

## The Laws of War and Public Support for Foreign Combatants\*

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Are publics in great power democracies more likely to approve of foreign armed combatants that comply with international humanitarian law (IHL)? A wealth of evidence indicates that armed combatants with an incentive to seek the support of outside compliance constituencies are more likely to adhere to IHL. Yet a key mechanism underlying these claims – that publics in great power democracies are more likely to support armed combatants that comply with IHL – has not yet been directly tested. We seek to address this question using a series of experiments embedded in nationally representative surveys conducted in three democracies that have frequently been involved in foreign interventions – France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Our results indicate that belligerents – both governments and rebels – that comply with the laws of war are significantly more likely to garner support from publics in likely intervening countries compared to those who fail to follow international rules governing wartime conduct. In all three countries, compliance with international law caused both greater levels of approval of armed combatants as well as greater support for intervention, either economically or militarily (although support for military intervention remained relatively low in the treatment groups). In turn, this lends support to arguments that, to the extent combatants seek support from outside audiences, this can serve as a mechanism by which international law constrains armed combat.

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Several recent theories about the relationship between international humanitarian law (IHL) and wartime conduct share a common element: that in some contexts armed combatants comply in order to gain the support of the international community, especially audiences in great power democracies.<sup>1</sup> Groups like the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines may have been motivated to demonstrate adherence to IHL, believing that doing so heightened prospects for international recognition.<sup>2</sup> Rewards from international approval can be sizable, including not only the rhetorical prize of favorable foreign opinion, but also material benefits like economic or military aid, alongside censure, sanctions, or even military intervention against the adversary.<sup>3</sup>

Do audiences in great power democracies – in particular their national publics – respond to compliance with IHL by supporting such combatants? There are important reasons to believe this is the case. International law can influence mass preferences and beliefs,<sup>4</sup> leading to support for sanctioning violators, at least for issue like human rights or the environment.<sup>5</sup> Reactions to Russia’s attack against Ukraine in 2022 and allegations of war crimes appear consistent with this claim. Condemnation of Russian spread amongst populations in the United States, the United Kingdom, and many other Western countries. Publics were willing to match words with deeds, supporting stringent economic sanctions against Russia, providing arms to Ukraine, though opinion was more tempered on direct military intervention.<sup>6</sup>

Yet there are also reasons to doubt the responsiveness of great power democratic citizens to IHL compliance abroad. Public opinion may prioritize pragmatic security concerns over

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<sup>1</sup> Jo 2015; Stanton 2016; Fazal 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Lasley and Thyne 2015; Fazal 2018, 59-66.

<sup>3</sup> Stanton 2016, 39-40.

<sup>4</sup> Wallace 2013; Chilton 2015; Tingley and Tomz 2020; Dill and Schubiger 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Tingley and Tomz 2014; Putnam and Shapiro 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Newport 2022; IPSOS 2022.

international legal considerations.<sup>7</sup> International inaction to halt the Rwandan Genocide was due in no small part to ambivalence from many publics toward abuses perpetrated in the country.<sup>8</sup> Whether supposed taboos against nuclear weapons or prohibitions on targeting civilians, publics in the United States and elsewhere sometimes seemingly show little concern for legal or moral constraints.<sup>9</sup> Several studies indicate restraints from international legal rules are limited,<sup>10</sup> or can even backfire and entrench opposing views.<sup>11</sup>

Are publics in great power democracies more likely to approve of foreign armed combatants that follow IHL? Addressing this question presents an opportunity to examine a key potential mechanism underlying observational claims about the relationship between IHL and wartime conduct, and one that has not yet been directly tested. To assess this claim, we designed a survey experiment that allows us to isolate the effect of such information about IHL compliance on attitudes toward both foreign state and non-state combatants. Because democratic publics are better able to influence their leaders, we fielded a cross-national survey in three democracies: France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Alongside being permanent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members with a history of foreign intervention, each possesses substantial institutional and material capacities to grant benefits, or impose costs, on foreign combatants. We also fielded a follow-up U.S. survey providing an even harder test of these claims.

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<sup>7</sup> Jentleson 1992; Gelpi et al. 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Powers 2002, 503-504.

<sup>9</sup> Press et al. 2013; Sagan and Valentino 2017; Dill et al. 2022. However, a subsequent extension and reanalysis suggests that international law continues to play a role even under scenarios privileging military-strategic factors (Carpenter and Montgomery 2020; Carpenter et al. 2021). Other public opinion work shows instrumental calculations can sit alongside legal rationales (Dill and Schubiger 2021).

<sup>10</sup> Chu 2019; Chilton and Versteeg 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Lupu and Wallace 2019; Cope and Crabtree 2020.

Our study yields four key findings. First, individuals in all three countries were significantly more likely to approve of foreign combatants they were told complied with international law. We specifically find that information about a foreign actor's IHL compliance increases approval of them from an average between about 0.35 to 0.40 (on a scale of 0 to 1) to an average between about 0.55 and 0.60 (with treatment effects ranging from 21% to 55% depending on the actor and country sampled). Second, respondents were consistently more likely to support costly policy actions by their home governments in favor of foreign combatants they were told complied with IHL. In most cases, this includes significant increases in support for sending economic aid (although overall support for military intervention remained relatively low in the treatment groups). Third, using causal mediation analysis we find evidence of two key mechanisms by which information about compliance increases foreign approval for combatants: enhancing their reputation, and viewing the way they fight as morally correct. With respect to non-state actors, a third mechanism indicates IHL compliance shapes approval through enhancing perceived legitimacy of their war aims. Finally, our follow-up U.S. study indicates these findings are robust under more demanding and nuanced contexts varying levels of U.S. interests in the foreign conflict and potential costs to intervening.

These findings make several important contributions. We provide direct evidence toward the debate over whether information about IHL compliance can shape public opinion in great power democracies. Second, our results contribute to understanding the role of domestic audiences in enforcing international rules. While much of the existing public opinion literature on international law focuses on attitudes toward behavior by individuals' *own* governments,<sup>12</sup> we show similar dynamics shape attitudes toward foreign actors. Our finding that information about

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<sup>12</sup> Chilton and Linos 2021.

compliance increases approval of foreign combatants means that public opinion may play an important function in how outside powers react to combatants' compliance choices. This finding is consistent with claims in several observational studies that susceptibility to international audiences can, in turn, shape combatants' wartime conduct, with external publics serving as important conduits.<sup>13</sup> We build on prior work showing publics are sensitive to legal and moral concerns in foreign policy.<sup>14</sup> Finally, moving beyond the common focus on the United States,<sup>15</sup> our study offers cross-national evidence indicating differences in the mechanisms underlying public opinion across national contexts.

This paper proceeds as follows. The next section provides an overview of existing debates at the intersection of IHL, wartime conduct, and public opinion, from which we generate several testable hypotheses. We then describe the research design and outline a set of cross-national survey experiments. The next section presents the empirical results. We close by discussing the implications of the findings and avenues for future research.

## **IHL, (Non)Compliance, and Public Opinion**

The laws of war, or IHL, represent a longstanding humanitarian project seeking to curb excesses of armed conflict by limiting particular means and methods of warfare.<sup>16</sup> Despite IHL's proliferation over the last century, actual compliance varies greatly, partly because of battlefield imperatives and security concerns. Belligerents may have strong incentives to engage in violations, especially as fighting intensifies or the tide turns against them.<sup>17</sup> Mechanisms for

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<sup>13</sup> Jo 2015; Stanton 2016; Fazal 2018; Fazal and Konaev 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Kertzer et al. 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Chilton and Linos 2021. Though exceptions include Lupu and Wallace 2019; Cope and Crabtree 2020.

<sup>16</sup> For a general review, see Best 1980. Broadly, IHL is divided into two categories of rules: 1) resorting to armed force against an adversary (*jus ad bellum*); and 2) regulating the conduct of belligerents after fighting begins (*jus in bello*). We focus on the latter given these rules stand out in debates over the role of international law in warfare.

<sup>17</sup> Downes 2008, 29-35.

enforcing IHL are often viewed as weaker compared to other domains.<sup>18</sup> Domestic compliance constituencies face a complicated environment for promoting restraint when a country's security is at risk.<sup>19</sup> Reciprocity and avoidance of escalation can sometimes constrain combatants; legal agreements may facilitate these dynamics, but are not foolproof.<sup>20</sup>

The historical record nonetheless suggests the potential of external mechanisms for punishing IHL violations. Neither in conventional inter-state and civil wars, nor insurgencies and other irregular conflicts, are warring parties isolated from outside influences.<sup>21</sup> From widespread condemnation of the Tatmadaw for killings of Rohingya minorities in Myanmar, to providing weapons to Ukrainian forces fighting Russia's invasion, to outright military intervention decades earlier in Bosnia, other countries have played pivotal roles in the course of many conflicts abroad. A growing literature suggests both government and opposition forces are correspondingly attuned to outside perceptions of their wartime conduct. Governments often depend on other countries for access to arms, foreign aid, and diplomatic assistance, alongside concerns over direct military involvement for or against them.<sup>22</sup> UNSC denunciation and later authorizing NATO intervention in the 2011 Libyan Civil War was motivated in part by the indiscriminate killing of civilians by Qaddafi forces. Rebel groups as varied as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador to the Free Papua Movement in Indonesia have likewise frequently employed diplomatic maneuvers to curry favor with foreign countries.<sup>23</sup> The preferences and actions of such third parties can ultimately have outsized influence on the course and conduct of hostilities.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Simmons 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Cardenas 2007, 12-13; Davenport 2007, 173-174.

<sup>20</sup> Morrow 2014, 111-121.

<sup>21</sup> Salehyan 2009; Jo and Simmons 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Salehyan et al. 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Coggins 2015; Huang 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Beardsley 2011.

Several prominent accounts consider conditions where combatants comply with IHL to appeal to powerful external actors who care about international law. With an eye toward outside legitimacy, rebels seeking “human rights-conscious external sponsorship” appear more restrained in their wartime conduct.<sup>25</sup> Similar dynamics may be especially important for secessionist rebel movements whose goals depend on obtaining international recognition. They may use compliance “to signal both their willingness and their capacity to be good citizens of the international community.”<sup>26</sup> Yet even non-secessionist actors may have good reason to want benefits that come from bolstering their credentials. The Syrian National Coalition actively sought endorsements from Western governments to legitimate their efforts to overthrow the Assad regime.<sup>27</sup> As incumbents, government forces may be institutionally more secure, but vary in their international sensitivity, and corresponding incentives to engage in restraint.<sup>28</sup> Both governments and rebels seek to “win support from domestic and international audiences,” deciding how to fight based on those groups’ preferences.<sup>29</sup> Combatants looking for support from “Western international actors” may be less prone to target civilians or engage in other IHL violations.<sup>30</sup> Combatants that are dependent on outside democracies have similarly been shown to be more reticent about resorting to abuse.<sup>31</sup>

A number of scholars thus share an emphasis on the crucial role of outside audiences in shaping combatants’ compliance decisions, whether referring broadly to the “international community” or “world opinion,” “Western states” and “democratic third parties,” or “human

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<sup>25</sup> Jo 2015, 4, 62-63.

<sup>26</sup> Fazal 2018, 62.

<sup>27</sup> Huang 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Stanton 2016, 40-41.

<sup>29</sup> Stanton 2016, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Stanton 2016, 40; 96-97.

<sup>31</sup> Prorok and Appel 2014; Salehyan et al. 2014; Jo 2015, 130-134; Appel and Prorok 2019.

rights-conscious” “foreign state sponsors.”<sup>32</sup> There is thus a wealth of evidence that combatants with incentives to seek support from outside compliance constituencies are more likely to follow IHL. Yet not always clear in these accounts is *who* exactly are the relevant actors within these external communities whose attention combatants are vying for, which could include international organizations (IOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), country leaders and other national elites, or mass publics.<sup>33</sup>

We argue that one of these key audiences is the foreign public, especially in great power democracies. Skepticism certainly exists over the public’s ability to influence foreign policy, especially with respect to matters of international law.<sup>34</sup> Yet a significant body of evidence suggests democratic governments and politicians are fairly responsive to their citizens’ views, including around foreign policy and the use of force abroad, contrary to common pronouncements that “politics stop at the water’s edge.”<sup>35</sup> Foreign policy issues have been shown to figure prominently in citizens’ electoral choices, while democratic leaders have historically been mindful of maintaining public consent throughout foreign adventures outside of the immediate threat of the ballot box.<sup>36</sup> And when it comes to questions of intervening in foreign conflicts, humanitarian objectives have figured prominently in mass opinion, even as public ambivalence has been cited for the lack of robust action by several Western governments in the

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<sup>32</sup> Prorok and Appel 2014, 720; Salehyan et al. 2014; Jo 2015, 60-70; Lasley and Thyne 2015, 303; Stanton 2016, 40, 54; Fazal 2018, 56, 62.

<sup>33</sup> Rathbun 2004; Guzman 2008; Hafner-Burton et al. 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Witness the absence of serious consideration of public opinion, even across radically different legal accounts (Goldsmith and Posner 2005; Guzman 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Gowa 1998, 321, Canes-Wrone 2015; Tomz et al. 2020; Chu and Recchia 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Reiter and Stam 2002, 199-201; Aldrich et al. 2006.



midst of particular atrocities.<sup>37</sup> Even studies expressing some misgivings about the public in the end acknowledge meaningful mass influence over foreign policies across various countries.<sup>38</sup>

For publics in powerful democracies, there is potential for their governments to take action for or against combatants abroad, which can, in turn, shape foreign conflicts. The United States, Britain, and France have been active in interventions through institutions like NATO or as UNSC members, but also individually like France's Opération Licorne in Côte d'Ivoire in 2002. Yet those same countries have chosen not to intervene or waited to get involved as killing raged abroad, whether in Rwanda, Bosnia, or initial phases of the war in Ukraine. Examining public opinion in such democracies offers part of an important pathway from below, even if not the only one, to understanding conflict dynamics and international law.

In addition to fighting on the battlefield, opposition groups actively pursue a form of "rebel diplomacy" to influence the preferences and beliefs of a variety of external actors, including directly speaking, or "marketing," themselves to foreign publics.<sup>39</sup> This can take the form of working through more traditional channels like lobbyists and interest groups, or more recently through innovative strategies using social media, but irrespective where foreign publics remain a key target.<sup>40</sup> Reflecting on the reliance of many non-state armed groups on ordinary people at home and abroad, one study concludes that "As significant as civilian support within rebel-controlled territory is, the support of civilians outside of rebel territory can be equally important."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Jentleson and Britton 1998; Powers 2002, 509. On the potential for publics to act as a constraint against, or facilitator for, intervention, see also Heraclides 1990.

<sup>38</sup> Risse-Kappen 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Bob 2005, 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Huang 2016; Jones and Mattiacci 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Coggins 2015, 112.

A similar sensitivity to outside mass opinion can be seen on the opposing side of government forces. Just as rebels seek to “influence public opinion in Western countries,” the changing international normative environment means state forces need to be mindful of “world public opinion” when prosecuting counterinsurgency operations.<sup>42</sup> Pointing the combined need to consider both legal rules and the masses, an analysis of modern military doctrine captures the general imperatives facing armed forces in their conduct, “no State can afford to be wholly regardless of public and world opinion.”<sup>43</sup>

There are thus reasons to believe that ordinary individuals in great power democracies *can* serve as a compliance constituency for foreign combatants; (non)adherence to IHL. Other evidence indicates, however, that members of the public may not be very sensitive to compliance with international law, instead following a consequentialist logic and focusing on their own national security.<sup>44</sup> For wartime conduct, several studies have found that public opinion in the United States and other democracies shows little regard for norms of civilian immunity or proportionality during warfare, at least by their own forces.<sup>45</sup> A guiding principle for many U.S. policymakers is to presume a public “resistant to spending money and risking the lives of American soldiers for international efforts that are not directly tied to a narrow reading of the national interest.”<sup>46</sup> Inconsistent support for humanitarian interventions despite extreme suffering has led to worries over the robustness of norms like the responsibility to protect (R2P).<sup>47</sup> In some contexts backlash effects against international law mean compliance could actually *reduce* public approval.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Kilcullen 2010, 83, 102.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Meron 2000, 85.

<sup>44</sup> Sagan and Valentino 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Sagan and Valentino 2018; Dill et al. 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Kull 1995, 102.

<sup>47</sup> Bellamy 2009: 1-3.

<sup>48</sup> Lupu and Wallace 2019; Cope and Crabtree 2020.

On the other hand, a range of research suggests public opinion is informed by international legal appeals, including during wartime.<sup>49</sup> International law is grounded in a deeper set of normative principles. Just as moral values shape general foreign policy attitudes,<sup>50</sup> invoking the “law” may activate a particular normative reasoning among audiences.<sup>51</sup> Existing work focuses primarily on attitudes toward individuals’ own governments, but international law may also shape opinion toward foreign actors. Ultimately, to serve as a compliance constituency members of the public need not already have nuanced understandings of IHL’s many rules, nor closely follow every event on foreign battlefields. Rather, the question is whether information about (non)compliance by foreign combatants can affect how these individuals respond. We aim to contribute to this debate by testing the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* Information about compliance with international law by foreign combatants increases public approval in democratic countries.

Existing research further contends such approval translates into support for more concrete actions on the group’s behalf, varying from the symbolic, like diplomatic representation, all the way to military intervention. For instance, when Libyan rebels gained U.S. recognition, they also received access to billions of frozen funds from the Qaddafi regime.<sup>52</sup> Partly responding to alleged war crimes by Libyan government forces, NATO countries’ air campaign proved vital in turning the tide in favor of rebel forces. Support for interventions can be grounded in moral concerns,<sup>53</sup> which may be reinforced by information about IHL compliance. Publics are willing to take costly steps in response to violations of international law, though the specific question concerning IHL remains unexplored.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Wallace 2013; Chilton 2015; Carpenter and Montgomery 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Kertzer et al. 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Fuller 1969, 40-41.

<sup>52</sup> Arsu and Erlanger 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Finnemore 2003; Kreps and Maxey 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Putnam and Shapiro 2017.

In other instances, like Rwanda and Bosnia, great power democracies and their publics dawdled or were averse to taking firm steps.<sup>55</sup> Economic and military intervention is costly financially, and the latter in particular endangers the lives of the public's own soldiers and risks escalating the conflict. One of the biggest concerns over how far NATO and other European countries would be willing to go in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine depended on whether their publics would bear the resulting burdens. Drawing out the individual-level implications leads to our second hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* Information about compliance with international law by foreign combatants increases public support in democratic countries for policies that favor such actors.

Take together, both hypotheses suggest that compliance with international law should shape democratic publics' views of the conduct of foreign combatants, and how their governments should respond. Yet the empirical record does not currently offer clear answers. Proponents and skeptics can each point to historical episodes conforming to their viewpoint of publics committed (or indifferent) to IHL. Observational studies offer important indications of the role of external democratic audiences in compliance with IHL. However, they do not directly test underlying mechanisms concerning the preferences of these audiences, relying instead on proxies like particular attributes of combatants or their connections to third parties. Existing public opinion research exhibits contrasting findings, focuses more on attitudes toward publics' own governments rather than those abroad, or examines issues unrelated to IHL.<sup>56</sup> It remains an open question whether information about compliance with IHL can shape public opinion in contemporary democracies. We offer a design strategy to more systematically study the potential impact of compliance in armed conflicts abroad on democratic audiences.

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<sup>55</sup> Powers 2002, 304-305, 503-504.

<sup>56</sup> Arves et al. 2019.

## Research Design and Samples

We use a series of survey experiments to test these hypotheses. This methodology has both advantages and limitations. The main strength of survey experiments is random assignment to treatment, which allows comparing groups who are similar to each other on average across both observed and unobserved factors. The approach thus allows us to infer with greater certainty whether providing information about combatants' (non)compliance with international law can affect public opinion. Such primes about combatants' compliance behavior have real-world analogues for mass audiences, where international legal language figures prominently in popular coverage of conflicts and intervention.<sup>57</sup>

Of course, the full reality is more complex, with individuals often receiving conflicting information and misinformation about these issues from multiple sources. Our design is not intended to recreate that tangled reality, but rather to isolate the potential effects of a specific salient type of signal, one that theoretical and observational work suggests should be important. Understanding those effects can help us, in turn, understand why such signals (and counter-signals) are deemed important enough to send by combatants. This approach complements other research tools, especially given formidable obstacles posed by selection effects and issues of strategic interaction when studying international law.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Nuñez-Mietz 2018. To illustrate the public's exposure to information about international law, we conducted a content analysis of newspaper coverage of the Ukraine War after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. During the war's first year, *half* of all stories in the *New York Times* included international law-related references. The pattern was even more pronounced around atrocities like the Bucha Massacre, where nearly three-quarters of the *Times*'s coverage mentioned international law. Comparable results held for other major newspapers in the three countries we survey. See appendices for details.

<sup>58</sup> Chilton and Tingley 2013.

We fielded our survey in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. While the United States is the most common site for experimental studies on international law,<sup>59</sup> we test our hypotheses across multiple countries given other research suggests cross-national similarities but also differences.<sup>60</sup> We included two European countries to assess common presumptions that Americans and Europeans hold sharply different foreign policy views.<sup>61</sup> These countries' histories of intervention also allow us to present more plausible scenarios. All three have experienced high-profile debates over intervening both economically and militarily abroad, perhaps most prominently the 2003 Iraq invasion when France refused to join the U.S./U.K.-led "Coalition of the Willing." On the other hand, France took the initiative to officially recognize Libya's rebel leadership in 2011, paving the way for others.<sup>62</sup> More generally, all are permanent members of the UNSC, so their publics are more likely to see their governments involving themselves in these sorts of decisions. Finally, all are consolidated democracies, and thus public opinion is more likely to be relevant for policy outcomes.

To provide a common baseline for the survey, respondents were presented some background to the scenario and an overall understanding of IHL:<sup>63</sup>

"Around the world in various foreign countries, some opposition groups decide to take up arms and fight against their government. Recent examples include the Shining Path in Peru, the Azawad National Liberation Movement in Mali, and Houthis in Yemen. During the fighting, both opposition and government military forces can differ in the level of violence they choose to use.

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<sup>59</sup> Chilton and Linos 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Cope and Crabtree 2018; Lupu and Wallace 2019; Strezhnev et al. 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Kagan 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Cowell and Erlanger 2011.

<sup>63</sup> Providing such background information is a common approach in related studies, Chapman and Chaudoin 2020; Tingley and Tomz 2020. The presence/absence of background legal information has been shown not to fundamentally change results in survey experiments (Zvobgo 2019). On the further ethical importance of including legal prompts in studies where the law is relevant, see Carpenter et al. 2021. More pragmatically, the prevalence of legal language in coverage of the Ukraine War noted earlier shows such references make for a more realistic scenario relative to the information publics actually encounter.

To try to limit the effects of armed conflict for humanitarian reasons, countries have collectively created a set of international rules, commonly referred to as the laws of war. These laws impose restrictions on how combatants are allowed to fight during warfare, such as attacks against civilians, abusing prisoners, or using land mines.

We will describe a situation involving an armed opposition group and a foreign government that various countries have faced many times in the past and will probably face again. This is a general situation, and is not about a specific opposition group or government in the news today. Some parts of the description may strike you as important; other parts may seem less important.

Please read the details carefully. After describing the situation, we will ask your opinion about a few policy options.”

We adopted an abstract scenario given concerns of pretreatment effects from references to historical or current events in opinion research on international law.<sup>64</sup> We still incorporated details to enrich the vignette and make it more concrete. Alongside the general background prompt referring to a range of real conflicts, we included two sets of contextual treatments varying the government’s regime type and the opposition group’s war aims. Past scholarship shows the importance for such attributes of state and non-state combatants in shaping how they are perceived by outsiders and their wartime conduct.<sup>65</sup> We varied whether the foreign government was a democracy or autocracy.<sup>66</sup> We also randomized the opposition group’s objectives: secession or overthrowing the government.<sup>67</sup>

As shown in the appendices, the effects of compliance with IHL on approval of these actors did not vary significantly based on these contextual treatments. In the remainder of our analysis, we therefore focus on average treatment effects for (non)compliance aggregated across

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<sup>64</sup> Chilton and Linos 2021.

<sup>65</sup> Morrow 2007; Tomz and Weeks 2014; Jo 2015, 79; Fazal 2018, 59-66. Relatedly, confounding is always a concern in experimental studies, where treatments might convey more information than intended, and which could affect any inferences. For instance, “compliers” and “violators” may differ in systematic ways, and it could be those ascribed attributes that affect respondents’ attitudes rather than the actual treated compliance behavior. These combatant contextual treatments help mitigate these concerns.

<sup>66</sup> Treatment language based on Tomz and Weeks 2013.

<sup>67</sup> This formulation follows how the UCDP/PRIO project differentiates the main “incompatibility” in armed conflicts, Gleditsch et al. 2002.

these contextual groups. Nonetheless, greater contextual detail tends to dampen the size of other treatment effects,<sup>68</sup> meaning our design should provide a conservative test for the main effects of IHL compliance.

Respondents were randomly assigned additional information, also in random order, regarding whether or not the government and opposition group's tactics complied with international law. Government/opposition (non)compliance behavior was allowed to vary separately, resulting in a 2x2x2 factorial design with 8 main experimental groups.<sup>69</sup> The following is the language for the compliance conditions:

*Compliance:* “There have been recent reports that military forces from the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government] have been following international laws that limit how combatants are allowed to fight.”

*Violation:* “There have been recent reports that military forces from the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government] have been violating international laws that limit how combatants are allowed to fight.”

Word choices for these conditions were influenced by two concerns. First, treatments were constructed as similarly as possible, where only one word – “following” versus “violating” – differs across treatments. This minimal contrast should bias against finding significant differences in outcomes, while allowing us to better infer the source of any effects detected. Second, we refer to “international laws” generically, rather than to specific legal instruments. This was both because: (a) individuals are generally less familiar with the detailed requirements of specific international treaties or customs; and (b) naming specific laws (e.g., Geneva Conventions) risks raising unmeasured concerns or priors in participants' minds.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Brutger et al. 2023.

<sup>69</sup> As noted above, we do not further analyze here the war aims and regime type contextual treatments, which leaves us with 8 experimental groups based on treatments for: 1) Government compliance/violation; 2) Opposition compliance/violation; and 3) Order the Government/Opposition prompts were presented.

<sup>70</sup> Since the main theoretical quantity of interest from prior observational research is the difference between compliance and non-compliance, and because the opening prompt provides a general background, we opted not to include a null control condition containing no information about compliance behavior.



Respondents were then asked a pair of items in random order evaluating each actor's actions: "Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the way the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government] is fighting the war?" For each question, respondents answered on a 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly approve" to "Strongly disapprove."

Along with these main outcome items, we asked additional questions to assess possible mechanisms underlying the relationship between international law and public opinion, which remain unresolved from prior experimental and observational studies. The *Reputation* and *Morality* questions continued being asked twice, once for each combatant. Since the government is the incumbent and generally seeking to maintain the status quo, we asked about *Legitimacy* of war aims only for the opposition.

*Reputation*: "Do you think the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government]'s conduct has helped or hurt the [group / country]'s reputation in the world?"  
(*Helped a lot/ Helped somewhat/ Neither helped nor hurt/ Hurt somewhat/ Hurt a lot*)

*Morality*: "Do you think the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government]'s conduct is morally acceptable?" (*Yes/No*)

*Legitimacy*: "How legitimate do you think are the aims of the Opposition Group?"  
(*Very legitimate/ Somewhat legitimate/ Neither legitimate nor illegitimate/ Not very legitimate/ Not at all legitimate*)

To better assess whether respondents would be willing to move beyond attitudinal affirmation to adopting more costly actions, we asked about three types of policy interventions by their country's government toward either combatant: (1) verbal statement of (dis)approval; 2) economic sanctions/aid; and 3) military intervention. The *Verbal Statement* and *Economic Policy* questions allow respondents to express support for either a more positive or negative (or taking neither) position. Respondents could thus support a statement by their country's leader condemning both sides, or condemning one and praising the other, or some other combination.

To do so, we asked a pair of each of these policy items, once with respect to each armed combatant (text adapted to respondents' home country). Responses to the two military intervention items were combined as described in the results section below.

*Verbal Statement:* “To what extent would you support the [U.S. President / UK Prime Minister/ French President] making a speech about this issue, where 1 is strongly supporting a speech condemning the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government], 7 is strongly supporting a speech praising the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government], and 4 is saying nothing about the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government]?” (*Respondents chose a whole number from 1 to 7*).

*Economic Policy:* “To what extent would you support the [U.S. President / UK Prime Minister/ French President] using economic policy to address this issue, where 1 is strongly supporting imposing economic sanctions on the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government], 7 is strongly supporting sending foreign aid to the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government], and 4 is doing nothing economically about the [Opposition Group / Foreign Government]?” (*Respondents chose a whole number from 1 to 7*).

*Military Intervention 1:* “To what extent do you approve or disapprove the [U.S. President / UK Prime Minister/ French President] sending military forces to the country?” (*Strongly approve/ Somewhat approve/ Neither approve nor disapprove/ Somewhat disapprove/ Strongly disapprove*).

*Military Intervention 2:* “If the [U.S. President / UK Prime Minister/ French President] sent military forces, would you prefer them being sent to support...” (*The Foreign Government/ Neither side (neutral)/ The Opposition Group*).

We fielded this experiment to diverse national samples using the online survey firm Lucid. Surveys were fielded in March (United States), April (United Kingdom), and August (France) of 2019. Lucid employed quota sampling based on gender, age, and geographic location (as well as race/ethnicity for the United States) so that participants were broadly representative of their relevant national adult populations.<sup>71</sup> Lucid samples have been shown to correspond well to national populations, and studies using Lucid have generated experimental

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<sup>71</sup> As an illustration, see appendices for further details comparing the socio-demographic profile of the U.S. survey samples to relevant national benchmarks.

results matching those using national benchmarks.<sup>72</sup> Table 1 summarizes national sample sizes and experimental groups.

Table 1: Compliance Experimental Groups

Opposition Group		Foreign Government	
		Compliance	Violation
Compliance	USA	494	505
	France	517	513
	UK	558	550
Violation	USA	506	504
	France	507	514
	UK	546	544

Notes: Sample sizes are USA (2,009); France (2,051); UK (2,198).

## Results

We begin with descriptive results for the main compliance treatments. Figure 1 shows the average approval for combatants depending on whether the actor followed/violated IHL.<sup>73</sup> Across country samples, average approval of either actor is in the range of 0.55 to 0.60 in the compliance groups, and 0.35 to 0.40 in the violation groups, providing an early indication that our respondents were sensitive to this information. We follow up with statistical tests that estimate the treatment effects of information (in terms of percent change) about IHL compliance/violation on individuals' approval of the combatants. The upper panel in Figure 2 shows the effects of foreign government compliance with international law (compared with violation) on approval of the foreign government in each national sample. The lower panel in

<sup>72</sup> Coppock and McClellan 2019. Lucid has also become an increasingly common platform for conducting experimental research in international relations, Tomz and Weeks 2020; Mattes and Weeks 2022; Brutger et al. 2022, 2023; Casler and Groves 2023; Chow and Levin 2024.

<sup>73</sup> We re-scaled outcome variables to range between 0 and 1, so effect sizes could be more clearly expressed.

Figure 2 reports corresponding effects for opposition group compliance. In all cases, the effect is positive and statistically significant, indicating compliance with IHL robustly improved individuals' attitudes toward each combatant.<sup>74</sup> Audiences thus appear to evaluate the compliance behavior of both foreign state and non-state combatants in similar ways, which is consistent with several past studies.<sup>75</sup> The treatment effects ranged from about 21% to 55%. In the U.S. sample, compliance increased average approval of the foreign government from about 0.42 to 0.57, a treatment effect of about 37%. In the France sample, compliance increased average approval of the foreign government from about 0.43 to 0.52, a treatment effect of about 21%. In the U.K. sample, compliance increased average approval of the foreign government from about 0.38 to 0.56, a treatment effect of about 49%. In the U.S. sample, compliance increased average approval of the foreign opposition from about 0.43 to 0.58, a treatment effect of about 35%. In the France sample, compliance increased average approval of the foreign opposition from about 0.43 to 0.54, a treatment effect of about 25%. In the U.K. sample, compliance increased average approval of the foreign opposition from about 0.33 to 0.55, a treatment effect of about 55%. There is evident cross-national variation in treatment effect sizes. UK respondents were most sensitive to information on compliance/violation, followed by the United States, and lastly France. Overall, these results provide strong support for Hypothesis 1.<sup>76</sup> Equally important (see appendices), we found no evidence to indicate these effects are conditional on the conduct of the other actor. While some work argues reactions to one group's

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<sup>74</sup> These results are robust to statistical models that include respondent covariates as controls (see appendices).

<sup>75</sup> Condra and Shapiro 2012; Lupu and Wallace 2023. On potential asymmetrical reactions to government vs. rebel violence, see Lyall et al. 2013.

<sup>76</sup> We found no statistically significant differences in any outcome item based on: (1) order treatments were provided; or (2) order outcome items were asked. Later respondents were asked which world region they believe the scenario took place; results were substantially the same irrespective of the region inferred.

(non)compliance may be affected by their opponent's actions,<sup>77</sup> our results suggest respondents are evaluating each side's behavior on its own terms.

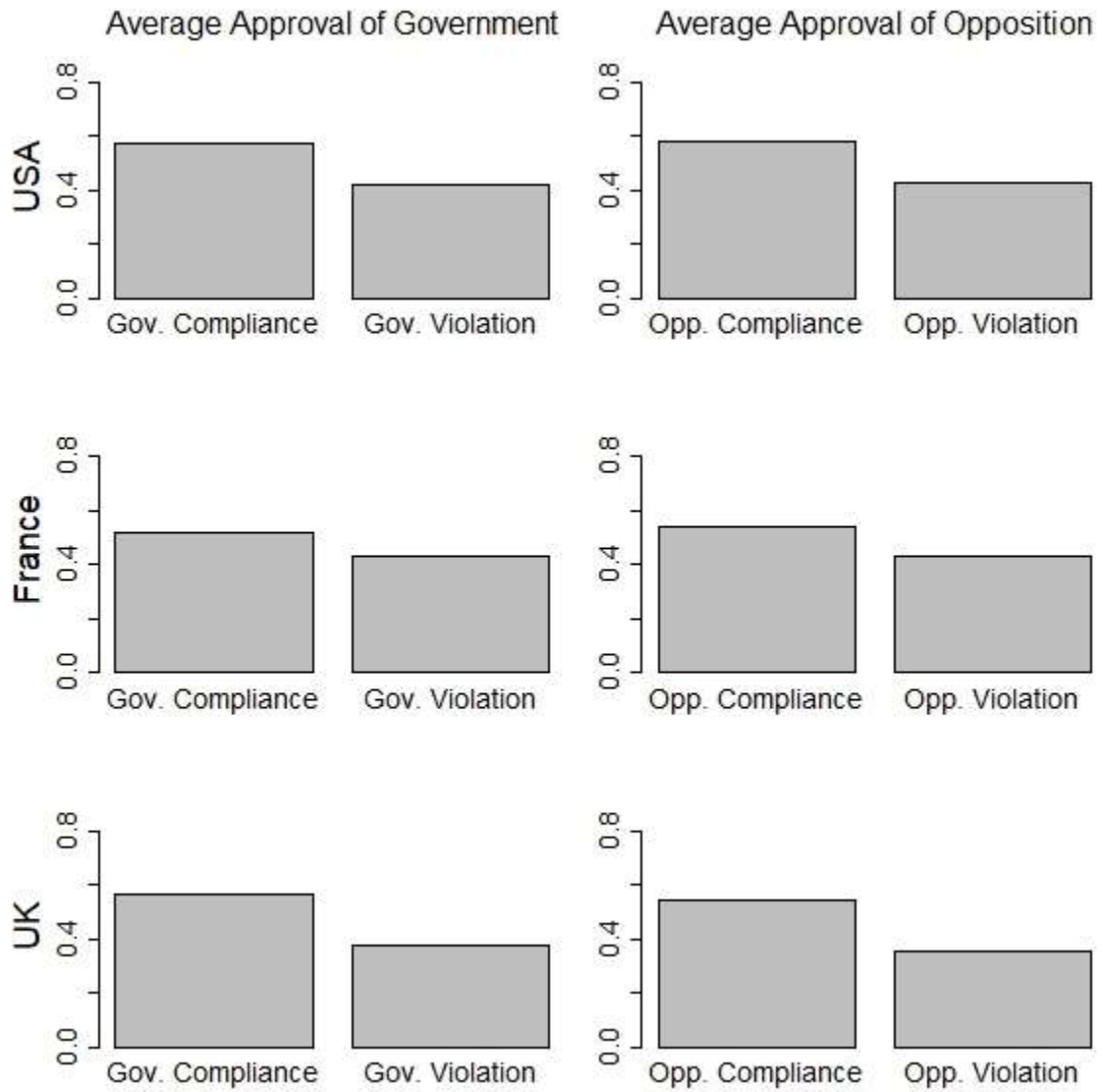


Figure 1: Average Approval of Combatants

<sup>77</sup> Chu 2019; Stanton 2020.

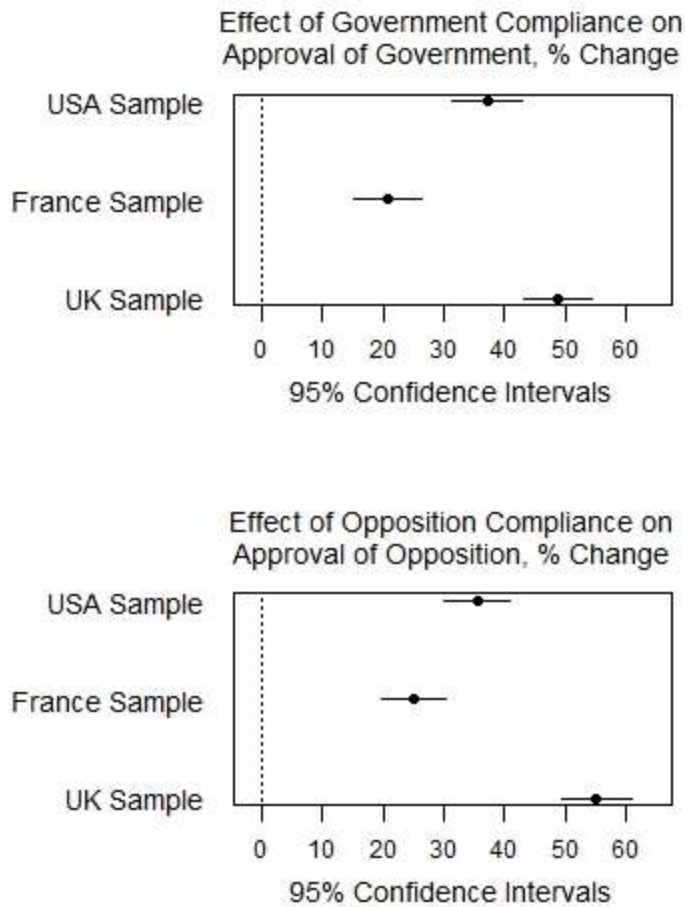


Figure 2: Effects of Compliance on Approval of Combatants by Country

To test Hypothesis 2, we analyzed the effects of information about IHL compliance/violation on individuals' support for actions of varying costs taken by their own government. In the first two instances, higher/lower values indicate stronger approval for actions that are helpful/harmful to the relevant combatant: for *Verbal Statement* (supporting a speech praising as opposed to condemning), and for *Economic Policy* (supporting foreign aid as opposed to sanctions). We combine respondents' answers to the pair of military-related questions into one binary item as follows: for each actor, respondents are coded as supporting a military intervention on behalf of that actor if: (1) in *Military Intervention #1* they either strongly or

somewhat approved of military intervention; and (2) in *Military Intervention #2* they backed military intervention in support of that actor.<sup>78</sup>

The upper panel in Figure 3 shows the treatment effects of foreign government compliance on individuals' support for policy actions by their home government (in terms of percent change). The lower panel shows the corresponding treatment effects for opposition group compliance. In all cases, the effect is positive, and in all but three instances statistically significant, indicating compliance generally increased individuals' willingness to support policy responses. With respect to *Verbal Statement*, in the U.S. sample foreign government compliance increased average support from about 3.6 to 4.1 (on a scale of 1 to 7), a treatment effect of about 13%. In the France sample, foreign government compliance increased average support from about 3.7 to 3.9, a treatment effect of about 6%. In the U.K. sample, foreign government compliance increased average support from about 3.5 to 4.0, a treatment effect of about 15%. In the U.S. sample, foreign opposition compliance increased average support from 3.8 to 4.1, a treatment effect of about 8%. In the France sample, foreign opposition compliance increased average support from about 3.8 to 4.0, a treatment effect of about 4%. In the U.K. sample, foreign opposition compliance increased average support from about 3.5 to 4.0, a treatment effect of about 16%.

With respect to *Economic Policy*, in the U.S. sample foreign government compliance increased average support from about 4.5 to 5.0 (on a scale of 1 to 7), a treatment effect of about 13%. In the France sample, foreign government compliance increased average support from about 4.6 to 5.0, a treatment effect of about 8%. In the U.K. sample, foreign government compliance increased average support from about 4.2 to 5.0, a treatment effect of about 19%. In

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<sup>78</sup> The dichotomous nature of this measure partly accounts for the relatively wide confidence intervals of its treatment effects.

the U.S. sample, foreign opposition compliance increased average support from 4.6 to 5.1, a treatment effect of about 10%. In the France sample, foreign opposition compliance did not significantly increase average support. In the U.K. sample foreign opposition compliance increased average support from 4.3 to 4.9, a treatment effect of about 14%.

Recall that *Military Intervention* is a binary variable, so we can describe the percentages of respondents who supported or opposed intervention. Unlike the previous two outcomes, support for military intervention, on behalf of either foreign combatant, was generally low across our samples. This is likely because of the costliness of such interventions. Thus, while we do find significant treatment effects as described below, it should be noted that these effects are increases relative to low baselines. In the U.S. sample, foreign government compliance did not significantly increase support for military intervention. In the France sample, foreign government compliance increased support from about 14% to 17%, a treatment effect of about 24%. In the U.K. sample, foreign government compliance increased support from about 12% to 16%, a treatment effect of about 33%. In the U.S. sample, foreign opposition compliance increased support from about 8.5% to 16%, a treatment effect of about 88%. In the France sample, foreign opposition compliance did not significantly increase support for military intervention. In the U.K. sample, foreign opposition compliance increased support from about 5% to 7%, a treatment effect of about 45%.

Respondents in all samples were significantly more likely to support military intervention on behalf of at least one combatant that complied with international law, even if absolute levels of approval for such intervention remained fairly modest: in the United States, the opposition group; in France, the foreign government; and in the United Kingdom, both actors. Comparing the treatment effects across actors, in all but one case, the relative effects of compliance when



comparing policy responses toward foreign government and opposition forces were statistically indistinguishable, suggesting respondents' sensitivity to legal information may not have depended on which actor was engaging in (non)compliance. The one exception concerns U.S. support for military intervention: the effect of compliance on support for intervening on behalf of opposition groups was significantly larger than the effect based on the foreign government's conduct. That is, Americans' support for military intervention on behalf of foreign governments is less sensitive to whether such governments did or did not comply with international law. Overall, these results provide general support for Hypothesis 2.

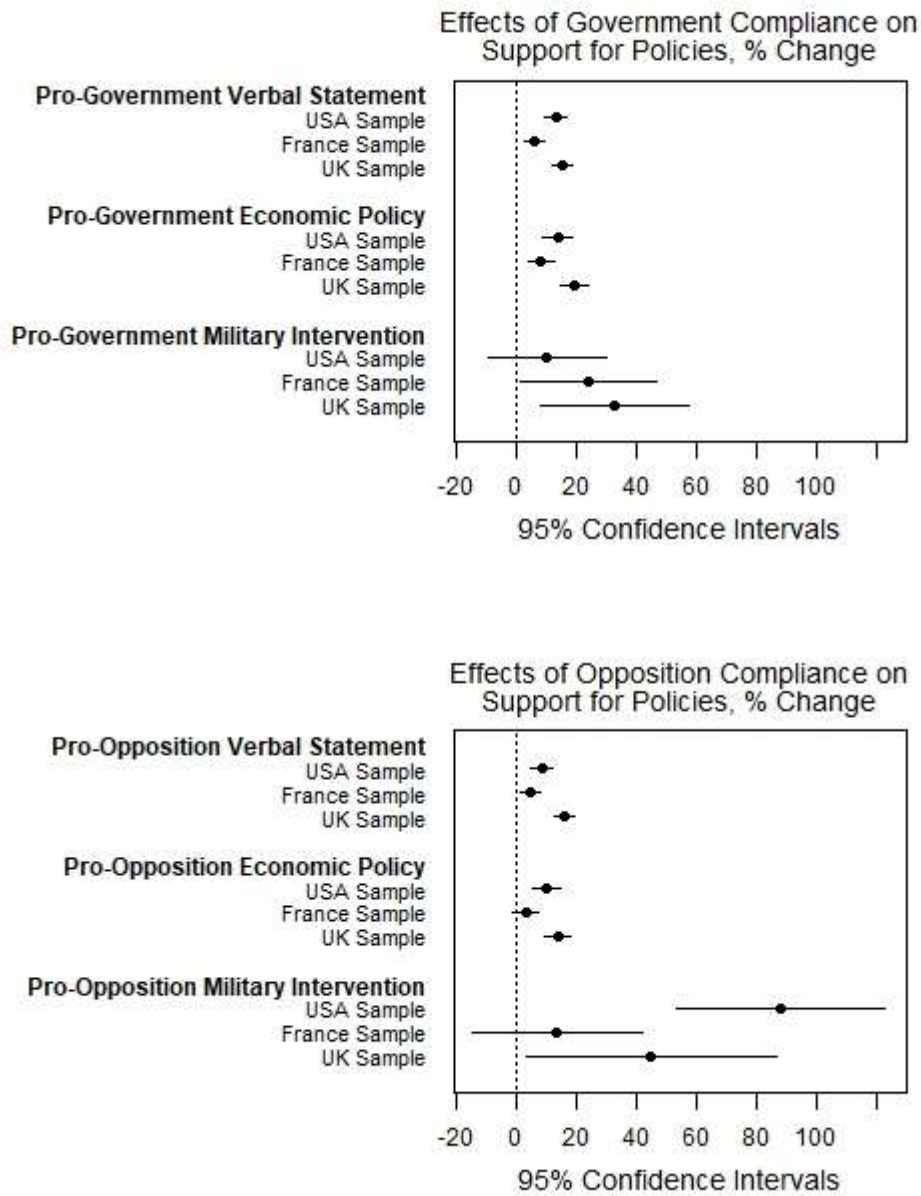


Figure 3: Effects of Compliance on Support for Policy Interventions by Country

To help uncover possible mechanisms underlying these relationships, we examine likely causal mediators of our results, using procedures proposed by Imai et al. (2011). Our candidate mediators are several follow-up questions in our survey, which are intended to probe possible

rationales for our respondents' answers: reputation, morality, and legitimacy of the opposition's cause. These factors may have mediated the effects of the compliance treatments on the main outcomes concerning individuals' approval of the combatants. For each potential mediator and actor, we estimated a model with the mediator as the dependent variable, estimated a model with approval of the actor as the dependent variable, and then estimated the average causal mediation effect (ACME).

Figure 4 reports the causal mediation results – the top panel for the foreign government, the bottom for the opposition.<sup>79</sup> Reputation and morality were significant mediators with respect to both actors in all three samples. This indicates respondents were more likely to approve of combatants who followed international law in part because they believed such compliance improved those actors' reputations, and partly because they believed compliance was morally correct. This does not imply, however, that there might be other, unmeasured mediating factors. The ACME for France is significantly smaller with respect to both actors and both mediators, suggesting especially in this sample that other unmeasured mechanisms may be at work. With respect to the third mediator – the legitimacy of the opposition group's cause – the estimated ACMEs are positive, but not significant in the U.S. sample. More importantly, ACMEs for this mediator are generally smaller than for other mediators. While legitimacy concerns might shape the relationship between compliance and outside audiences' approval, they are less important compared to reputation and morality.

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<sup>79</sup> The main outcomes were asked before the mediator items because the mediators could have served as cues biasing responses to outcome questions. Chaudoin et al. (2021) caution that the order in which mediators and outcomes are asked can affect the mediation analysis results, meaning our findings here should be taken as suggestive.

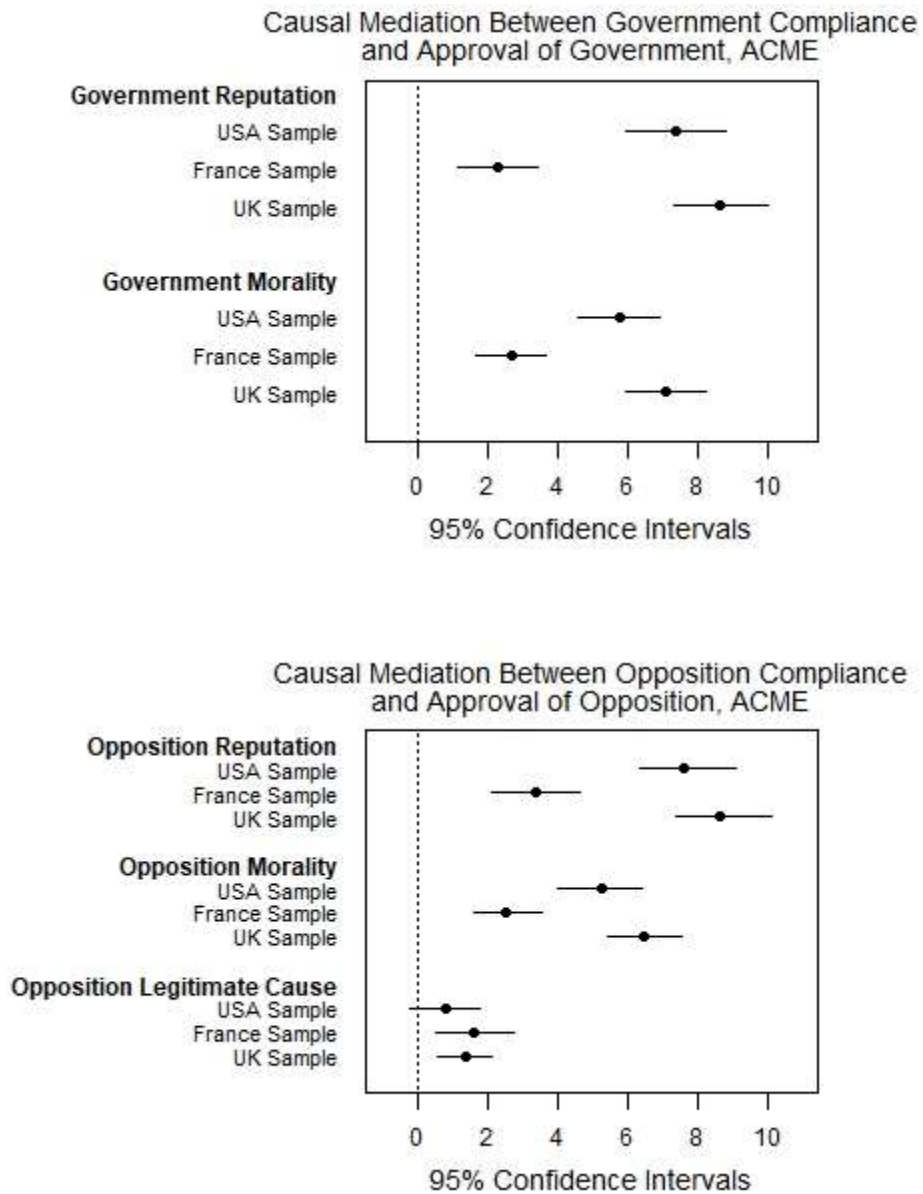


Figure 4: Causal Mediation Analysis by Country

### Follow-up Study

While our design looks to inject sufficient contextual detail about the conflict and combatants to resonate with respondents, there may still be concerns that a harder test is warranted. This is especially the case given common critiques that international legal principles are set aside when core national interests are at stake, or the prospect of significant costs to

publics' own country.<sup>80</sup> Taking into account this possibility, we fielded a follow-up study in March 2024 in the United States (n = 549) using the same survey firm Lucid, but with two new contextual treatments, which explicitly varied: 1) the extent the foreign conflict affected U.S. security and economic interests (high or low); and 2) the potential costs to the United States should it choose to get involved (high or low).<sup>81</sup> Limiting the number of moving parts to maintain sufficient statistical power, we fixed the attributes of the combatants from the two contextual treatments from our original survey (regime type and opposition aims), but kept all other elements of the design identical.<sup>82</sup>

We begin with descriptive results. Figure 5 shows the average approval for combatants depending on whether the actor followed/violated IHL for each of the experimental groups. Average approval of either actor is in the range of 0.55 to 0.60 in the compliance groups, and 0.35 to 0.45 in the violation groups. This first look suggests that foreign combatants' compliance with IHL continues to matter a great deal, even across changing circumstances regarding the relative interests and costs involved. We follow up with statistical tests that estimate the treatment effects of information about IHL compliance/violation and information about U.S. interests and costs on individuals' approval of the combatants.

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<sup>80</sup> Morgenthau 1985, 295; Mearsheimer 1994. We thank an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing this point.

<sup>81</sup> Phrasing for both sets of treatments based on Tomz and Weeks 2021.

<sup>82</sup> We kept the descriptive details about the combatants to heighten the realism of the scenario. Since our original experiment indicates the combatant attributes do not condition the effects of the compliance treatments, the exact choice of the combatant conditions is not expected to unduly affect the results. Nonetheless, given the timing of the follow-up survey, we opted to set the regime type as an autocracy and opposition aims as overthrowing the government to reduce the likelihood respondents would associate the scenario specifically with the Israel-Gaza War, which could bias responses. Instrument provided in the appendices.

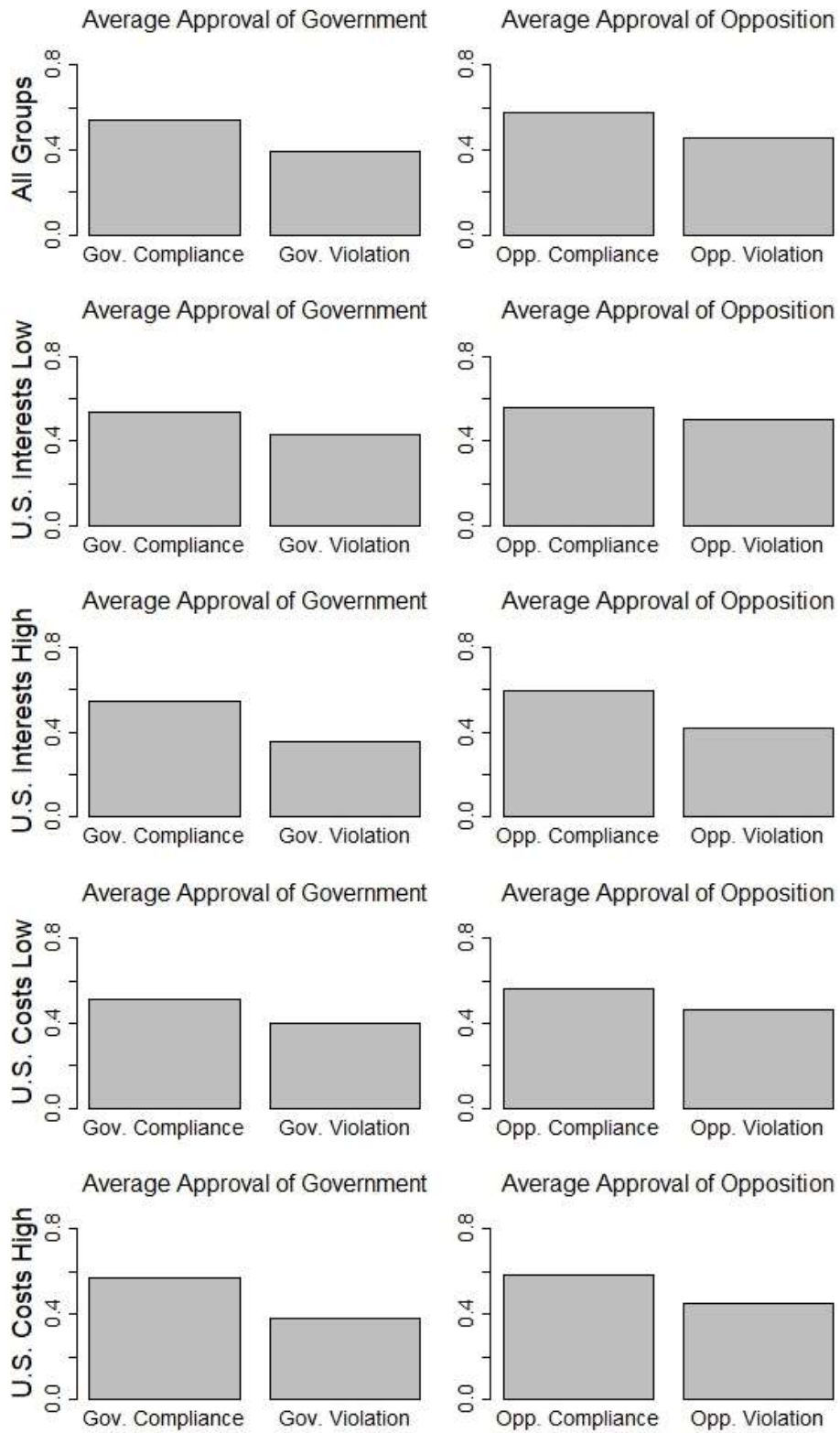


Figure 5: Average Approval of Combatants by Experimental Group (2024)

Figure 6 reports the effects of the government and opposition compliance with international law. The first row of each panel reports this treatment effect across all survey respondents, while the remaining rows do so by subsample, each of which received different information with respect to U.S. interests and costs. Across all groups, information about foreign combatants' compliance with IHL consistently increases U.S. respondents' approval of that actor, suggesting the results of our 2019 study are unlikely to be an artifact of a particular sample or point in time. With respect to the foreign government, compliance increased average approval from about 0.39 to 0.54 across all groups, a treatment effect of about 38%. When U.S. interests were low, average approval increased from about 0.43 to 0.53, a treatment effect of about 25%. When U.S. interests were high, average approval increased from about 0.35 to 0.55, a treatment effect of about 54%. When U.S. costs were low, average approval increased from about 0.40 to 0.51, a treatment effect of about 27%. When U.S. costs were high, average approval increased from about 0.38 to 0.57, a treatment effect of about 50%. With respect to the foreign opposition, compliance increased average approval from about 0.46 to 0.57 across all groups, a treatment effect of about 25%. When U.S. interests were low, compliance did not significantly increase approval. When U.S. interests were high, average approval increased from about 0.42 to 0.59, a treatment effect of about 41%. When U.S. costs were low, average approval increased from about 0.46 to 0.56, a treatment effect of about 21%. When U.S. costs were high, average approval increased from about 0.45 to 0.58, a treatment effect of about 30%.

Interestingly, the treatment effects of compliance were significantly smaller ( $p < 0.05$ ) with respect to both actors when U.S. interests were low than when U.S. interests were high. In other words, information about compliance with IHL increased approval of the foreign actor by a greater amount when respondents were told the U.S. interests in the conflict were greater. This is

consistent with several studies showing that legal rules are important even under more trying circumstances.<sup>83</sup>

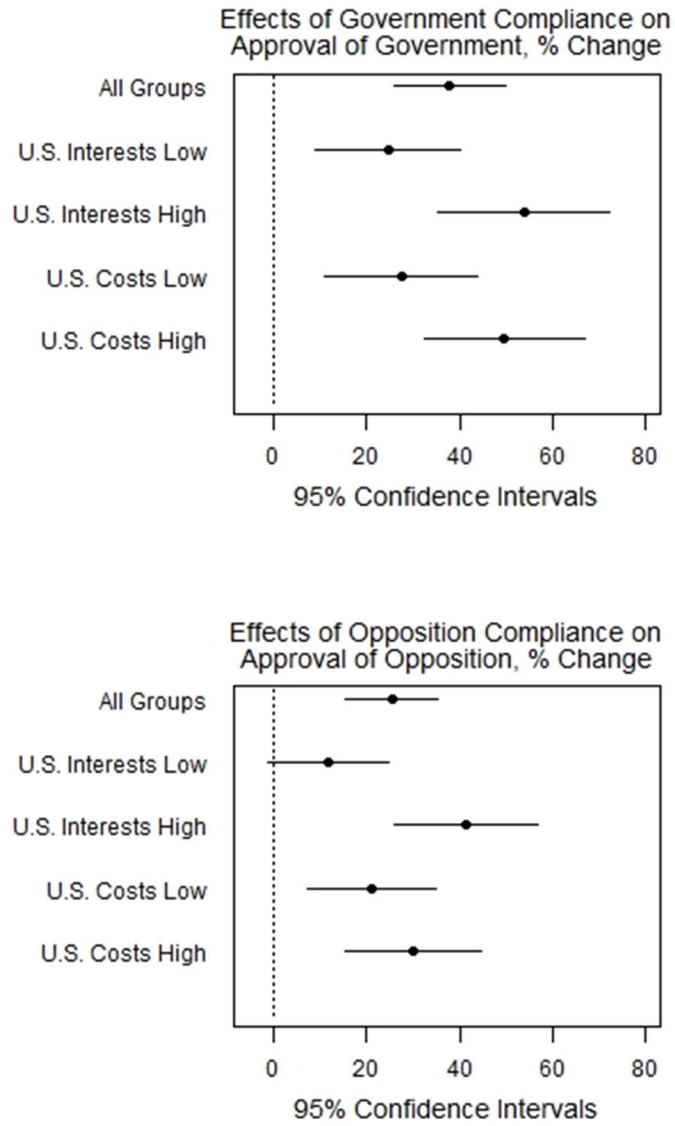


Figure 6: Effects of Compliance on Approval of Combatants (2024)

<sup>83</sup> Wallace 2013; Tomz and Weeks 2021.



## Conclusions

Are publics in great power democracies more likely to support foreign combatants that comply with IHL? Important recent theoretical developments seeking to explain wartime conduct operate under the assumption that this question can be answered in the affirmative. Existing work further argues that compliance choices are driven in part by armed combatants' seeking approval and assistance from various compliance constituencies, including publics in great power democracies, as well as states and NGOs, among others.<sup>84</sup>

We build on this research by directly examining the relationship between information about compliance with IHL and public opinion in three powerful democracies. We find that such information significantly and consistently increases public approval for foreign combatants, as well as for government policies to assist them. We also uncover at least part of *why* individuals in democratic countries are more likely to approve of foreign combatants complying with IHL – they believe that such compliance enhances these actors' reputations, and that compliance is the morally correct choice, though with some important cross-national variation. Moreover, with respect to non-state combatants, we find a third mechanism – perceived legitimacy of war aims – to a lesser extent also mediates the relationship between IHL compliance and public approval.

In addition to providing a better understanding of the relationship between IHL compliance and public opinion in great power democracies, our findings also offer important contributions to the ways IHL may constrain armed combatants. The spread of IHL has been argued to shape incentives of various combatants.<sup>85</sup> Although enforcement is costly and inconsistent, actors often comply when we might expect otherwise. How and why does IHL influence the choices of combatants? Our findings suggest an important role for public opinion

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<sup>84</sup> Jo 2015, 60; Stanton 2016, 40; Fazal 2018, 149.

<sup>85</sup> Fazal 2018, 11-12.

in powerful democracies. Democratic publics are more likely to approve of, and support costly assistance to, foreign combatants that comply with IHL. This may result in compliance in some situations in which combatants seek the support of those publics, when they might not otherwise in the absence of IHL. This provides evidence of an external role of domestic audiences for the enforcement of international rules, specifically in the challenging area of armed conflict. Our results also contribute to other findings showing the role of “ordinary” actors in international law’s functioning.<sup>86</sup>

Yet there are reasons to interpret our results less optimistically. We did not use deception, but outside our controlled experimental setting actors regularly attempt to mislead and misinform. Returning to our opening example of the Ukraine War, Russia engaged in a concerted propaganda campaign before and after its 2022 invasion, especially toward subsequent allegations of war crimes and other IHL violations.<sup>87</sup> If individuals are susceptible to accurate information about compliance, they may also be susceptible to such misinformation. In turn, this could lead publics to support actors they have been misled into believing are “following” IHL, in which case public opinion would not contribute to compliance, potentially assisting instead abuses. By establishing an important empirical baseline that publics *can* be influenced by legal appeals in foreign conflicts, however, we hope future work will explore how information and misinformation compete in shaping public opinion during wartime.

Our findings suggest other avenues for future work. First, we focused on the average effects of compliance with IHL on public opinion, while incorporating a few relevant contextual features. Our follow-up U.S. study built on this by varying general levels of U.S. interests in the foreign conflict and the costs of intervention. Yet many other factors may condition the

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<sup>86</sup> Simmons 2009, 351.

<sup>87</sup> McGlynn and Garner 2022.

receptivity of domestic audiences to international legal appeals, such as whether offending foreign combatants are formal or ideological allies, or the potential agenda setting role of domestic or other foreign elite voices that could cloud perceptions of wartime behavior or the precise meaning of legal rules. Additional research should assess the resilience of the effects we found, especially when confronted by counteracting legal *and* non-legal forces, which can help broaden our understanding of how mechanisms involving the public work in bolstering (or limiting) international law.<sup>88</sup>

Second, while we focused on three democracies that have at times acted alone, many of their interventions have been multilateral, requiring buy-in from other countries. Smaller democracies have played pivotal roles diplomatically and militarily, but it remains unclear whether their publics are similarly susceptible to compliance information. Third, while publics in autocracies are generally thought to hold less sway over their leaders, they may be sensitive to information about foreign policy behavior, including international law.<sup>89</sup> Mass-level influences may still operate in ways that make it fruitful to explore in greater detail the international legal preferences of publics in non-democracies.<sup>90</sup>

Fourth, not only do states sometimes provide assistance to armed combatants, but sometimes so do IOs and NGOs. These actors may represent important additional compliance constituencies for rebel groups and governments.<sup>91</sup> In the future, we hope to explore if and how combatants' compliance with international law affect elites working in such organizations, which would help deepen our understanding of whether belligerents make strategic decisions in part based on these institutional actors' preferences. Alongside elites within IOs/NGOs, attention

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<sup>88</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for these suggestions.

<sup>89</sup> Weiss and Dafoe 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Chilton and Linos 2021.

<sup>91</sup> Jo 2015 266-268; Stanton 2016, 39.

should also be devoted to more traditional national policy-making elites as past research has suggested important areas of similarity (but also differences) between the foreign policy preferences of elites and mass publics.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Hafner-Burton et al. 2014; Kertzer 2022.

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