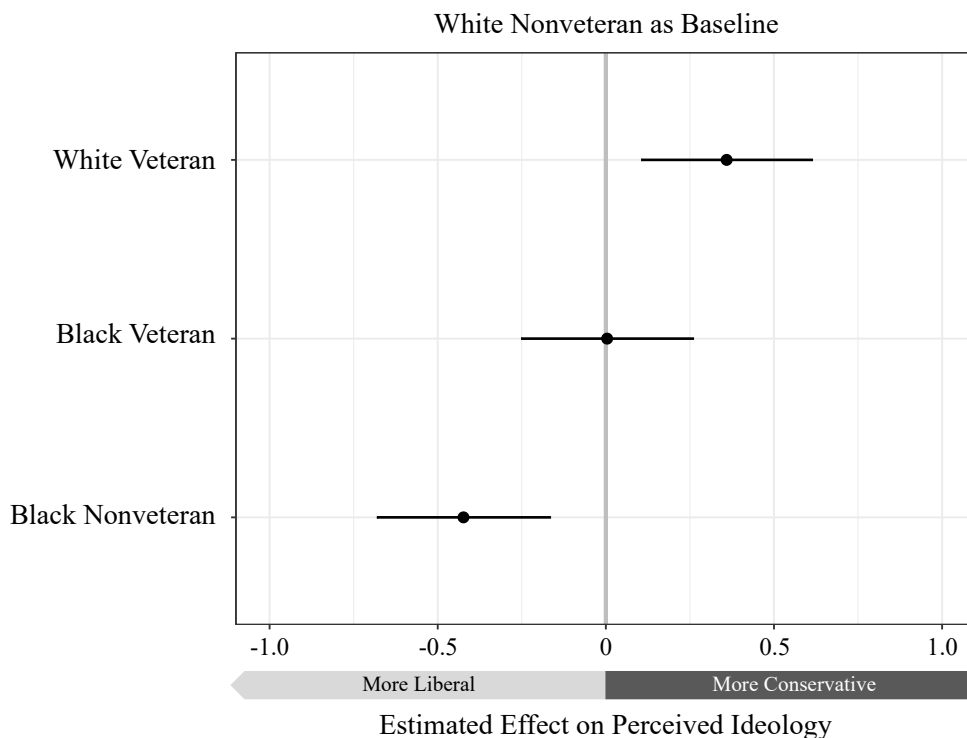
	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>
<i>Veteran</i>	<i>White Veteran</i>	<i>Black Veteran</i>
N	171	167
Mean Ideology Score	4.91	4.56
<i>Nonveteran</i>	<i>White Nonveteran</i>	<i>Black Nonveteran</i>
N	179	162
Mean Ideology Score	4.55	4.13

Note: Candidates' perceived ideology is measured on a 7-point scale, where higher numbers indicate more conservative. Excludes respondents that answered "Not sure."

To visualize where respondents collectively placed the four types of candidates on the ideological spectrum, I estimate an ordinary least squares regression in which the candidate's perceived ideology is the dependent variable and the experimental treatment conditions, are the independent variables. The results are reported relative to a baseline category, which in this case is the White nonveteran candidate. Figure 3.2 presents the results from this estimation on the full sample of respondents. These results are consistent with the ideological perceptions hypothesis. Respondents consider the White veteran to be the most conservative candidate and the Black nonveteran to be the most liberal candidate. Interestingly, I observe no statistical difference in terms of ideological perception between the White nonveteran and the Black veteran. These results suggest

that for a Black candidate, veteran cues counteract stereotypical perceptions of ideological liberalism, while for a White candidate, veteran cues increase perceptions of ideological conservatism.

Figure 3.2: Perceived Ideology of the Candidate by Experimental Condition



Note: Figure plots the coefficients based on the results from an ordinary least squares regression. Bars represent 95% Confidence Intervals. The White Nonveteran candidate is the baseline category. See Appendix 3.B, Table B.3 for full results.

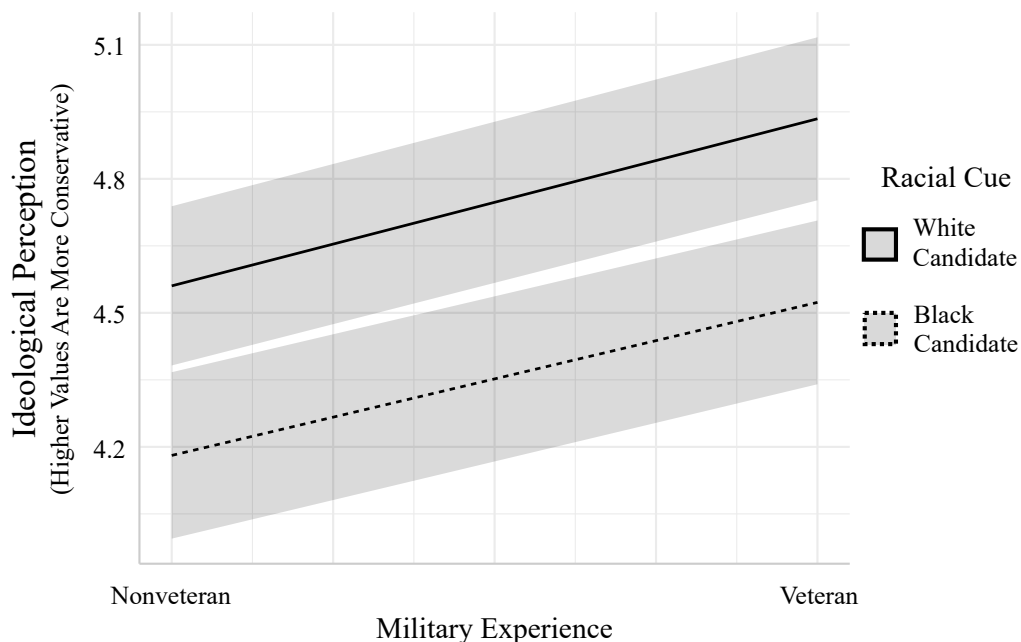
To test these expectations further, I estimate another ordinary least squares regression, but here I create an indicator variable for the type of cues included in the campaign ads. The veteran cue variable indicates whether the flyer included military images and messages, and the racial cue variable indicates whether the flyer included images of a Black candidate. In this analysis, I look to see if these cues alone influence ideological perceptions and if there is an interaction between the two, such that when a

Black candidate signals his military service, voters perceive a difference his ideology. Similar to the approach in study 1, I include respondent-specific controls known to commonly influence voter evaluations. These include respondent party identification, ideology, education level, gender, and race. I do not include any additional control variables for the candidate since there are no other differences between candidates aside from the veteran and race experimental manipulations.

The results from this analysis are depicted in Figure 3.3.²⁵ The marginal effects plot based on the estimation shows a positive and significant relationship between veteran status and perceptions of a more conservative ideology. Substantively, evidence of a military background in the campaign ad amounts to a 0.37-point increase in the ideology score respondents give to the candidate ($p < 0.001$). Race also appears to significantly influence ideological perceptions such that voters seeing a Black candidate on the flyer attribute a 0.38-point decrease in the ideology score (more liberal, $p < 0.001$). However, there appears to be no evidence of an interaction between veteran status and race. The findings support the expectation that veterans, regardless of race, are seen as more conservative and that Blacks, regardless of military service, are considered to be more liberal.

²⁵ For the full results from the model estimation, see Appendix 3.B, Table B.4.

Figure 3.3: Marginal Effects of Veteran and Racial Experimental Cues on Perceptions of Ideology



Note: Figure plots the marginal effects of the veteran and racial cues on perceptions of ideology. Predicted values based on an ordinary least squares regression. Shaded region denotes 95% confidence intervals. For the full results of the model see Appendix 3.B, Table B.4.

Consistent with the results from study 1, the experimental findings offer strong support for the first hypothesis. While the veteran and racial cues do not interact to moderate perceptions of ideology, exposure to these cues significantly impacts where voters place candidates on the ideological spectrum. The Black candidate without military experience is considered the most liberal of the four conditions, while the White veteran is perceived to be the most conservative. The results indicate that there is no statistical difference between perceptions of a White nonveteran candidate and a Black veteran candidate.

3.6 Study 2: Favorability in a Candidate Evaluation Experiment

In this second study, I go beyond voters' perception of ideology and next consider the extent to which these ideological stereotypes influence electoral favorability among different subgroups of respondents. The key dependent variable for this analysis is a voters' response to the favorability thermometer question. Of the 849 respondents who received the experimental treatment, 844 provided an evaluation. Table 3.3 lists the number of respondents who received each treatment and reported a favorability assessment. I include the mean evaluation offered for each of the experimental conditions. These means suggest differences between the Black and White candidates, in that Black candidates were generally seen as more favorable. There appears to be little difference between the nonveteran and veteran candidates. The Black veteran candidate received the highest average score from the sample.

Table 3.3: Number of Respondents Assigned to Each Experimental Treatment Condition with Mean Candidate Favorability Ratings

	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>
<i>Veteran</i>	<i>White Veteran</i>	<i>Black Veteran</i>
N	202	210
Mean Favorability	55.48	63.81
<i>Nonveteran</i>	<i>White Nonveteran</i>	<i>Black Nonveteran</i>
N	226	206
Mean Favorability	56.06	62.57

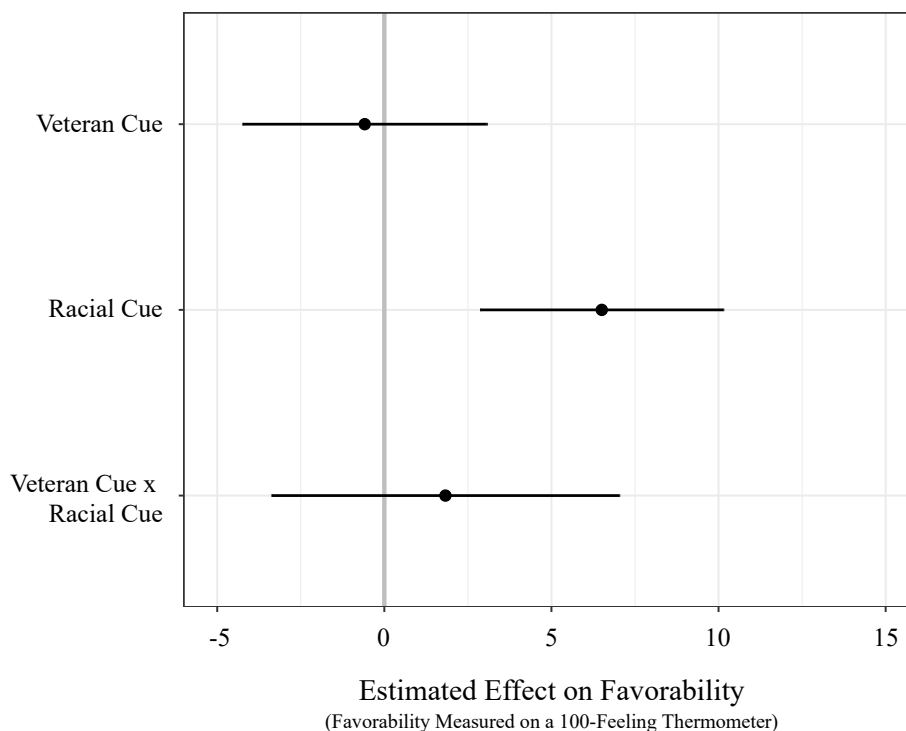
Note: Candidates' favorability is measured on a 100-point thermometer scale, where higher numbers indicate a more favorable assessment. Excludes respondent that answered "Not sure."

To test expectations associated with the second hypothesis, I estimate an ordinary least squares regression to capture the effects of veteran and racial cues on the favorability measure. I also include an interaction term to see if military experience in some way moderates the favorability of a Black candidate. Figure 3.4 plots the coefficients from this estimation. Surprisingly, I find that veteran candidates do not enjoy a universal advantage among voters. The results from the survey experiment indicate that a military background does not significantly improve a candidate's favorability. However, I do find that cues indicating that a candidate is Black have a positive impact on favorability, improving a voter's assessment of the candidate by 6.5 points ($p < 0.001$). Moreover, these initial results demonstrate that veteran cues do not significantly interact with race to influence assessments of favorability. If anything, veteran status may be dampening support for Black candidates among the full sample, but these results are not statistically significant. Findings from this preliminary estimation suggest that veteran status has no effect on electoral appeal and Black candidates generally enjoy an advantage.

This paper's investigation is inspired by the potentially strategic emphasis of a candidate's military service on the campaign trail, and what these cues imply for certain voters. Given the results on ideological perceptions for veteran and Black candidates, I expect that favorability for particular candidates will be consistent with their ideological stereotypes. For example, if military service is "synonymous" with being more conservative, I expect conservatives to view these candidates more favorably. To further test these empirical expectations, I estimate two ordinary least squares regression models

that incorporate control variables and interactions between the experimental cues and respondent ideology to get a sense for how particular attitudes among the respondents influence candidate favorability.

Figure 3.4: Effects of Veteran and Racial Cues on Candidate Favorability



Note: Figure plots the estimated coefficients based on an ordinary least squares regression. Bars represent 95% Confidence Intervals. See Appendix 3.B, Table B.5 for full results of the model.

I first estimate a basic model (Model 3A) assessing the impact of veteran and racial cues on candidate favorability while including controls for respondents' partisan identification, ideology, education, gender, and race. I also include a variable that accounts for respondents' military experience. Service in the military is highly formative, during which servicemembers develop strong bonds with one another. Shared values and experiences tied to military service can impact social cohesion and consequently political preferences (e.g., Endicott 2022; Wilson and Ruger 2021). The military experience

variable is binary, such that 1 denotes status as a veteran or current member of the military. Lastly, attitudes toward Black candidates are still influenced by voters' level of racial resentment (Visalvanich 2017; Jardina 2021). Thus, I consider how expressed racial animus affects evaluations. The racial resentment score is based on the four-item scale developed by Kinder and Sanders (1996). This scale is converted into a continuous variable from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate greater racial resentment.²⁶

The results from Model 3A indicate that veterans enjoy no clear benefit among voters and that Black candidates score significantly higher than White candidates on the favorability thermometer. Those who viewed the flyer featuring a Black candidate were likely to award more than 7.4 points on the favorability thermometer ($p < 0.001$). This result is especially striking considering the estimation controls for racial resentment. However, it is plausible that the current political climate surrounding race is reducing the intensity of racial bias among a majority of Americans or that voters are paying more attention to what their choice says about them. A fair amount of work examines the extent to which Americans “self-monitor” their expressed preferences in the face of social desirability pressures (e.g., Terkildsen 1993; Highton 2004). Researchers observe this norm-adhering behavior even on anonymous surveys such as the CCES (e.g., Krupnikov, Piston, and Bauer 2016). Either way, these results challenge general assumptions about the electoral favorability of veteran and Black candidates.

²⁶ See Appendix B.3, Table B.1 for a description of the control variables

Table 3.4: Estimating the Effects of Veteran and Racial Cues on Perceptions of Candidate Favorability

<i>Dependent Variable: Candidate Favorability</i>	Model 3A:	Model 3B:
Veteran Cue	-0.31 (1.33)	-10.50*** (3.22)
Racial Cue	7.35*** (1.32)	17.75*** (3.17)
Respondent Ideology x Veteran Cue		2.43*** (0.70)
Respondent Ideology x Racial Cue		-3.04*** (0.70)
Veteran Cue x Racial Cue		2.16 (2.62)
<i>Respondent Variables</i>		
Republican	0.56 (1.93)	1.21 (1.90)
Ideology	2.08*** (0.52)	2.32*** (0.70)
Education	0.49 (0.47)	0.42 (0.46)
Female	4.40*** (1.40)	4.07*** (1.38)
Black	0.97 (2.34)	0.86 (2.30)
Veteran	0.68 (2.29)	0.80 (2.26)
Racial Resentment	4.91 (2.84)	5.03 (2.79)
Constant	41.47*** (2.90)	41.23*** (3.46)
N	791	791
Adjusted R ²	0.10	0.13

*Notes: Estimates from an ordinary least squares regression. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

The results from this first model (Model 3A) indicate that a respondent's ideology is a significant predictor of candidate favorability. Combined with the earlier findings on

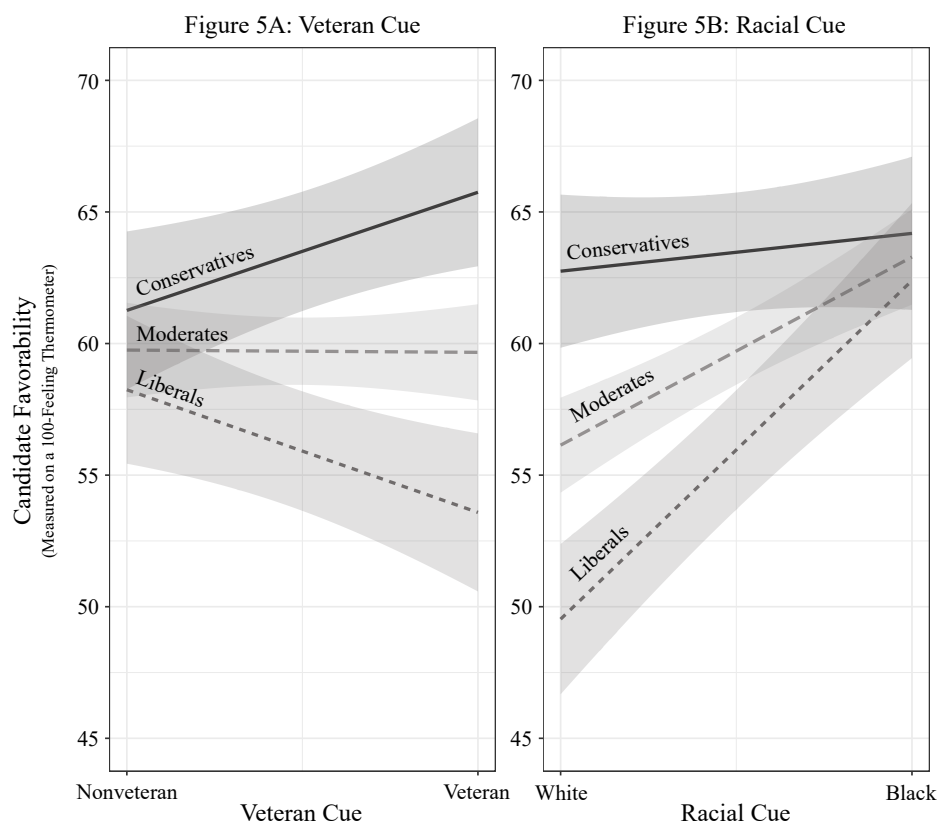
perceptions of candidate ideology, this result offers more support for the claim that ideological stereotypes also influence evaluations of favorability. To scrutinize this possibility, I estimate a second model (Model 3B) that includes a series of interactions. First, I interact respondents' ideology with whether they received the military experience cues to examine the extent to which evaluations of veteran candidates depend on respondents' ideology. Second, I interact respondents' ideology with whether they viewed the flyer for a Black candidate to see if favorability based on race also depends on respondents' ideology. Third, as in previous analyses, I include an interaction between the veteran and racial cues to explore whether veteran status modifies the effects of the racial cue.

Taken together, the results from this second model (Model 3B) indicate that a candidate's military experience and race work in opposite directions for liberal and conservative voters.²⁷ For ease of interpretation, Figure 3.5 presents the marginal effects plots for the two significant interactions observed between the candidate cues and ideology. In particular, I first find that the assessed favorability of veteran candidates depends on the respondents' ideology, such that conservatives view veteran candidates more favorably and liberals view veteran candidates less favorably (See Figure 3.5A). Second, the results indicate that liberal voters offer higher favorability assessments of Black candidates over White candidates, whereas the racial cue has no impact on candidate favorability among conservative respondents (see Figure 3.5B). Lastly, there is

²⁷ I perform a likelihood ratio test to compare the two models. Model 3B, with the interactions, was a better fit ($\chi^2 = 30.57$, $p < 0.001$)

no evidence of a significant interaction between military experience and candidate race on evaluations of candidate favorability. Taken together, these findings suggest that conservatives express greater support for veteran candidates, regardless of race and that liberals favor Black candidates more than White candidates, regardless of military experience.²⁸

Figure 3.5: Marginal Effects of Veteran and Racial Cues on Candidate Favorability, Considering Respondent Ideology



Note: Figures plot the marginal effects of the veteran and racial cues on favorability, interacting respondent ideology with the experimental cues. Predicted values based on an ordinary least squares regression (Table 3.4). Shaded region denotes 95% confidence intervals.

²⁸ I further test the validity of this interpretation by estimating a model with a three-way interaction (veteran cue x racial cue x respondent ideology), and find that this interaction is not statistically significant and does not change the results of the other key interactive terms included in Model 3B. Thus, for ease of overall interpretation, I focus on the constitutive two-interactions (See Appendix 3.B, Table B.6).

In a final set of analyses, I explore the extent to which the veteran and racial cues influence favorability among other relevant subgroups of respondents. In particular, I estimate the effects of these cues among veteran respondents, Black respondents, and those scoring high or low on the racial resentment index (Table 3.5).²⁹ For the veteran cue, I find that it only has a significant impact among respondents scoring low on racial resentment, such that these respondents view the veteran candidates less favorably. This is similar to the earlier results among liberal respondents, which is not surprising given that the foundations of the racial resentment scale may be related to ideological preferences (e.g., Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Feldman and Huddy 2005). What is surprising is that the veteran cue appears to exert no impact on favorability among veteran respondents. This suggests that knowledge of a candidate's military experience cues assumptions about the candidate's politics much more than anything about shared military experiences or professional admiration. When it comes to the racial cue, I find that the results are consistent with expectations. Black candidates receive a 12-point boost in favorability ratings among Black respondents and those scoring low on the racial resentment scale. The racial cue does not exert an effect on favorability among veteran respondents nor among those scoring high on the racial resentment scale. Additionally, across all four models, there is no evidence suggesting the interaction between veteran status and race effects candidate evaluations.

²⁹ The mean racial resentment score for the sample is 0.44. Respondents considered high on the racial resentment scale are those with a score higher than one standard deviation above the mean (> 0.74). Those considered low on the racial resentment scale are those who score lower than one standard deviation below the mean quartile (< 0.12).

Table 3.5: Estimating the Effects of Veteran and Racial Cues on Perceptions of Candidate Favorability, by Subset of Respondents

<i>Dependent Variable:</i> <i>Candidate Favorability</i>	Model 5A: Veterans	Model 5B: Blacks	Model 5C: High RR	Model 5D: Low RR
Veteran Cue	0.54 (7.49)	-2.27 (6.15)	4.68 (4.29)	-6.84** (3.06)
Racial Cue	7.10 (6.20)	13.30** (5.60)	1.69 (4.31)	12.47*** (3.07)
Veteran Cue x Racial Cue	0.09 (9.82)	-1.42 (8.70)	0.44 (5.84)	-1.98 (4.35)
<i>Respondent Variables</i>				
Republican	1.29 (6.26)	1.21 (14.38)	5.09 (3.30)	13.53 (12.19)
Ideology	1.48 (1.83)	1.42 (1.59)	1.01 (1.12)	5.76*** (0.99)
Education	0.25 (1.57)	-1.18 (1.56)	0.70 (1.02)	0.65 (0.84)
Female	-0.37 (6.54)	4.70 (5.15)	0.38 (3.00)	8.25*** (2.30)
Black	-5.09 (10.30)		-23.35* (12.25)	4.43 (3.19)
Veteran		-5.93 (9.00)	-3.15 (4.00)	-5.62 (4.95)
Racial Resentment	2.55 (10.41)	-23.20** (11.33)		
Constant	47.77*** (9.32)	55.42*** (9.96)	50.09*** (7.28)	29.46*** (4.93)
N	81	74	215	230
Adjusted R ²	-0.02	0.12	0.02	0.29

*Notes: Estimates from ordinary least squares regressions. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

3.7 Discussion and Conclusions

This paper set out to investigate the extent to which a candidate's military experience influences voters' perceptions of political ideology, above and beyond partisanship and other salient political factors. I put the veteran label to the test,

comparing its impact relative to race, another cue that is known to sway electoral evaluations. In general, I expected these two characteristics to work in opposite directions: veteran candidates would be stereotyped as more conservative, and Black candidates would be stereotyped as more liberal. Overall, the findings offer support for this dynamic. Moreover, I find that favorability of a candidate parallels these assumptions. A Black candidate enjoys an electoral advantage, especially among Blacks, liberals, and those low in racial resentment, while the veteran candidate is favored among conservatives, but penalized among liberal voters.

This research contributes to the literature on electoral politics in two key ways. First, I present military experience as a politically-charged heuristic in American elections, with an effect that is on par with candidate race. Second, I offer additional support for the claims that political identities, by way of stereotyping, can motivate reasoning among citizens such that voters favor candidates who ostensibly share their political views (e.g., Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Rogowski 2016; Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstein 2020).

Popular observations, along with the few previous studies on military experience in elections, seem to focus on two themes: veterans as experts and veterans as preferred candidates (e.g., McDermott and Panagopoulos 2015; Teigen 2012). These themes are not all that surprising. Veterans on the campaign trail often highlight how their service informs their understanding of national security policy, and very few veteran candidates shy away from touting the admirable principles associated with military service. What is surprising is that most of this research finds limited indication that veterans enjoy an

advantage at the polls, and their appeal might only be limited to those concerned about defense (e.g., Hardy et al. 2019). It is possible that military service may not have the universal advantage that most think it does in electoral politics. The growing politicization of military experience and the institution itself, might be conditioning whatever benefit these cues are expected to offer.

The analysis offered in this paper considers this to be the likely consequence of military cues in campaigning. The findings suggest that military service is a politically-informative attribute in a candidate's biography and knowledge of a candidate's military experience drums up ideological stereotypes. Just like other powerful heuristics in elections, a military background can condition expectations about a candidate's political beliefs, ultimately influencing assessments of favorability. The data show that veteran status appears to act as a conservative marker, just as being Black can be a liberal marker. The impact of these labels on electoral evaluations must be considered relative to other candidate characteristics, and their meaning should be understood as stereotypes, viewed differently across subgroups of the electorate. The results of these studies provide some indication of when emphasizing military experience can be an advantage or disadvantage and among what types of voters.

In the electoral politics literature, scholars have long been concerned with the extent to which voters live up to their democratic responsibilities. This is especially the case within the context of elections considered to be low on information. Do citizens make reasoned decisions at the ballot box? The sum of the findings offered in this paper suggest that the answer is "yes." While voters likely know little about specific policy

issues or the detailed preferences of candidates, they manage to draw meaning from shortcuts and consider the relevance of these shortcuts in their evaluations of candidates. Seeing a veteran or Black candidate on the flyer calls to mind an ideological stereotype, and the results show that these stereotypes coincide with favorability as would be expected: citizens favor the candidate whose stereotype aligns with their own political views. To be clear, my analyses do not address the extent to which citizens vote “correctly” (e.g., Lau and Redlawsk 1997). Stereotypes can be misguided and political elites can behave in ways that run counter to popular stereotypes (e.g., Valentino et al. 2002; Arceneaux 2008). Voters’ ideological assumptions about the veteran or the Black candidate may not match the actual preferences of these candidates, but these assumptions appear to be considered relative to voters’ preferences.

The empirical findings from both the observational and experimental studies presented in this paper are complementary, and taken together, they offer support for the general premise guiding the electoral strategies of candidates like Jared Golden and Wesley Hunt. In the only New England district that leans Republican, Democrat Jared Golden is keen in highlighting the extent to which his military service informs his approach to representing his constituents. Similarly, Republican Wesley Hunt must appeal to a historically Republican Texas district that recently elected a Democrat. For Hunt, emphasizing his military experience and race, cues that this paper shows work in opposite directions, might be the key to winning in a marginal district. A military background, like race, can be an informative heuristic with more of a political implication than has been previously addressed in the literature. The Golden and Hunt campaigns,

along with efforts by the national parties to recruit more veteran candidates, suggest that military service will remain a strategic consideration in congressional elections.

3.A Appendix: Study 1 – Analysis of CCES Data

Table A.1: Study 1: Description of Variables (CCES Observational Data)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>
Perceived Ideology (Candidate): (<i>Dependent Variable</i>)	Continuous variable - measured using a 7-point ideology scale. 1 indicates “Very Liberal” and 7 indicates “Very Conservative.” Those who answer “Not Sure” are considered N/A. Response to question: “How would you rate each of the following individuals and groups?” and respondents are given a list of names which includes the candidates running for the House seat in their congressional district.
Veteran (Candidate) (<i>Independent Variable</i>)	Indicator variable – 1 indicates any amount of military service in a candidate’s background and 0 indicates no previous military experience. This includes active-duty, National Guard, and Reserves. Variable is primarily based on data from Veterans Campaign, a nonpartisan educational and research organization dedicated to supporting and tracking veteran candidates running for federal office. For any gaps in Veterans Campaign data, the author consulted archived, official candidate websites and biography pages to confirm veteran status.
Black (Candidate): (<i>Independent Variable</i>)	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the candidate is Black and 0 indicates the candidate is any other race. Variable is coded by the author, relying on archived, official candidate websites and biography pages to confirm the candidate is Black.
Female (Candidate):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the candidate is a woman and 0 indicates the candidate is a man. Variable relies on CCES data which record each House candidate’s gender only for 2014, for 2016-2020 this variable was not collected in the CCES and was therefore coded by the author, relying on archived, official candidate websites and biography pages to confirm the candidate is a woman.
Incumbent (Candidate):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the candidate is the incumbent candidate and 0 indicates that the candidate is a challenger. Variable relies on CCES data (for all cycles) which records each respondent’s current member of the House of Representatives. If the candidate’s name matches the current House member, that candidate is considered an incumbent.
Republican (Candidate):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the candidate is a Republican and 0 indicates any other party. Variable relies on CCES data (for all cycles) which records House candidates party affiliation.
Campaign Spending: (Candidate)	Continuous variable – The log value of a candidate’s disbursements during an election year. Data drawn from the Federal Elections Commission (FEC). Variable is used in supplemental analysis for election years 2014 and 2016.
Republican (Respondent):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the respondent self-identifies as a Republican and 0 indicates identification with any other party. Variable relies on CCES data (for all cycles) which asks respondents to identify as either Republican, Democrat, Independent or Other.
Ideology (Respondent):	Continuous variable - measured using a 7-point ideology scale. 1 indicates “Very Liberal” and 7 indicates “Very Conservative.” Those who answer “Not Sure” are considered N/A. Variable relies on CCES data (for all cycles) which asks respondents how they would rate their own political ideology.

Table A.1: Study 1: Description of Variables (CCES Observational Data) (Cont.)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>
Republican (Respondent):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the respondent self-identifies as a Republican and 0 indicates identification with any other party. Variable relies on 2020 CCES data which asks respondents to identify as either Republican, Democrat, Independent or Other.
Ideology (Respondent):	Continuous variable - measured using a 7-point ideology scale. 1 indicates "Very Liberal" and 7 indicates "Very Conservative." Those who answer "Not Sure" are considered N/A. Variable relies on 2020 CCES data which asks respondents how they would rate their own political ideology.
Income (Respondent):	Continuous variable - measured using a 16-item scale. For the 2020 CCES, respondents are asked to report their family's total annual income for the past year. 1 indicates "Less than \$10,000" and 16 indicates "\$500,000 or more." Those who answer "Prefer Not to Say" are considered N/A.
Education (Respondent):	Continuous variable - measured using a 6-point scale. For the 2020 CCES, respondents are asked to report the amount of education they have completed. 1 indicates a respondent is not a high school graduate and 6 indicates that the respondent has attended graduate school.
Female (Respondent):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the respondent is a woman and 0 indicates the respondent is a man. Variable relies on 2020 CCES data which asks respondents to provide their gender based on female/male options
Black (Respondent):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the respondent self-identifies as Black and 0 indicates the respondent is any other race. Variable relies on 2020 CCES data which asks respondents to provide their race based on White/Black/Hispanic/Asian/Other options.
Veteran (Respondent):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the respondent self-identifies as a veteran or current member of the military and 0 indicates the respondent has no personal military experience. Variable relies on 2020 CCES data
Racial Resentment (Respondent):	Continuous variable - ranging from 0-1. The variable is based on answers to the 4-item racial resentment measure developed by Kinder and Sears (1996). Answers to these questions are combined and rescaled such that higher composite values indicate higher levels of racial resentment.

Table A.2: Estimated Effects of Military Experience and Race on Perceptions of Ideology for U.S. House Candidates, 2014-2020 Congressional Elections

<i>Dependent Variable: Perceived Ideology</i>	2014	2016	2018	2020
<i>Candidate Variables</i>				
Veteran	0.07*** (0.02)	0.09*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	0.09*** (0.02)
Black	-0.26*** (0.03)	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.22*** (0.02)	-0.17*** (0.02)
Veteran x Black	0.13** (0.06)	-0.03 (0.06)	0.08 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.06)
Republican	2.36*** (0.01)	1.96*** (0.01)	2.46*** (0.01)	2.85*** (0.01)
Incumbent	0.001 (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)
Female	-0.17*** (0.02)	-0.20*** (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.01)	-0.14*** (0.01)
<i>Respondent Variables</i>				
Republican	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.28*** (0.02)	-0.22*** (0.02)	-0.26*** (0.02)
Ideology	-0.05*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	-0.04*** (0.00)	-0.07*** (0.00)
Education	0.02*** (0.01)	0.01** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01** (0.01)
Political Knowledge	0.04** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Political Interest	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.004 (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
Income	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01** (0.01)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
Female	0.07*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)
Black	0.19*** (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Constant	3.17*** (0.04)	3.10*** (0.04)	3.14*** (0.04)	3.11*** (0.04)
N	44,471	51,735	50,090	55,195
Adjusted R ²	0.42	0.31	0.42	0.50

*Note: Table depicts results of ordinary least squares regressions. Candidate's perceived ideology for each cycle is measured on a 7-point scale. Higher values indicate more conservative. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

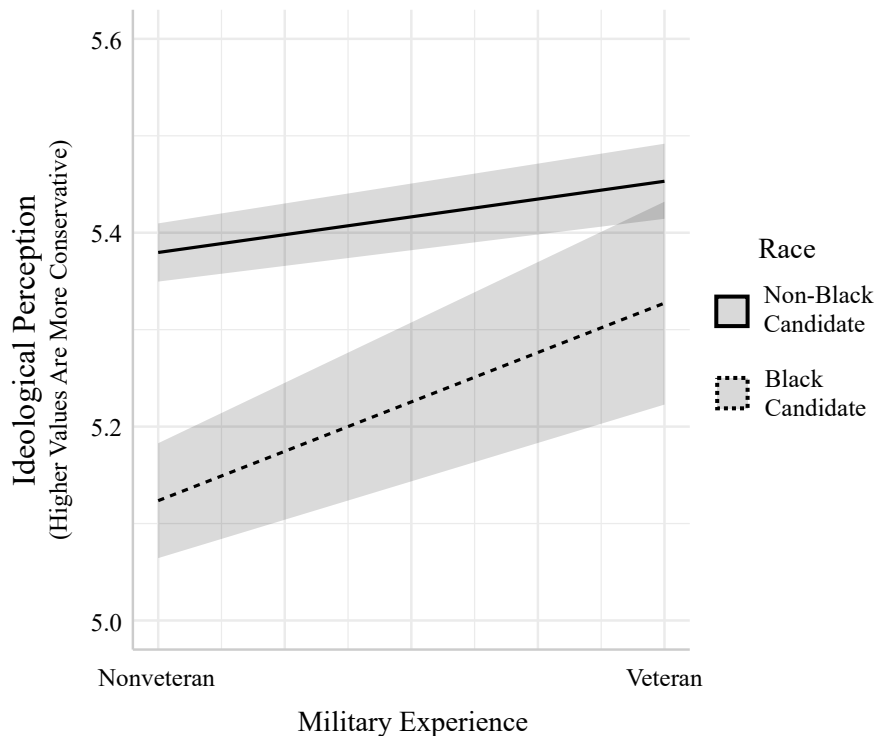
Table A.3: Estimated Effects of Military Experience and Race on Perceptions of Ideology, 2014-2016 Congressional Elections – with Campaign Spending

<i>Dependent Variable: Perceived Ideology</i>	2014	2016
<i>Candidate Variables</i>		
Veteran	0.07*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)
Black	-0.28*** (0.02)	-0.15*** (0.02)
Veteran x Black	0.15*** (0.06)	-0.04 (0.06)
Republican	2.35*** (0.01)	1.97*** (0.01)
Campaign Spending (log)	-0.004** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Incumbent	0.01 (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Female	-0.18*** (0.02)	-0.21*** (0.02)
<i>Respondent Variables</i>		
Republican	-0.17*** (0.02)	-0.28*** (0.02)
Ideology	-0.05*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Education	0.02*** (0.01)	0.01** (0.01)
Political Knowledge	0.02 (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)
Political Interest	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Income	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01** (0.01)
Female	0.08*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)
Black	0.19*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Constant	3.23*** (0.05)	2.92*** (0.05)
N	46,992	52,014
Adjusted R ²	0.42	0.31

Note: Table depicts results of ordinary least squares regressions. Candidate's perceived ideology for each cycle is measured on a 7-point scale. Higher values indicate more conservative. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

*Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Figure A.1: Marginal Effects of Military Experience and Race on Perceptions of Ideology for U.S. House Candidates, 2014 Congressional Election



Note: Figure plots the marginal effects of a congressional candidate's race and military experience on perceptions of ideology during the 2014 cycle. Predicted values based on an ordinary least squares regression. Shaded region denotes 95% confidence intervals. For the full results of the model see the 2014 model in Table A.2 in this Appendix.

3.B Appendix: Study 2 – Analysis of Experimental Data

Table B.1: Study 2: Description of Variables (Experimental Data)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>
Perceived Ideology (Candidate): (<i>Dependent Variable</i>)	Continuous variable - measured using a 7-point ideology scale. 1 indicates “Very Liberal” and 7 indicates “Very Conservative.” Those who answer “Not Sure” are considered N/A. Response to question: “How would you rate Scott Harris’ likely political viewpoint?”.	4.543 (1.238)
Favorability (Candidate): (<i>Dependent Variable</i>)	Continuous variable – measured from 0 to 100. Based on a 100-point feeling thermometer, whereby zero represents a “cold” or unfavorable feeling toward the candidate and 100 represents a “warm” or favorable feeling.	59.437 (19.550)
Veteran Cue (Candidate) (<i>Independent Variable</i>)	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent was exposed to a candidate flyer featuring pictures of the candidate in a military uniform and text emphasizing the candidate’s military experience.	0.4877 (0.500)
Racial Cue (Candidate): (<i>Independent Variable</i>)	Indicator variable – 1 indicates that the respondent was exposed to a candidate flyer featuring pictures of a Black candidate (See Appendix, Figure A2 for details).	0.493 (0.500)
Republican (Respondent):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the respondent self-identifies as a Republican and 0 indicates identification with any other party. Variable relies on 2020 CCES data which asks respondents to identify as either Republican, Democrat, Independent or Other.	0.259 (0.438)
Ideology (Respondent):	Continuous variable - measured using a 7-point ideology scale. 1 indicates “Very Liberal” and 7 indicates “Very Conservative.” Those who answer “Not Sure” are considered N/A. Variable relies on 2020 CCES data which asks respondents how they would rate their own political ideology.	3.851 (1.880)
Education (Respondent):	Continuous variable - measured using a 6-point scale. For the 2020 CCES, respondents are asked to report the amount of education they have completed. 1 indicates a respondent is not a high school graduate and 6 indicates the respondent attended graduate school.	3.751 (1.466)
Female (Respondent):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the respondent is a woman and 0 indicates the respondent is a man. Variable relies on 2020 CCES data which asks respondents to provide their gender based on female/male options	0.570 (0.495)
Black (Respondent):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the respondent self-identifies as Black and 0 indicates the respondent is any other race. Variable relies on 2020 CCES data which asks respondents to provide their race based on White/Black/Hispanic/Asian/Other options.	0.092 (0.289)

Table B.1: Study 2: Description of Variables (Experimental Data) – Cont.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>
Veteran (Respondent):	Indicator variable - 1 indicates that the respondent self-identifies as a veteran or current member of the military and 0 indicates the respondent has no personal military experience. Variable relies on 2020 CCES data	0.0954 (0.294)
Racial Resentment (Respondent):	Continuous variable - ranging from 0-1. The variable is based on answers to the 4-item racial resentment measure developed by Kinder and Sears (1996). Answers to these questions are combined and rescaled such that higher composite values indicate higher levels of racial resentment.	0.443 (0.339)

Table B.2: Descriptive Statistics for Sample from Candidate Evaluation Experiment

<i>Candidate Evaluation Experiment, 2020 CCES</i>	
Experimental Conditions	
White Nonveteran	26.6%
White Veteran	24.0%
Black Nonveteran	24.6%
Black Veteran	24.7%
Experimental Responses	
Ideological Perception	80.0%
Mean Ideology Response	4.5
Favorability Assessment	99.4%
Mean Favorability Response	59.4
Respondent Demographics	
Male	57.0%
Female	43.0%
White	76.3%
Black	9.2%
Republican	33.9%
Democrat	48.9%
Conservative	31.8%
Liberal	37.5%
Moderate	26.3%
Mean Ideology	4.0
Mean Racial Resentment	0.44
High RR	20.4%
Low RR	27.8%
Veteran	9.5%
N	849

Figure B.2: Renderings of Campaign Flyers, by Experimental Condition

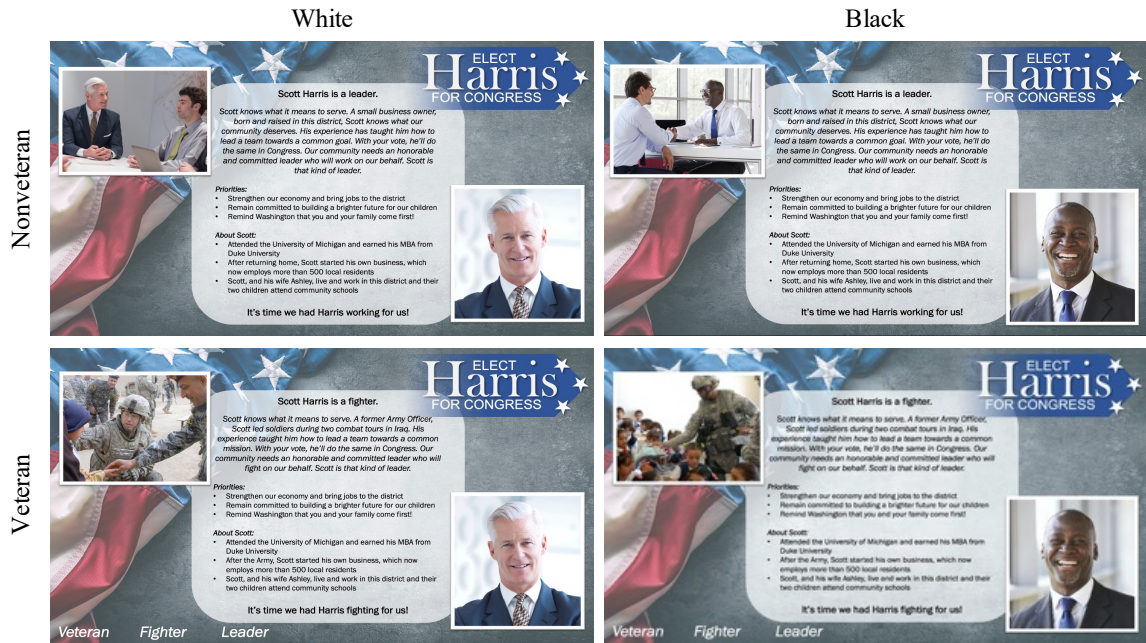


Figure B.3: Details of Experimental Manipulations for the Veteran and Black Candidate Conditions



Table B.3: Perceived Ideology of the Hypothetical Candidate Based on Experimental Condition

<i>Dependent Variable: Perceived Ideology</i>	
White Veteran	0.36** (0.13)
Black Veteran	0.004 (0.13)
Black Nonveteran	-0.42** (0.13)
White Nonveteran (Constant)	4.6*** (0.09)
N	679
Adjusted R ²	0.04

Note: Table depicts results of an ordinary least squares regression. Candidate's perceived ideology in the experimental setting is measured on a 7-point scale. Higher values indicate more conservative. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

*Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Table B.4: Effects of Veteran and Racial Cues on Perceptions of Ideology – Candidate Evaluation Experiment

<i>Dependent Variable: Perceived Ideology</i>	
Veteran Cue	0.37*** (0.13)
Racial Cue	-0.38*** (0.13)
Veteran Cue x Racial Cue	-0.03 (0.19)
<i>Respondent Variables</i>	
Republican	0.25* (0.13)
Ideology	0.01 (0.03)
Education	0.03 (0.03)
Female	-0.15 (0.09)
Black	-0.63*** (0.16)
Constant	4.45*** (0.20)
N	663
Adjusted R ²	0.08

Note: Table depicts results of an ordinary least squares regression. Candidate's perceived ideology in the experimental setting is measured on a 7-point scale. Higher values indicate more conservative. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

*Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Table B.5: Effects of Veteran and Racial Cues on Favorability – Candidate Evaluation Experiment

<i>Dependent Variable: Candidate Favorability</i>	
Veteran Cue	-0.59 (1.86)
Racial Cue	6.51*** (1.85)
Veteran Cue x Racial Cue	1.83 (2.65)
Constant	56.06*** (1.28)
N	844
Adjusted R ²	0.03

*Note: Table depicts results of an ordinary least squares regression. Candidate's favorability in the experimental setting is measured on a 100-point thermometer. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Table B.6: Estimating the Effects of Veteran and Racial Cues on Perceptions of Candidate Favorability, with 3-Way Interaction

<i>Dependent Variable: Candidate Favorability</i>	
Veteran Cue	-11.79*** (4.20)
Racial Cue	16.5*** (4.03)
Respondent Ideology x Veteran Cue	2.77*** (1.00)
Respondent Ideology x Racial Cue	-2.72*** (0.96)
Veteran Cue x Racial Cue	4.71 (5.94)
Respondent Ideology x Veteran Cue x Racial Cue	-0.66 (1.39)
<i>Respondent Variables</i>	
Republican	1.24 (1.91)
Ideology	2.15*** (0.78)
Education	0.42 (0.46)
Female	4.04*** (1.38)
Black	0.88 (2.30)
Veteran	0.82 (2.26)
Racial Resentment	5.04 (2.80)
Constant	41.86*** (3.71)
N	791
Adjusted R ²	0.13

*Notes: Estimates from an ordinary least squares regression. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

4. Deployed to the Hill: How Military Experience Influences Legislative Behavior in Congress

As a helicopter aircraft commander, I never asked if someone was a Republican or a Democrat before starting a mission. I knew we were all Americans and we all had the same mission. And my mission now is to bring that experience to Washington, to bring a different kind of leadership to Congress – Leadership that will move this country forward and leaders who will listen to people and put their interests ahead of party.

- Representative Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ-11)³⁰

Representative Mikie Sherrill is certainly not the first candidate to emphasize her military background on the campaign trail. Veteran candidates frequently tout their time in uniform, most often signaling to voters their competence on issues relating to national security or foreign affairs (e.g., Hardy et al. 2019; McDermott and Panagopoulos 2015; Teigen 2012). Recently, however, veteran status has come to indicate more than just policy expertise. One editorial contends, “Lawmakers who have served in the military often have a special sense of duty and an uncommon ability to reach across party lines and get things done” (Barcott and Wood 2017).³¹ In another recent article, a bipartisan group of veterans in Congress explain that “In the military, the goal is to effectively execute the mission at hand. Regardless of background, experience or ideology, our actions were in service to and for country.” The veteran lawmakers go on to say that they are committed to “continuing that ethos in Congress” (Panetta et al. 2019).³² Claims like

³⁰ “Why I’m Running,” <https://www.mikiesherrill.com/page/why-im-running/> (accessed January 19, 2019).

³¹ The 2017 editorial introduces the founding of *With Honor*, a political action committee “dedicated to promoting and advancing principled veteran leadership in order to reduce polarization.” Supported veteran congressional candidates sign a pledge “to put principles before politics” (<https://withhonor.org/>).

³² Consistent with the *With Honor* mission, veteran members of Congress launched the bipartisan For Country Caucus in 2019 (<https://vantaylor.house.gov/forcountry/>). This quote is from a *Washington Post* op-ed introducing the For Country Caucus.

these illustrate an emerging narrative that suggests veterans, armed with an appreciation of military values such as commitment to duty and teamwork, behave differently on Capitol Hill. More specifically, veteran lawmakers are assumed to be more productive and cooperative members of Congress (e.g., Riley-Topping 2019; Panetta et al. 2019).

This particular “veteran narrative” is motivated by an observable correlation: As veteran representation in Congress has decreased over the years, the institution has become increasingly discordant. In 1971, more than 70 percent of Congress had prior military experience; today, veterans make up only 17 percent of Congress (Shane 2020). During this same period, Congress has grown increasingly more partisan and ideologically polarized (e.g., McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Theriault 2006, Binder 2014; Lee 2016). Furthermore, public confidence in Congress has steadily declined (e.g., Gallup 2020). Veterans running for Congress often highlight these correlations, and emphasize the public’s consistently high level of trust in the military (e.g., Breiner 2017). They argue that electing more veterans will remedy the partisan rancor and fix congressional dysfunction.

Investigating the link between military experience and political behavior is not without precedent. Scholars of international relations find that military experience can influence leaders’ diplomatic policy preferences and decisions over the use of force (e.g., Horowitz, et al. 2018; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015; Sechser 2004). Fewer in number, studies in the American context tend to find the same thing (e.g., Bianco 2005; Gelpi and Feaver 2002; Lupton 2017, 2021). The message invoked by Representative Sherrill and many of her contemporaries, however, is less about defense expertise and more about

work ethic and cooperation. Missing from the existing literature is a consideration of how military service might impact a broader range of governing behaviors.

Are veteran members of Congress more effective and bipartisan than their colleagues without military experience? This paper investigates this central question, examining the impact of a military background on lawmaking performance. I draw upon literature on representation, legislative behavior, and civil-military relations to cast the contemporary veteran narrative as a theory. I hypothesize that values learned or strengthened during military service, such as duty, teamwork, and selfless service, translate into higher levels of legislative productivity and greater bipartisan cooperation. Drawing on data from the 104th to 116th congresses (1995-2020), this study offers one of the first comprehensive empirical assessments of the relationship between veteran status and lawmaking behavior. Taken together, the results suggest that veterans in the House are somewhat more effective and bipartisan than their nonveteran colleagues—a normatively encouraging sign for those committed to reducing partisan dysfunction in Congress.

4.1 How a Lawmaker's Background Matters

Scholars have long been interested in how personal characteristics and experiences influence both electoral success and governance. Much of this prior work is grounded in theories of representation. Voters often seek representatives based on the demonstration of certain qualities that serve as reliable indicators of their core values and future political behavior (e.g., Fenno 1978; Popkin 1991). Relatedly, these representatives bear a unique sense of responsibility based on the expectations associated

with their defining characteristics (Mansbridge 2003; Bianco 1994).³³ These ideas are foundational to the veteran narrative. The public's high degree of trust in the military and the institution's tradition of values might guide the actions of veterans serving in elective office.

Building on these concepts and largely outside the context of veterans, scholars examine the extent to which traits and experiences can result in substantive representation, where lawmakers act for constituents and on behalf of their expressed interests. Many of these studies focus on the implications of descriptive representation for socially marginalized groups such as women (e.g., Swers 2002; Lawless 2015) and racial minorities (e.g., Swain 1993; Grose 2005; Bratton 2006; Wallace 2014). Looking beyond physical traits, others focus on how influential backgrounds—like a career in law (Miller 1995) or coming from the working-class (Carnes 2012)—impact legislative behavior. Burden (2007) contends that representatives' life experiences shape their knowledge, values, interests, and ideology, all of which comprise the key personal ingredients contributing to distinct policy preferences. Moreover, in Congress, these factors are considered most pronounced when members engage in proactive activities requiring individual initiative, such as crafting legislation or delivering floor speeches (Burden 2007, 86).

³³ Here I refer to Mansbridge's "gyroscopic representation" where the representative "looks within for guidance in taking action" (2003, 520). This type of representative relies on principles derived from her upbringing and experiences. This is one of several forms of representation described by Mansbridge, who adds nuance to traditional models of representation (2003).

This particular finding highlights an important concept: substantive representation is part policy content and part legislative performance. In Congress, a member's job is demanding, subject to various institutional constraints and limited resources (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 2005; Curry 2015; Guenther and Searle 2019). Therefore, how she chooses to spend her time and energy can signify a great deal about her legislative priorities (Hall 1996; Bernhard and Sulkin 2018). A large body of work investigates how members' participation and performance can differ based on background characteristics (e.g., Payne 1980; Rocca and Sanchez 2008; Volden, Wiseman and Wittmer 2013; Anzia and Berry 2011; Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019). The manner by which lawmakers advance their agenda and their success doing so contribute to the effective representation of particular groups and the electorate as a whole. Despite all the literature highlighting the institutionally-induced pressures associated with maintaining a seat in Congress, scholars still find evidence that identities and experiences matter.

4.2 Can Military Experience Shape Legislative Behavior?

I contend that military service, like other influential life experiences, can similarly impact a member's broader approach to lawmaking. The study of civil-military relations has long been interested in how military experience relates to political attitudes and behaviors (Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960; Jennings and Markus 1977; Dempsey 2010). When it comes to elite political behavior, much of this work centers on related policy areas such as defense, diplomacy, or veterans' affairs. This is not surprising, considering these are the areas in which military expertise should be most salient. Experiences and knowledge gained while serving in the military inform leaders'

understanding about the costs of war and the requirements needed to succeed in conflict (e.g., Gelpi and Feaver 2002; Horowitz and Stam 2014).

The limited work on military experience and legislative behavior similarly focuses on matters of defense. In her analysis of congressional roll call votes, Lupton (2017; 2021) finds compelling evidence that throughout history veteran lawmakers have maintained distinct attitudes regarding how much oversight Congress should exert on defense policy.³⁴ Beyond voting behavior, research also finds that veteran lawmakers are more likely to engage unilaterally with federal bureaucratic agencies on behalf of veteran constituents (Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019). Taken together, the literature suggests that military service is a meaningful life experience that noticeably impacts a veteran lawmaker's representation of national security interests and those of other veterans, active-duty servicemembers, and their families.³⁵

Can military experience influence behavior beyond issues of defense and veteran benefits? After all, the dominant veteran campaign narrative emphasized today is less about particular policies and more about claims regarding general legislative performance. In a recent interview, Army veteran and Maryland Congressman Anthony Brown said, "What I know about veterans who have served in the military is that we are problem solvers, we focus first on mission...we understand that we may disagree, but we

³⁴ More specifically, Lupton finds that compared to nonveterans, Vietnam-era veteran legislators supported less restriction on defense policies (2021), while post-9/11 veteran members appear more likely to vote in favor of increasing war oversight (2017).

³⁵ There are some notable studies that find conflicting evidence. Bianco (2005) finds that military experience does not impact vote choice on key defense bills and Cormack (2018) finds that veteran members are no more likely than nonveterans to sponsor legislation regarding veteran social benefits.

have a responsibility to find common ground” (Brown 2018). Brown joins countless others in highlighting two domains in which military servicemembers are expected to excel: mission accomplishment and teamwork. In the context of legislative behavior, the claim suggests that these qualities translate into greater productivity and bipartisanship among veteran lawmakers.

4.3 Veterans and Legislative Effectiveness

A lawmaker’s primary mission on Capitol Hill is legislative success. Advancing one’s agenda through the lawmaking process contributes to policy success, achieving influence, and future electoral prospects (e.g., Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1973, 1978).

Veterans in Congress maintain that values strengthened during military service make them exceptionally focused on accomplishing this mission on behalf of constituents. The words “duty” or “commitment” appear in the values statements of every military service branch (Mattox 2013). Relatedly, a sense of civic duty or “service to country” remains a dominant motivation informing recruits’ decisions to join the military (Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal 2006; Helmus et al. 2018). From the first day of “boot camp,” servicemembers are taught to internalize the military’s values and rely on them to guide their behavior in uniform. Studies have shown that the socialization of these values can leave a lasting impression on veterans, impacting their participation in civic life (e.g., Janowitz 1983; Mettler 2005; Leal and Teigen 2018).

More concrete than the ethical conception of duty, the military is a hierarchical, results-driven organization. Servicemembers’ conduct is subject to intense scrutiny by military leadership, elected officials, and the public. While this is true of other

professions, the stakes in the military context are often life-and-death. Scholars find that this socialized sense of mission impacts veterans' broad approach to decision-making and job performance. An experimental study comparing the policy decision-making of military officers and civilians demonstrates that members of the military are more likely to take deliberate action, even when information is limited (Mintz, Redd, and Vedlitz 2006). Research finds that even corporations led by CEOs with prior military experience tend to perform better financially and have a lower incidence of fraud (Benmelech and Frydman 2015). Given this work on military socialization and prior research on how personal traits and experiences can influence legislative effectiveness, time in the military might influence lawmakers' drive toward accomplishing their lawmaking mission.

H1: Members of Congress with prior military experience will be more effective lawmakers than members without military experience.

A recent study offers some preliminary insight regarding the expected link between military service and legislative productivity in Congress.³⁶ In a working paper, Hagner (2020) finds evidence to suggest that veteran lawmakers who deployed in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are more effective at advancing legislation than both nonveterans and veterans who served prior to 9/11. Despite these initial findings, his analysis is limited in that the significant results are based on very few observations.³⁷

³⁶ With data on bill introductions and laws passed in four states, Best and Vonnahme (2021) also examine legislative productivity among veteran lawmakers. While the authors find that veteran legislators do focus on similar policy agendas, their results indicate that veteran state lawmakers are no more productive than their nonveteran peers. Additionally, in his dissertation research on veterans in Congress, Richardson (2018) found little evidence that veteran lawmakers were more effective. His work focused mostly on veterans serving in the Senate. His analysis of LES among members of the House of Representatives was limited to only two sessions (2011-2015).

³⁷ In a dataset with over 9,600 member-Congress observations, 59 fit the category of "deployed following 9/11" (Hagner 2020, 7).

Moreover, in this paper I more directly consider *why* veterans might be more effective in the lawmaking process. The second half of the veteran campaign narrative implies that compromise is key to their sense of mission on Capitol Hill. To the extent that veteran lawmakers differ in terms of legislative performance, are these differences related to their bipartisan behavior?

4.4 Veterans and Bipartisanship

Legislative progress in Congress depends heavily on bipartisanship. Empirical evidence demonstrates that in an institution constrained by multiple veto players, super-majoritarian requirements, and strong electoral incentives, cross-party coalitions are critical to advancing legislation and addressing policy problems (e.g., Krehbiel 1998; Harbridge 2015; Adler and Wilkerson 2013). Thus, lawmakers must team up with members of the opposite party to achieve their agenda goals, even amid contemporary polarization (Curry and Lee 2020). Recent work finds compelling evidence that this sort of bipartisan behavior increases members' legislative effectiveness in Congress (Harbridge-Yong, Volden, and Wiseman 2020). If lawmakers are motivated to advance their legislative agendas, bipartisan collaboration is key to achieving success. Research on bipartisanship suggests that personal connections and shared experiences between lawmakers are central to fostering such cross-partisan teamwork (e.g., Koger 2003; Fowler 2006; Kirkland 2011; Craig 2021; Fong 2020).³⁸ Given these insights, are veteran lawmakers particularly well-suited to bridge the partisan gap?

³⁸ Lawless, Theriault, and Guthrie (2018) find that this is not always the case. In their study of women in Congress, the authors find that while female lawmakers are more likely to engage in social activities that build comradery, there is no

The military is often characterized as a “team of teams” (e.g., McChrystal et al. 2015). Speaking about veterans, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates said, “In putting on the uniform, they have undertaken a mission that forces them to work together with anybody and everybody. They learn how important teamwork is and the value of tolerating and embracing people with a different point of view” (Gates 2018). While valuing teamwork is not unique to the military, building and sustaining cohesion throughout the institution is considered necessary for survival. As such, teamwork built upon values of “respect” and “selfless service” are key elements of the military’s moral-ethical curriculum and doctrinal standards (e.g., *Army Techniques Publication 6-22.6*). Moreover, studies in behavioral psychology find that members of the military are particularly adept at working in teams (see Goodwin, Blacksmith, and Coats 2018). Evaluations of military group performance appear to depend more on assessments of “unit cohesion” than any measures of individuals’ performance (Oliver et al. 1999, 75). Modest comparative evidence also suggests that members of the military score higher than civilians on traits associated with team-building (Matthews et al. 2006). Formative socializing experiences in the military may uniquely shape veterans’ values toward teamwork and cooperation—an orientation that can subsequently impact political behavior.

evidence that they engage in more bipartisan legislative behavior. Their research suggests that for both women and men, partisanship seems to trump any motivation to reach across the aisle.

So far, there is limited evidence drawing a link between veteran lawmakers and teamwork on Capitol Hill, most of which is anecdotal.³⁹ Following World War II, when the proportion of veterans in Congress was at its highest, the shared experience of military service brought members together to advance key legislation (e.g., Koger 2003, 29). Today, the House’s bipartisan “For Country Caucus” unites veteran members who seek “a less polarized Congress that works for— and is trusted by—Americans.”⁴⁰ In a recent opinion article, former Republican Senator Richard Lugar and former Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle recall how their own experiences in the military influenced their attitudes toward bipartisanship.⁴¹ “We think it’s no coincidence,” they write, “that the current dysfunction in Congress comes as the number of lawmakers with military experience is at a historic low” (Lugar and Daschle 2017).

Committed to a legacy of encouraging greater bipartisanship, these former senators both founded organizations dedicated to this mission.⁴² The Lugar Center, in particular, developed a Bipartisan Index that uses sponsorship and cosponsorship data to score the extent to which members of Congress engage in bipartisan lawmaking. In their article, Lugar and Daschle highlight simple comparative results suggesting veteran lawmakers score higher on the index than their nonveteran colleagues (Lugar and

³⁹ A notable exception is the recent dissertation work by Richardson (2018), who mostly focused on measuring the bipartisan behavior of veterans in the U.S. Senate.

⁴⁰ “Our Mission,” <https://vantaylor.house.gov/forcountry/> (accessed January 4, 2022).

⁴¹ Many media accounts highlight the spirit of compromise shared by other famous veteran lawmakers including Gerald Ford, Bob Michel, Daniel Inouye, John McCain, Bob Dole, John Kerry, and Chuck Hagel.

⁴² Former Senate Democratic Leader Senator Tom Daschle cofounded the Bipartisan Policy Center (<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/about/>) and former Republican Senator Richard Lugar founded The Lugar Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated, in part, to “enhancing bipartisan governance” (<https://www.thelugarcenter.org/about.html>).

Daschle 2017).⁴³ A study building on The Lugar Center's early findings further examines veteran bipartisanship in the House by relying on comparisons of DW-NOMINATE scores as a proxy for bipartisan behavior (Robinson et al 2018). Although the authors find little evidence of greater bipartisanship among veterans, their analysis is limited in that DW-NOMINATE scores are largely used to measure legislators' relative ideological preferences rather than describe one's bipartisan, consensus-building behavior (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Lee 2009). The persistence of the veteran bipartisanship narrative and the limited empirical analysis of these claims leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: Members of Congress with prior military experience will exhibit higher levels of bipartisan activity than members without military experience.

To be clear, it is possible that the same team-building values that I expect lead veterans to reach across the aisle could alternatively lead to greater partisan loyalty. This could have the opposite impact on measures of bipartisanship, but still allow veteran lawmakers to remain effective. Parties in Congress seem to act more and more like competing teams. Maintaining a seat and gaining institutional influence often requires party loyalty (e.g., Heberlig and Larson 2012). Accordingly, members of each party engage in behavior that both promotes the efforts of their own "team" and vilifies the opposition (Lee 2016). The particular narrative advanced by many veteran lawmakers, however, is that their sense of team cuts across the party divide—that veterans will "put principles before politics" to accomplish their mission.⁴⁴ Thus, veterans may translate

⁴³ At the time of the article's publication in 2017, The Lugar Center's Bipartisan Index data was limited when it came to the House of Representatives. The center reported House scores for only the 113th Congress.

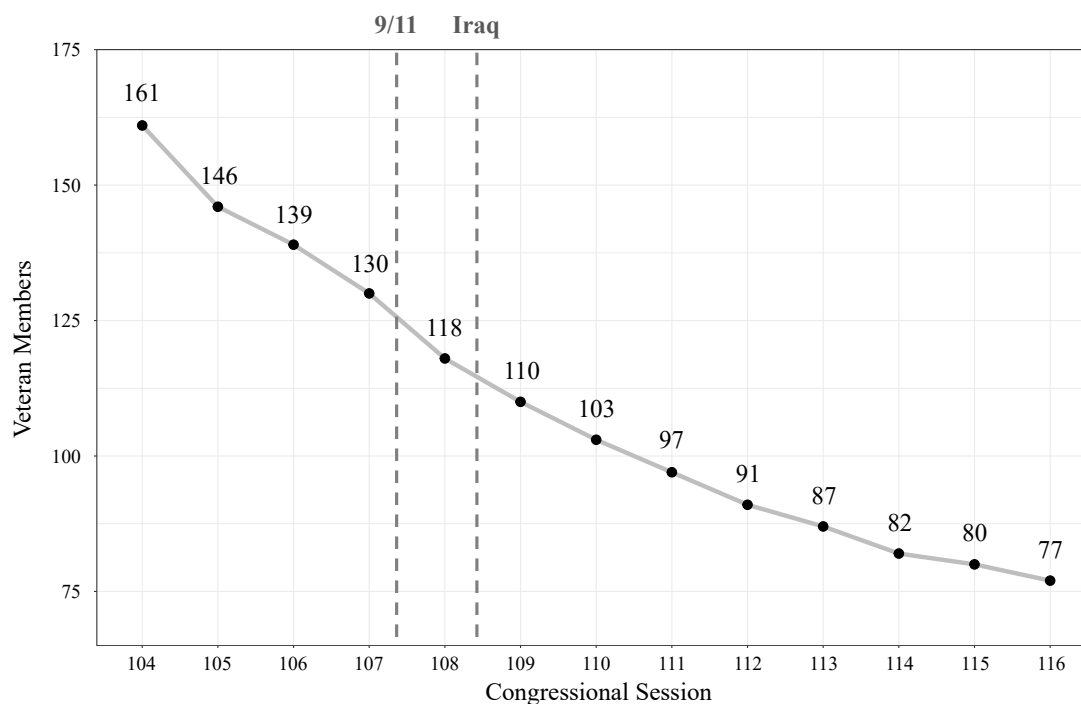
⁴⁴ "The Pledge," <https://withhonor.org/the-pledge/> (accessed March 10, 2021).

their team mentality into cross-partisan collaboration while advancing their legislative agendas.

4.5 Empirical Approach: 2 Tests

To investigate these hypotheses, I conduct two empirical tests using data from the House of Representatives for the 104th to 116th Congresses (1995-2021). These 13 legislative sessions include the sharpest decline for veterans in Congress but capture substantial diversity in military experience (Figure 4.1).⁴⁵ For the first test, I rely on Volden and Wiseman's (2014) Legislative Effectiveness Scores (LES) to compare lawmaking productivity among veterans and nonveteran members. Second, to explore the bipartisan behavior of veteran lawmakers, I employ the latest Bipartisan Index data from the Lugar Center and supplement these evaluations with legislative cosponsorship data collected by Fowler (2006) and updated by Harbridge-Yong, Volden, and Wiseman (2020).

⁴⁵ This period includes data on 1,249 different members of Congress, 326 of which had some amount of military experience and 250 served on active-duty. This amounts to 5,731 member-congress observations, including 1,421 veteran member-congress observations and 1,026 active-duty member-congress observations. Veteran members in this sample served in periods of conflict from World War II to the current Global War on Terrorism, as well as during intervening times of peace. Some veteran lawmakers were subject to the draft and some volunteered. Appendix 4.A, Table A.1 offers additional descriptive statistics for the members of Congress included in the sample.

Figure 4.1: Veterans Serving in the 104th-116th U.S. House of Representatives

For the tests, the key independent variable is whether a lawmaker previously served in the military. To measure military experience, I gathered details regarding each member's military background using *Congressional Quarterly (CQ) Member Profiles*, cross-referenced with official and archived member websites.⁴⁶ It is important to highlight that not all military experiences are the same. Therefore, in addition to the basic veteran indicator, I also recorded information about the nature of each veteran member's experience. Specifically, I developed an indicator for whether a veteran member served on active-duty or in the National Guard and Reserves.⁴⁷ The active-duty variable is

⁴⁶ After coding, I confirmed veteran members of Congress with lists maintained by veteranscampaign.org, a nonpartisan educational and research organization dedicated to supporting and tracking veteran candidates running for federal office.

⁴⁷ For this variable (1) indicates any amount of active-duty experience and (0) indicates that the member only served in either the National Guard or Reserves. According to Title 10, U.S.C. active-duty means "full-time duty in the active

constructive because it differentiates between those members whose military service was, for some period of time, their full-time occupation.⁴⁸ To the extent that military service influences legislative behavior, this influence should be most salient among those with time on active duty.⁴⁹

4.6 Test 1: Veterans and Legislative Effectiveness Scores

In the first test, I compare the lawmaking effectiveness of veteran and nonveteran members of the House of Representatives using Volden and Wiseman's (2014) Legislative Effectiveness Scores (LES). These scores are widely used to measure a lawmaker's ability to advance policy issues through the various stages of the bill-making process. The score combines a member's share of legislation that was introduced, received action in committee, received action beyond committee, passed in the House of Representatives, and enacted into law. Each piece of legislation is also assigned a weight based on the bill's substance and significance, such that scores are higher for members who more frequently move consequential legislation further along in the lawmaking process. Although LES does not capture all legislative activities, the measure is useful in addressing the particular expectations associated with the veteran narrative. If veteran members of Congress are uniquely equipped at accomplishing their legislative "mission"

military service." When servicemembers from the National Guard or Reserves are deployed in support war operations, these servicemembers are considered active-duty for the period of their deployment.

⁴⁸ There is limited research that explores the differences in socialization between active and reserve-component military service. What literature does exist focuses on implications for behavioral health (e.g., Sanchez et al. 2004; Lane et al. 2012). These studies find that active-duty experience has greater impact on stress and job satisfaction.

⁴⁹ Any amount of military experience can inform an appreciation for the sacrifices and personal costs associated with military life. As such, individuals with comparatively less service can still act as surrogates on issues pertaining to veterans and their families. I primarily focus my analysis on differences between nonveterans and lawmakers with any amount of military service, while including supplemental models that examine the particular effects of active-duty service.

on Capitol Hill, I should see this difference emerge when analyzing performance in the lawmaking process. Moreover, I also expect veterans to engage in greater bipartisanship and that this behavior ultimately impacts effective lawmaking. Examining legislative effectiveness, as opposed to other, less collaborative legislative activities, allows for the analysis of this possible association.

I explore the relationship between military experience and legislative effectiveness by estimating a series of ordinary least squares regressions. The dependent variable is a member's LES and the key independent variables are the binary indicators for general military experience and active-duty military service. Table 4.1 presents the results of these analyses. The first two models (1A and 1B), simply describe the bivariate relationship between general and active military experience on legislative effectiveness. For both categories, the relationship is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). In substantive terms, these bivariate results suggest that veteran members are 35 percent more effective, and active-duty veteran members are 46 percent more effective than their nonveteran colleagues.⁵⁰ Additionally, these preliminary estimations suggest that active service, assumed to be the more intensive sort of military experience, has a greater substantive impact on lawmaking success.

⁵⁰ Legislative Effectiveness Scores are normalized such that for each congress the average score is (1.0).

Table 4.1: The Relationship between Military Experience and Legislative Effectiveness in the House of Representatives, 1995-2021

	1A	1B	1C	1D
<i>Military Experience</i>	0.352*** (0.098)		0.107 (0.066)	
<i>Active-Duty Experience</i>		0.460*** (0.126)		0.204* (0.084)
Majority Party			0.470*** (0.069)	0.469*** (0.069)
Seniority			0.015 (0.017)	0.017 (0.017)
Seniority ²			0.002 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)
State Legislative Experience			-0.038 (0.068)	-0.037 (0.068)
State Legislative Experience × Professionalism			0.376* (0.174)	0.370* (0.173)
Majority Party Leadership			0.350** (0.125)	0.352** (0.126)
Minority Party Leadership			-0.066 (0.067)	-0.060 (0.067)
Speaker			-0.780*** (0.184)	-0.791*** (0.193)
Committee Chair			3.015*** (0.286)	3.005*** (0.284)
Subcommittee Chair			0.530*** (0.061)	0.525*** (0.061)
Power Committee			-0.172** (0.060)	-0.175** (0.060)
Distance from Median			-0.237 (0.147)	-0.242 (0.147)
Female			0.039 (0.049)	0.051 (0.048)
African American			-0.035 (0.065)	-0.039 (0.065)
Latinx			-0.097 (0.066)	-0.098 (0.066)
Size of Congressional Delegation			-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)
Vote Share			0.011 (0.017)	0.011 (0.012)
Vote Share Squared			-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Constant	0.909*** (0.032)	0.914*** (0.031)	0.119 (0.411)	0.114 (0.412)
N	5,731	5,731	5,616	5,616
Adjusted-R ²	0.011	0.015	0.391	0.393

Notes: Results are from ordinary least squares regression analyses with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by legislator. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

The second two estimations (Models 1C and 1D) consider military experience relative to a range of other variables known to correlate with legislative effectiveness (Volden and Wiseman 2014). Together, these variables account for many of the institutional and individual factors that likely influence a member's approach to lawmaking.⁵¹ In this multivariate context, the coefficient for general military experience (1C) is still positive but no longer statistically significant ($p = 0.102$). Unsurprisingly, being a member or a leader in the majority party and serving as a committee or subcommittee chair are factors most correlated with greater legislative effectiveness.⁵² Given the substantive differences observed in the earlier bivariate analysis, the final model (1D) estimates the impact of active-duty military experience in the multivariate context. The results suggest that experience in the active military influences legislative effectiveness, above and beyond the other factors known to play a role ($p < 0.05$). Substantively, veteran members of Congress who once served on active-duty are 20 percent more effective than their colleagues. This is equivalent to about half the boost in effectiveness that members of the majority party seem to enjoy.

Prior research finds that a legislator's personal background is particularly influential in guiding proactive, resource-intensive behavior on Capitol Hill (e.g., Burden 2007; Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019). As such, I also examine veteran members' relative performance at each stage of the lawmaking process. Do veterans

⁵¹ For a description of these additional variables, see Appendix A.1, Table A.2.

⁵² It is possible that veteran members are more likely to achieve leadership positions within the House that could, in turn, increase their effectiveness. I run a series of logistic regression models where chair or leader is the dependent variable and find that veterans are no more likely to occupy these positions than their nonveteran colleagues.

introduce more bills than their nonveteran colleagues? How successful are veterans at keeping this legislation moving? To address these questions, I focus on veteran members' progress on substantive and significant pieces of legislation: bills that are considered especially consequential for public policy.⁵³ One example of this type of legislation was the Chemical Safety Improvement Act of 2016.⁵⁴ The bill, which was signed into law by President Obama, was the result of a bipartisan effort to substantially overhaul the country's chemical safety standards and provide critical funding to the Environmental Protection Agency to enforce updated regulations (H.R. 2576). Republican Representative John Shimkus from Illinois, a 28-year Army veteran, introduced the legislation during 114th Congress and led negotiations to ensure its passage (Goode and Guillen 2016).

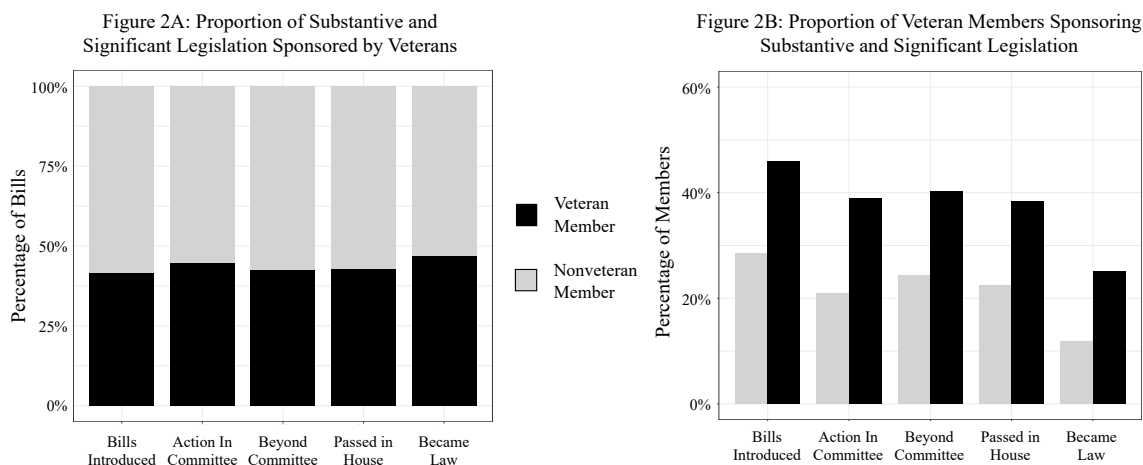
Focusing on these sorts of substantive and significant bills, Figure 2A displays the share of legislation sponsored by veteran members of Congress from 1995-2021, broken down by the furthest stage achieved in the legislative process.⁵⁵ Veteran members are responsible for the advancement of nearly half of all substantive and significant legislation during this period. This is noteworthy, considering that veteran members comprise only one-quarter of the lawmakers analyzed in the dataset.

⁵³ Volden and Wiseman (2014) distinguish legislation using three categories: commemorative/symbolic; substantive; or substantive and significant. Substantive and significant legislation is highlighted by *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* in its end-of-year reports. Between 1995 and 2021, 7,212 substantive and significant bills reached at least one stage of the legislative process.

⁵⁴ H.R. 2576 is also known as the Frank Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/2576>

⁵⁵ For this analysis, I return to the general "Military Experience" variable. Given the earlier results, focusing on this variable offers a more challenging test of the first hypothesis.

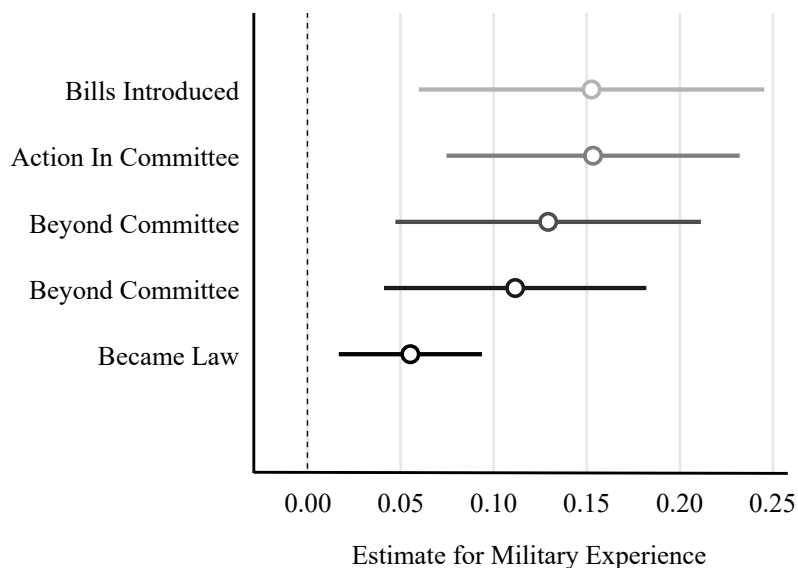
Figure 4.2: Comparing Veteran and Nonveteran Lawmakers' Performance on Substantive and Significant Legislation in the House of Representatives 1995-2021



Notes: Figure 2A compares the proportion of total substantive and significant legislation sponsored by veteran members versus the proportion sponsored by nonveteran members during the 104th-116th Congresses. Figure 2B compares the proportion of all veteran members and proportion of all nonveteran members who sponsored at least one bill reaching the phase listed on the x-axis. For both figures, “veteran” includes members with any amount of military experience.

Next, I compare veteran and nonveteran members’ legislative success on substantive and significant bills relative to their respective peers. In Figure 2B, the bars account for the percentage of members with at least one bill reaching the various stages of the process. For example, in the “Became Law” category, approximately 25 percent of all veteran lawmakers serving between 1995 and 2021 saw at least one of their substantive and significant bills become law. Among all the lawmakers without military experience, only 12 percent achieved this milestone. Moreover, these descriptive differences hold up to multivariate analysis.

Figure 4.3: Impact of Military Experience on Members' Performance in Advancing Substantive and Significant Legislation in the House of Representatives, 1995-2021



Notes: Results from five separate models where the number of substantive and significant bills reaching each stage is the dependent variable. Plot displays coefficients for “Military Experience” with 95% confidence intervals. All estimates are significant ($p < 0.01$, two-tailed). Full results from the five models are included in Appendix 4.B, Table B.1.

Figure 4.3 plots the results from a series of ordinary least squares regressions modeling military service experience and the same control variables from earlier, on the number of substantive and significant bills associated with a member at each stage.⁵⁶ In each analysis, military experience has a positive and statistically significant impact on the number of bills reaching each point of the process ($p < 0.01$). In substantive terms, veteran members in the House introduced substantive and significant pieces of legislation

⁵⁶ I estimated the same models but replaced the “Military Experience” variable for the “Active-Duty Experience” variable and obtained similar results. The “Active-Duty Experience” variable is positive and statistically significant in all models except for Model 9: Become Law, where $p = 0.07$.

at a rate 43 percent higher than members without military experience. When it comes to bills that became law, veterans were successful at a rate 55 percent above average.⁵⁷

Overall, lawmakers with military experience are notably effective at advancing substantive and significant legislation through Congress.⁵⁸ While veteran members with any amount of military experience do not differ in terms of overall LES, those with more extensive military experience are more effective. This distinction is suggestive of the particular socializing effect of active-duty military service. Veterans who once wore the uniform daily and either deployed or regularly trained to deploy appear to translate their experience into behavior out of uniform. Consistent with the veteran narrative, the consequence for veteran lawmakers is greater legislative effectiveness.

4.7 Test 2: Veterans and Bipartisanship

Advancing legislation requires teamwork, both inside and out of the party. If veterans are especially skilled at moving important legislation, it is possible that their bipartisan behavior is the reason why. To explore the association between a lawmaker's military experience and her propensity to engage in bipartisanship, I rely on measures of cosponsorship activity. A clear act of teamwork in Congress, legislators who join colleagues in cosponsoring a bill are publicly endorsing that bill's proposed policy

⁵⁷ In the sample, the average number of substantive and significant bills introduced per member is 0.359. The average number of substantive and significant bills that became law was 0.101.

⁵⁸ Similar to the analysis on substantive and significant bills, I also examine veterans' performance on other types of legislation classified by the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (commemorative/symbolic and substantive). I find that there is no significant difference between veteran and nonveteran lawmakers when it comes to advancing these types of bills. One interpretation of this finding is that veterans focus their legislative efforts on issues that are considered to be most consequential for public policy. In other words, their relative performance on substantive and significant legislation speaks to a prioritization of quality over quantity.

(Kessler and Krehbiel 1996; Koger 2003; Bernhard and Sulkin 2013). Beyond strategic signaling, this sort of collaboration often reflects the interpersonal relationships developed between members of Congress. Research demonstrates that connected members, as measured by their cosponsorship activity, are more likely to achieve success in advancing their legislative agendas (Fowler 2006; Kirkland 2011; Craig 2021). When lawmakers cosponsor legislation with members of the opposite party, they are indicating a commitment to bipartisanship in the interests of advancing substantive policy (Harbridge 2015).

The first measures of cosponsorship draw upon data for all public bills introduced in the House of Representatives between 1995 and 2016.⁵⁹ For this time period, I explore the extent to which legislators offer support to contra-partisan bills and attract bipartisan cosponsors for their own bills. When it comes to bipartisan lawmaking, cosponsorship goes both ways. Gaining support from members of the other party often requires a willingness to cosponsor bills introduced by members outside of the party (Harbridge-Yong, Volden, and Wiseman 2021). In the context of the military, these reciprocal behaviors are similar to being both a valued team player when others are in charge or cultivating a cohesive team when you are in charge. The measure for offering bipartisan support is based on the average proportion of bills a lawmaker cosponsors that were introduced by a member of the opposite party out of the total number of bills cosponsored

⁵⁹ Data for bill sponsorship and cosponsorship for the 104th to 110th congresses (1995-2008) were initially collected by Fowler (2006). Harbridge-Yong, Volden, and Wiseman (2021) extended these data for the 111th to 114th congresses (2009-2016) and shared the full dataset with the author.

by the lawmaker in a given session.⁶⁰ Similarly, the measure of bipartisan cosponsorship attracted is the average proportion of cosponsors from the opposite party that a lawmaker attracts in support of her sponsored legislation out of all of the cosponsors she attracts in a session.⁶¹ For both directions of bipartisan cosponsorship activity, higher proportions suggest greater collaboration with members across the aisle. Across the time period included in the data, the average proportion of bipartisan cosponsorships offered is 0.253 among veteran members and 0.249 among nonveterans. The average proportion of bipartisan cosponsorships attracted is 0.297 among veterans and 0.256 among nonveterans.

I examine whether there is an association between military experience and bipartisanship by estimating two ordinary least squares regression models. The dependent variables are the two types of cosponsorship activity—the proportion of bipartisan cosponsorships offered or attracted—and the key independent variable is the binary indicator for military experience. The models also include the same set of institutional and individual covariates used in earlier analyses of legislative effectiveness. Table 4.2 reports the results from these estimations.⁶² In the first model (2A), the results indicate a

⁶⁰ As an example, in the 116th Congress, Representative and Marine Corps veteran Mike Gallagher (R-WI-8) cosponsored 227 bills, 105 of which were sponsored by a Democrat. His proportion of bipartisan cosponsorship offered is 0.463.

⁶¹ The proportion of bipartisan cosponsors attracted is based on calculating the proportion of cosponsors from the opposite party on each bill and then calculating the mean across all bills sponsored by a member. This measure is limited to account for only sponsored bills that attracted at least one cosponsor. Members registered as Independents are excluded from the analyses of both measures. For example, Representative and Navy veteran Elaine Luria (D-VA-2) sponsored 19 bills in the 116th Congress, 15 of which were cosponsored. For one bill, four out of eleven cosponsors were Republicans (0.363). This proportion is calculated for all 20 of her sponsored bills and then averaged.

⁶² The proportional nature of the dependent variable calculated for all members ensures that I am not inadvertently capturing systematic differences that could be attributed to the conditions of a particular legislative session. If some congressional sessions are generally more productive than others, using a member's proportion for each session adjusts for such time-variant characteristics. I also consider how varying polarization could impact legislative behavior by

positive and statistically significant relationship between military experience and the proportion of cosponsorships offered to members of the opposite party ($p < 0.05$). When it comes to attracting bipartisan cosponsors (2B), this relationship remains positive but just falls short of statistical significance ($p = 0.11$).

Not surprisingly, for both models several institutional factors correlate strongly with cosponsorship activity. All else equal, being a member of the majority party and greater ideological distance from the chamber median are associated with a lower tendency for bipartisan collaboration. Amid polarization in Congress, it is conceivable that more ideologically extreme members and those of the controlling party are less likely to offer support or receive it from the other team. Given this context, the null results observed in Model 2B imply that veterans are not uniquely better at encouraging contrapartisans to surmount institutionally-induced pressures impacting cooperation. But, the results from Model 2A suggest that having military experience helps to cut against these other pressures, such that veteran members are slightly more willing to team up with the other side.

including the control for a member's relative ideology in a given session. Appendix 4.C, Table C.1 presents results from an alternate model specification that includes congressional session fixed effects. The relationship between military experience and bipartisanship remains positive for both measures but is just beyond standard levels of statistical significance ($p > 0.10$). Based on goodness-of-fit measures, these alternate models do not offer any additional statistical leverage.

Table 4.2: The Relationship between Military Experience and Bipartisan Cosponsorship in the House of Representatives, 1995-2016

	2A: <i>Proportion of Bipartisan Cosponsorships Offered</i>	2B: <i>Proportion of Bipartisan Cosponsors Attracted</i>
<i>Military Experience</i>	0.011* (0.005)	0.015 (0.009)
Majority Party	-0.414*** (0.009)	-0.069*** (0.012)
Seniority	0.007*** (0.001)	0.016*** (0.002)
Seniority ²	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)
State Legislative Experience	0.007 (0.007)	0.005 (0.012)
State Legislative Experience × Professionalism	-0.042* (0.018)	-0.042 (0.030)
Majority Party Leadership	-0.016* (0.007)	-0.018 (0.019)
Minority Party Leadership	-0.036** (0.014)	0.011 (0.025)
Speaker	0.023 (0.050)	-0.098* (0.043)
Committee Chair	-0.003 (0.007)	0.026 (0.016)
Subcommittee Chair	0.006 (0.004)	0.013 (0.009)
Power Committee	-0.008 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.010)
Distance from Median	-0.325*** (0.018)	-0.319*** (0.021)
Female	-0.024*** (0.006)	-0.031** (0.011)
African American	-0.050*** (0.006)	-0.026 (0.015)
Latinx	-0.025 (0.013)	-0.040* (0.019)
Size of Congressional Delegation	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Vote Share	-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.004 (0.002)
Vote Share Squared	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Constant	0.831*** (0.039)	0.537*** (0.075)
N	4,722	4,589
Adjusted-R ²	0.789	0.188

Notes: Results are from ordinary least squares regression analyses with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by legislator. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

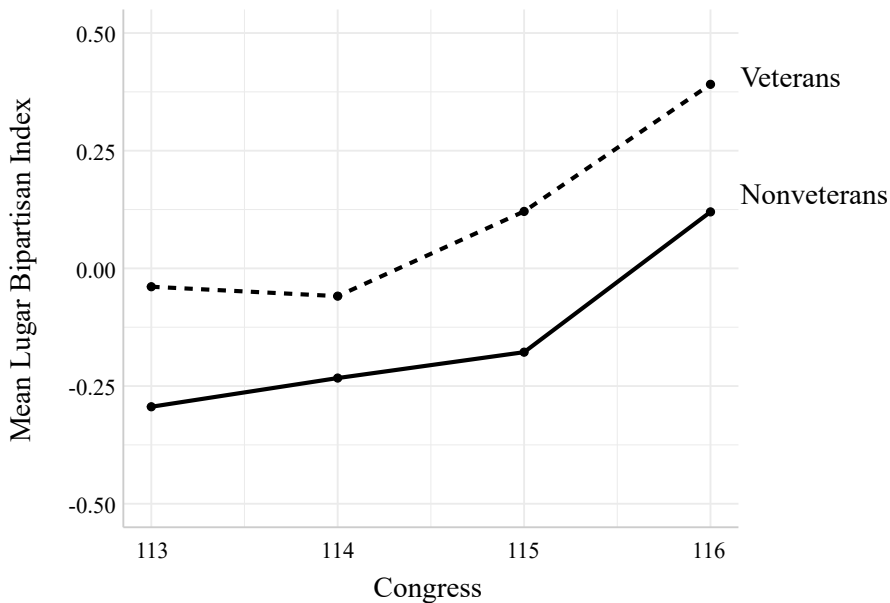
To round out the analysis, I turn to the Lugar Center's Bipartisan Index. A member's Bipartisan Index is primarily calculated based on the weighted combination of the two cosponsorship measures examined in the earlier models: proportions of bipartisan cosponsorship offered and attracted. Additionally, the index incorporates counts for the total number of cosponsorship offered or received in a session as well as a metric of "Bipartisan Intensity," which is a means of weighting values by accounting for how many bipartisan cosponsors particular bills attract.⁶³ The results of these calculations produce comprehensive scores that range from a low of -1.78 to a high of 6.84, where higher index scores denote greater bipartisan sponsorship and cosponsorship activity.

For the House of Representatives, the Lugar Center has developed scores for members serving in the 113th to 116th congresses (2013-2020).⁶⁴ Given that partisanship and polarization have steadily increased while the share of veterans in Congress has reached its lowest numbers, modeling the bipartisan behavior of veteran members over this eight-year period presents a challenging test of the second hypothesis. If veteran lawmakers are more bipartisan than their nonveteran colleagues, we should see differences emerge during these more recent and particularly polarized sessions. A simple bivariate comparison of mean Bipartisan Index scores among veteran and nonveteran members of Congress reveals a clear difference (Figure 4.4). In each of the four sessions, members with military experience score higher on the index ($p < 0.001$).

⁶³ Additional details regarding the construction of the Lugar Bipartisan Index are available at "Overview of the Lugar Center-McCourt School Bipartisan Index," <https://www.thelugarcenter.org/ourwork-Bipartisan-Index.html>

⁶⁴ Representatives who served less than 10 months, who sponsored less than 2 bills, or served as Speaker or Minority Leader are not given an index score. This amounts to approximately 15-30 exclusions per session.

Figure 4.4: Comparing Bipartisan Index Scores for Veteran Members in the House of Representatives, 2013-2020



Moreover, these observed differences hold up to multivariate scrutiny. Table 4.3 presents the results of an ordinary least squares regression estimating the relationship between military experience and a member's Bipartisan Index score. The model (3A) again considers other individual and institutional variables likely to impact legislative behavior.⁶⁵ All else equal, members of Congress with military experience score significantly higher than their nonveteran colleagues on the Bipartisan Index ($p < 0.01$).⁶⁶ Substantively, having military experience is associated with a 0.165 increase on the

⁶⁵ The Bipartisan Index scores are standardized such that scores are comparable over time. The results presented here are robust to alternate specifications that incorporate congress fixed effects.

⁶⁶ In supplemental analysis, I check to see if members of a particular party are driving this relationship (See Appendix 4.C, Table C.2). I find that there is a slight difference between veteran lawmakers from the two parties. Military experience among Democrats amounts to a 0.387 increase in Bipartisan Index scores ($p < 0.001$), and military experience among Republicans amounts to a 0.121 increase, but this result falls short of statistical significance ($p = 0.11$). Greater bipartisan behavior among veteran Democrats in the House implies that these members might be more willing to work across the aisle because of shared interests among conservatives.

Bipartisan Index.⁶⁷ To further emphasize this difference, consider Republican Representatives Morgan Griffith of Virginia and Jim Baird of Indiana, both of whom served in the 116th Congress. Griffith achieved the average score for the session (0.174), with a rank of 191, while Baird, a Vietnam veteran and Purple Heart recipient, scored .156 higher (0.330) on the index with a rank of 151. For this particular session, military experience amounts to a 40-point increase in Lugar Score rankings.

It is important to highlight that supplemental analysis of these bipartisanship measures in which I replaced the general military experience variable for the active-duty variable did not yield statistically significant results.⁶⁸ Unlike the tests for legislative effectiveness, the extent of a lawmaker's military experience does not seem to make a difference in terms of bipartisan behavior. This suggests that the socializing impact of active military experience may bear more on a veteran lawmaker's work ethic and follow-through, but any amount of military experience is enough to imbue an appreciation for collaboration. Additionally, other members interested in cooperating with veteran members of Congress might not know the difference between the types of service or find it to be of little relevance in bipartisan endeavors.

⁶⁷ This is equivalent to about one half of a standard deviation above the mean index, which is -0.098.

⁶⁸ For all supplemental tests the relationship between active-duty military experience and bipartisanship remains positive but outside conventional standards for statistical significance. See Appendix 4.C, Table C.3 for these results.

Table 4.3: The Relationship between Military Experience and Lugar Bipartisan Index in the House of Representatives, 2013-2020

	<i>Bipartisan Index</i>
<i>Military Experience</i>	0.165** (0.063)
Majority Party	-1.132*** (0.108)
Seniority	0.025 (0.016)
Seniority ²	-0.001 (0.001)
State Legislative Experience	-0.062 (0.073)
State Legislative Experience × Professionalism	0.172 (0.177)
Majority Party Leadership	-0.077 (0.101)
Minority Party Leadership	0.111 (0.100)
Committee Chair	0.016 (0.090)
Subcommittee Chair	0.035 (0.051)
Power Committee	-0.003 (0.054)
Distance from Median	-2.538*** (0.192)
Female	-0.025 (0.051)
African American	-0.065 (0.062)
Latinx	-0.090 (0.100)
Size of Congressional Delegation	0.001 (0.002)
Vote Share	-0.064*** (0.013)
Vote Share Squared	0.000*** (0.000)
Constant	4.070*** (0.500)
N	1,698
Adjusted-R ²	0.313

Notes: Results are from ordinary least squares regression analysis with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by legislator. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Despite these nuances, the collective analysis of cosponsorship activity in the House of Representatives over the last 25 years suggests that military experience is associated with a greater tendency for bipartisan collaboration. This is particularly the case when it comes to veterans offering support for bills introduced by members outside of their party. Even when controlling for other factors likely to influence legislative behavior in the contemporary Congress, veterans appear more willing to cross the partisan divide.

4.8 Discussion and Conclusion

Americans look to Capitol Hill and they see intense partisanship and numbing dysfunction. Lawmakers appear to be stubborn party stalwarts, demonstrating very little appetite for compromise. These images motivate countless academic and policy initiatives dedicated to finding an appropriate remedy. Veteran candidates and lawmakers argue that they have what it takes to fix Congress. In recent a campaign ad, Congressman Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin lamented, “After two tours in Iraq, I thought nothing could surprise me, but the Washington swamp is deeper than I thought.” He continues by highlighting his role in leading a bipartisan effort to impose term limits on fellow members— “To force everyone in Congress to treat their time there like a deployment, to put the country before their careers, get the job done, then come home” (Gallagher 2018). To veterans like Gallagher the cure is simple: “deploy” more veterans to Congress.

This paper examines the increasingly popular narrative claiming that veteran lawmakers are uniquely skilled at accomplishing their legislative mission and building teams across the aisle. While this assertion garners substantial coverage in the media and

on the campaign trail, few scholars have attempted a comprehensive assessment of such claims. Relying on measures of legislative effectiveness and bipartisan cosponsorship activity in the House of Representatives, I find compelling evidence in support of the veteran narrative. Even when controlling for other factors likely to influence legislative behavior, lawmakers with military experience tend to be more effective at advancing consequential bills through the legislative process. In terms of overall legislative productivity, I find that active-duty veteran lawmakers are, on average, 20 percent more effective than their peers. When it comes to bipartisan behaviors, the results indicate that veterans in Congress tend to cosponsor bills introduced by members of the opposite party at higher rates—a notable finding considering the pressure on lawmakers to demonstrate party loyalty. Analysis of Lugar Bipartisan Index scores from the last four sessions of Congress reveal strong evidence that veterans outperform lawmakers without military experience. Given the concurrent rise in polarization and precipitous decline in veteran representation over the last decade, the results of the Lugar score analysis are especially striking. The totality of the findings offered here reveals a story that is largely consistent with the narrative advanced by veterans and their support networks.

There are several important contributions and implications that can be drawn from the results of this study. First, this examination is one of only a few that considers the impact of military experience on legislative performance. What little work exists on veteran lawmakers primarily focuses on how military experience translates into relevant policy expertise. More than just building warriors, the military prides itself on being a values-based organization, committed to building servant leaders of character. The theory

offered in this study links values strengthened in the military, such as duty, selfless service, and teamwork, to differences in a broader range of legislative behaviors among veteran lawmakers. Understanding how military experience might inform more than just policy preferences or expertise, highlights veterans as another meaningful identity in elite politics. The findings thus add to the wider literature claiming that identities matter within legislative institutions.

Second, this study offers a rare bit of encouragement when it comes to addressing the crippling partisanship in Congress. Bipartisan electoral recruitment organizations like With Honor and New Politics are dedicated to getting more veterans in Congress—efforts that are largely motivated by anecdotal evidence or hopeful assumptions.⁶⁹ The results offered in this paper provide valuable empirical support for their normative claims. More strategically, these findings could be exploited as party elites increasingly look to veteran candidates as a way to win elections in marginal districts (e.g., Best and Teigen 2018; Merica and Grayer 2018; Mutnick 2021). If veterans in Congress are considered to be more bipartisan, parties might prop up veteran candidates in tough races to take advantage of the symbolism their experience offers.

Finally, and related to this potential for exploitation, as more and more veterans highlight their service as preparation for bipartisan and effective lawmaking, it is possible that this message loses its legitimacy. While many veterans in Congress and on the campaign trail ascribe to the narrative motivating this paper, others politicize their

⁶⁹ With Honor and New Politics are bipartisan PACs that recruit, train, and fund veteran candidates for office. For more information on these organizations see <https://withhonor.org/about-us/> and <https://www.newpolitics.org/about>

military service. Overemphasizing how military experience is valuable for politics complicates civil-military relations norms in America. In a democracy, the military institution must remain nonpartisan, subordinate, and accountable to civilian government authorities. Increasing veteran representation on Capitol Hill, encouraging veterans to highlight their military credentials in campaigns, and harping on the exceptionalism of veterans in politics potentially weakens the government's accountability of the military. While these findings offer promise for Americans seeking a representative who will work hard and well with others, veteran lawmakers should not be the only solution.

4.A Appendix: Exploring Veterans in the House, 1995-2020

Table A.2: Descriptive Statistics of Members of Congress Serving in the House of Representatives, 1995-2020

<i>Members of Congress</i>	Veterans	Nonveterans
Unique Members (Total = 1,249)	326 (26.1%)	923 (73.9%)
Member-Congress Observations (Total = 5,731)	1,421 (24.8%)	4,310 (75.2%)
<i>Following Percentages Based on Member-Congress Observations in Each Category</i>		
Men	98.7%	78.9%
Women	1.3%	21.1%
White	87.9%	81.0%
African American	7.2%	10.1%
Committee Chair	7.2%	4.0%
Subcommittee Chair	25.8%	19.2%
Democrat	63.4%	52.5%
Republican	36.6%	47.5%
Mean Distance from Median	0.399	0.463
Active Military Service	72.2%	
Only Active Service	46.4%	
Deployed to Combat Zone	33.1%	
National Guard or Air National Guard Reserves	20.7%	
Served in GWOT	36.1%	
	12.9%	

Table A.3: Description of Variables Used in Model Estimations

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>
Military Service: (Independent Variable)	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress had any amount of military experience included in their <i>Congressional Quarterly (CQ)</i> Member Profiles. When necessary, this information was cross-referenced with official and archived member websites. The data for this variable were collected by the author.	0.248 (0.432)
Active: (Independent Variable)	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress had any amount of active-duty military experience included in their <i>Congressional Quarterly (CQ)</i> Member Profiles. When necessary, this information was cross-referenced with official and archived member websites. The data for this variable were collected by the author. Members with only National Guard or Reserve duty experience were assigned a “0” value.	0.179 (0.383)

Data for the following variables were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking and used in work on measuring Legislative Effectiveness in Congress (e.g., Volden and Wiseman 2014). These data are publicly available at <https://thelawmakers.org/data-download>.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>
LES:	Legislative Effectiveness Score, as described in text. 104th-116th Congresses.	0.997 (1.416)
Bipartisan Cosponsorship Offered:	As described in text. 104th-114th Congresses.	0.249 (0.163)
Bipartisan Cosponsorship Attracted:	As described in text. 104th-114th Congresses.	0.266 (0.183)
Luger Bipartisan Index Score:	As described in text. 113th-116th	-0.099 (0.776)
Seniority:	Continuous variable – This variable captures the number of terms served by the member of Congress. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking and based on the <i>Almanac of American Politics</i> . The <i>Seniority</i> ² variable squares this value so that the effect of seniority tapers off as a member continues to serve.	5.421 (4.251)
State Legislator:	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress previously served in the state legislature. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking and based on the <i>Almanac of American Politics</i> . This variable is interacted with an updated version of Squire’s (1992) <i>Legislative Professionalism</i> to account for state legislative experience within more professional state legislatures.	0.512 (0.499)
Committee Chair:	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress served as the chair of a House Committee. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking.	0.048 (0.214)

Table A.2: Description of Variables Used in Model Estimations (Cont.)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean (S.D.)</i>
Power Committee:	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress served on the House Rules, Appropriations, or Ways and Means Committees. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking.	0.252 (0.434)
Majority:	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress was a member of the majority party. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking.	0.539 (0.498)
Distance from the Median:	Continuous variable – measured as the member’s distance from the median voter. This is the absolute distance between the member and the chamber median on Poole and Rosenthal’s (1997) DW-NOMINATE ideological scale. Data for this variable were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking.	0.447 (0.277)
Vote Share:	Continuous variable – Percentage of votes a member received in previous election cycle. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking and based on the <i>Almanac of American Politics</i> .	67.234 (13.086)
Delegation Size:	Continuous variable – Number of districts in the member’s state congressional delegation. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking.	10.097 (10.443)
Majority Party Leadership:	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress holds a position in the leadership of the majority party (e.g., leader, whip). Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking and based on the <i>Almanac of American Politics</i> .	0.022 (0.148)
Minority Party Leadership:	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress holds a position in the leadership of the minority party (e.g., leader, whip). Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking and based on the <i>Almanac of American Politics</i> .	0.024 (0.154)
Speaker:	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress served as Speaker of the House. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking and based on the <i>Almanac of American Politics</i> . In analysis of the Lugar Bipartisan index, this variable is omitted since Index scores are not calculated for the Speaker.	0.002 (0.049)
African American:	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress is African American. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking and based on the <i>Almanac of American Politics</i> .	0.094 (0.291)
Latinx:	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress is Latinx. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking and based on the <i>Almanac of American Politics</i> .	0.059 (0.236)
Democrat:	Indicator variable – 1 indicates the member of Congress is a Democrat. Data were made available by the Center for Effective Lawmaking. Used to subset the data based on party.	0.485 (0.499)

4.B Appendix: Supplemental Analyses – Legislative Effectiveness

Table B.1: Relationship Between Military Experience and the Progression of Substantive and Significant Bills in the House of Representatives, 1995-2022

<i>Substantive and Significant Bills Reaching Each Stage</i>	Model 5: Bills Introduced	Model 6: Action in Committee	Model 7: Action Beyond	Model 8: Passed in House	Model 9: Became Law
<i>Military Experience</i>	0.153** (0.047)	0.153*** (0.040)	0.129** (0.042)	0.112** (0.036)	0.055** (0.020)
Majority Party	0.192*** (0.047)	0.170*** (0.039)	0.167*** (0.043)	0.139*** (0.038)	0.022 (0.018)
Seniority	0.011 (0.012)	0.021** (0.008)	0.006 (0.011)	-0.001 (0.010)	-0.004 (0.006)
Seniority ²	0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001* (0.001)	-0.001* (0.000)
State Legislative Experience	-0.010 (0.050)	-0.012 (0.040)	-0.019 (0.044)	-0.011 (0.038)	0.001 (0.021)
State Legislative Experience × Professionalism	0.196 (0.132)	0.137 (0.098)	0.202 (0.119)	0.132 (0.097)	0.083 (0.063)
Majority Party Leadership	0.281** (0.109)	0.176* (0.081)	0.272** (0.095)	0.269** (0.083)	0.079 (0.051)
Minority Party Leadership	-0.008 (0.032)	-0.014 (0.022)	-0.023 (0.027)	-0.016 (0.024)	-0.016 (0.012)
Speaker	-0.101 (0.179)	-0.353*** (0.102)	-0.085 (0.150)	-0.022 (0.140)	0.084 (0.131)
Committee Chair	2.058*** (0.250)	1.428*** (0.195)	1.979*** (0.231)	1.580*** (0.182)	0.725*** (0.091)
Subcommittee Chair	0.373*** (0.056)	0.314*** (0.046)	0.351*** (0.049)	0.287*** (0.044)	0.144*** (0.025)
Power Committee	0.126* (0.050)	0.051 (0.040)	0.129** (0.045)	0.118** (0.038)	0.102*** (0.023)
Distance from Median	-0.075 (0.096)	-0.009 (0.077)	-0.077 (0.083)	-0.056 (0.073)	-0.057 (0.036)
Female	-0.010 (0.028)	-0.014 (0.021)	-0.015 (0.025)	-0.007 (0.022)	-0.008 (0.013)
African American	-0.122** (0.045)	-0.090*** (0.026)	-0.088* (0.039)	-0.070* (0.035)	-0.025 (0.019)
Latinx	-0.164*** (0.040)	-0.117*** (0.034)	-0.133*** (0.039)	-0.108** (0.034)	-0.057** (0.022)
Size of Congressional Delegation	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Vote Share	-0.012 (0.011)	-0.011 (0.009)	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.011 (0.008)	-0.003 (0.004)
Vote Share Squared	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Constant	0.298 (0.351)	0.222 (0.277)	0.339 (0.306)	0.294 (0.266)	0.067 (0.137)
N	5,616	5,616	5,616	5,616	5,616
Adjusted-R ²	0.282	0.244	0.302	0.275	0.214
Total S&S Bills	2056	1436	1736	1408	576

Notes: Results are from ordinary least squares regression analyses with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by legislator. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

4.C Appendix: Supplemental Analyses – Bipartisanship

Table C.1: Relationship Between Military Experience and Bipartisan Cosponsorship in the House of Representatives, 1995-2016

<i>DV: Proportion of Bipartisan Cosponsorships</i>	Model 1: <i>Offered</i>	Model 2: <i>Attracted</i>
<i>Military Experience</i>	0.007 (0.005)	0.015 (0.009)
Majority Party	-0.409*** (0.009)	-0.069*** (0.013)
Seniority	0.007*** (0.001)	0.016*** (0.002)
Seniority ²	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)
State Legislative Experience	0.007 (0.006)	0.004 (0.012)
State Legislative Experience × Professionalism	-0.042* (0.017)	-0.037 (0.030)
Majority Party Leadership	-0.014* (0.007)	-0.016 (0.018)
Minority Party Leadership	-0.032* (0.014)	0.011 (0.025)
Speaker	0.017 (0.047)	-0.100** (0.036)
Committee Chair	-0.003 (0.006)	0.026 (0.016)
Subcommittee Chair	0.007 (0.004)	0.014 (0.009)
Power Committee	-0.009 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.009)
Distance from Median	-0.318*** (0.018)	-0.321*** (0.022)
Female	-0.023*** (0.006)	-0.031** (0.011)
African American	-0.048*** (0.006)	-0.025 (0.015)
Latinx	-0.022 (0.013)	-0.039* (0.019)
Size of Congressional Delegation	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Vote Share	-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.004 (0.002)
Vote Share Squared	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Congress FE	✓	✓
Constant	0.836*** (0.029)	0.566*** (0.065)
N	4,721	4,588
Adjusted-R ²	0.791	0.180

Notes: Results are from cross-sectional time-series least squares regression analyses with congress fixed effects. Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered by legislator. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Table C.2: Relationship between Military Experience and Lugar Bipartisan Index in the House of Representatives, 2013-2020

<i>DV: Bipartisan Index</i>	Model 3A: Among All Members	Model 3B: Among Democrats	Model 3C: Among Republicans
<i>Military Experience</i>	0.165** (0.063)	0.387*** (0.100)	0.121 (0.075)
Majority Party	-1.132*** (0.108)	-0.400** (0.137)	-1.434*** (0.161)
Seniority	0.025 (0.016)	0.025 (0.016)	0.002 (0.028)
Seniority ²	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.002* (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)
State Legislative Experience	-0.062 (0.073)	0.176 (0.106)	-0.241* (0.100)
State Legislative Experience × Professionalism	0.172 (0.177)	-0.552* (0.235)	0.877** (0.268)
Majority Party Leadership	-0.077 (0.101)	-0.278 (0.180)	0.018 (0.120)
Minority Party Leadership	0.111 (0.100)	0.227* (0.095)	-0.509 (0.279)
Committee Chair	0.016 (0.090)	0.108 (0.142)	-0.016 (0.076)
Subcommittee Chair	0.035 (0.051)	-0.012 (0.078)	0.012 (0.058)
Power Committee	-0.003 (0.054)	0.114 (0.077)	-0.106 (0.076)
Distance from Median	-2.538*** (0.192)	-1.688*** (0.237)	-2.680*** (0.286)
Female	-0.025 (0.051)	-0.104* (0.051)	0.077 (0.122)
African American	-0.065 (0.062)	-0.247*** (0.066)	0.132 (0.125)
Latinx	-0.090 (0.100)	-0.224* (0.105)	0.266 (0.241)
Size of Congressional Delegation	0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.008 (0.004)
Vote Share	-0.064*** (0.013)	-0.059** (0.019)	-0.049* (0.020)
Vote Share Squared	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)
Constant	4.070*** (0.500)	3.267*** (0.075)	3.818*** (0.813)
N	1,698	797	901
Adjusted-R ²	0.313	0.411	0.364

Notes: Results are from ordinary least squares regression analysis with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by legislator. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Table C.3: Relationship Between Active-Duty Military Experience and Bipartisan in the House of Representatives, 1995-2020

<i>DV: Bipartisanship Measures</i>	Model E1: <i>Bipartisan Cosponsorships Offered</i>	Model E2: <i>Bipartisan Cosponsors Attracted</i>	Model E2: <i>Lugar Bipartisan Index [113th-116th]</i>
<i>Active Military Experience</i>	0.005 (0.006)	0.012 (0.010)	0.129 (0.066)
Majority Party	-0.415*** (0.009)	-0.069*** (0.012)	-1.131*** (0.109)
Seniority	0.008*** (0.001)	0.017*** (0.002)	0.025 (0.016)
Seniority ²	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001 (0.010)
State Legislative Experience	0.008 (0.006)	0.006 (0.012)	-0.067 (0.074)
State Legislative Experience × Professionalism	-0.044* (0.018)	-0.044 (0.030)	0.170 (0.178)
Majority Party Leadership	-0.017* (0.007)	-0.020 (0.019)	-0.087 (0.103)
Minority Party Leadership	-0.036** (0.013)	0.011 (0.025)	0.104 (0.101)
Speaker	0.021 (0.050)	-0.099* (0.043)	
Committee Chair	-0.003 (0.007)	0.025 (0.016)	0.011 (0.090)
Subcommittee Chair	0.006 (0.004)	0.013 (0.009)	0.036 (0.009)
Power Committee	-0.008 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.006 (0.054)
Distance from Median	-0.326*** (0.018)	-0.321*** (0.021)	-2.548*** (0.193)
Female	-0.026*** (0.006)	-0.032** (0.011)	-0.035 (0.051)
African American	-0.050*** (0.006)	-0.027 (0.015)	-0.068 (0.062)
Latinx	-0.025 (0.013)	-0.041* (0.019)	-0.094 (0.100)
Size of Congressional Delegation	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.002)
Vote Share	-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.063*** (0.014)
Vote Share Squared	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)
Constant	0.835*** (0.039)	0.537*** (0.075)	0.537*** (0.075)
N	4,721	4,588	1,698
Adjusted-R ²	0.788	0.184	0.317

Notes: Results are from ordinary least squares regression analyses with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by legislator. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

5. Conclusion

“...my movements to the chair of Government will be accompanied with feelings not unlike those of a culprit who is going to the place of his execution: so unwilling am I, in the evening of a life nearly consumed in public cares, to quit a peaceful abode for an Ocean of difficulties, without that competency of political skill—abilities and inclination which is necessary to manage the helm. I am sensible, that I am embarking the voice of my Countrymen and a good name of my own, on this voyage, but what returns will be made for them—Heaven alone can foretell. Integrity and firmness is all I can promise...”

- George Washington, in a letter to Henry Knox, April 1, 1789

“I am running as a Republican because Republicans still believe in and fight for the American dream...I did two tours in Iraq, first to Baghdad, second in Fallujah, where I got blown up by an RPG in a firefight. I did not serve my country and fight for our freedoms to let the radical left destroy everything we hold dear.”

- Christopher Rodriguez, Republican candidate for California’s 49th Congressional District⁷⁰

“Mr. President, here’s something you’d know if you paid any attention in those briefings or if instead of playing dress up, you’d actually served when you were called. The United States military is sworn to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic. All enemies of our Constitution. Like you.”

- Excerpt from an ad critiquing former President Donald Trump, entitled “Enemy,” produced by VoteVets⁷¹

A lot has changed since George Washington reluctantly assumed the presidency.

For the nation’s most celebrated veteran officeholder, military experience was not a campaign talking point, nor did it provide him any guarantees when it came to political preparedness. He was called to continue his service and he humbly obliged. Today, an

⁷⁰ Excerpt from an on-air interview with Brian Kilmeade for Fox & Friends on the Fox News Channel. October 25, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=52GdeICkCMA>

⁷¹ VoteVets is a progressive political action committee that supports veteran candidates and “uses public issue campaigns to relentlessly lift up the voices of veterans.” (<https://votevets.org/about>). Ad published July 23, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUy7r6LMqoA>.

emerging veteran narrative seeks to build upon Washington's example, claiming that government could benefit from more duty-bound, servant leaders committed to transcending divisive partisanship. However, the more recent quotes included above are suggestive of an entirely different message, they invoke military experience in ways that contribute to existing political discord. It is not uncommon to see veteran candidates and office holders tout their military accomplishments to win favor with voters, but for some, military service is considered a prerequisite for political office: those who spent time in uniform deserve the public's reverence or vote, while those who did not are expected to explain why they did not serve. As I conclude, I consider how my research sheds light on both extremes.

In this dissertation, I examine contemporary veteran candidates: why they run, how they campaign, and how they govern. Throughout, I empirically test the claims associated with the increasingly common veteran narrative that emphasizes how electing officials with military experience is the remedy for the division and dysfunction in Washington. Overall, my findings support the argument that military experience influences elite political behavior in noticeable ways, and that knowledge of this background can be a meaningful signal for voters. In particular, I find that veterans elected to Congress live up to the expectations associated with the veteran narrative, prioritizing bipartisan collaboration and legislative progress in the face of strong partisan pressures. While this is encouraging, these results should be accepted with some caution.

When it comes to political ambition and campaigning, veterans interested in seeking office are not as different as the narrative would lead one to believe. Their

military experience does not appear to make them immune to power-seeking motivations or the strategy of campaign messaging. In my study of veteran candidate emergence, the results indicate that veterans see themselves as particularly qualified to run for office and are susceptible to recruitment efforts. On measures of personal values, politically ambitious veterans value tradition, achieving personal success, and gaining power, suggesting that veterans interested in running for office are not especially selfless. Among voters, evidence of military experience is a perceived indicator of a candidate's ideology. Above and beyond other characteristics, candidates who served in the military are stereotyped as more conservative and this assumption influences assessments of favorability. Moreover, anecdotal evidence from real-world campaigns suggests that candidates understand these impacts, and thus, reference their military experience strategically.

The findings offered in the preceding chapters have several implications and present numerous opportunities for further research. In discussing the impacts of my work, I focus on two broad themes: what these results mean for the efforts to recruit and elect more veterans and what they mean for civil-military relations.

Support for Veterans in Electoral Politics

For the proponents of the veteran narrative, these studies should provide some empirical leverage. My findings indicate that veterans are a politically attentive and active subgroup of the population, more interested in running for office than the average American and most civilian eligible candidates. In addition, receiving the encouragement

to run for office positively influences this level of interest. What remains to be explored is what turns nascent political ambition into more expressive forms of ambition among these veterans. In future research I plan to examine the additional factors and resources that veterans consider before launching an actual campaign. What does an acceptable electoral opportunity look like for a veteran? It is possible that military experience fuels nascent ambition, but the enduring challenges associated with veterans' transition to civilian life complicates taking the next step. Organizations like With Honor, Veterans Campaign, and New Politics, all of which seek to educate veterans on how to participate in electoral politics, should continue their efforts in directing the interests of politically ambitious veterans. My expectation is that veterans require additional help when it comes to identifying feasible electoral opportunities and establishing connections to political and partisan networks—connections that may have been limited by structural limitations and regulatory requirements associated with their time in service.

On the campaign trail, I find that military experience matters to voters, but not in the way the veteran narrative suggests. Consistent with prior work on military cues in elections, my results show that veteran candidates do not enjoy a universal advantage among voters. The high regard for the military institution does not translate unconditionally into votes for a veteran candidate. Moreover, I find that a military background is a powerful ideological heuristic that registers in the minds of voters as a signal of political preferences. Veterans are viewed favorably by conservatives but punished by liberals. Yet, on both sides of the ideological spectrum and in a variety of electoral contexts, veterans continue to emphasize their military experience. In the world

of political advertising, veteran candidates are getting more creative with each election cycle. In recent years, candidates with military experience have been seen boarding a fighter jet, parachuting from an airplane, flying a helicopter, and assembling a rifle blindfolded. The enduring attention given to a candidate's military background on the campaign trail suggests that there is more to examine. In particular, what are the different types of military cues employed by veterans, and to whom do these different cues matter? Veteran candidates often point to how their military experience prepares them to fight opponents on behalf of constituents, while other military references emphasize teamwork and unity. In future work I plan to explore more directly the content of veteran political advertising and the extent to which different types of cues are employed strategically.

When it comes to the values orientation among politically ambitious veterans, it is possible that my interpretation is overly pessimistic. Combining the insights from chapters 2 and 4, veterans' prioritization of goals relating to power and personal achievement while also respecting customs and traditions might be the right combination of values that bring about their relative effectiveness on Capitol Hill. The broad literature on institutions, particularly relating to Congress, stresses the influence of both formal and informal structural arrangements that influence legislator behavior (e.g., McCubbins and Sullivan 1987; Binder 2015). I show in chapter 4 that above and beyond these pressures, veteran lawmakers differ from their colleagues in noticeable ways. It is most likely the case that veterans' experiences and values constitute the right ingredients to work effectively within the institutional constraints of government. Veteran lawmakers can channel their power-seeking, ambitious nature while remaining committed to the rules

and demands of the institution. This leaves open many questions about how veteran elected officials perform across a wider range of government institutions. Are veteran officeholders especially effective in local and state governments? Are they more likely to pursue leadership roles within their parties or institutions? How does military experience influence progressive ambition and the pursuit of higher office? Similar to the results offered here, I expect that experiences and values associated with military service might lead to behavioral differences in these other institutional contexts.

Lastly, the results from veteran lawmakers in Congress are encouraging for the veteran narrative and the state of American politics, generally. I find strong evidence that veteran lawmakers are more bipartisan than their colleagues, and this is particularly true in more recent years. These are rare findings given the crippling nature of partisanship in Congress today and the normative significance of these results generates additional questions. In particular, with whom are veteran lawmakers collaborating? Speaking to the inspiration behind the veteran narrative, are lawmakers with military experience mostly teaming up with other veterans? Is this pattern driven less by cooperative skills learned in the military, and more by shared experiences and camaraderie among veteran legislators? In future research, I plan to explore bipartisan behavior among veteran lawmakers further, in hopes of describing how they manage to work so well across the aisle.

Consequences for Civil-Military Relations

While the evidence of veterans' bipartisanship and legislative effectiveness in Congress might offer promising empirical support to the veteran narrative, it is important

to consider the consequences of my findings for civil-military relations. Over the last several decades, a growing number of scholars and policymakers have expressed their concerns regarding the increased politicization of the military (Feaver and Kohn 2001; Urban 2017; Brooks 2020; Golby 2021). It is true that today, and throughout history, many veterans serve honorably in elected office, providing critical policy perspective, and as I have shown, achieving legislative results in a cooperative manner. However, healthy civil-military relations in a democracy rely on strong norms that are at risk of erosion the more military experience is used to justify political distinctions. These democratic norms are cultivated to ensure the military institution remains nonpartisan, subordinate, and accountable to civilian government authorities—integrated into the political community, but ultimately “above politics” (Janowitz 234).

When “above politics” becomes the tagline of political ads featuring images of veteran candidates from their time in uniform, it becomes difficult to disentangle the candidate from the institution. Despite the fine print that explains veteran candidates are not endorsed by the Department of Defense, it is hard to believe that voters watching the ad are making this distinction. The results from chapter 3 are suggestive of this possibility. Facing limited information about a hypothetical congressional candidate, citizens who saw pictures of a candidate in uniform, regardless of race, assumed the candidate maintained more conservative political preferences. Moreover, I find evidence that this stereotype influenced assessments of favorability. The military and its members have a history of being associated with conservatism and Republicanism (e.g., Holsti 1998) and the institution continues to face many challenges in trying to preserve its

nonpartisan ethic (Urban 2017; Brooks 2020). However, veterans running for office under the banner of a party or with explicit reference to ideology are complicating these efforts. In future research I plan to explore the impact of veteran campaign messaging on subsequent opinions of the military. Implicit assumptions about the military lead voters to stereotype a veteran candidate, but how do a veteran candidate's political associations influence citizens' attitudes toward the military?

Overall, the goal of my research is to offer a comprehensive empirical evaluation of how military experience influences electoral politics. In the three preceding chapters, I provide compelling evidence of how this experience effects candidate emergence, campaigning, and legislative behavior. Consistent with the claims that veterans make for “mission-driven” and “team-oriented” public servants, I find that military experience matters for government in normatively desirable ways. However, increasing veteran representation in government, encouraging veterans to highlight their military credentials in campaigns, and harping on the exceptionalism of veterans in politics risk further politicization of the military. In the end, we must ask: to what extent is the veteran narrative—which intends to restore the trust and improve the legitimacy of government institutions like Congress—inadvertently harming the legitimacy of the military? In light of my findings, that military experience substantively effects electoral politics from ambition to office, I plan to further investigate this normative consequence and encourage others in the field to consider the same.

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