



# Center for Effective Lawmaking

## **Deployed to the Hill: How Military Experience Influences Legislative Behavior in Congress**

**Joseph G. Amoroso**  
**United States Military Academy, West Point**

### **Abstract:**

Congress is more polarized than ever before. There are fewer military veterans serving in Congress than ever before. Candidates with military experience and their supporters think that electing more veterans will help reduce dysfunction and gridlock. They claim that military values, such as duty and teamwork, translate into differences in legislative behavior. Are veteran lawmakers more effective than those without military experience? Are they more bipartisan? Drawing on House data from the 104<sup>th</sup> to 116<sup>th</sup> congresses (1995-2021), I examine the extent to which military experience influences a lawmaker's capacity to advance legislation and engage in bipartisan behavior. I find that veteran lawmakers are more effective when it comes to moving consequential bills through the lawmaking process. Additionally, veterans appear more willing to collaborate with members of the opposite party, particularly during recent congresses. I consider the impact of these results on the maintenance of healthy civil-military relations in America.

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*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the United States Military Academy, the Department of Defense, or any part of the U.S. government.*

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*As a helicopter aircraft commander, I never asked if someone was a Republican or a Democrat before starting a mission. I knew we were all Americans and we all had the same mission. And my mission now is to bring that experience to Washington, to bring a different kind of leadership to Congress – Leadership that will move this country forward and leaders who will listen to people and put their interests ahead of party.*  
- Representative Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ-11)<sup>1</sup>

Representative Mikie Sherrill is certainly not the first candidate to emphasize her military background on the campaign trail. Veteran candidates frequently tout their time in uniform, most often signaling to voters their competence on issues relating to national security or foreign affairs (e.g., Hardy et al. 2019; McDermott and Panagopoulos 2015; Teigen 2012). Recently, however, veteran status has come to indicate more than just policy expertise. One editorial contends, “Lawmakers who have served in the military often have a special sense of duty and an uncommon ability to reach across party lines and get things done” (Barcott and Wood 2017).<sup>2</sup> In another recent article, a bipartisan group of veterans in Congress explain that “In the military, the goal is to effectively execute the mission at hand. Regardless of background, experience or ideology, our actions were in service to and for country.” The veteran lawmakers go on to say that they are committed to “continuing that ethos in Congress” (Panetta et al. 2019).<sup>3</sup> Claims like these illustrate an emerging narrative that suggests veterans, armed with an appreciation of military values such as commitment to duty and teamwork, behave differently on Capitol Hill. More specifically, veteran lawmakers are assumed to be more productive and cooperative members of Congress (e.g., Riley-Topping 2019; Panetta et al. 2019).

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<sup>1</sup> “Why I’m Running,” <https://www.mikiesherrill.com/page/why-im-running/> (accessed January 19, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> The 2017 editorial introduces the founding of *With Honor*, a political action committee “dedicated to promoting and advancing principled veteran leadership in order to reduce polarization.” Supported veteran congressional candidates sign a pledge “to put principles before politics” (<https://withhonor.org/>).

<sup>3</sup> Consistent with the With Honor mission, veteran members of Congress launched the bipartisan For Country Caucus in 2019 (<https://vantaylor.house.gov/forcountry/>). This quote is from a *Washington Post* op-ed introducing the For Country Caucus.

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

Investigating the link between military experience and political behavior is not without precedent. Scholars of international relations find that military experience can influence leaders’ diplomatic policy preferences and decisions over the use of force (e.g., Horowitz, et al. 2018; Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis 2015; Sechser 2004). Fewer in number, studies in the American context tend to find the same thing (e.g., Bianco 2005; Gelpi and Feaver 2002; Lupton 2017, 2022). The message invoked by Representative Sherrill and many of her contemporaries, however, is less about defense expertise and more about work ethic and cooperation. Missing from the existing literature is a consideration of how military service might impact a broader range of governing behaviors.

Are veteran members of Congress more effective and bipartisan than their colleagues without military experience? This paper investigates this central question, examining the impact of a military background on lawmaking performance. I draw upon literature on representation, legislative behavior, and civil-military relations to cast the contemporary veteran narrative as a

theory. I hypothesize that values learned or strengthened during military service, such as duty, teamwork, and selfless service, translate into higher levels of legislative productivity and greater bipartisan cooperation. Drawing on data from the 104<sup>th</sup> to 116<sup>th</sup> congresses (1995-2020), this study offers one of the first comprehensive empirical assessments of the relationship between veteran status and congressional behavior. Taken together, the results suggest that veterans in the House are somewhat more effective and bipartisan than their nonveteran colleagues—a normatively encouraging sign for those committed to reducing partisan dysfunction in Congress.

### ***How a Lawmaker's Background Matters***

Scholars have long been interested in how personal characteristics and experiences influence both electoral success and governance. Much of this prior work is grounded in theories of representation. Voters often seek representatives based on the demonstration of certain qualities that serve as reliable indicators of their core values and future political behavior (e.g., Fenno 1978; Popkin 1991). Relatedly, these representatives bear a unique sense of responsibility based on the expectations associated with their defining characteristics (Mansbridge 2003; Bianco 1994).<sup>4</sup> These ideas are foundational to the veteran narrative. The public's high degree of trust in the military and the institution's tradition of values might guide the actions of veterans serving in elective office.

Building on these concepts and largely outside the context of veterans, scholars examine the extent to which traits and experiences can result in substantive representation, where lawmakers act for constituents and on behalf of their expressed interests. Many of these studies

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<sup>4</sup> Here I refer to Mansbridge's "gyroscopic representation" where the representative "looks within for guidance in taking action" (2003, 520). This type of representative relies on principles derived from her upbringing and experiences. This is one of several forms of representation described by Mansbridge, who adds nuance to traditional models of representation (2003).

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

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

### ***Can Military Experience Shape Legislative Behavior?***

I contend that military service, like other influential life experiences, can similarly impact a member's broader approach to lawmaking. The study of civil-military relations has long been interested in how military experience relates to political attitudes and behaviors (Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960; Jennings and Markus 1977; Dempsey 2010). When it comes to elite political behavior, much of this work centers on related policy areas such as defense, diplomacy, or veterans' affairs. This is not surprising, considering these are the areas in which military expertise should be most salient. Experiences and knowledge gained while serving in the military inform leaders' understanding about the costs of war and the requirements needed to succeed in conflict (e.g., Gelpi and Feaver 2002; Horowitz and Stam 2014).

The limited work on military experience and legislative behavior similarly focuses on matters of defense. In her analysis of congressional roll call votes, Lupton (2017; 2022) finds compelling evidence that throughout history veteran lawmakers have maintained distinct attitudes regarding how much oversight Congress should exert on defense policy.<sup>5</sup> Beyond voting behavior, research also finds that veteran lawmakers are more likely to engage unilaterally with federal bureaucratic agencies on behalf of veteran constituents (Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019). Taken together, the literature suggests that military service is a meaningful life experience that noticeably impacts a veteran lawmaker's representation of national security interests and those of other veterans, active-duty servicemembers, and their families.<sup>6</sup>

Can military experience influence behavior beyond issues of defense and veteran benefits? After all, the dominant veteran campaign narrative emphasized today is less about

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<sup>5</sup> More specifically, Lupton finds that compared to nonveterans, Vietnam-era veteran legislators supported less restriction on defense policies (2022), while post-9/11 veteran members appear more likely to vote in favor of increasing war oversight (2017).

<sup>6</sup> There are some notable studies that find conflicting evidence. Bianco (2005) finds that military experience does not impact vote choice on key defense bills and Cormack (2018) finds that veteran members are no more likely than nonveterans to sponsor legislation regarding veteran social benefits.

particular policies and more about claims regarding general legislative performance. In a recent interview, Army veteran and Maryland Congressman Anthony Brown said, “What I know about veterans who have served in the military is that we are problem solvers, we focus first on mission...we understand that we may disagree, but we have a responsibility to find common ground” (Brown 2018). Brown joins countless others in highlighting two domains in which military servicemembers are expected to excel: mission accomplishment and teamwork. In the context of legislative behavior, the claim suggests that these qualities translate into greater productivity and bipartisanship among veteran lawmakers.

### ***Veterans and Legislative Effectiveness***

A lawmaker’s primary mission on Capitol Hill is legislative success. Advancing one’s agenda through the lawmaking process contributes to policy success, achieving influence, and future electoral prospects (e.g., Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1973, 1978). Veterans in Congress maintain that values strengthened during military service make them exceptionally focused on accomplishing this mission on behalf of constituents. The words “duty” or “commitment” appear in the values statements of every military service branch (Mattox 2013). Relatedly, a sense of civic duty or “service to country” remains a dominant motivation informing recruits’ decisions to join the military (Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal 2006; Helmus et al. 2018). From the first day of “boot camp,” servicemembers are taught to internalize the military’s values and rely on them to guide their behavior in uniform. Studies have shown that the socialization of these values can leave a lasting impression on veterans, impacting their participation in civic life (e.g., Janowitz 1983; Mettler 2005; Leal and Teigen 2018).

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

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

A recent study offers some preliminary insight regarding the expected link between military service and legislative productivity in Congress.<sup>7</sup> In a working paper, Hagner (2020) finds evidence to suggest that veteran lawmakers who deployed in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are more effective at advancing legislation than both nonveterans and veterans who served prior to 9/11. Despite these initial findings, his analysis is limited in that the significant results are based on very few observations.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in this paper I more directly

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<sup>7</sup> With data on bill introductions and laws passed in four states, Best and Vonnahme (2021) also examine legislative productivity among veteran lawmakers. While the authors find that veteran legislators do focus on similar policy agendas, their results indicate that veteran state lawmakers are no more productive than their nonveteran peers. Additionally, in his dissertation research on veterans in Congress, Richardson (2018) found little evidence that veteran lawmakers were more effective. His work focused mostly on veterans serving in the Senate. His analysis of LES among members of the House of Representatives was limited to only two sessions (2011-2015).

<sup>8</sup> In a dataset with over 9,600 member-Congress observations, 59 fit the category of "deployed following 9/11" (Hagner 2020, 7).



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

### ***Veterans and Bipartisanship***

Legislative progress in Congress depends heavily on bipartisanship. Empirical evidence demonstrates that in an institution constrained by multiple veto players, super-majoritarian requirements, and strong electoral incentives, cross-party coalitions are critical to advancing legislation and addressing policy problems (e.g., Krehbiel 1998; Harbridge 2015; Adler and Wilkerson 2013). Thus, lawmakers must team up with members of the opposite party to achieve their agenda goals, even amid contemporary polarization (Curry and Lee 2020). Recent work finds compelling evidence that this sort of bipartisan behavior increases members' legislative effectiveness in Congress (Harbridge-Yong, Volden, and Wiseman 2020). If lawmakers are motivated to advance their legislative agendas, bipartisan collaboration is key to achieving success. Research on bipartisanship suggests that personal connections and shared experiences between lawmakers are central to fostering such cross-partisan teamwork (e.g., Koger 2003; Fowler 2006; Kirkland 2011; Craig 2021; Fong 2020).<sup>9</sup> Given these insights, are veteran lawmakers particularly well-suited to bridge the partisan gap?

The military is often characterized as a “team of teams” (e.g., McChrystal et al. 2015). Speaking about veterans, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates said, “In putting on the

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<sup>9</sup> Lawless, Theriault, and Guthrie (2018) find that this is not always the case. In their study of women in Congress, the authors find that while female lawmakers are more likely to engage in social activities that build comradery, there is no evidence that they engage in more bipartisan legislative behavior. Their research suggests that for both women and men, partisanship seems to trump any motivation to reach across the aisle.

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

So far, there is limited evidence drawing a link between veteran lawmakers and teamwork on Capitol Hill, most of which is anecdotal.<sup>10</sup> Following World War II, when the proportion of veterans in Congress was at its highest, the shared experience of military service brought members together to advance key legislation (e.g., Koger 2003, 29). Today, the House’s bipartisan “For Country Caucus” unites veteran members who seek “a less polarized Congress that works for— and is trusted by—Americans.”<sup>11</sup> In a recent opinion article, former Republican Senator Richard Lugar and former Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle recall how their own

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<sup>10</sup> A notable exception is the research by Richardson (2018), who mostly focused on measuring the bipartisan behavior of veterans in the U.S. Senate.

<sup>11</sup> “Our Mission,” <https://vantaylor.house.gov/forcountry/> (accessed January 4, 2022).

experiences in the military influenced their attitudes toward bipartisanship.<sup>12</sup> “We think it’s no coincidence,” they write, “that the current dysfunction in Congress comes as the number of lawmakers with military experience is at a historic low” (Lugar and Daschle 2017).

Committed to a legacy of encouraging greater bipartisanship, these former senators both founded organizations dedicated to this mission.<sup>13</sup> The Lugar Center, in particular, developed a Bipartisan Index that uses sponsorship and cosponsorship data to score the extent to which members of Congress engage in bipartisan lawmaking. In their article, Lugar and Daschle highlight simple comparative results suggesting veteran lawmakers score higher on the index than their nonveteran colleagues (Lugar and Daschle 2017).<sup>14</sup> A study building on The Lugar Center’s early findings further examines veteran bipartisanship in the House by relying on comparisons of DW-NOMINATE scores as a proxy for bipartisan behavior (Robinson et al 2018). Although the authors find little evidence of greater bipartisanship among veterans, their analysis is limited in that DW-NOMINATE scores are largely used to measure legislators’ relative ideological preferences rather than describe one’s bipartisan, consensus-building behavior (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Lee 2009). The persistence of the veteran bipartisanship narrative and the limited empirical analysis of these claims leads to the second hypothesis:

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

To be clear, it is possible that the same team-building values expected to lead veterans to reach across the aisle could alternatively lead to greater partisan loyalty. This could have the

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<sup>12</sup> Many media accounts highlight the spirit of compromise shared by other famous veteran lawmakers including Gerald Ford, Bob Michel, Daniel Inouye, John McCain, Bob Dole, John Kerry, and Chuck Hagel.

<sup>13</sup> Former Senate Democratic Leader Senator Tom Daschle cofounded the Bipartisan Policy Center (<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/about/>) and former Republican Senator Richard Lugar founded The Lugar Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated, in part, to “enhancing bipartisan governance” (<https://www.thelugarcenter.org/about.html>).

<sup>14</sup> At the time of the article’s publication in 2017, The Lugar Center’s Bipartisan Index data was limited when it came to the House of Representatives. The center reported House scores for only the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress.

opposite impact on measures of bipartisanship, but still allow veteran lawmakers to remain effective. Parties in Congress seem to act more and more like competing teams. Maintaining a seat and gaining institutional influence often requires party loyalty (e.g., Heberlig and Larson 2012). Accordingly, members of each party engage in behavior that both promotes the efforts of their own “team” and vilifies the opposition (Lee 2016). The particular narrative advanced by many veteran lawmakers, however, is that their sense of team cuts across the party divide—that veterans will “put principles before politics” to accomplish their mission.<sup>15</sup> Thus, veterans may translate their team mentality into cross-partisan collaboration while advancing their legislative agendas.

### ***Empirical Approach: 2 Tests***

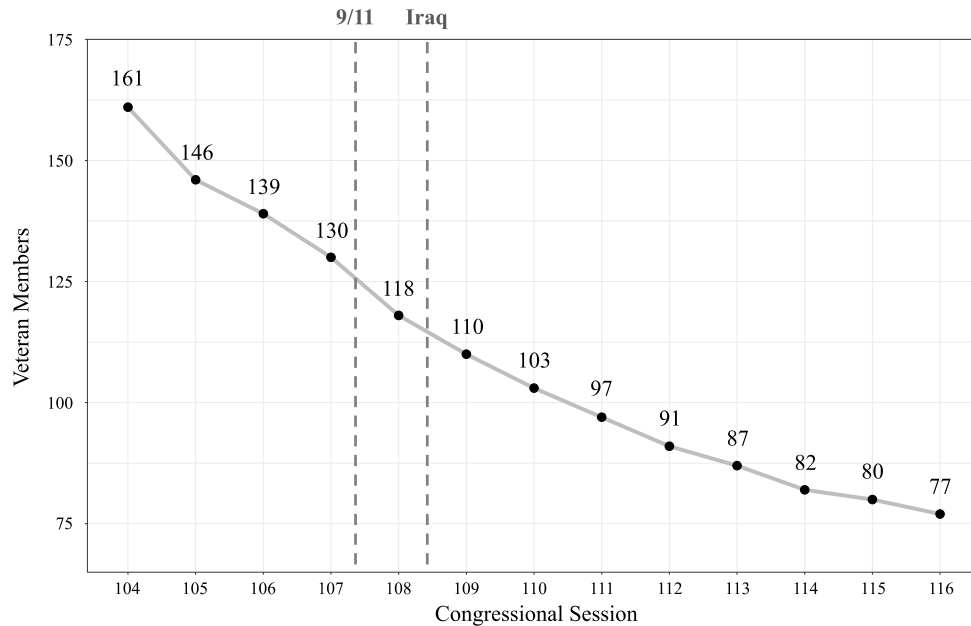
To investigate these hypotheses, I conduct two empirical tests using data from the House of Representatives for the 104<sup>th</sup> to 116<sup>th</sup> Congresses (1995-2021). These 13 legislative sessions include the sharpest decline for veterans in Congress but capture substantial diversity in military experience (Figure 1).<sup>16</sup> For the first test, I rely on Volden and Wiseman’s (2014) Legislative Effectiveness Scores (LES) to compare lawmaking productivity among veterans and nonveteran members. Second, to explore the bipartisan behavior of veteran lawmakers, I employ the latest Bipartisan Index data from the Lugar Center and supplement these evaluations with legislative cosponsorship data collected by Fowler (2006) and updated by Harbridge-Yong, Volden, and Wiseman (2020).

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<sup>15</sup> “The Pledge,” <https://withhonor.org/the-pledge/> (accessed March 10, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> This period includes data on 1,249 different members of Congress, 326 of which had some amount of military experience and 250 served on active-duty. This amounts to 5,731 member-congress observations, including 1,421 veteran member-congress observations and 1,026 active-duty member-congress observations. Veteran members in this sample served in periods of conflict from World War II to the current Global War on Terrorism, as well as during intervening times of peace. Some veteran lawmakers were subject to the draft and some volunteered. Appendix A, Table A.1 offers additional descriptive statistics for the members of Congress included in the sample.

Figure 1: Veterans Serving in the 104<sup>th</sup>-116<sup>th</sup> U.S. House of Representatives



Notes: Figure shows the total number of veterans serving in each session of Congress from 1995 to 2021

For the tests, the key independent variable is whether a lawmaker previously served in the military. To measure military experience, I gathered details regarding each member's military background using *Congressional Quarterly (CQ)* Member Profiles, cross-referenced with official and archived member websites.<sup>17</sup> It is important to highlight that not all military experiences are the same. Therefore, in addition to the basic veteran indicator, I also recorded information about the nature of each veteran member's experience. Specifically, I developed an indicator for whether a veteran member served on active-duty or in the National Guard and Reserves.<sup>18</sup> The active-duty variable is constructive because it differentiates between those

<sup>17</sup> After coding, I confirmed veteran members of Congress with lists maintained by veteranscampaign.org, a nonpartisan educational and research organization dedicated to supporting and tracking veteran candidates running for federal office.

<sup>18</sup> For this variable (1) indicates any amount of active-duty experience and (0) indicates that the member only served in either the National Guard or Reserves. According to Title 10, U.S.C. active-duty means "full-time duty in the active military service." When servicemembers from the National Guard or Reserves are deployed in support war operations, these servicemembers are considered active-duty for the period of their deployment.

members whose military service was, for some period of time, their full-time occupation.<sup>19</sup> To the extent that military service influences legislative behavior, this influence should be most salient among those with time on active duty.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Test 1: Veterans and Legislative Effectiveness Scores***

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

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<sup>19</sup> There is limited research that explores the differences in socialization between active and reserve-component military service. What literature does exist focuses on implications for behavioral health (e.g., Sanchez et al. 2004; Lane et al. 2012). These studies find that active-duty experience has greater impact on stress and job satisfaction.

<sup>20</sup> Any amount of military experience can inform an appreciation for the sacrifices and personal costs associated with military life. As such, individuals with comparatively less service can still act as surrogates on issues pertaining to veterans and their families. I primarily focus my analysis on differences between nonveterans and lawmakers with any amount of military service, while including supplemental models that examine the particular effects of active-duty service.

as opposed to other, less collaborative legislative activities, allows for the analysis of this possible association.

I explore the relationship between military experience and legislative effectiveness by estimating a series of ordinary least squares regressions. The dependent variable is a member's LES and the key independent variables are the binary indicators for general military experience and active-duty military service. Table 1 presents the results of these analyses. The first two models (1A and 1B), simply describe the bivariate relationship between general and active military experience on legislative effectiveness. For both categories, the relationship is positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). In substantive terms, these bivariate results suggest that veteran members are 35 percent more effective, and active-duty veteran members are 46 percent more effective than their nonveteran colleagues.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, these preliminary estimations suggest that active service, assumed to be the more intensive sort of military experience, has a greater substantive impact on lawmaking success.

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<sup>21</sup> Legislative Effectiveness Scores are normalized such that for each congress the average score is (1.0).

*Table 1: The Relationship between Military Experience and Legislative Effectiveness in the House of Representatives, 1995-2021*

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

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



The second two estimations (Models 1C and 1D) consider military experience relative to a range of other variables known to correlate with legislative effectiveness (Volden and Wiseman 2014). Together, these variables account for many of the institutional and individual factors that likely influence a member's approach to lawmaking.<sup>22</sup> In this multivariate context, the coefficient for general military experience (1C) is still positive but no longer statistically significant ( $p = 0.102$ ). Unsurprisingly, being a member or a leader in the majority party and serving as a committee or subcommittee chair are factors most correlated with greater legislative effectiveness.<sup>23</sup> Given the substantive differences observed in the earlier bivariate analysis, the final model (1D) estimates the impact of active-duty military experience in the multivariate context. The results suggest that experience in the active military influences legislative effectiveness, above and beyond the other factors known to play a role ( $p < 0.05$ ). Substantively, veteran members of Congress who once served on active-duty are 20 percent more effective than their colleagues. This is equivalent to about half the boost in effectiveness that members of the majority party seem to enjoy.

Prior research finds that a legislator's personal background is particularly influential in guiding proactive, resource-intensive behavior on Capitol Hill (e.g., Burden 2007; Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019). As such, I also examine veteran members' relative performance at each stage of the lawmaking process. Do veterans introduce more bills than their nonveteran colleagues? How successful are veterans at keeping this legislation moving? To address these questions, I focus on veteran members' progress on substantive and significant pieces of

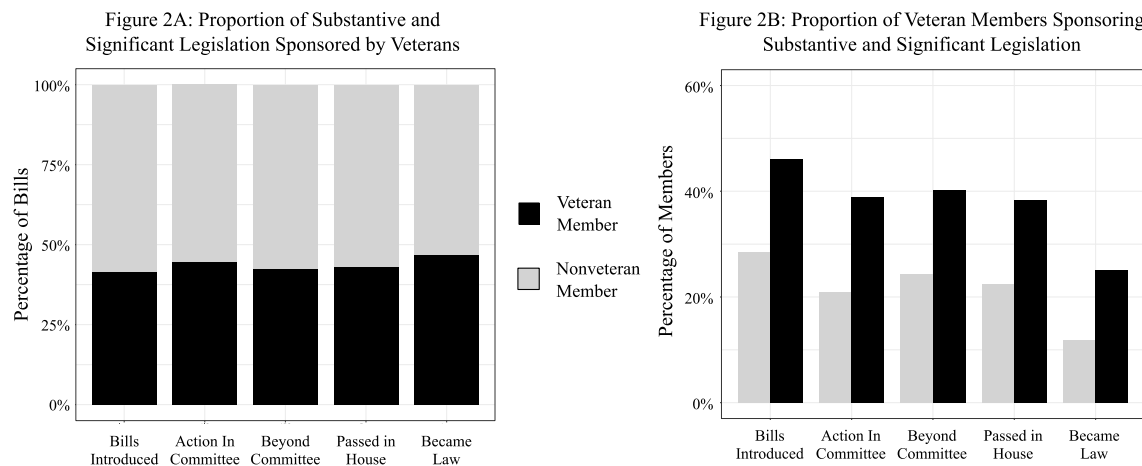
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<sup>22</sup> For a description of these additional variables, see Appendix A, Table A.2.

<sup>23</sup> It is possible that veteran members are more likely to achieve leadership positions within the House that could, in turn, increase their effectiveness. I run a series of logistic regression models where chair or leader is the dependent variable and find that veterans are not more likely to occupy these positions than their nonveteran colleagues.

legislation: bills that are considered especially consequential for public policy.<sup>24</sup> One example of this type of legislation was the Chemical Safety Improvement Act of 2016.<sup>25</sup> The bill, which was signed into law by President Obama, was the result of a bipartisan effort to substantially overhaul the country’s chemical safety standards and provide critical funding to the Environmental Protection Agency to enforce updated regulations (H.R. 2576). Republican Representative John Shimkus from Illinois, a 28-year Army veteran, introduced the legislation during 114<sup>th</sup> Congress and led negotiations to ensure its passage (Goode and Guillen 2016).

*Figure 2: Comparing Veteran and Nonveteran Lawmakers’ Performance on Substantive and Significant Legislation in the House of Representatives 1995-2021*



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

Focusing on these sorts of substantive and significant bills, Figure 2A displays the share of legislation sponsored by veteran members of Congress from 1995-2021, broken down by the

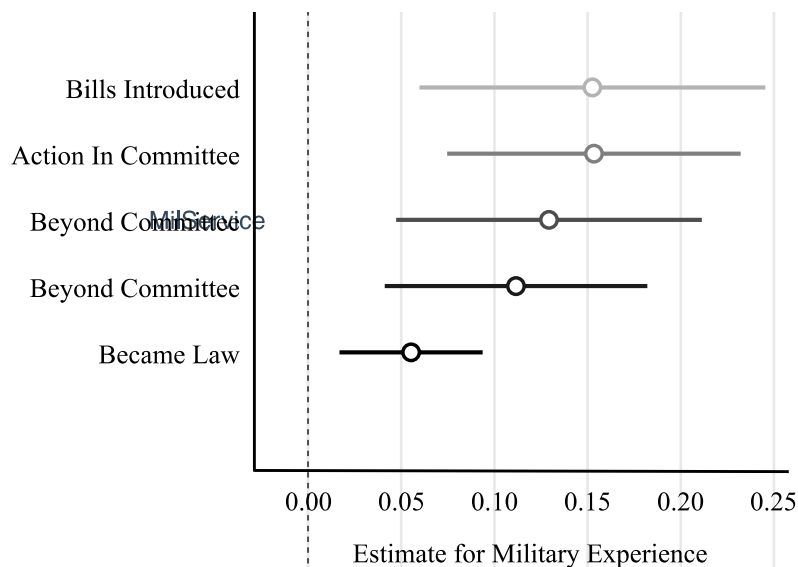
<sup>24</sup> Volden and Wiseman (2014) distinguish legislation using three categories: commemorative/symbolic; substantive; or substantive and significant. Substantive and significant legislation is highlighted by *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* in its end-of-year reports. Between 1995 and 2021, 7,212 substantive and significant bills reached at least one stage of the legislative process.

<sup>25</sup> H.R. 2576 is also known as the Frank Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/2576>

furthest stage achieved in the legislative process.<sup>26</sup> Veteran members are responsible for the advancement of nearly half of all substantive and significant legislation during this period. This is noteworthy, considering that veteran members comprise only one-quarter of the lawmakers analyzed in the dataset.

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

*Figure 3: Impact of Military Experience on Members' Performance in Advancing Substantive and Significant Legislation in the House of Representatives, 1995-2021*



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

<sup>26</sup> For this analysis, I return to the general "Military Experience" variable. Given the earlier results, focusing on this variable offers a more challenging test of the first hypothesis.

Figure 3 plots the results from a series of ordinary least squares regressions modeling military service experience and the same control variables from earlier, on the number of substantive and significant bills associated with a member at each stage.<sup>27</sup> In each analysis, military experience has a positive and statistically significant impact on the number of bills reaching each point of the process ( $p < 0.01$ ). In substantive terms, veteran members in the House introduced substantive and significant pieces of legislation at a rate 43 percent higher than members without military experience. When it comes to bills that became law, veterans were successful at a rate 55 percent above average.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, lawmakers with military experience are notably effective at advancing substantive and significant legislation through Congress.<sup>29</sup> While veteran members with any amount of military experience do not differ in terms of overall LES, those with more extensive military experience are more effective. This distinction is suggestive of the particular socializing effect of active-duty military service. Veterans who once wore the uniform daily and either deployed or regularly trained to deploy appear to translate their experience into behavior out of uniform. Consistent with the veteran narrative, the consequence for veteran lawmakers is greater legislative effectiveness.

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<sup>27</sup> I estimated the same models but replaced the “Military Experience” variable for the “Active-Duty Experience” variable and obtained similar results. The “Active-Duty Experience” variable is positive and statistically significant in all models except for Model 9: Become Law, where  $p = 0.07$ .

<sup>28</sup> In the sample, the average number of substantive and significant bills introduced per member is 0.359. The average number of substantive and significant bills that became law was 0.101.

<sup>29</sup> Similar to the analysis on substantive and significant bills, I also examine veterans’ performance on other types of legislation classified by the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (commemorative/symbolic and substantive). I find that there is no significant difference between veteran and nonveteran lawmakers when it comes to advancing these types of bills. One interpretation of this finding is that veterans focus their legislative efforts on issues that are considered to be most consequential for public policy. In other words, their relative performance on substantive and significant legislation speaks to a prioritization of quality over quantity.

## ***Test 2: Veterans and Bipartisanship***

Advancing legislation requires teamwork, both inside and out of the party. If veterans are especially skilled at moving important legislation, it is possible that their bipartisan behavior is the reason why. To explore the association between a lawmaker's military experience and her propensity to engage in bipartisanship, I rely on measures of cosponsorship activity. A clear act of teamwork in Congress, legislators who join colleagues in cosponsoring a bill are publicly endorsing that bill's proposed policy (Kessler and Krehbiel 1996; Koger 2003; Bernhard and Sulkin 2013). Beyond strategic signaling, this sort of collaboration often reflects the interpersonal relationships developed between members of Congress. Research demonstrates that connected members, as measured by their cosponsorship activity, are more likely to achieve success in advancing their legislative agendas (Fowler 2006; Kirkland 2011; Craig 2021). When lawmakers cosponsor legislation with members of the opposite party, they are indicating a commitment to bipartisanship in the interests of advancing substantive policy (Harbridge 2015).

The first measures of cosponsorship draw upon data for all public bills introduced in the House of Representatives between 1995 and 2016.<sup>30</sup> For this time period, I explore the extent to which legislators offer support to contra-partisan bills and attract bipartisan cosponsors for their own bills. When it comes to bipartisan lawmaking, cosponsorship goes both ways. Gaining support from members of the other party often requires a willingness to cosponsor bills introduced by members outside of the party (Harbridge-Yong, Volden, and Wiseman 2021). In the context of the military, these reciprocal behaviors are similar to being both a valued team player when others are in charge or cultivating a cohesive team when you are in charge. The

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<sup>30</sup> Data for bill sponsorship and cosponsorship for the 104<sup>th</sup> to 110<sup>th</sup> congresses (1995-2008) were initially collected by Fowler (2006). Harbridge-Yong, Volden, and Wiseman (2021) extended these data for the 111<sup>th</sup> to 114<sup>th</sup> congresses (2009-2016) and shared the full dataset with the author.

measure for offering bipartisan support is based on the average proportion of bills a lawmaker cosponsors that were introduced by a member of the opposite party out of the total number of bills cosponsored by the lawmaker in a given session.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the measure of bipartisan cosponsorship attracted is the average proportion of cosponsors from the opposite party that a lawmaker attracts in support of her sponsored legislation out of all of the cosponsors she attracts in a session.<sup>32</sup> For both directions of bipartisan cosponsorship activity, higher proportions suggest greater collaboration with members across the aisle. Across the time period included in the data, the average proportion of bipartisan cosponsorships offered is 0.253 among veteran members and 0.249 among nonveterans. The average proportion of bipartisan cosponsorships attracted is 0.297 among veterans and 0.256 among nonveterans.

I examine whether there is an association between military experience and bipartisanship by estimating two ordinary least squares regression models. The dependent variables are the two types of cosponsorship activity—the proportion of bipartisan cosponsorships offered or attracted—and the key independent variable is the binary indicator for military experience. The models also include the same set of institutional and individual covariates used in earlier analyses of legislative effectiveness. Table 2 reports the results from these estimations.<sup>33</sup> In the

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<sup>31</sup> As an example, in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, Representative and Marine Corps veteran Mike Gallagher (R-WI-8) cosponsored 227 bills, 105 of which were sponsored by a Democrat. His proportion of bipartisan cosponsorship offered is 0.463.

<sup>32</sup> The proportion of bipartisan cosponsors attracted is based on calculating the proportion of cosponsors from the opposite party on each bill and then calculating the mean across all bills sponsored by a member. This measure is limited to account for only sponsored bills that attracted at least one cosponsor. Members registered as Independents are excluded from the analyses of both measures. For example, Representative and Navy veteran Elaine Luria (D-VA-2) sponsored 19 bills in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, 15 of which were cosponsored. For one bill, four out of eleven cosponsors were Republicans (0.363). This proportion is calculated for all 20 of her sponsored bills and then averaged.

<sup>33</sup> The proportional nature of the dependent variable calculated for all members ensures that I am not inadvertently capturing systematic differences that could be attributed to the conditions of a particular legislative session. If some congressional sessions are generally more productive than others, using a member's proportion for each session adjusts for such time-variant characteristics. I also consider how varying polarization could impact legislative behavior by including the control for a member's relative ideology in a given session. Appendix C, Table C.1 presents results from an alternate model specification that includes congressional session fixed effects. The

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

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

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relationship between military experience and bipartisanship remains positive for both measures but is just beyond standard levels of statistical significance ( $p > 0.10$ ). Based on goodness-of-fit measures, these alternate models do not offer any additional statistical leverage.

Table 2: The Relationship between Military Experience and Bipartisan Cosponsorship in the House of Representatives, 1995-2016

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

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

To round out the analysis, I turn to the Lugar Center's Bipartisan Index. A member's Bipartisan Index is primarily calculated based on the weighted combination of the two



cosponsorship measures examined in the earlier models: proportions of bipartisan cosponsorship offered and attracted. Additionally, the index incorporates counts for the total number of cosponsorship offered or received in a session as well as a metric of “Bipartisan Intensity,” which is a means of weighting values by accounting for how many bipartisan cosponsors particular bills attract.<sup>34</sup> The results of these calculations produce comprehensive scores that range from a low of -1.78 to a high of 6.84, where higher index scores denote greater bipartisan sponsorship and cosponsorship activity.

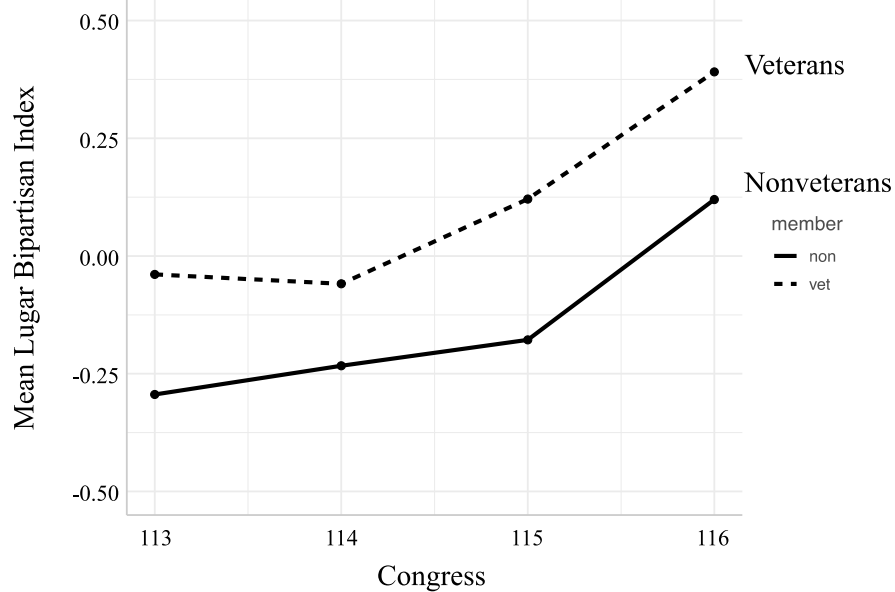
For the House of Representatives, the Lugar Center has developed scores for members serving in the 113<sup>th</sup> to 116<sup>th</sup> congresses (2013-2020).<sup>35</sup> Given that partisanship and polarization have steadily increased while the share of veterans in Congress has reached its lowest numbers, modeling the bipartisan behavior of veteran members over this eight-year period presents a challenging test of the second hypothesis. If veteran lawmakers are more bipartisan than their nonveteran colleagues, we should see differences emerge during these more recent and particularly polarized sessions. A simple bivariate comparison of mean Bipartisan Index scores among veteran and nonveteran members of Congress reveals a clear difference (Figure 4). In each of the four sessions, members with military experience score higher on the index ( $p < 0.001$ ).

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<sup>34</sup> Additional details regarding the construction of the Lugar Bipartisan Index are available at “Overview of the Lugar Center-McCourt School Bipartisan Index,” <https://www.thelugarcenter.org/ourwork-Bipartisan-Index.html>

<sup>35</sup> Representatives who served less than 10 months, who sponsored less than 2 bills, or served as Speaker or Minority Leader are not given an index score. This amounts to approximately 15-30 exclusions per session.

Figure 4: Comparing Bipartisan Index Scores for Veteran Members in the House of Representatives, 2013-2020



Notes: Figure compares the mean Lugar Bipartisan Index for veteran and nonveteran members of the House of Representatives for each session from 2013 to 2020.

Moreover, these observed differences hold up to multivariate scrutiny. Table 3 presents the results of an ordinary least squares regression estimating the relationship between military experience and a member's Bipartisan Index score. The model (3A) again considers other individual and institutional variables likely to impact legislative behavior.<sup>36</sup> All else equal, members of Congress with military experience score significantly higher than their nonveteran colleagues on the Bipartisan Index ( $p < 0.01$ ).<sup>37</sup> Substantively, having military experience is associated with a 0.165 increase on the Bipartisan Index.<sup>38</sup> To further emphasize this difference,

<sup>36</sup> The Bipartisan Index scores are standardized such that scores are comparable over time. The results presented here are robust to alternate specifications that incorporate congress fixed effects.

<sup>37</sup> In supplemental analysis, I check to see if members of a particular party are driving this relationship (See Appendix C, Table C.2). I find that there is a slight difference between veteran lawmakers from the two parties. Military experience among Democrats amounts to a 0.387 increase in Bipartisan Index scores ( $p < 0.001$ ), and military experience among Republicans amounts to a 0.121 increase, but this result falls short of statistical significance ( $p = 0.11$ ). Greater bipartisan behavior among veteran Democrats in the House implies that these members might be more willing to work across the aisle because of shared interests among conservatives.

<sup>38</sup> This is equivalent to about one half of a standard deviation above the mean index, which is -0.098.

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

It is important to highlight that supplemental analysis of these bipartisanship measures in which I replaced the general military experience variable for the active-duty variable did not yield statistically significant results.<sup>39</sup> Unlike the tests for legislative effectiveness, the extent of a lawmaker's military experience does not seem to make a difference in terms of bipartisan behavior. This suggests that the socializing impact of active military experience may bear more on a veteran lawmaker's work ethic and follow-through, but any amount of military experience is enough to imbue an appreciation for collaboration. Additionally, other members interested in cooperating with veteran members of Congress might not know the difference between the types of service or find it to be of little relevance in bipartisan endeavors.

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

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<sup>39</sup> For all supplemental tests the relationship between active-duty military experience and bipartisanship remains positive but outside conventional standards for statistical significance. See Appendix C, Table C.3 for these results.

*Table 3: The Relationship between Military Experience and Lugar Bipartisan Index in the House of Representatives, 2013-2020*

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

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

## ***Discussion and Conclusion:***

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

This paper examines the increasingly popular narrative claiming that veteran lawmakers are uniquely skilled at accomplishing their legislative mission and building teams across the aisle. While this assertion garners substantial coverage in the media and on the campaign trail, few scholars have attempted a comprehensive assessment of such claims. Relying on measures of legislative effectiveness and bipartisan cosponsorship activity in the House of Representatives, I find compelling evidence in support of the veteran narrative. Even when controlling for other factors likely to influence legislative behavior, lawmakers with military experience tend to be more effective at advancing consequential bills through the legislative process. In terms of overall legislative productivity, I find that active-duty veteran lawmakers are, on average, 20 percent more effective than their peers. When it comes to bipartisan behaviors, the results indicate that veterans in Congress tend to cosponsor bills introduced by members of the opposite

party at higher rates—a notable finding considering the pressure on lawmakers to demonstrate party loyalty. Analysis of Lugar Bipartisan Index scores from the last four sessions of Congress reveal strong evidence that veterans outperform lawmakers without military experience. Given the concurrent rise in polarization and precipitous decline in veteran representation over the last decade, the results of the Lugar score analysis are especially striking. The totality of the findings offered here reveals a story that is largely consistent with the narrative advanced by veterans and their support networks.

There are several important contributions and implications that can be drawn from the results of this study. First, this examination is one of only a few that considers the impact of military experience on legislative performance. What little work exists on veteran lawmakers primarily focuses on how military experience translates into relevant policy expertise. More than just building warriors, the military prides itself on being a values-based organization, committed to building servant leaders of character. The theory offered in this study links values strengthened in the military, such as duty, selfless service, and teamwork, to differences in a broader range of legislative behaviors among veteran lawmakers. Understanding how military experience might inform more than just policy preferences or expertise, highlights veterans as another meaningful identity in elite politics. The findings thus add to the wider literature claiming that identities matter within legislative institutions.

Second, this study offers a rare bit of encouragement when it comes to addressing the crippling partisanship in Congress. Bipartisan electoral recruitment organizations like *With Honor* and *New Politics* are dedicated to getting more veterans in Congress—efforts that are largely motivated by anecdotal evidence or hopeful assumptions.<sup>40</sup> The results offered in this

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<sup>40</sup> With Honor and New Politics are bipartisan PACs that recruit, train, and fund veteran candidates for office. For more information on these organizations see <https://withhonor.org/about-us/> and <https://www.newpolitics.org/about>

paper provide valuable empirical support for their normative claims. More strategically, these findings could be exploited as party elites increasingly look to veteran candidates as a way to win elections in marginal districts (e.g., Best and Teigen 2018; Merica and Grayer 2018; Mutnick 2021). If veterans in Congress are considered to be more bipartisan, parties might prop up veteran candidates in tough races to take advantage of the symbolism their experience offers.

Finally, and related to this potential for exploitation, as more and more veterans highlight their service as preparation for bipartisan and effective lawmaking, it is possible that this message loses its legitimacy. While many veterans in Congress and on the campaign trail subscribe to the narrative motivating this paper, others politicize their military service (e.g., See Weismann 2022). Over the past several decades, many have grown increasingly concerned with this politicization of the military. The contemporary assessment is that Americans view the military through a partisan lens (Drezner 2022) and these perceptions influence assessments of institutional confidence (Burbach 2018). As more veteran candidates and lawmakers use their military experience to claim political advantages, bipartisan or otherwise, trust in the military will likely continue to erode.

Today, and throughout history, many veterans have served honorably in elected office, providing critical policy perspectives and, as this paper shows, achieving legislative results in a cooperative manner. However, healthy relations between the military and the public rely on strong norms that are threatened when military experience is used to justify political distinctions. These democratic norms are cultivated to ensure the military institution remains nonpartisan, subordinate, and accountable to civilian government authorities—integrated in politics, but ultimately trusted for its accountability to the Constitution over partisan preferences. Efforts aimed at increasing veteran representation on Capitol Hill, encouraging veterans to highlight

their military credentials in campaigns, and harping on the exceptionalism of veterans in politics potentially weakens the government's accountability of the military. While these findings offer promise for citizens seeking to improve conditions in Congress, the unintended consequence might be further degradation of healthy civil-military relations in America.



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

## *Appendix A: Exploring Veterans in the House, 1995-2021*

**Table A.1: Descriptive Statistics of Members of Congress Serving in the House of Representatives, 1995-2020**

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

**Table A.2: Description of Variables Used in Model Estimations**

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

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

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

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

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

## Appendix B: Supplemental Analysis – Legislative Effectiveness

**Table B.3: Relationship Between Military Experience and the Progression of Substantive and Significant Bills in the House of Representatives, 1995-2022**

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

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

## Appendix C: Supplemental Analysis – Bipartisanship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



