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Identity Fusion and the Use of Force: A Group-Psychological Explanation for Support of Military Interventions

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Abstract

Under what circumstances will the public support military intervention in other countries? Recent answers have focused on the importance of identity and attachment to one's nation to explain variation in public support. We posit that some segments of the public are more willing than others to support military action even when there is perceived risk due to a psychological attachment to veterans. We distinguish kinship, geographic, and psychological forms of propinquity and argue that the psychological attachment of an individual to a group drives disparate attitudes about military force when their group is threatened. Using a unique national data set, we examine public attitudes across a range of hypothetical and actual military interventions and find that psychological attachment, measured using identity fusion, helps to explain the pattern of support across interventions. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings on the use of force literature.

Keywords

identity fusion, military intervention, public opinion

Under what circumstances will the public support military intervention in other countries? The responses to this question are many and varied, with prior work examining the type of intervention, casualties, the role of elites, and ideology. More recently, scholars have focused on the importance of identity and attachment to one's nation to explain variation in public support (Herrmann 2017; Herrmann, Isernia, and Segatti 2009). These perspectives suggest multiple approaches to disaggregating public opinion, although the results of disaggregation have not always been consistent (Krueger and Pedraza 2018; Mader 2015; Reifler et al. 2014).

Here, we attempt to clarify some of these findings by disaggregating the public by their degree of psychological attachment to military veterans and the type of intervention proposed, to enhance existing explanations of why some individuals are more aggressive in their support of certain types of military intervention.

We begin from existing literature on proximity to the military, which analyzes individual-level factors, including geographic location or relational proximity to a veteran (Gartner 2008; Krueger and Pedraza 2015) to understand attitudes toward both hypothetical and actual military interventions. We ask why it is that some segments of the public may appear more aggressive, or are more willing to support military action even when there is perceived risk, than others. The means by which some members of the public choose among forms of intervention to support and which to oppose lay at the heart of this question. Some scholars emphasize the importance of nationalism to explain this variation (Herrmann, Isernia, and Segatti 2009; Kinder and Kam 2010). As a complement to this identity-attachment perspective, we suggest that attachment to the group most visible in intervention, military veterans, is also a useful lens for understanding variation in support for military interventions.

Attachment to military veterans has been measured in several ways, including having a relative who served (Gartner 2008), local veteran population density (Krueger and Pedraza 2015), and local casualties (Althaus, Bramlett, and Gimpel 2012). Implicit in these measures is a conflation of multiple forms of attachment: the social attachment created by the increased density of military veteran population within a community and the proximity of respondents to those veterans, and the psychological attachment of individuals who emphasize the interests of military veterans in the calculations. By eschewing a

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geographic explanation for proximity, our focus on psychological attachment better accounts for attitude variation that appears inconsistent with the density measures of a locale.

We argue that psychological group attachment to veterans sharpens our analytical focus on social belonging, thus retaining a core component of explanations that emphasize different types of attachment for understanding why some individuals are more likely to back some types of interventions more than others. To measure individuals' psychological attachment to veterans, we import a psychological theory, identity fusion (IF), which models extreme pro-group attitudes and behavior that has demonstrated substantial explanatory success over the last decade on outcomes including self-sacrifice, life-long loyalty, and pro-group activities (Newson, Buhrmester, and Whitehouse 2016; Swann et al. 2010; Swann et al. 2014).

Those whose identities have been "fused" to a group have fused social and personal identities to the extent that they view their actions as defending the group as a whole (Swann et al. 2009). Below, we explain how the inclusion of this psychological attachment measure expands upon the existing models of public support for military intervention insofar as IF provides a theoretical explanation for why some people are more bellicose and others are not. Theoretically, our approach allows risk assessment to vary by individual for each type of military intervention, and remains distinct from the ideology and value constructs (Gries 2014; Rathbun et al. 2016). Specifically, we suggest that fused individuals should react strongly to both physical and reputational threats to the group. We expect that those respondents who are fused or have a strong psychological group attachment to military veterans should show support of military action when (1) members of the military are in perceived risk or (2) veterans' reputation is at risk, even if those risks are hypothetical.

We offer an initial test of the psychological dimension of proximity theory by examining respondent fusion with military veterans and its effect on support for both hypothetical and actual military interventions. Using data from the 2011 Cooperative Congressional Election study (CCES), we find that fused respondents express substantially higher levels of support for military interventions which defend the security of the group, specifically support for the War in Iraq and the hypothetical use of force to secure the U.S. supply of oil or destroy a terrorist camp, while not affecting attitudes toward military interventions for other less direct threats, such as protecting allies, spreading democracy, or stopping a genocide. Identity fusion offers additional theoretical and empirical insight into the explanation of instrumental bellicosity.

The following sections situate this work in the use of force literature and make the case for the explanatory potential of our psychological attachment hypothesis. In doing so, we review key findings and confounds within the nationalism and proximity literatures, examine the critical assumptions used by our identity fusion measure, and develop expectations for high-attachment respondents with regard to military intervention. We then offer evidence from the 2011 CCES which supports the inclusion of IF as a predictor of intervention attitudes. The final section expands on the contributions of our approach and offers suggestions for future extension in the nationalism, proximity, and identity fusion literatures in political science.

Military Intervention Attitudes and Social Attachments

The study of military interventions has taken many forms, including kinship connections, geographic proximity, casualties, patriotism, nationalism, and ethnocentrism. At their cores, each emphasizes individuals' social connections as a major consideration for explaining their attitudes regarding military intervention.

Group proximity explanations rely on social or geographic measures to evaluate the importance of a specific group to issue salience and specific attitudes for individuals. We suggest that the social or geographic measures employed in the proximity literature are fundamentally a proxy for psychological attachment. The approach we champion here distills group attachment to its psychological core. In our view, neither the repetition of symbols, such as commuting past military base, nor social proximity (frequently seeing uniformed service members in public) changes the internal calculus of members of the public on veteran-salient issues without an additional, psychological push.

Past research has measured social proximity to the military through both social and geographic proximity including having a relative who served (Gartner 2008), the nearby veteran population density (Krueger and Pedraza 2015), and local casualties (Althaus, Bramlett, and Gimpel 2012). They have found that proximity to a group is associated with stronger support for the group on salient issues (Krueger and Pedraza 2015) or on the increased importance of the group's considerations when reaching a decision (Lau, Brown, and Sears 1978). Lau and colleagues (1978) found that civilians who have a veteran relative expressed increased support for the Vietnam War. Examining public attitudes toward 9/11 and the Iraq War, Gartner (2010) found those personally connected to events have distinct attitudes from members of the public without such connections. Others have found similarly group-interested attitudes among those with a family connection to a group (Krueger and Pedraza 2018). While each of these effectively measures a social

proximity, simply being near a group does not ensure a psychological attachment to it.

What is often missing from this work is a connection to the group which raises its concerns above those of other proximate groups. Scholars of the Contact Hypothesis have shown that mere repetition of casual interactions between racial groups have little impact on racial and racialized policy attitudes (Pettigrew et al. 2011). It is reasonable to expect that the same casual interactions between veterans and nonveterans would similarly fail to generate lasting attitude change on military intervention questions. Beyond physical proximity, what is needed is a psychological attachment and a sense of personal belonging with a group. This attachment, then, becomes the basis for the increased importance of the group's concerns on salient issues.

Approaches that focus on attachment to the nation have demonstrated clear advances in our understanding of support for policies related to intervention (Herrmann, Isernia, and Segatti 2009; Kinder and Kam 2010). Scholars distinguish patriotism, or love for the country or positive evaluation of the nation, from nationalism, which adds feelings of competition and hostility toward outsiders to positive affect for their ingroup (Federico, Golec, and Dial 2005). Patriotism and nationalism are further distinguished in that patriotism is most often defined in relation to cultural, value-based, historic, or geographic elements, whereas nationalism is a social identity (Wolak and Dawkins 2017). Others disassemble a national social identity into a feeling of belonging (attachment), a set of inherited markers (culturalism), and a comparative feeling of superiority or hostility with other groups (chauvinism) (Herrmann, Isernia, and Segatti 2009, 727–30). What is most important here is that individuals' connection to the nation drives intervention attitudes, although that influence depends on which components of nationalism are present (Herrmann, Isernia, and Segatti 2009).

Strong nationalists are driven by a rational calculation: an expected value based on the threat and opportunity payoffs from any course of action between their country and another. To the extent that one's social attachment to the nation (the group) increases, the importance of seeking a higher payoff does as well (Herrmann 2017). Using this perspective, Herrmann and colleagues have found that nationalism shapes attitudes toward the Iraq War, contingent on the strength of individuals' national attachment and the importance they place on the Middle East in U.S. foreign policy (Herrmann 2017, S79). While ideology is found to have an effect here, that effect is distinct from and weaker than those of the nationalism variables.

Others have explored military intervention attitudes and support for the War on Terror through the lens of ethnocentrism (Kam and Kinder 2007; Kinder and Kam 2010). Kinder and Kam define ethnocentrism as "prejudice, broadly conceived," which brings the concept into line with the exclusionary cultural and chauvinist elements of nationalism explored by Herrmann and others (Kam and Kinder 2007, 321). Relying on the ethnocentrist perspective, they find that those most willing to distinguish among Americans based on race were also most supportive of the War on Terror, suggesting these attitudes were driven by a generalized racial animus (Kam and Kinder 2007, 335).

Kinder and Kam (2010) suggest ethnocentrism is a durable group-based perspective, but is contextually activated by policy domain. As a result, ethnocentrism can be as strong in effect as partisanship, though these effects are dependent on the respondent's political knowledge: higher knowledge respondents are better able to apply their attitudes across policy domains (Kinder and Kam 2010). Further limits of ethnocentrism appear when attempting to account for domestic policies, as well as in their attempt to account for support for the War in Afghanistan. Kam and Kinder suggest this null result may indicate different motivations: keeping the nation safe for ethnocentrics and removing oppressive regimes for others. In situations where nonethnocentric support for intervention is high, ethnocentrism would not distinguish a respondent's attitudes (Kam & Kinder 2007, 329).

The sum of this recent work is a recognition of the importance of group identity and attachment to attitudes toward military intervention and foreign policy. Their effects have been found to be as strong as that of leading political identifiers, such as ideology and partisanship on these issues. What is needed is a theoretical lens that gives insight into the core of what the extant war attitudes literature expounds, unlike geographic proximity, but without the loss of analytical precision that comes with nationalism. Our solution is identity fusion. As a conceptual tool, IF is useful because it retains the core elements of "belonging" and "social attachment." It enables us to examine the effect of attachment to a group with whom members of different racial and ethnic groups can become psychologically attached to explain more generally why some people support intervention and some do not.

Identity Fusion: An Attachment-Driven Explanation for Intervention Attitudes

The concept of identity fusion is a corollary to other psychological attachment models, such as proximity and nationalism, in that it explains why some members of the public are more willing to endorse certain acts of military intervention while other members of the public do not. Identity fusion has been defined as "a visceral sense of 'oneness' with a group and its individual members that

motivates personally costly pro-group behaviors" (Swann and Buhrmester 2015, 52). It is distinctive from other forms of group attachment in that the personal and social identities of fused individuals become "functionally equivalent" without individuals experiencing a depersonalization as a prototypical or peripheral group member, as in approaches rooted in social identity theory (Swann et al. 2009). Identity fusion comprised four attributes: retention of personal agency in pro-group actions (*agentic personal-self principle*), synergy between personal and social identities to motivate self-sacrifice and violence on behalf of the group (*identity-synergy principle*), strong connections to both the group as a whole and individual members (*relational-ties principle*), and the persistence of a fused identity over time (*irrevocability principle*) (Swann and Buhrmester 2015; Swann et al. 2012, 443).

Identity fusion is distinct from other models of group identity in that individuals who are fused with a group retain agency demonstrate strong psychological attachment to group members as well as the group itself, and are stable in their fusion with the group (Fredman et al. 2015). Identity fusion theorists emphasize the "family-like" connection of fused individuals to other group members. This focus on the relational nature of group membership suggests that the strength of member-to-member connections can act to reinforce and cultivate extreme views or encourage extreme behavior (Gómez and Vázquez 2015). These feelings often extend beyond those with whom the fused individual has direct personal contact (local fusion) to other group members (extended fusion/fictive kin; Buhrmester et al. 2015; Swann et al. 2012). The creation of "fictive kin" is particularly important as a precursor for fused individuals to view favorably and even act on behalf of group members whom they have never met (Buhrmester et al. 2015). This connection has frequently been studied in the context of nationality, and shows that fused individuals endorse both violent action and self-sacrifice on behalf of both local and extended groups (Swann et al. 2014). Thus, while fused individuals view group members as "family-like," the connection extends beyond social proximity and fused individuals' attachment to the group extends beyond local proximity.

Actions resulting from IF can be exacerbated by several characteristics, including physical arousal (Swann et al. 2010), social pressure (Littman and Paluck 2015), perceived discrimination (Gómez et al. 2011; Swann et al. 2009), and a strong connection to group values (Halloran and Kashima 2004; Swann et al. 2010). Most commonly, scholars have tested for these behaviors in the form of self-sacrifice using a prompt in which the respondent is given the opportunity to sacrifice themselves for other group members (Swann et al. 2014). Recently this work has been extended to include examples beyond the laboratory, which has found that individuals fused to an American national identity were more likely to donate money or provide aid following the Boston Marathon bombings (Buhrmester et al. 2015).

While these efforts distinguish identity fusion from group identity and consciousness, their applicability has thus far focused on explaining the endorsement of extreme (typically violent) forms of behavior. Endorsing violent behavior may appear in actions beyond the individual, however. Individuals who are connected to military veterans have been found to be more broadly supportive of military interventions, for example (Feaver and Kohn 2001; Gartner 2008; Krueger and Pedraza 2012). While these studies rely on the presence of familial relationship, rather than a self-identified psychological attachment to military veterans as a group, these studies hint at the importance of respondents' closeness to military veterans as an explanation for variation in attitudes on the use of force.

Identity Fusion has been applied in the study of a wide range of groups, including siblings (Vázquez et al. 2015), gender groups (Swann et al. 2015), and national identity (Buhrmester et al. 2015; Swann et al. 2009). Here, we are importing IF specifically to provide a psychologically based explanation for why some individuals support military interventions and others do not. Therefore, we rely on a psychological attachment to a group that is largely free of ethnocentrism but still captures the symbolism of nation, military veterans. We also examine other groups active in American politics, including the Tea Party, whose frequent use of "Take our country back" rhetoric better reaches the ethnocentric perspective (Skocpol and Williamson 2016).

We believe that a psychological attachment to military veterans, measured through identity fusion, will lead respondents to endorse more bellicose attitudes in situations where the use of military force will address a direct physical or reputational threat to the group. Identity fusion understands an individual's connection to the group as an "automatic, intuitive, and reflexive processes" (Fredman et al. 2015, 472). Similarly, the depth of the psychological attachment of an individual to veterans means that an attack on that group will be perceived as an attack on the self, and implies the primacy of the group identity when compared to other considerations (Fredman et al. 2015, 468). Therefore, those military interventions which are responses to a physical threat, such as destroying a terrorist camp or ensuring the supply of oil, should elicit a more bellicose response from individuals who are psychologically attached to military veterans. Similarly, fused individuals should respond to threats to the group's reputation, such as negative domestic attitudes toward a long-term military commitment,

such as the war in Vietnam or Iraq (Brutger and Kertzer 2018). Other interventions, such as defending an ally, have also been treated as reputational, indicating a cost for a domestic or foreign audience for failing to honor the commitment (Brutger and Kertzer 2018).

Interventions for other purposes, including humanitarian interventions, upholding international law, or spreading democracy, would not elicit a more aggressive response for fused individuals than nonfused respondents. Approaches focusing on ethnocentrism or national chauvinism may offer similar expectations on outcomes such as destroying a terrorist camp, but rely on a fundamentally different mechanism. Fusion-based explanations assume that personal and social identities reinforce one another, rather than compete (Swann et al. 2009). For veteran-fused individuals, we expect that intervention policy is intensely personal, and predicated not on feelings of superiority or competition with other groups, as in the case of national chauvinism, but rather a focus on threats to the group. Therefore, those instances in which a fused individual perceives a direct physical or reputational threat to the group should elicit distinct attitudes from nonfused individuals. This distinction separates IF's expectations from those of national attachment, which emphasizes greater support for cooperation-based international policy (Herrmann et al. 2009). The next section discusses our expectations for military veteran-fused individuals in detail.

Hypotheses

We expect that those respondents who are psychologically attached to veterans will most strongly support interventions on perceived threats to this group as a result of their strong connection. Therefore, physical threats to the group should elicit distinct attitudes for the psychologically proximate respondents. While physical threats include violence resulting from a terrorist attack, the category also encompasses threats to the well-being of the group and self. A substantial increase in the price individuals pay at the gas pump resulting from a threat to access to oil or other natural resources is a threat personal economic prosperity for fused individuals and would motivate greater support for intervention than we might expect for nonfused individuals.[1]

We expect that psychologically attached respondents will also act in the defense of reputational threats to the group. Given the controversies surrounding the causes of the 2003 military intervention in Iraq, and the ensuing decline in public opinion as costs for the intervention mounted, those psychologically attached to veterans should respond with more favorable opinions of the conflict. This attitude results not from increased patriotism or support for elites, but rather as a response to justify the sacrifices made by military veterans involved in the conflict. In other words, suggesting that the Iraq War was a mistake amounts to a reputational threat for psychologically fused respondents. This reputational threat was muted for the Afghanistan war, where public support was more in favor, but we would still expect increased support for this intervention for fused respondents. Stating these expectations formally, our first two hypotheses are the following:

> **Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Respondents who are psychologically attached to veterans will express higher levels of support for the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars than nonfused respondents.
> **Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Respondents who are psychologically attached to veterans will express higher levels of support for hypothetical interventions which target perceived physical or reputational threats to the group (destroy terrorist camp, ensure supply of oil, protect allies under attack).

In contrast, situations with little threat to the group such as assisting the spread of democracy, intervening in a region with genocide or civil war, helping the United Nations uphold international law, or preferring no intervention in any of these situations, should not trigger psychologically attached respondents to offer stronger interventionist opinions than others. Both fused and nonfused respondents may be influenced by other factors which drive support for humanitarian interventions, such as a moral obligation to help civilians (Kreps and Maxey 2018), but this mechanism would not produce distinct responses among fused and nonfused respondents. In this way, we distinguish our attachment-based expectations from those of values or ideology-based work. Our perspective emphasizes group threat as the mechanism by which psychologically attached respondents systematically differ from others, and only when their attachment group is threatened. In this way, we distinguish them from respondents who possess extreme ideologies or consistently pro-intervention attitudes:

> **Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Respondents who are psychologically attached to veterans will express similar levels of support as other respondents for hypothetical interventions which target threats not directly relevant to the group's safety (spread democracy, stop genocide, uphold international law).

These hypotheses indicate a clear limit of our approach here in the distinction between group salient (all possible military interventions) and group protecting (interventions which address a threat to the group) issues. For us, intervention attitudes should not map to a

liberal/conservative dichotomy. For psychologically proximate respondents, the distinction appears between supporting any hypothetical interventions and only those which result directly in the protection of the group. Interventions which protect other groups would not experience the same level of support since they would put service members at risk while achieving a goal other than group protection. Finally, these attitudes should be stronger than those who are merely socially proximate to veterans. Our next section discusses the different approaches to measuring identity fusion, the 2011 CCES, and our methodology.

Methods

We evaluate the testable implications of respondent proximity to a group described above using the common content and team module in the 2011 CCES. The study is the joint effort of thirty-six research teams, and includes over 36,500 completed interviews of adults in the United States. Each research team fielded separately at least one national sample survey of 1,000 cases, with half of the survey content controlled by the research team and the other half devoted to Common Content (Ansolabehere 2012). All surveys were completed on the Internet under the auspices of You Gov/Polimetrix, and cases were selected using matched random samples. Sample matching is ideally suited for Internet access panels, and the opt-in Internet approach generates data similar to telephone and mail modes of surveys (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2011).

Measures

Outcome variables. We measure *attitudes toward hypothetical military interventions* through several different questions following the prompt "We'd now like to ask you about some issues facing the country. Would you approve of the use of the U.S. military troops in order to . . .?" Respondents were asked about their approval of (1) ensuring the supply of oil, (2) destroying a terrorist's camp, (3) protecting U.S. allies under attack, (4) intervening in a genocide or civil war, (5) assisting the spread of Democracy, (6) helping the United Nations uphold international law, or (7) providing no aid in any of these instances. In addition, to measure *attitudes toward real military interventions*, we asked "All things considered, do you think it was a mistake to invade Iraq/Afghanistan?"

The span of these questions allows for a diverse level of investment and closeness to the military as a group. For example, approving of military intervention to "destroy a terrorist's camp" would directly protect the military group's desire to meet their core mission of providing physical safety for their nation whereas "upholding international law" is more abstract and distant from the group's protection or interest. Beyond physical threats, "protecting U.S. allies under attack" could represent a reputational threat to the extent that domestic audiences see the group as shirking its responsibilities (Brutger and Kertzer 2018). At the time the survey data were collected, support for the Iraq war was in sharp decline. Thus, we expect that this would be another reputational threat to the group. This range of closeness and military attitudes allows us to effectively evaluate both the breadth and limitations of identity fusion.[2]

Explanatory variable. *Identity fusion*, a psychological group attachment, has previously been measured using dynamic, verbal, and pictorial approaches. All three methodologies have been found to measure identity fusion successfully (Gómez and Vázquez 2015). Here, we partake in the pictorial approach which asks respondents "Which of these pictures best represents your relationship with the following group: military veterans?" and then asks them to select an image which indicates the degree of personal identification with a larger group, as represented by small and large circles (see Figure 1). This measure, developed by Swann et al. (2009), offers respondents five possible relationships between the respondent's self-identity and that of a group.[3] Respondents selecting image E are considered fused to their group, as the self is completely engulfed in the group, where all other selections are considered nonfused as they visibly lack a full commitment to the group (Swann et al. 2009). We agree with Gómez and Vázquez (2015) that the pictorial approach is better able to prevent respondents from guessing what we are measuring. Furthermore, it appropriately builds on our conceptualization of psychological attachment.

Controls. In order to ensure that these military attitudes are a function of someone's psychological group attachment with the military and not any alternative social proximity or political or social reasoning, we control for a number of factors. *Military Service* is a dummy variable indicating whether an individual is currently serving in the military (n = 5) or has served in the past (n = 169). *Family served* indicates whether an individual has a family member or had a family member in the military service. These are held relative to individuals who have no relation to individuals serving in the military, nor have served themselves. *Ideology* is a five-point scale from very liberal to very conservative. *Republican* and *Democrat* are dummy variables for individuals identifying with the respective parties, including party leaners, in relation to those identifying as independents or supporting other parties. *Black* and *Hispanic* are dummy variables included to account for race and ethnicity. *Age* (coded as 18+), *gender* (female = 1, male = 0), *education* (coded in six incremental categories), and

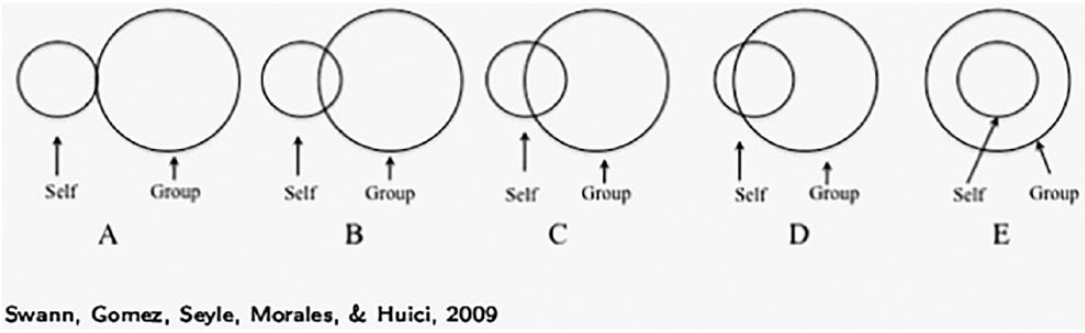

Figure 1. Pictorial scale used to measure identity fusion.

income (ranges through sixteen categories, imputed for missing values) account for demographic information. *South* is a broad indicator of geographic proximity and accounts for whether an individual is from the south or not, and is included here to capture attitudinal variation which is not accounted for by ideology (Wright, Erikson, and McIver 1987). Ideology, age, education, and income were all rescaled to range from 0 to 1 and all analyses are weighted using the given CCES weight.

Who is fused?. Before moving to the results, we first look at *who* is psychologically attached, or fused, to military veterans. As expected, those psychologically attached are also socially attached, but not exclusively. Out of the 992 respondents who answered the identity fusion question, we find that a substantial number of respondents were fused to military veterans (n = 343, or 34.6%). Of the 343 respondents who considered themselves fused to military veterans, 106 of those have current or past military experience. Thus, a majority of fused number of respondents considered themselves fused despite a lack of objective membership (current or prior) to the group they indicated fusion with. When expanding this to fusion among respondents who are not themselves group members, but are instead family members, and thus should have social proximity, we find that an additional 216 respondents who are psychologically fused to veterans have a family member who currently or previously served. This is consistent with prior work which has found immediate family members of veterans are subject to pressures and obligations distinct from other civilians (Krueger and Pedraza 2012; Segal 1986). However, having a family member who is serving or has served (n = 391) does not guarantee that they will be psychologically attached to veterans. In this way, group membership and social proximity predicts psychological attachment, but we argue that psychological attachment goes beyond this social proximity.

Figure 2 plots the coefficients from our logistic regression model explaining identity fusion (for full table, see Online Appendix Table A2). Those who are directly engaged in the military (current or past) are more likely to express their self-identity as psychologically merged with military veterans, as are those with a family member who has served in the military, when compared to those who have no kinship tie to military veterans. It is important to note that ideology does not significantly predict identity fusion showing that this group identity is distinct from one's political ideology. Although educational attainment has received little attention in the use of force literature, we find that higher levels of education reduce the likelihood a respondent is fused to military veterans. Finally, we see that older respondents are more likely to be fused to military veterans than younger respondents.

Results

Now that we know *who* is fused, we ask whether these psychologically attached respondents have different attitudes toward military interventions than those who are not fused. Our analyses tests three hypotheses. The first two hypotheses predict that fused respondents will show support for interventions (both real and hypothetical) wherein physical or reputational threats to the group are perceived. Our true threat to the group, and its reputation, comes from support for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, where respondents were asked if they thought (1) the Iraq war was a mistake or (2) the war in Afghanistan was a mistake (H1). For hypothetical interventions, a fused respondent will show greater support for (3) ensuring the supply of oil, (4) destroying a terrorist's camp, and (5) protecting American allies under attack by foreign nations (H2). Although the threats are not "real," we expect that based on the all-encompassing nature of identity fusion, these will spark a threat to fused respondents regardless. Finally, we expect to see little difference in support where

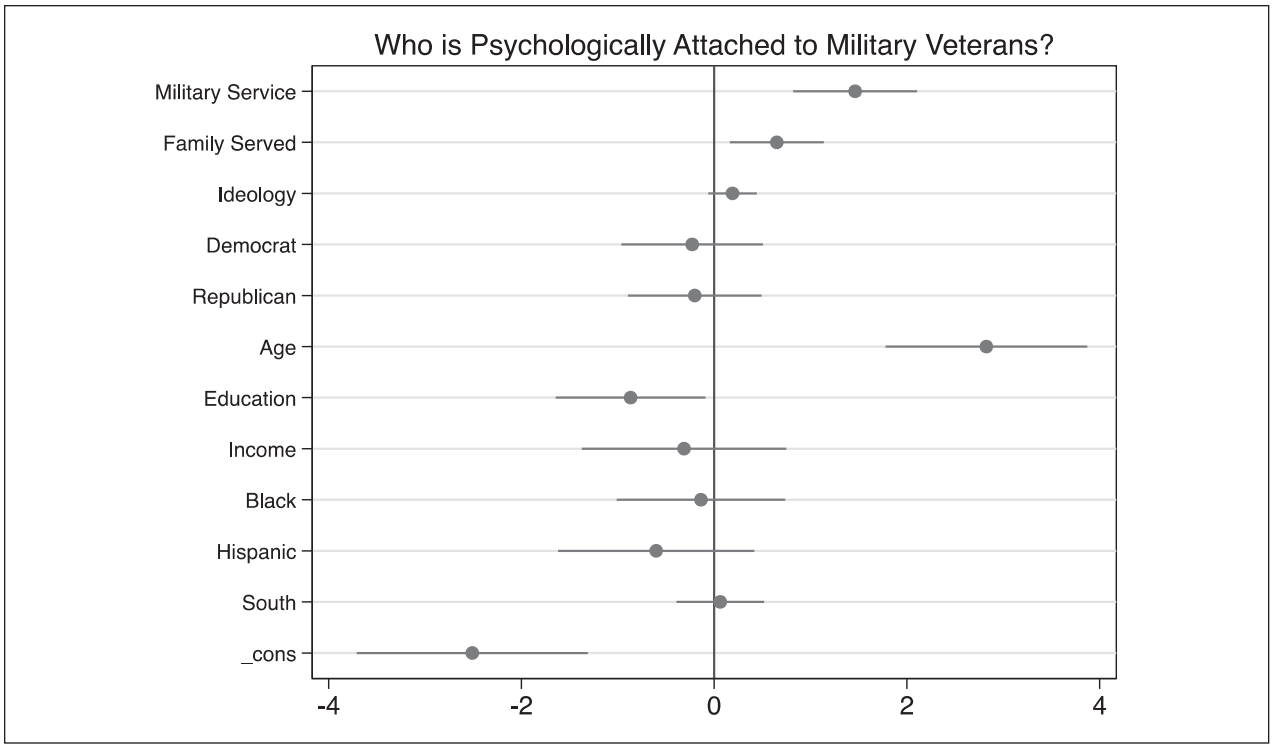

Figure 2. Coefficient plot of military veteran fusion.

hypothetical military interventions do not include a threat to the group such as (6) intervening in a region where there is genocide or a civil war, (7) assisting in the spread of democracy, (8) upholding international law, or (9) no support of using troops in any instance (H3).

Logistic regressions of these nine outcomes show, in large part, support for all three hypotheses. To start, Model 1 in Table 1 shows support for H2; when the group's reputational status is in threat, such as the case in 2011 with a large public negative backlash against the Iraq war, those who are psychologically attached continued to show support of the Iraq War. The coefficient for identity fusion in Table 1, Model 1 is negative, as fused respondents are less willing to report that the war in Iraq was a mistake. When looking at support for the Afghanistan war, however, psychological attachment to military veterans does not predict an increase or decreased level of support. The coefficient is negative, indicating fused respondents are less likely to think the war in Afghanistan was a mistake, but this is not statistically significant.

We see strong support for H2 as fused respondents show greater endorsement for hypothetical interventions where there are perceived threats to the group (Table 2, Models 1 to 3). Fused respondents are more willing to send U.S. troops in to ensure oil supply, to destroy a terrorist's camp, and to protect allies under attack. Finally, and in support of H3, in Table 2, Models 5 to 8, we see no significant difference for fused members as the use of military force in each of these instances no longer contains a physical or reputational threat to the group.

Predicted probabilities, displayed in Figure 3, show these relationships across fused and nonfused respondents for each significant outcome (Table 1, Model 1; Table 2, Models 1 to 3). Holding all other variables constant, the effect of being fused to military veterans increases one's strength in support for military interventions that threaten the group. In one instance, that support is shown as a negative slope as fused respondents are less likely to admit that the Iraq war was a mistake which reflects our findings in Model 1. The strongest effect is seen in one's willingness to send troops to destroy a terrorist's camp. Here we see that, holding all other variables constant, someone who is fused to military veterans is about 15 percent more likely to support this action than someone who is not fused.

Another notable finding in terms of individual-level factors is the lack in significance among individual-level factors across uses of force. Women and black Americans are less likely to support troops in protecting American allies and more likely to support no use of troops in any instance. These findings are consistent with prior literature, but do not predict attitudes across all models

Table 1. Logistic Regression Models of Actual Military Interventions.

	1	2
	Iraq war a mistake	Afghanistan war a mistake
Military	−0.69**	−0.32
Fusion	(0.23)	(0.24)
Family	0.01	−0.34
Served	(0.26)	(0.23)
Military	−0.59	−0.71*
Service	(0.30)	(0.34)
Ideology	−1.76*	−1.18*
	(0.73)	(0.60)
Democrat	0.21	−0.53
	(0.49)	(0.40)
Republican	−1.35**	−0.94*
	(0.47)	(0.40)
Black	−0.46	−0.04
	(0.49)	(0.38)
Hispanic	0.42	0.23
	(0.46)	(0.39)
Age	0.97	1.51**
	(0.62)	(0.57)
Gender	−0.14	−0.05
	(0.26)	(0.24)
Education	0.14	0.16
	(0.47)	(0.40)
Income	0.50	−1.04
	(0.66)	(0.54)
South	0.22	−0.41
	(0.25)	(0.24)
_cons	1.52*	1.03
	(0.70)	(0.54)
N	900	897
Pseudo R^2	.186	.079
AIC	926.15	1,014.88

Source. 2011 CCES.
Values are logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses.
All values scale from 0–1. AIC = Akaike information criterion;
CCES = Cooperative Congressional Election study.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

(Boussios and Cole 2012; Federico, Golec, and Dial 2005). We see that these individual-level factors do little to predict support in most instances, and are most reliable in predicting lack of support in general. We read these findings to be consistent with Reifler et al. (2014), who also found the predictive effects these factors diminished when compared with prior research.

Robustness Test

Within our main model, we account for relational proximity, whether an individual is involved themselves, or has a family member who served in the military. However, it may be the case that individuals who live in close proximity, or geographically, to higher rates of military casualties, will have stronger attitudes about foreign interventions. Those in close proximity to casualties may read or hear about these instances more often in the local news. This heightened awareness may cause individuals to be less supportive of foreign interventions (Althaus, Bramlett, and Gimpel 2012). To test this notion, we merged casualty rates by county with the respondents' county. Following Koch and Nicholson (2016), we measure casualty rates using data on aggregated casualties listed through the Department of Defense from 2004 to 2010 by county. This was the sum of casualties in the six years prior to the 2011 CCES. Table 3 accounts for the casualty rates of military individuals by county of the respondent and controls for the population of each county across each of the main dependent variables.[4] The results show that casualty rates do not significantly affect any of the attitudes toward military interventions, even when controlling for county population.

We use identity fusion here to examine a particularly strong variant of "belonging," one that IF scholars conceptualize as a root of extreme behavior, including support or willingness to engage in acts of violence (Swann et al. 2009). If a predisposition to use violence in support of the group is simply higher among those who link their personal identity to any particular social identity, then we may find that fusion to any group, and not a particular fusion to those who bear the direct costs of war, is sufficient to explain war attitudes. To examine this possibility, we measured fusion to three other nationally politically relevant groups active in politics: the Tea Party, religious groups, and unions. Individuals who selected option E (Figure 1) were considered fused to the respective group. Findings show that neither fusion to religious groups, nor to a union has any effect on attitudes toward military interventions (see Online Appendix, Tables A5–A7).

As a test to untangle nationalism and identity fusion, we evaluate a model with both Tea Party fusion and military veteran fusion (see Online Appendix, Table A8). Here, the aim is to exploit what we know about nationalism as a multidimensional concept and use a measure of fusion to the Tea Party as proxy for some of the ethnocentric attitudes present in cultural nationalism, chauvinism, and Tea Party discourse.[5] By accounting for ethnocentrism, via an individual's identity fusion to the Tea Party, we present a cleaner comparison of how variation in psychological attachment to veterans translates into support for military intervention. The results show that military fusion remains a significant predictor in the instances of threat to the group, even controlling for fusion to the Tea Party.[6] Thus, support for real and hypothetical interventions do pivot on the symbolic representation of military veterans as defenders of our country.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models of Hypothetical Military Interventions.

	Threat to group			Nonthreat to group			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Ensure oil	Destroy camp	Protect ally	Intervene	Spread Dem.	Uphold int'l law	No aid
Military	0.59*	0.69**	0.62*	0.38	0.55	−0.16	−0.88
Fusion	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.29)	(0.25)	(0.48)
Family	0.09	0.36	0.12	0.12	0.08	−0.01	0.24
Served	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.22)	(0.31)	(0.24)	(0.40)
Military	0.42	0.37	−0.23	−0.08	−0.02	−0.22	0.47
Service	(0.31)	(0.35)	(0.40)	(0.31)	(0.36)	(0.30)	(0.67)
Ideology	1.32*	1.74**	2.03**	−0.83	1.06	−1.76**	−0.38
	(0.58)	(0.57)	(0.67)	(0.50)	(0.63)	(0.53)	(1.29)
Democrat	0.41	1.00**	0.91*	0.49	0.61	0.64	−0.80
	(0.45)	(0.38)	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.66)	(0.39)	(0.58)
Republican	0.99*	1.19**	0.66	0.12	0.83	−0.24	−1.03
	(0.43)	(0.39)	(0.41)	(0.41)	(0.68)	(0.38)	(0.54)
Black	0.23	−0.51	−1.28**	−0.25	0.71	−0.65	1.67**
	(0.41)	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.36)	(0.45)	(0.40)	(0.48)
Hispanic	−0.62	−0.30	−0.76	−0.58	0.51	0.20	0.48
	(0.56)	(0.38)	(0.45)	(0.40)	(0.65)	(0.49)	(0.57)
Age	−0.50	−0.69	−2.08**	−1.40**	−1.02	−1.34**	0.80
	(0.54)	(0.55)	(0.53)	(0.50)	(0.60)	(0.52)	(0.78)
Gender	−0.15	−0.39	−0.85**	−0.41	−0.11	−0.36	1.69**
	(0.28)	(0.26)	(0.28)	(0.22)	(0.30)	(0.25)	(0.50)
Education	0.49	1.16*	1.13*	0.72	0.01	0.71	−2.92**
	(0.41)	(0.49)	(0.46)	(0.39)	(0.57)	(0.41)	(0.82)
Income	−0.70	0.84	0.07	0.54	−0.84	−0.56	0.07
	(0.56)	(0.63)	(0.59)	(0.55)	(0.74)	(0.54)	(0.91)
South	0.16	0.22	0.12	−0.01	0.22	0.04	−0.65
	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.22)	(0.30)	(0.23)	(0.39)
_cons	−2.67**	−1.88**	0.10	−0.14	−2.71**	1.43**	−2.09*
	(0.64)	(0.54)	(0.58)	(0.59)	(0.76)	(0.54)	(0.84)
N	900	900	900	900	900	900	900
Pseudo R^2	.08	.12	.12	.05	.05	.12	.21
AIC	849.82	906.79	811.19	1,057.53	687.58	1,010.82	347.12

Source. 2011 CCES.
Values are logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. All values scale from 0 to 1. AIC = Akaike information criterion; CCES = Cooperative Congressional Election study.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

We find that it is not close proximity by way of being related to a member of the armed services, nor is it geographic proximity, but by nature of being close to instances of higher military deaths, that predicts one's attitudes toward military involvement. And while we are unable to directly measure nationalism or ethnocentrism, we have shown that fusion to military veterans, even after culling a person's fusion to groups with strong nationalist and ethnocentric underpinnings (e.g., Tea Party), suggests the importance of a psychological attachment to warriors beyond related, but distinct central elements of nationalism.

Discussion and Conclusion

By looking at individual-level factors that feed into a group-centric psychological concept, we have uncovered a group of people who have distinct views on foreign military interventions. These attitudes do not strictly correspond to universal pro-intervention views. This group also thinks differently from the rest of the public in its willingness to commit troops in unknown or more risky situations. Individuals who are fused to military veterans exhibit a distinct strength in attitudes toward military interventions only when they view a threat to their group.

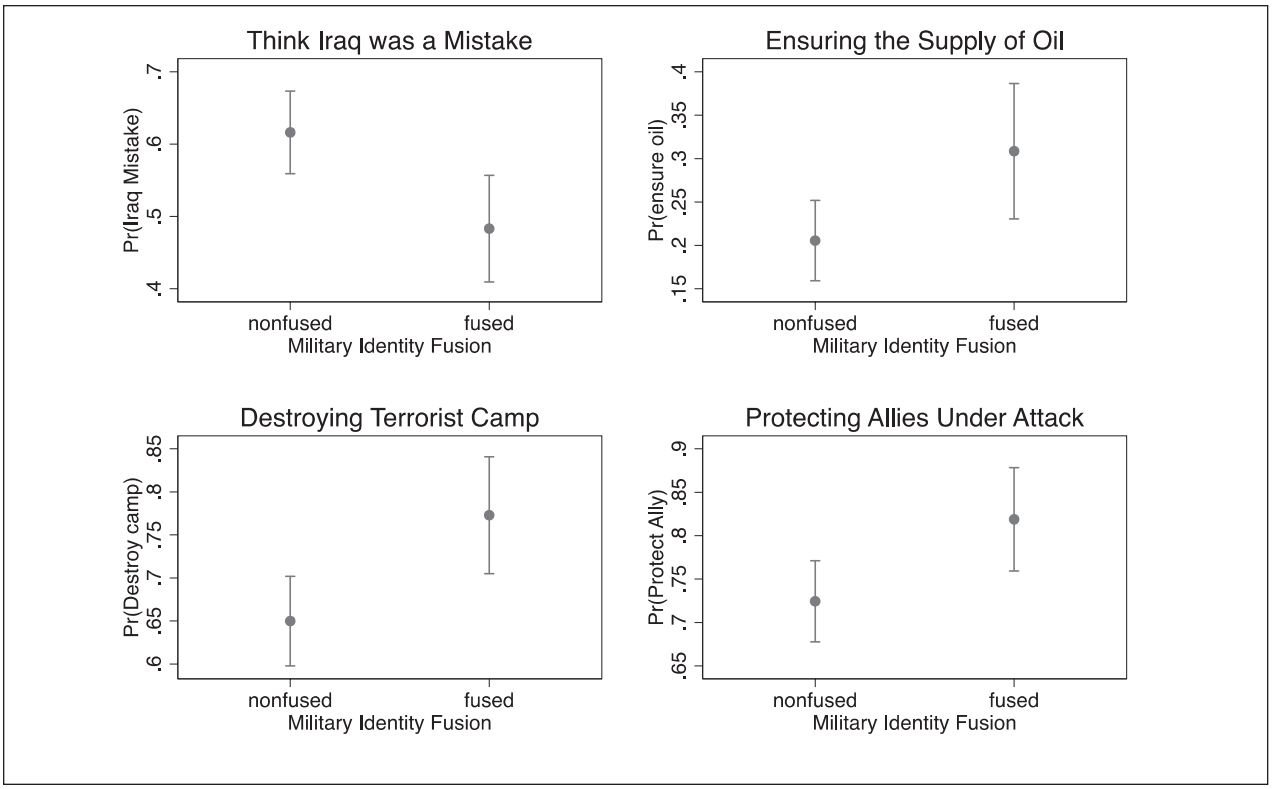

Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of military interventions for fused and nonfused respondents (Table 1, Model 1, Table 2, Models 1 to 3).
Source. 2011 CCES.
Predicted values based on Table 1, Model 1; Table 2, Models 1 to 3, setting covariates at sample means or modes. CCES = Cooperative Congressional Election study.

This occurs in both hypothetical and actual uses of military force where the threat may be physical or reputational, but in each instance, the group has something to lose. We see that fused respondents are more likely to support military troops to ensure the supply of oil, to destroy terrorist's camps, and to protect American allies. Fused respondents are also less willing to admit that the Iraq war was a mistake. When there is little to no hypothetical threat to the group, such as in upholding international law or spreading democracy, we see no difference in support.

One result did give us pause. We did not find that fused respondents were more in support of the Afghanistan war (or admit that it was not a mistake). We suggest one of several explanations: (1) Afghanistan constituted a lesser threat to reputation than the war in Iraq, or (2) as other scholars have noted, the dynamics of public opinion differ substantially between Afghanistan and Iraq, and that broader public support for the war in Afghanistan masks the effect for ethnocentrics or military veteran fused respondents (see also Kam and Kinder 2007, 329).

Here we have theorized a psychological group attachment that helps to explain attitudes for specific military interventions. Whereas previous work has described aggregate public attitudes toward specific forms of intervention, we advance a novel approach to disaggregate the public using a specific group-concept, psychological attachment. Incorporating this theory into the uses of force literature helps to explain why a certain portion of the public, those fused with military veterans, would have specific attitudes for some military interventions. Leveraging a proxy measure of ethnocentrism in order to partial out from our analysis a core dimension of nationalism, our robustness checks show that it is not fusion to just any particular national group, but rather fusion specifically to military veterans in particular that show responses to military group threats. We believe that this measure of psychological attachment to military veterans is distinct, but complementary to the most recent research on nationalism and attitudes toward military interventions. First, identity fusion is grounded in both personal and social identities whereas nationalism is grounded in social identity.

Table 3. Military Fusion in Support of Foreign Interventions, Controlling for Local Casualties.

	Threat to group				Nonthreat to group			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Iraq mistake	Ensure oil	Destroy camp	Protect ally	Intervene	Spread Dem.	Uphold int'l law	No aid
Military fusion	−0.65*	0.66*	0.66*	0.15	0.43	0.54	−0.11	−0.29
	(0.27)	(0.32)	(0.28)	(0.33)	(0.28)	(0.33)	(0.30)	(0.57)
Casualties	**–2.64**	**–2.03**	**4.01**	**0.17**	**3.72**	**–0.62**	**–0.98**	**2.76**
	(3.00)	(3.42)	(3.23)	(2.84)	(2.74)	(3.38)	(2.99)	(4.23)
County	2.62	1.39	−4.44	−0.72	−3.61	1.37	0.59	−1.81
Population	(3.01)	(3.17)	(3.16)	(2.86)	(2.75)	(3.42)	(2.91)	(4.26)
Family	−0.15	−0.03	−0.03	0.01	−0.01	0.04	−0.12	0.36
Served	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.30)	(0.26)	(0.35)	(0.28)	(0.53)
Military	−0.67*	0.85*	0.19	0.10	−0.06	0.23	−0.40	−0.02
Service	(0.33)	(0.34)	(0.40)	(0.44)	(0.34)	(0.41)	(0.36)	(0.91)
Ideology	−1.82*	1.69*	1.80**	2.59**	−0.54	1.03	−2.35**	0.75
	(0.87)	(0.72)	(0.68)	(0.81)	(0.57)	(0.76)	(0.64)	(1.49)
Democrat	0.29	0.91	0.96*	0.83	0.75	0.81	0.52	−0.52
	(0.60)	(0.56)	(0.46)	(0.50)	(0.51)	(0.77)	(0.46)	(0.71)
Republican	−1.20*	1.20*	1.48**	0.34	0.22	1.06	−0.34	−0.93
	(0.55)	(0.54)	(0.45)	(0.51)	(0.51)	(0.80)	(0.45)	(0.59)
Black	−0.71	0.17	−0.20	−1.23**	0.05	0.73	−0.26	1.11
	(0.60)	(0.52)	(0.47)	(0.48)	(0.44)	(0.55)	(0.49)	(0.67)
Hispanic	0.34	−0.30	−0.20	−0.85	−0.49	0.71	0.67	0.53
	(0.53)	(0.68)	(0.46)	(0.47)	(0.46)	(0.71)	(0.57)	(0.60)
Age	0.81	−0.98	−0.85	−2.08**	−1.40*	−1.27	−0.81	0.14
	(0.76)	(0.69)	(0.65)	(0.63)	(0.57)	(0.70)	(0.62)	(1.09)
Gender	0.09	−0.29	−0.21	−0.88**	−0.47	−0.15	−0.68*	2.11**
	(0.29)	(0.32)	(0.28)	(0.31)	(0.25)	(0.33)	(0.29)	(0.61)
Education	−0.09	0.56	1.22*	1.09*	0.49	−0.60	0.79	−3.58**
	(0.54)	(0.46)	(0.55)	(0.53)	(0.46)	(0.67)	(0.48)	(1.03)
Income	0.49	−0.97	0.64	0.34	0.89	−0.62	−0.54	0.12
	(0.80)	(0.67)	(0.65)	(0.68)	(0.63)	(0.82)	(0.64)	(1.09)
South	0.31	0.02	−0.01	0.22	−0.13	0.30	0.28	−1.37*
	(0.34)	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.29)	(0.38)	(0.30)	(0.57)
_cons	1.99	−3.01**	−1.85*	0.38	0.21	−2.77*	2.88**	−5.16**
	(1.10)	(1.01)	(0.88)	(0.93)	(0.96)	(1.10)	(0.90)	(1.12)
N	660	660	660	660	660	660	660	660
Pseudo R^2	.18	.1	.12	.14	.06	.07	.15	.25
AIC	701.43	622.8	683.21	594.43	802.45	527.73	746.04	250.41

Source. 2011 CCES.
Values are logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. All values scale from 0 to 1. AIC = Akaike information criterion; CCES = Cooperative Congressional Election study.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Second, while both nationalism and identity fusion emphasize social belonging, the former is also defined by exclusionary elements. Nevertheless, future research should further distinguish and decouple nationalism and identity fusion to veterans as they are both psychological group attachments.

This work has also contributed to the group proximity/relational identity literature. It provides a test of the psychological proximity (attachment) which moves beyond the social proximity literature (Krueger and Pedraza 2012) by using identity fusion. Here, one's positional attitude toward military veterans extends to current and hypothetical situations wherein one is possessed to protect the group at all costs. We find that fused respondents are more willing to support military interventions when there is an observable threat to their group, be it

physical or reputational. Importantly, this psychological attachment is conceptually distinct from both social proximity and from other individual-level characteristics, such as ideology. Our findings are robust with respect to both the actual and hypothetical interventions, and we call for further use of this measure in future research.

Looking to the future, this work sketches an expanded role for the study of identity fusion in political science. Further research on military intervention or foreign policy could be improved to the extent that individuals fused with relevant ethnic or national groups. Perception of physical or reputational threats by groups relating to other public policies, such as those on taxation and the economy also lend themselves to further examination. Identity fusion may also contribute to the literature on racial threat and immigration policy insofar as groups defined by ethnicity or time within a community undergoing rapid demographic change may exhibit the intensity of self-group identification to meet the requisites of identity fusion.

Our work suggests that identity fusion's explanatory power extends beyond acts to attitudes. This is a critical step in extending its applicability beyond existing work on self-sacrifice and acts of terrorism. Further work on translating identity fusion into a robust theory of public opinion is needed. This first step for identity fusion demonstrates that there exists a natural home for this work in political science, better understanding the range of its contributions is our next step.

This work also adds to the growing literature on individual characteristics in public opinion on military attitudes. Our measure of psychological attachment to military veterans outperforms both traditional measures of "objective" membership, such as veteran status, as well as ideology, a measure which has received much more scholarly attention of late. This contribution adds to the ongoing discussion of which individual factors drive differences of opinion on actual and hypothetical military interventions and suggests the importance for further probing the circumstances in which each of these approaches is more or less appropriate in future studies. For instance, one avenue for further exploration is to disentangle group membership from group attachment: additional analysis restricted to civilians (see Online Appendix) showed that fused respondents expressed support for additional forms of intervention. A scenario, where civilians with a strong group attachment desire an expanded mission for veterans when veterans do not, calls for a very different interpretation and discussion of democratic representation than one where variation in veterans' psychological attachment to veterans leads differences in public opinion about military engagements.

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Notes

1. Oil has been considered a strategic consideration for intervention by others (Kreps and Maxey 2018). Although these considerations failed to motivate respondents in the aggregate, we expect fusion would elicit a clearer response relative to nonfused respondents.
2. These variables also address concerns raised by scholars who suggest that using variables which measure ongoing or past interventions can introduce a hindsight or simultaneity problem (Berinsky and Druckman 2007; Boussios and Cole 2012; Mader 2015) with the extensive battery of hypothetical tests. For scholars who suggest that hypothetical interventions inflate the magnitude of effects over the real world (Reifler et al. 2014), we include the measure of an actual intervention with the "Iraq Mistake?" variable.
3. Verbal measures of identity fusion have also been employed. Results suggest similar rates of respondent identification as fused or nonfused from both the verbal and pictorial measures (Gómez et al. 2011).
4. Support for the war in Afghanistan is not included in these analyses. Because support was not found in the initial hypotheses, it was excluded from further analyses.
5. Identity fusion has often relied on one's nation as a group for evaluating its claims (Buhrmester et al. 2015; Swann et al. 2009). While we believe our group, military veterans, is distinct from the nation, we recognize the possibility that individuals could interpret a group emblematic of the nation as a proxy for it. Other groups, including the Tea Party and union members (see Online Appendix), are less likely to be emblematic of the nation for respondents. We acknowledge that this is not a perfect test to control for nationalism. While we agree that nationalism and fusion to military veterans are likely closely linked, we believe that they are different concepts. While nationalism has been defined as a social identity (Wolak and Dawkins 2017), fusion has been defined as a molding of personal and social identities. Swann et al. (2009) show that fusion is a distinct group attachment, but that fused individuals did not differ significantly in their beliefs about their national identity.
6. Support of Iraq War, ensuring the supply of oil and destroying a terrorist camp were all significant at the $p < .05$ level. Protecting an ally under attack dropped to $p < .1$.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental materials and replication materials for this article are available with the manuscript on the *Political Research Quarterly* (PRQ) website: http://www.franciscoipedraza.com/research/

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