

1. Title and Name

US Military Casualties in the Iraq War and Public Opinion

-With CBS-NYT, ABC-WP and Fox News Polls-

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2. Abstract

This study examines how and to what extent military casualties affect US domestic opinion proxied by various media poll questions concerning the recently terminated military operation in Iraq after having prolonged for 7 years since 2003. Principal findings of the time series analysis conforms to the conventional wisdom that increasing military casualties result in decreased support towards the war. The general support captured in the 'right/wrong' type or the 'worth' type poll questions tapping the justification of the war, was severely aggravated as military casualties accumulated. Furthermore, the presidential approval ratings on war issues signified by the 'approve' type poll questions had substantially been affected by cumulative casualties after the initial rally 'round the flag effect disappeared. The poll respondents, however, showed distinctive attitudes when faced with a practical issue; whether the military forces should stay in Iraq or be withdrawn. When the respondents were asked this 'stay/go' type questions, neither cumulative nor marginal casualties during the recent week prior to the polls were useful in predicting opinion. This differentia of the respondents' attitudes implies that whilst political rhetoric for the justification of war is quickly washed out as military casualties grow, public consensus towards the continuation or cessation of military operations is shaped without reference to the accumulation of death tolls. These findings suggest that the casualty based approach in examining the opinion-casualty nexus should be reconsidered when it comes to the prospective judgement represented by the stay/go type poll questions.