

Detecting diverse perspectives: using text analytics to reveal sex
differences in congressional debate about defense

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Abstract

Scholars interested in substantive representation for women have primarily focused on whether women vote for and prioritize “women’s issue” legislation. It is now well-established that female lawmakers do vote for and introduce bills on issues like reproductive rights, childcare, and women’s health at rates higher than men. With this finding widely accepted, scholars have more recently investigated levels of female involvement on a wider range of topics, and find that women are just as active as men—sometimes even more active—on an array of policy topics other than “women’s issues.” In particular, several studies show women are more active sponsors of defense-related bills than are their male colleagues. We provide a case study that investigates whether female lawmakers offer distinct perspectives on these topics. We use structural topic modeling (STM) to explore sex and party differences in floor speeches delivered in the House of Representatives. Our analysis of these floor speeches given in the 109th Congress reveals that women and men do focus their attention on distinct facets of defense issues—focusing on the implications of war for women, civilians and communities—and that these differences are conditioned by party.

“When men talk about defense, they always claim to be protecting women and children, but they never ask the women and children what they think (Rep. Pat Schroeder (D-CO), 1978).”

Defense is among the most salient issues with American voters, particularly during times of war. Over the course of the entire post-war period, only the economy has been more consistently cited by the public as the country’s most pressing problem. From the 1950s through the 2000s, defense topped the nation’s most important problem list for at least one year in each decade (and often for several years), with the exception of the 1980s. The issue’s salience with the public makes defense perennially important for national electoral politics in a way that few other issues are.

The issue is also one on which female politicians are disadvantaged. Women are stereotyped as being more liberal, more compassionate and caring, and less likely to use force than are their male colleagues (e.g., Hernson, Lay and Stokes, 2003; Koch, 2000, 2002; McDermott, 1997, 1998). Male politicians are stereotyped as being tougher, more assertive, stronger leaders, and as more willing to use force than female officials. These sex-based stereotypes advantage women on issues related to care and compassion like health care, education, and social welfare, which are sometimes referred to as traditional “women’s issues.” Voters believe female politicians are better able to handle these policy domains than are men. But on the issues voters typically care most about, defense and the economy, the opposite is true. Voters believe male leaders are better suited to policymaking in these areas.

These sex-based stereotypes are also evident in the institutional positions held by women in Congress and in the media coverage female politicians receive. The appointment of women to leadership positions on defense-related committees and sub-committees was rare until the 21st century. Prior to 2005, when Heather Wilson and JoAnn Davis were appointed to lead defense-related subcommittees in the House, only three women had previously done so in the history of the institution (Beverly Butcher Byron, Patricia Schroeder, and Barbara Kennelly).¹ Since that time, women in the House and Senate have steadily gained influence within Congress on defense

¹Edith Nourse Rogers (R-MA) chaired the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs during the 80th and 83rd Congresses and several women have since led subcommittees within Veterans’ Affairs.

policy. To date, 24 women have chaired defense-related subcommittees in the House. In the Senate, women like Dianne Feinstein and Susan Collins have chaired defense-related committees in recent years (the Select Committee on Intelligence, and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, respectively), while other female senators have led subcommittees related to defense, intelligence, and homeland security. Yet, even when women in Congress do rise to leadership positions related to defense policy, political reporters often turn to more junior male Members of Congress (MCs) for comment on defense issues (Swers, 2007*b*). Some forty odd years after Pat Schroeder lamented the marginalization of women in debates about defense policy, women are still not always seen as equals in this domain.

This marginalization has not hampered the electoral success of female lawmakers, however. As numerous studies have shown, women who run for Congress are as likely to be elected as men (e.g., Burrell, 1994; Darcy and Clark, 1994; Dolan, 1997; Fox, 2000). This is, in part, because many female lawmakers have devised strategies to overcome the biases they face, like building a reputation of competence on defense policy through bill sponsorship. Particularly in the post-9/11 era, studies find female lawmakers sponsor more defense-related bills than do similarly situated men (Atkinson and Windett, 2019; Swers, 2007*b*; Volden, Wiseman and Wittmer, 2016). In the U.S. Senate, female lawmakers also speak on the floor about defense more frequently than do their male colleagues (Osborn and Mendez, 2010), and co-sponsored more amendments to the Defense Authorization Bills passed in the wake of 9/11 (Swers, 2013). Given the salience of the issue, the volume of female participation on the issue of defense, and the growing number of defense-related leadership positions held by women in Congress, we ask whether and how the perspectives of female lawmakers differ from those of men on the issue of defense.

One does not have to read too far between the lines of Pat Schroeder's quote to understand that she believed women, if asked, would voice preferences that were distinct from those of the men making defense policy. This viewpoint was echoed by then Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) in a press conference the day after the 2018 midterm elections. In discussing the role of women in Congress, she stated, "We view every issue as a women's issue. We believe the national security of our country is a women's issue" (November 7, 2018). Put differently, the impact of women in

Congress is not limited to the prioritization of certain “women’s issues.” Rather, women view a wide range of policies through a different lens, which sometimes leads them to provide distinct insights and novel approaches to policy problems. And, indeed, a large body of literature supports the idea that women might bring distinct perspectives to debates on an array of issues, including defense.

We draw on the literature linking the descriptive and substantive representation of women, as well as the literature on gender socialization, and issue ownership, in hypothesizing that female members of Congress will bring distinct perspectives to defense-related policy debates. In particular, we expect women to focus on the ramifications of defense policies for women, civilians, and communities to a greater extent than their male colleagues. But, in doing so, we note that women must also attend to electoral and partisan considerations. Female lawmakers must tread carefully in the face of the sex-based stereotypes outlined above. Women in the GOP, in particular, must balance their desire to serve as “surrogate” representatives for women nationwide with their party’s conservative and hawkish positions. These women must combat stereotypes painting them as more liberal and less supportive of the use of force than their male colleagues or they risk being viewed as out of step with their party—something for which women incur greater electoral penalties than do men (Cassese and Holman, 2017). We, therefore, expect Republican women to be among the chamber’s strongest supporters of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We expect female Republicans to advocate for the rights of women only when doing so aligns with the Bush Administration’s priorities in the War on Terror. Democratic women face a different set of challenges, as neither their sex nor their partisan affiliation signals defense-related expertise to voters. We expect these legislators to gain leverage on the issue by framing defense policy through the lens of care for vulnerable groups—a trait associated with both women and the Democratic party.

We test these hypotheses with a case study of debate in the 109th Congress (2005–2006)—the session during which public concern over the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan crested. Using Structural Topic Modeling (STM), we explore sex differences in the population of floor speeches delivered in the U.S. House of Representatives. Overall, we find that women and men do focus their attention on distinct facets of defense policy, that these differences are conditioned by party, and

that speeches given by female MCs are often distinguished by their focus on policy implications for women, civilians and communities. In particular, female Republicans give significantly more speeches about defense than do other members of the House and these speeches reveal strong support for the War on Terror. But female Republicans are also the most likely to talk about women in their floor speeches. In the case of the Iraq War, women in the GOP weave these themes together by focusing on the rights gained by Iraqi women following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. This framing allows Republican women to take a strong position in favor of the war—aligning them with their party's stance—while also advocating for women's rights. On the other side of the aisle, speeches by female Democrats are differentiated by their attention to humanitarian crises and concern for civilians. For instance, female Democrats focus more on the genocide in Darfur than other MCs and raise discussions of refugees more frequently than other lawmakers.

Our findings speak to the importance of gender diversity for substantive representation in legislative bodies. We show that female lawmakers offer substantively distinct perspectives on policy topics outside the sphere of “women's issues.” They often interject discussions of marginalized groups into their speeches about defense policy and focus attention on distinct aspects of the bills under consideration. Simply put, without women's voices, congressional debate would be narrower, less robust, and less apt to focus on the needs of women, civilians and communities. But our findings also speak to the range of views presented by women in Congress. The topics on which female Democrats and Republicans focus and the perspectives they voice are distinct, meaning they offer altogether different types of substantive representation for women.

The Substantive Representation of Women

Scholars studying the role gender plays in shaping the behavior of legislators have focused heavily on establishing a link between descriptive and substantive representation. Theorists like Jane Mansbridge (1999) argue that members of marginalized groups—like women and African Americans—share a common bond with other members of their group because of their marginal-

ization. For female legislators, this bond cultivates the desire and ability to serve the interests of other women through their actions in Congress (Mansbridge, 1999).

Other scholars point to differences in the socialization, moral development, and lived experiences of women and men as a foundation for gender differences in worldview. In particular, scholars note that women have traditionally been more engaged in the private sphere than men, where they have raised children, fostered relationships, maintained households, and engaged in caregiving (e.g., Gilligan, 1979; Kathlene, 1989; Ruddick, 1988; Tronto, 1991). Even as more women have entered the workforce and public life, as recently as 2019, women in the United States devoted roughly 50% more time to childcare than men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). These lived experiences are thought to lead women to value caregiving to a greater extent than do men, and thus to champion social welfare policies designed to meet the needs of society’s most vulnerable members. In fact, preferences over social welfare policy are one of the primary reasons for the gender gap advantaging Democratic candidates among female voters in U.S. elections (Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999).

Drawing on these studies, numerous scholars have investigated the degree to which distinct worldviews lead female legislators to offer substantive representation for women. It is now well-established that female MCs vote for and introduce bills on issues related to social welfare, health, and education (policies linked with caregiving) as well as issues like reproductive rights, childcare, and women’s health (topics of particular importance to the lives of women) at higher rates than men (e.g., Dodson, 2006; Gerrity, Osborn and Mendez, 2007; MacDonald and O’Brien, 2011; Osborn and Mendez, 2010; Swers, 2007*a*, 2002*b,a*). Female lawmakers also discuss the policy implications of legislation for women and other marginalized communities more frequently than their male colleagues (although the context in which they raise these concerns has not been analyzed) (Pearson and Dancey, 2011; Walsh, 2002). Interviews with women in Congress support these findings and show that female politicians believe their experiences *as women* shape their contributions in office (e.g. Carroll, 2002; Dittmar et al., 2017). Carroll (2002) concludes that it is the norm for women in Congress to conceive of themselves as serving at-large, or as surrogates for women nationwide, “regardless of their party, ideology, race, ethnicity, tenure in office, or institutional position” (56). Kelly Dittmar and her colleagues find that female MCs “believe women ... bring different perspec-

tives than men to their work in Congress because of their life experiences...[on] not just issues that might commonly be considered women's issues" (Dittmar et al., 2017).

Floor speeches provide a venue for MCs to express these distinct viewpoints and serve as surrogate representatives, as they are less constrained by party ties than are other types of congressional activities, like floor votes.² Partisan pressures—coupled with heightened polarization during the modern era—mean we are unlikely to find many instances where MCs (whether male or female) break with their party's positions in roll call votes. Indeed, a study of roll call votes found Republican women to be ideologically indistinct from Republican men in the 109th Congress (Frederick, 2009). Members have more opportunity to express their points of view, to each other, to constituents, to interest groups, and to the Administration, on the House floor (Harris, 2005; Rocca and Gordon, 2010; Mayhew, 1974). For instance, floor speeches offer women and minority members the opportunity to share insights on issues with “uncrystallized interests” (Mansbridge 1999). These are topics not previously debated and not yet salient with the public, where members may draw on their lived experiences to explicate a policy's likely impacts on marginalized groups. Floor speeches, therefore, provide members with opportunities to signal their positions to a range of actors, and to contribute to the representation of minority interests during deliberations. We assess the degree to which female MCs raise distinct perspectives from their male colleagues in debates over a highly masculinized topic—defense policy.

²Representatives are typically given time for “general debate” when bills are considered by the chamber. Party leaders from both sides control how time is allotted to their membership during these debates (see Dodson (2006)). Even with these restrictions in place, floor debate is far less constrained than floor votes. Moreover, members can insert extended versions of their remarks directly into the Congressional Record, which gives all MCs the ability to make their full remarks public.

Gender and Defense Policy

Studies show sex differences in policy preferences on defense related issues among members of the public and among politicians. Research on both the U.S. and European democracies finds that female members of the public are less likely to support the use of force in international conflicts than are males (e.g. Conover and Sapiro, 1993; Eichenberg, 2003; Jelen and Wilcox, 1994; Wilcox and Allsop, 1994). Moreover, as more women enter national legislatures, cross-national studies find states become less likely to enter conflicts (Caprioli, 2000; Caprioli and Boyer, 2001; Regan and Paskeviciute, 2003) and that they decrease defense spending (Koch and Fulton, 2011).³ Female leaders, feminist IR scholars, and women’s rights activists have also worked to incorporate discussions of women’s well-being into debates about defense and national security (Blanchard, 2003). For instance, activists worked to classify rape as a war crime and violations of women’s rights as human rights violations (Blanchard, 2003). This work demonstrates how national security and defense can be viewed through an alternative lens—one that brings the experiences of women, civilians, and communities to the forefront—and the types of policy changes that can result from this thinking.

Nevertheless, women are not a monolithic group. Female legislators of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, religions, and so on, will likely bring distinct viewpoints to bear on their work in Washington. Moreover, members are typically elected and serve as partisans, they represent the needs of diverse constituencies, and they differ in their ideological positions. While all women might, in fact, share a desire to serve the interests of other women while in office, the ways they do so will be shaped by the intersectionality of their identities, and partisan and electoral pressures. For instance, Shogan (2002) finds that when women in the 105th Congress gave speeches on the House floor, Democrats and Republicans spoke about women and women’s interests with the same frequency. But women from opposite parties raised the needs of women in the context of different policy

³Female executives, however, sometimes impose more hawkish policies than do their male counterparts, and some studies find that the gender composition of the executive and legislative branches can interact to influence policy (Koch and Fulton 2011).

domains—Republican members discussed how “tax, business, and pension laws affect working women while Democratic female representatives concern themselves with laudatory tributes and funding for welfare state programs” (Shogan, 2002, 129). Black female Democrats also took a distinct approach, raising concerns about women related to economic issues and equality. These findings demonstrate that even when women share a single goal—such as advocating for the needs of women and communities—the diversity of their backgrounds may lead them to pursue the goal in different ways. We expect to find a similar dynamic in speeches about defense. We hypothesize that female members of Congress will focus on aspects of defense policy that hold particular significance for women, civilians, and communities to a greater extent than will their male colleagues. But we expect the interaction of partisanship and sex stereotypes to shape the specific context in which they do so.

*H*₁: Female MCs are more likely than males to discuss the impacts of defense policy on women, civilians, and communities.

Partisan and Sex-Based Issue Ownership

Defense policy is a broad area that includes a range of subtopics, such as homeland security, nuclear threats, veteran’s affairs, terrorism and so on. There are, thus, numerous contexts in which female legislators might raise the interests of women, civilians, and communities. While one might choose to highlight the particular needs of female U.S. service members, veterans and their families, others might focus on the impact of war on civilian women and children abroad. The ways lawmakers choose to combine policy areas and impacted populations will depend, in part, on the degree to which their sex and party allows them to “own” or “lease” specific issues.

The theory of issue ownership holds that Democrats and Republicans are viewed by the public as competent to handle different sets of issues (Petrocik, 1996). Whereas Democrats are trusted to handle social welfare and civil rights issues, for example, Republicans are more trusted to handle taxes and defense. These reputations for strength are based on the policy positions staked out by the parties during the New Deal era and throughout the post-war period.

While politicians are advantaged on particular sets of issues, they must typically engage on a

range of salient topics (some “owned” and some not), both while in office and on the campaign trail. Sides (2006) argues that what allows candidates to successfully “trespass” into the domain of the opposition party is strategic issue framing (also see, Holian, 2004). By “espousing position[s] that are consonant with their party’s traditional concerns or reputation,” in the discussion of an issue owned by the opposition party, a candidate can “lease” such an issue (Sides, 2006, 431)⁴. For example, when Democrats discuss taxes (a Republican owned issue), they often highlight their party’s push for a progressive tax structure, which is consonant with the larger progressive platform (Sides, 2006). In sum, by framing opposition party issues in a way that highlights their own party’s traditional stance, partisan candidates are able to incorporate a wider range of issues into their campaign agendas.

The theory of issue ownership based on partisanship is readily extended to a theory of issue ownership based on gender (Hernson, Lay and Stokes, 2003). While partisan ownership stems from the platforms, performance, and reputations of parties, gender issue ownership stems from conventional norms of gender roles and gender stereotypes. As discussed in the introduction, sex stereotypes contribute to beliefs that men and women are competent to handle different sets of issues. The link between feminine character traits such as care and compassion with issues like healthcare and social welfare contributes to the belief that women are better suited to handle these issues. The linkage between masculine character traits like toughness, aggression and leadership with policy domains like defense and crime gives rise to the belief that men are better suited to handle these topics.

The same groups of issues are owned by both women and Democrats. Both groups own social welfare issues and neither group owns the issues of defense, foreign affairs, or crime. Hayes (2005) argues that Democrat’s ownership of social welfare issues, which are linked with feminine character traits, has led Democrats to be associated with these same traits. Female Democrats, therefore, enjoy a certain degree of consonance between their gender and their party affiliation, due to the overlap between women- and Democrat-owned issues and traits. This consonance might particularly advantage Democratic women on social welfare issues, but it brings their leadership into question

⁴Also see Druckman, Jacobs and Ostermeier (2004).

in times of war (Holman et al., 2019; Holman and Zechmeister, 2017, 2011). Particularly during in the post-9-11 era, Democratic women must develop strategies designed to gain leverage on the highly salient issue of national defense (a Republican/male-owned issue). We expect them to do so by connecting defense topics to discussions of care, compassion, and cooperation—character traits heavily linked with Democratic women. For example, female Democrats might “lease” the topic of military action by focusing attention on the impacts of war on women and civilians—vulnerable groups in need of care and compassion. By framing the issue in a way that highlights the applicability of feminine/Democratic character traits, female Democrats may increase the perception of competence on a traditionally masculine issue among voters, while also serving as surrogate representatives for women.

H₂: Female Democrats will connect defense topics to discussions of care, compassion, and cooperation.

On the other side of the aisle, the Republican Party “owns” the masculine issue of defense (Petrocik, 1996). This allows Republican women to “own” defense on the basis of their party, but sex stereotypes call into question their competence on this topic. The GOP is associated with “hawkish” positions, while women are linked with “doveish” views. This is one reason why individuals who support “an aggressive military policy [in the war on terror] are 30 percentage points more likely than those who can be classified as ‘doves’ to deem men better suited than women to handle a military crisis” (Lawless 2005, 484). Female Republicans, must, therefore work to convince voters that their views on defense policy are in line with those of their party—that they are conservative, willing to use force, and tough on terror—as a deviation from the party line could exacerbate the belief that female politicians are more liberal and less competent on defense issues than are their male counterparts. We, therefore, expect female Republicans to use much of their time on the floor to emphasize their support for the Bush Administration’s War on Terror.

H₃: Female Republicans will use their time on the floor to emphasize their support for the Bush Administration’s War on Terror.

Adopting language already in use by the Bush Administration could help Republican women in Congress establish their willingness to use force while also allowing them to speak to the interests

of women. The Bush Administration adopted a rhetorical strategy after 9/11 that justified the war in Afghanistan “not only in terms of the war on terror but also in terms of restoring the rights of women mistreated under Taliban rule” (Ferguson, 2005, 9). Laura Bush’s position within the administration, as a wife, mother and First Lady (rather than a military strategist) made her one of the most credible and frequent purveyors of this message. In public statements, she frequently noted the need to build democratic institutions in Afghanistan as a means of “protecting the rights and dignity of women” (Ferguson, 2005).⁵ Republican Congresswomen could use similar framing to “lease” the issue of defense, as their sex allows them to speak with authority about women’s issues.⁶ We, therefore, expect female Republicans to couple statements about concern for the rights of women abroad with strong support for the use of force in Iraq and Afghanistan.

H₄: Female Republicans will couple statements about concern for the rights of women abroad with strong support for the War on Terror.

Data and Methods

We analyze the population of House floor speeches in the Congressional Record for the 109th Congress initially collected by Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Taddy (N.D.). The data include all speeches delivered on the chamber floor or subsequently entered into the record, as well as metadata about each speaker, including their name and party. To this, we merged additional data about each representative that is specific to defense, including their veteran status (combat veteran, non-

⁵Note that many feminist scholars viewed these concerns as disingenuous and argued that the Bush Administration’s policies made conditions worse for women in the U.S. and abroad (Ferguson, 2005).

⁶In fact, Pearson and Dancey (2011) find some instances of Republican women making these types of arguments in the 109th Congress, but they do not systematically investigate whether Republican women link the rights of women abroad to support for the War on Terror.

combat veteran, or non-veteran) and whether they have a child serving in the military.⁷ We also added indicators for each representative’s sex and race, and for districts in the south to the dataset.

The 109th session is examined because public concern over defense reached a high water mark in 2005 and 2006, a period during which the United States was engaged in wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Figure 1 shows the share of the American public that believed defense-related issues constituted the most important problem facing the nation for each Congressional session between 1987 and 2018. This share stood at 24.6% during the 109th Congress—a share that has not been matched during any other post-September 11 session of Congress.⁸ The post-9/11 era also provides an opportunity to study debate over defense-related issues during a period with relatively high levels of female representation in the House. Seventy one women served in the 109th House, including 46 Democrats and 25 Republicans. By comparison, only 16 women served in the 93rd Congress, the session that preceded the end of the Vietnam War in April of 1975. Only two of those women were Republicans. We have, therefore, selected a session of Congress during which defense was salient, and levels of female representation were both large enough and diverse enough (from a partisan perspective) to allow a quantitative analysis. We use structural topic modeling (STM) to analyze these data.

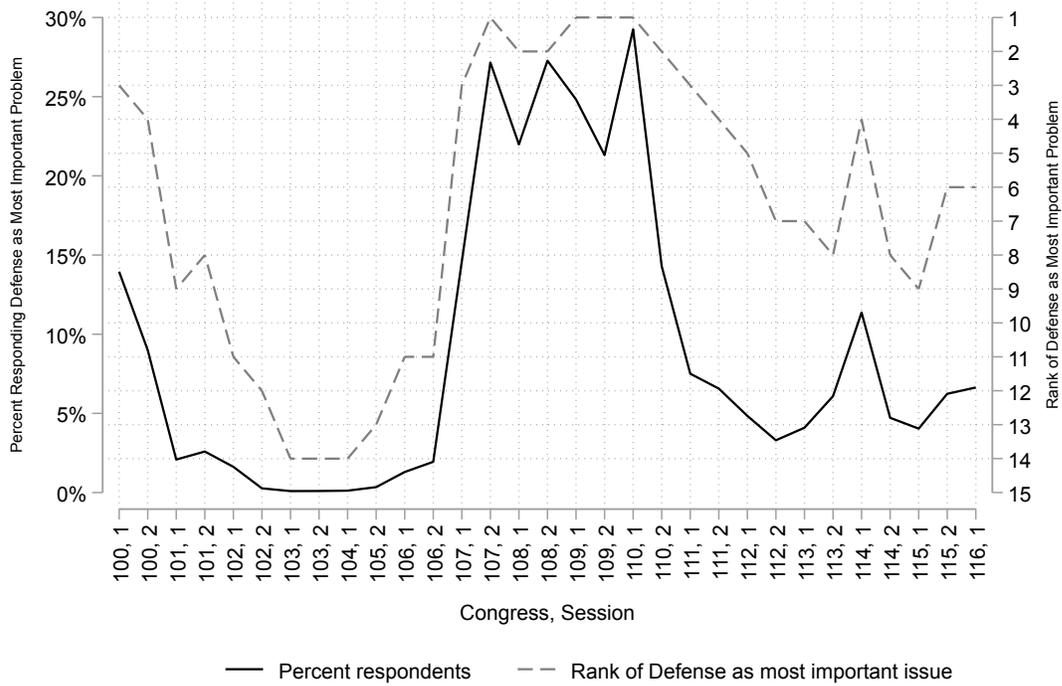
Structural Topic Modeling

Structural Topic Modeling (STM) is an unsupervised technique that allows for the discovery of latent topics. The assumption underscoring the model is that topics generate particular sets of

⁷Military service and having children in the military represent lived experiences that are particularly relevant to debates about defense policy. Information about veteran status and military children was supplied by the Library of Congress.

⁸Note that by selecting a session during which Congress was particularly attentive to defense-related issues, we are not selecting on the dependent variable. Our dependent variables are related to *how* lawmakers talk about defense during a period when the issue was highly salient. Moreover, focusing on a single Congressional session allows us to explore the context behind the results of the quantitative analyses we perform.

Figure 1: Percent of the Public Identifying Defense as the Most Important Problem



Source: Policy Agendas Project, Most Important Problem Dataset. The axis labeled “Rank of Defense” shows how Defense was ranked among the 15 issues in the MIP dataset (based on the proportion of respondents who stated “defense” was the most important problem).

words. STM allows topics to be correlated with each other and expects documents to be multi-dimensional. It reports the share of each document related to each topic identified. Importantly, STM allows researchers to estimate the impact of document meta-data—such as the speaker’s sex or party affiliation—on the prevalence of speeches on a given topic and the rate at which particular words are used within a given topic can also vary across speakers. In our case, women might generate more speeches about terrorism than do men *and* they might emphasize different words when talking about terrorism.⁹

Our goals using STM are threefold. First, we identify all the speeches given during the 109th that are broadly related to defense and establish that women are active participants in these debates. Second, we discern whether women raise distinct considerations in their speeches on this broad topic—by focusing, for instance, more on terrorism and less on the defense budget than do co-partisan men. Finally, we examine the specific words that distinguish speeches given by women and men when they are both discussing the same narrow aspect of defense policy, such as the Iraq War. These tests allow us to explore whether substantive differences exist in the defense-related speeches given by co-partisan women and men.

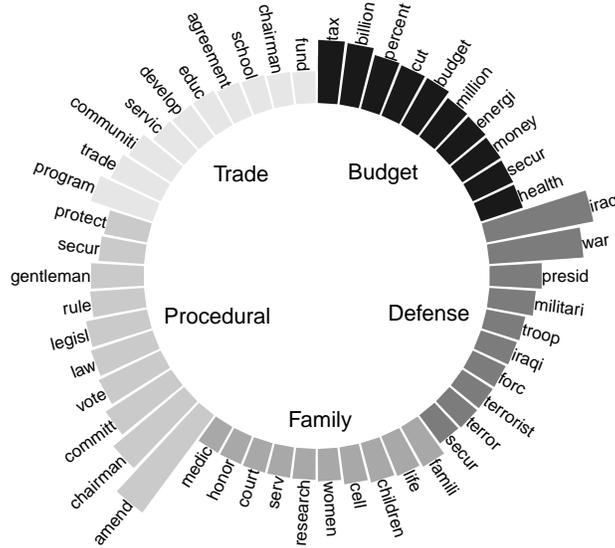
Attention to Defense

After pre-processing the data (see Appendix A), we identify the main categories of speeches given in the 109th Congress using STM. Figure 2 shows the words that distinguish those topics, including the first, which we have labeled “Defense and Military.” The speeches within this broad topic—distinguished by words like “Iraq, war, freedom, troop, terrorist, secur[ity], soldier, fight”—are the subject of all of our additional analyses.

The extant research outlined above finds that women in the House are at least as likely as their male colleagues to offer bills on defense-related topics. Here, we validate this finding by estimating the share of speeches devoted to defense for each MC. Covariates include the MC’s sex

⁹For more on the attributes of STM, see Roberts et al. (2013), Roberts et al. (2014), Lucas and Tingley (2015), and Quinn and Radev (2010).

Figure 2: Primary Topics in the 109th House



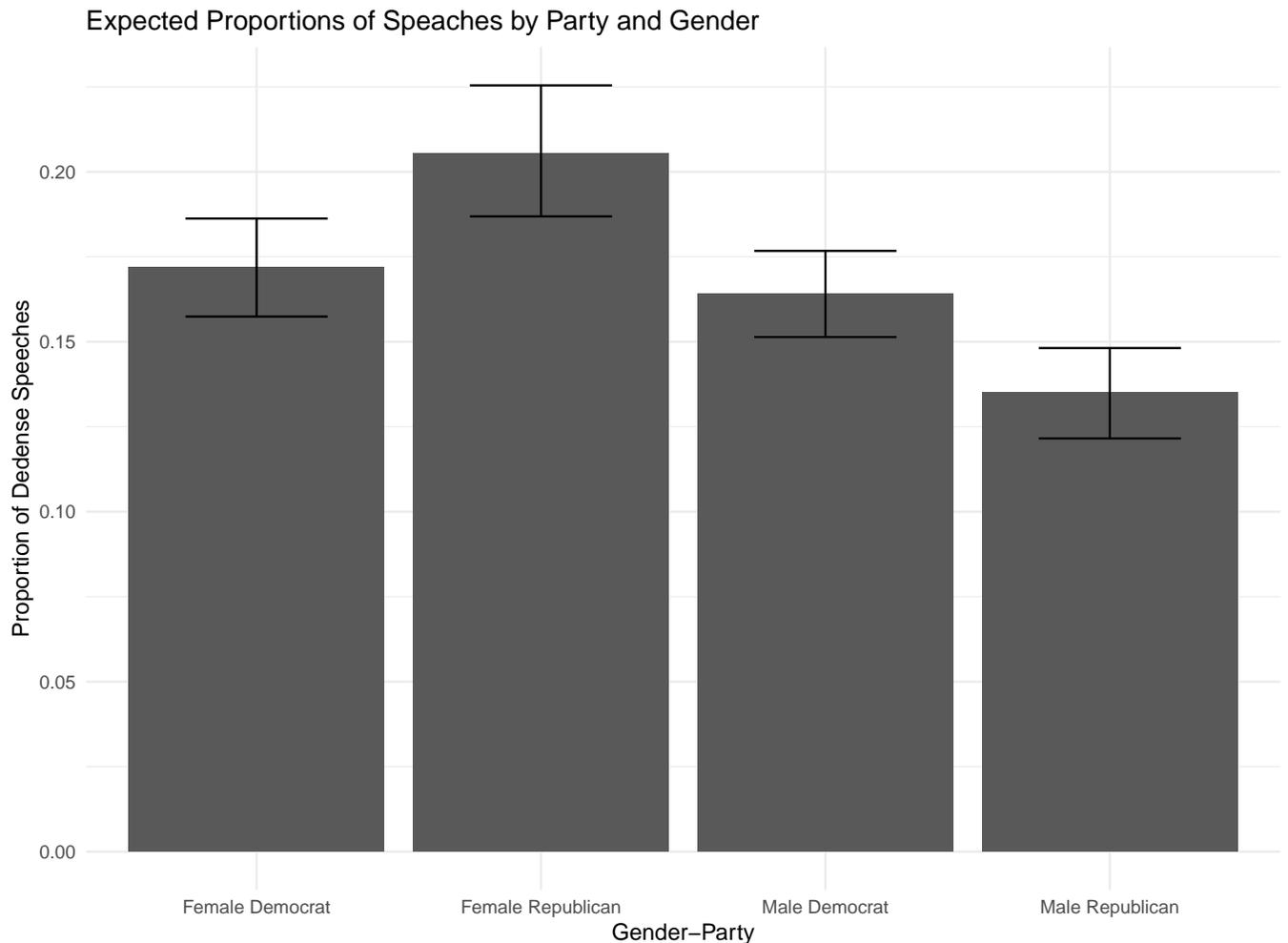
and party (male Democrats are the comparison category), type of military service (combat veteran, non-combat veteran, non-veteran is the excluded category), whether the MC has at least one child serving in the military, the MC’s race, and whether the MC comes from a district in the South. We also include fixed effects for each month in the session.¹⁰

From our regression model¹¹, we plot the expected proportions of defense speeches in Figure 3. These estimates reveal that Republican women devote roughly 21% of their floor speeches to defense-related issues—a statistically significant result indicating they discuss Defense more than any other group of lawmakers. Male Republicans devote the smallest share of speeches to defense-related issues—roughly 13.5%. We find no statistically significant differences among Democrats. These findings confirm those from prior scholars finding that female lawmakers are often just as active—if not more active—on defense as their male colleagues (Atkinson, 2020; Atkinson and

¹⁰As a robustness check, we repeat this analysis using propensity score matching using sets of female and male MCs by party in Appendix C. Our results remain supported.

¹¹We show the full model results in Appendix F.

Figure 3: Estimating the proportions of defense speeches in the 109th House of Representatives by Party and Gender



Windett, 2019; Osborn and Mendez, 2010; Swers, 2007b; Volden, Wiseman and Wittmer, 2016).

Defense-Related Subtopics

We now turn our attention to our primary research question—whether the speeches offered by women differ substantively from those offered by men. To assess this, we begin by performing a second round of topic modeling over the speeches that fall into the broad “Defense and Military” category. This process reveals eight subtopics within the umbrella category. They are displayed in Figure 4, along with the words most associated with each subtopic. To determine the substantive

theme of each subtopic we also create word clouds for them. Word clouds (shown in Appendix D) report a larger number of associated words than does the table shown here and use varying text size to indicate the importance of different words to the topic classifications.¹²

Five of the subtopics encapsulate areas of substantive debate: Terrorism, Middle East and African Conflicts, Nuclear Threats, the Iraq War, and the Defense Budget. For instance, the Iraq War subtopic includes discussions of military missions and strategy, training forces, building coalitions, and establishing a democratic government in Iraq. The remaining three subtopics (U.S. Party Politics, Patriotism, and Progress in Iraq and Afghanistan) include discussions that are more symbolic or political in nature. For instance, the Patriotism category is dominated by discussions of freedom, honor, liberty, and sacrifice. The “Progress” category, similarly, includes symbolic speeches that make broad arguments about U.S. successes and failures in Iraq and Afghanistan (either arguing that the wars are going well, or that they are going poorly).

In Figure 5, we visualize the average number of speeches for members in each party-gender group, as well as the total count of speeches by groups. These are only summary statistics (covariate effects are not included), but they show high levels of involvement by both Republican and Democratic Women. To determine whether women and men focus their attention on different facets of defense policy, we estimate (for each member of Congress) the share of all defense-related speeches devoted to each of the eight subtopics. Here, we once again control for factors related to military service (by the MC and his or her children), race, and Southern region. We also include fixed effects for each month of the session.

¹²In addition to these visualizations of the data, we also read the five speeches most indicative of each subtopic. These speeches, along with descriptive information about the Representatives who gave them, are provided in Supplemental Information B. Additionally, two coders independently read a random sample of 200 of the defense speeches and assigned subtopic codes to them. Our coders had a 91.6% and 94.7% agreement with the topic model results, respectively. Intercoder agreement was 90%. These robustness checks served to validate the STM results while also providing insights that allow us to further contextualize the findings of the STM models.

Figure 4: Words Most Associated with Defense and Military Subtopics

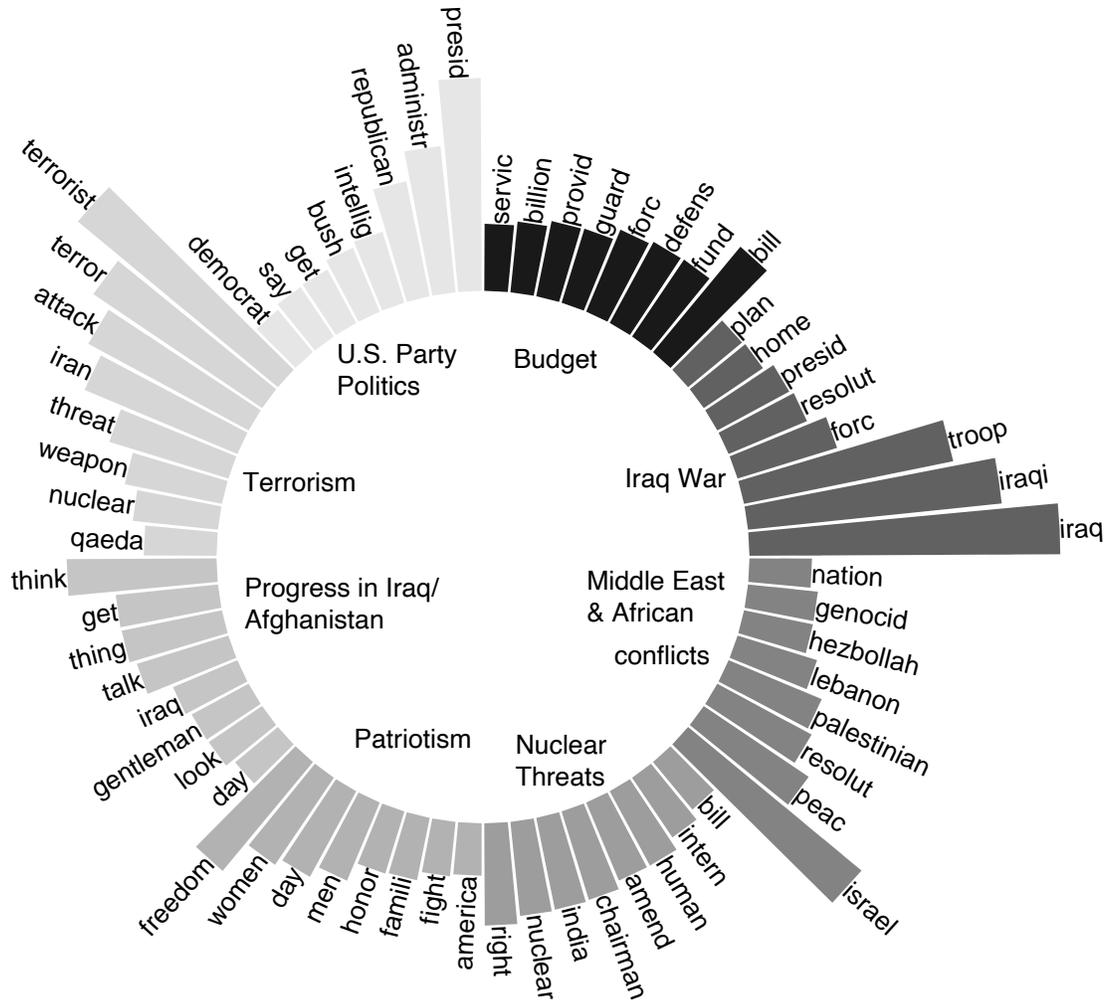


Figure 5: Defense topics speech total counts and averages by gender and party.

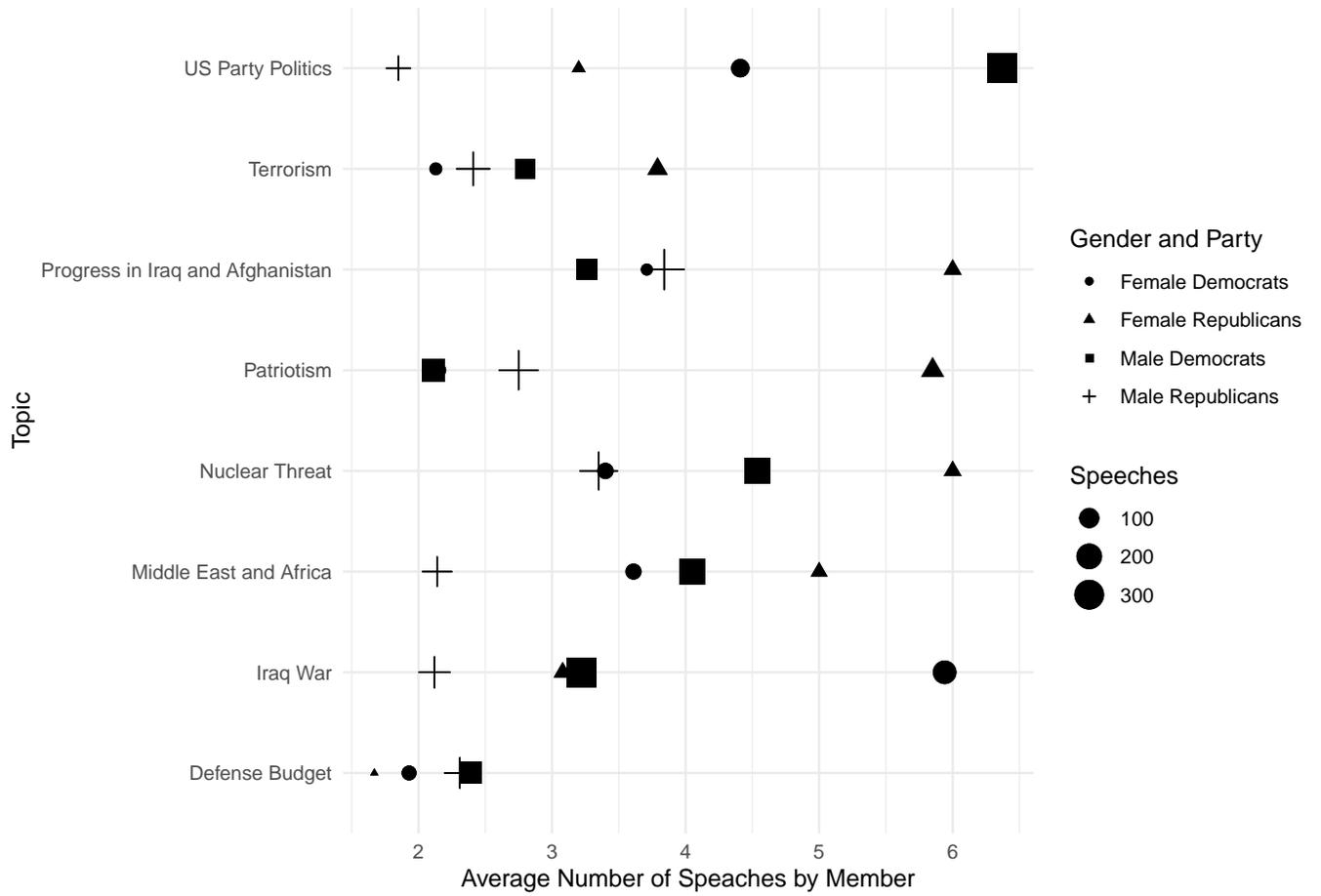


Figure 6 shows the distribution of defense speeches across subtopics for women and men from each party predicted by the model.¹³ We find that female Democrats are the most likely to talk about the war in Iraq (more than one third of their Defense speeches are on this subtopic as compared with roughly one quarter of speeches by male Democrats and female Republicans). Female Republicans are the most likely to discuss Terrorism—they devote 12% of their defense speeches to this subtopic compared with 8% of male Republican’s speeches. These findings reveal that women in Congress are active participants in debates about defense, but that they focus their attention on distinct facets of the issue.

Female Republicans are the *least* likely discuss the Defense Budget. Roughly 2% of defense speeches made by women from the GOP are on this topic—less than half the share devoted to the Defense Budget by all other categories of MCs. Democrats, regardless of sex, connect defense policy to U.S. partisan politics—a category that is dominated by discussions of the Bush Administration’s handling of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. On the other hand, Republicans of both sexes give more patriotic speeches than do Democrats. We see little variance (by sex or party) in attention to Middle East and African Conflicts, and Nuclear Weapons.

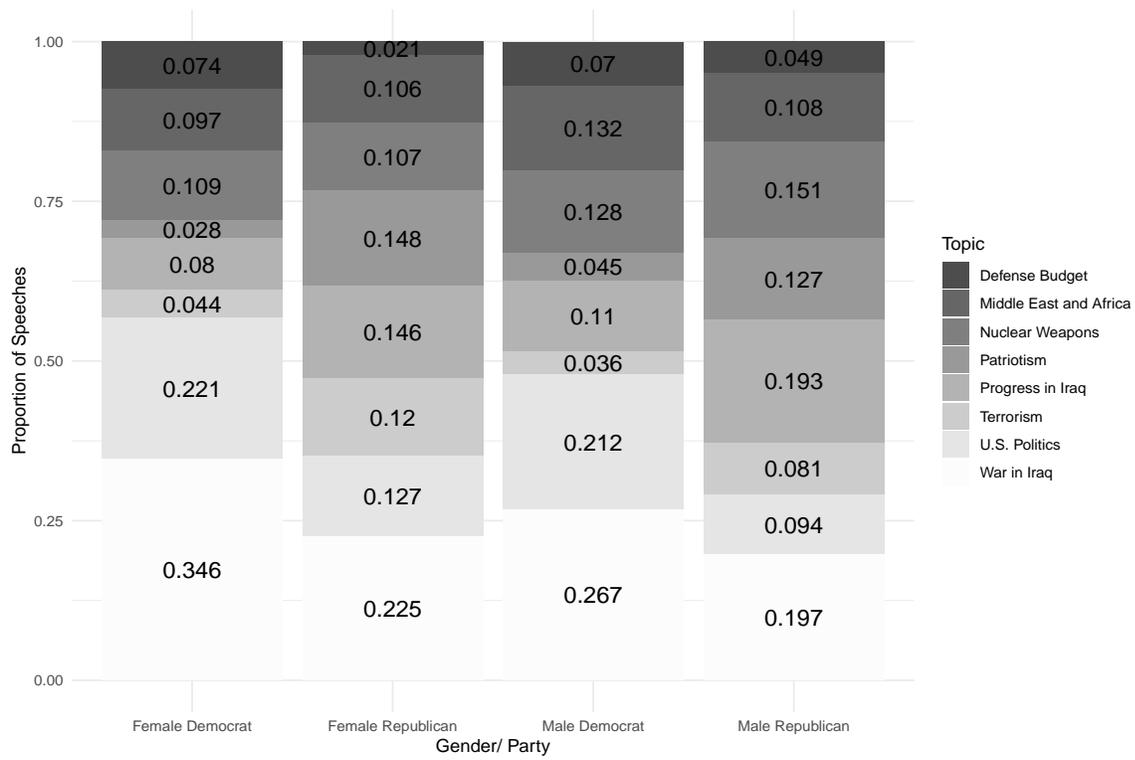
We next examine the words that distinguish speeches given by women and men from each party on specific subtopics.¹⁴ When discussing Terrorism, we find that Republican men frequently use terms that define the problem—“attack,” “kill,” “bomb,” and “threat.” Women, however, raised “intelligence” as a means of addressing these problems. One Republican women was particularly well positioned to offer solutions related to intelligence gathering. JoAnn Davis (R-VA) chaired the Terrorism/HUMINT, Analysis and Counterintelligence Subcommittee of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence during the 109th Congress. Fourteen of the 25 Republican women in the 109th offered a total of 53 speeches primarily focused on terrorism.¹⁵ Three of them came from Davis and were, in fact, related to intelligence gathering. This finding illustrates a way in

¹³The full model output is in Appendix F.

¹⁴These pairwise comparisons come from our categorical variable that measures gender-party. We show all plots in Appendix G.

¹⁵Appendix E provides descriptive statistics for each of the 8 subtopics.

Figure 6: Share of Defense and Military Speeches Devoted to each Subtopic



which women and men are similar—their perspectives are often shaped by institutional position (here, subcommittee leadership), in addition to their gender identity and a range of other factors. But in addition to the focus on intelligence, Republican women also discussed Islamic extremism, “nuclear” threats (a theme also found in speeches by male Democrats), and terrorists to a greater extent than did their male colleagues. In her remarks on the 5th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, Davis offered a speech that exemplifies the ways these themes were often woven together.¹⁶

The attacks reminded us that there are extremists in this world that would do anything, including sacrificing their own lives to destroy ours and our way of life. ... Until families can go to bed at night feeling secure, we cannot stop the fight for freedom. ... Our intelligence forces have played a vast role in protecting America. And together we are safer today. However, we must remain vigilant and prepare to fight these radical Islamic terrorists whenever and wherever they may strike (Rep. JoAnn Davis, R-VA).

During the same debate, Davis’ colleague, Terry Everret (R-AL) also spoke. Like Davis, Everett was a Republican from a southern state and a member of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (serving on the Intelligence Policy Subcommittee). His remarks reflect the areas of overlap and divergence in speeches about terrorism by Republican women and men.

9/11 served as a wake-up call for us in the sense that we could no longer afford to sit on our hands and let terrorists continue to kill Americans and kill Americans and kill Americans. ... We have accomplished so much in the global war on terror. ... We have significantly degraded the al Qaeda network by capturing and killing many of their leaders and associates. ... we must remain resolute to fight and win this war against terror (Rep. Terry Everett, R-AL).

As demonstrated in these examples, Republicans, regardless of sex, promoted the idea that the War on Terror was succeeding in making America safer, but that there was more to do. Both men and women argued that the U.S. must continue the fight against terrorism. Men, however, used language related to killing—both Americans and members of al Qaeda—far more frequently than did women. Women, in contrast, focused on threats to democracy and the American way of life by Islamic extremists, and argued that intelligence gathering was vital to continued success in the War on Terror.

¹⁶All of the examples come from speeches identified by our STM model as being most associated with the subtopic of interest.

Republican women also frequently linked discussions of intelligence gathering with the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay in their speeches about terrorism, :

Intelligence gained at Gitmo has and will continue to prevent terrorist attacks and help save American lives (Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-NC).

... Democrats still do not understand who the enemy is. They have turned their rhetoric to the American soldiers who guard the prison at Guantanamo Bay, which houses some of the worlds most wanted and is vital to the war on terror. Their efforts have provided some very valuable intelligence, intelligence that will save countless lives and keep our country secure (Deborah Price, Rep-OH).

Guantanamo provides the United States with a secure interrogation center to gain essential intelligence information from terrorists (Rep. Ilena Ros Lehtinen, R-FL).

During a period when the Bush Administration faced considerable backlash over the treatment of detainees captured during the War on Terror and held in facilities like Guantanamo Bay and Abu-Ghraib, Republican women in the House reaffirmed their support for the Administration's course of action. As outlined here, these women expressed a commitment to keeping Guantanamo Bay open. These findings support H_3 , showing that Republican women took a hard-line stance to establish their conservative bona fides and to signal their willingness to use force in the face of gender stereotypes. Overall, their speeches on the Terrorism demonstrate strong support for the Bush Administration's policies.

On the other side of the aisle, the analysis reveals that the words "smart" and "multilateral" distinguish speeches given by Democratic women from those given by co-partisan men. Democratic men raise issues related to Iran and India more frequently than do the women in their party. Both male and female democrats use the word "nuclear" more frequently than do their colleagues on the other side of the aisle. But as the quotations below reveal, male and female Democrats often use these words in different contexts.

"SMART stands for Sensible Multilateral American Response to Terrorism. SMART calls on the United States to lead by example, to honor its treaties and meet its non-proliferation obligations. ... SMART includes an ambitious international development program to combat the poverty and hopelessness that give rise to terrorism in the first place." (Rep. Lynn Woolsey, D-CA)

“President George Bush, in creating fear about terrorists in the American people rather than understanding, often says ‘If we don’t fight terrorists over there, we will have to fight them right here.’ He never bothers to explain in detail who the terrorists are or what motivates them or how his policies are creating more of them.” (Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D–OH)

Female Democrats routinely focused their speeches about terrorism on nuclear nonproliferation and multilateral action. In doing so, they stressed the importance of working with the international community to reduce the use of weapons like “bunker busters,” which represent a grave threat to civilians. As stated by Rep. Woolsey (D–CA), the use of these nuclear weapons “could cause the death of thousands of innocent civilians and devastate large tracts of lands.” Democratic women also focused on the root causes of terrorism—poverty, hopelessness, Islamaphobia, and interventionist U.S. policies—a theme that rarely appeared in the speeches of other lawmakers from either party. As the above quote from Woolsey demonstrates, they stressed the importance of provisions designed to alleviate these social ills in defense-related bills. These findings support hypotheses H_1 and H_2 . The perspectives voiced by female Democrats represent a distinct viewpoint—one focused on meeting obligations to the international community, protecting civilians, and addressing the causes of terrorism—which are linked with the values of care for the vulnerable and concern for community. When male Democrats use the word “nuclear,” however, they are more likely than their female colleagues to be talking about the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by countries like Iran, and pointing out that no such weapons were found in Iraq.

Turning to discussions of the Iraq War, one of the most striking findings here are the differences between female and male Republicans. Speeches by female Republicans about the Iraq war are distinguished by the terms “women” and “democracy,” whereas their male colleagues’ speeches use the words “freedom,” “resolution” and “troops” more often. Note that women and men from the GOP both discuss terrorists, fighting, Saddam Hussein, insurgents, victory, training, and so forth when they talk about the war in Iraq. But along with these shared concerns, Republican women weave in remarks about the impacts of the war and subsequent efforts to rebuild the country on the lives of women. This finding offer support for H_1 , H_3 and H_4 . Female Republican MCs focus on the needs and experiences of women to a greater extent than their male colleagues—but do so

in a way that is consistent with their party's position and that supports the Administration's War on Terror. The quotes below illustrate the context in which Republican women used these words.

In America it took 132 years for women to have the right to vote, but in Iraq women voted in their very first democratic election. This election is only the beginning of democracy in Iraq. As their newly elected leaders draft a constitution this year, America's commitment to Iraq's security is critical. We must ensure that democracy and freedom take root and begin to thrive in the hearts and the lives of the Iraqi people (Rep. Thelma Drake, R-VA).

Since the fall of Saddam's regime and the emergence of a new democratic government, the women of Iraq have made tremendous progress in reclaiming their rightful place in society. These women have overcome unimaginable obstacles and deserve our ongoing support as they work to build a new democracy. (Rep. Judy Biggert, R-IL).

These quotes illustrate the focus among female Republicans on building institutions that will expand rights and civic participation for Iraqi women. This framing allows women in the GOP to focus on the needs of women while also supporting their party's stance on the Iraq War. These priorities set Republican women apart from all other groups of legislators, include their female colleagues on the other side of the aisle.

Speeches by female Democrats are distinguished by use of the words "president," "home," "troop," "plan," and "soldier." Note that speeches made by female *and* male Democrats are distinguished by the words "response," "insurgent," "withdraw," "redeploy," "mission," and others. But along with these shared priorities, female Democrats focus on the lives and sacrifices of service members, and call for President Bush to bring them home. The quotes below provide examples of speeches in which Democratic women link the President to the Iraq War and to call for a plan to bring the troops home.

This legislation will help restore independence in Iraq and will bring our troops home safe. Since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, 1,423 members of the United States military have died which includes 1,084 dead as a result of hostile action and 333 of non-hostile causes. ... The message as to our exit plan must be made clear to the Iraqi people, the American people, and to our troops. (Sheila Jackson-Lee, D-TX).

Consider, over 2500 young men and women killed, over 30,000 amputees, blinded and the like, hundreds of thousands who will have mental health deficiencies when they

return. Retired generals have spoken. We need a new direction. The troops should be redeployed. They should be brought home at the most practical time with a plan that we don't now have under this administration (Carolyn Kilpatrick, D-MI).

Here, female Democrats couple their focus on the soldiers killed and injured during the Iraq War—showing care and compassion—with calls for President Bush to end it. This framing ties President Bush to an increasingly unpopular war and allows Democratic women to take a strong stance against it while highlighting their support for the troops. Democratic women also highlight the needs of veterans returning from war, noting that “Veterans’ health care continues to suffer under this administration’s reckless fiscal policies” (Rep. Woosley, D-CA). Again, this allows Democratic women to voice their concern for the nation’s troops while also criticizing the Bush Administration and its policies. Both Democratic and Republican women, therefore, raise distinct perspectives related to the lives of women (in the case of Republican women), and care and compassion (in the case of Democratic women) in their speeches about the Iraq War. But as we hypothesized, they do so in ways that are consonant with their party’s positions.

Men and women are equally likely to discuss the subtopic “Middle East and African Countries” in their floor speeches. Nevertheless, we find sex differences in the considerations raised by co-partisan legislators on this subtopic. Speeches given by female Democrats are distinguished by their focus on Sudan, the genocide in Darfur, and by discussions of refugees. In short, Democratic women are focused on humanitarian crises and the need to care of vulnerable populations, which supports H_1 and H_2 . Speeches by Democratic men, however, are distinguished by discussions of Israel, Hamas, and Hezbollah. The areas of focus for Democratic women and men who discuss conflicts in the Middle East and Africa are, therefore, quite distinct. In fact, there are more thematic overlaps between speeches by Democratic men and *Republican* women than Democratic men and women on this subtopic. Like male Democrats, female Republicans are also discuss the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Speeches by Republican men are set apart by their focus on Iran. In sum, even for a subtopic that women and men are equally likely to discuss, we find that MCs of different sexes focus on distinct themes.

Implications and Conclusions

Overall, this study elucidates the different approaches women and men from both parties bring to discussions of defense policy. We find that women distribute their attention to different sets of issues within the broad category of defense—devoting more of their floor speeches to the Iraq War (in the case of Democratic women) and Terrorism (in the case of Republican women) and less attention to the defense budget (again, in the case of Republican women). Further, for both of the subtopics to which women devote more attention vis-à-vis men, we find speeches by female lawmakers were distinguished by their attention to policy implications for women and civilians. These findings suggest that female MCs provide substantive representation for women outside the sphere of so-called “women’s issues,” by focusing on the ways that a wide range of policies influence the lives of women and communities. This finding holds for women in both parties, although female Democrats and Republicans raise the needs of women in different contexts. In sum, conversations in Congress about defense policy are shaped by the contributions of female legislators, who raise perspectives and concerns that are distinct from those of their male colleagues. But the dearth of women in Congress—and of Republican women in particular—means that these distinct perspectives are likely not being voiced in every congressional venue. Much of the work of legislating happens in congressional committees and subcommittees. It is at this point that legislators are best able to revise legislation to match their preferences, and it is (arguably) at this point that including diverse perspectives would have the largest impact on the shape of legislation. The impact of women’s distinct perspectives on public policy may, therefore, be tempered until women make up a large enough share of their respective parties to allow for a “dispersion of influence” across subcommittees spanning the full breadth of the congressional agenda (Mansbridge, 1999).

Researchers might extend this analysis to include a longer period of time (looking at sessions prior to 9/11 or after the rise of the Tea Party, for instance). Such an extension would allow researchers to explore how the sex differences revealed here evolved over time and are shaped by factors such as changes in party control, changing levels of women in office, and levels of public interest in defense policy. Researchers might also test the hypotheses developed here in the context

of western parliaments. Higher levels of opposition to the use of force among women vis-à-vis men have been demonstrated in several western democracies (e.g. Jelen and Wilcox, 1994; Wilcox and Allsop, 1994). Moreover, comparative work has established that the presence of women in government has an impact on foreign policy (Caprioli, 2000; Caprioli and Boyer, 2001; Koch and Fulton, 2011; Regan and Paskeviciute, 2003). However, comparative studies of parliamentary questions also find that national defense remains a male-dominated topic in a range of countries, despite high levels of female participation in debates on other issues (Bäck and Debus, 2019; Chaqués-Bonafont and Cristancho, 2021). These findings stand in contrast to ours and other studies on the U.S. Congress, showing women in Congress speak about defense at least as often as their male colleagues (more in the case of Republican women) (Osborn and Mendez, 2010). Scholars might investigate the social and political reasons for the differences. They might also investigate whether levels of engagement on masculine topics are correlated with women’s willingness to offer distinct perspectives on these topics. Put differently, do female MPs ask different types of questions than their male colleagues, even though they ask relatively few questions about defense? Or do low levels of engagement signify an unwillingness (or inability) for female lawmakers to offer substantive representation for women on masculine issues. This study finds that differences in perspectives between female and male lawmakers on defense-related topics are important for the substantive representation of women and for the shape of defense policy. Limiting women’s voices in debates about defense, therefore, has the potential to adversely affect both policymaking and representation.

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