

in line when it comes to deserving help according to the public. These results indicate an embedded societal sentiment that civilian men are less worthy of protection and less innocent in conflict. This contracted compassion towards men is likely linked to an important point the authors make—the public notion that men should not remain civilians during conflict, and that their “natural” masculine role as the warrior is to pick a side and engage in conflict rather than elude it. However, while being a man almost automatically makes one eligible for combat, this does not mean that all men want to become combatants.

This is an important distinction the authors point out: given our modern understanding of gender, it should be considered acceptable for male civilians to not want to engage in conflict, or even experience fear and seek protection just as female civilians. But instead of being considered vulnerable victims of conflict, male civilians who choose to flee rather than fight are eyed with suspicion as covert combatants disguised as citizens, or worse, with contempt as deserters who ran away from their duty. Both instances would imply that they are less worthy of protection than female refugees, who are generally prevented from becoming combatants and participating in conflict yet this story is to be explored.

This article signals the need for more nuanced work on how social gender roles affect public opinion. For example, there continues to be palpable social and legal imbalances between the sexes in society (<https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/>

[indices/GII](#)) and war continues to be overwhelmingly enacted and fought by men as every country still struggles with women’s representation in government (<https://www.npr.org/2022/01/25/1075624771/mexico-has-become-a-world-leader-of-gender-equality-in-politics>). Together, this gives the impression that men have the most say when it comes to civil war and—as the adage goes—with great power comes great responsibility. It is possible that men who flee are perceived as avoiding this responsibility and are thus unworthy of protection, but this needs to be further explored.

The article points at differences in public perceptions of war victims based on gender. To build on this understanding, future research could examine why male refugees are deemed less deserving by society and how to cultivate a more inclusive understanding of victimhood which expands social conceptions of vulnerability during conflict. Moving beyond a male/female dichotomy is important as arguing for the legitimate deservingness of one group could mean diminishing the legitimate deservingness of the other. Doing so would highlight blind spots in refugee protections for policymakers and help make the case that services should be expanded—not divided—to protect the wider and more diverse body of vulnerable peoples. ■

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