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Attitudes toward the Use of Force: Instrumental Imperatives, Moral Principles, and International Law

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Abstract: *What informs ordinary citizens' attitudes toward the use of force? Previous research identifies several key concerns in public opinion toward war, but does not directly evaluate the relative importance of these considerations. We articulate three distinct logics of war support—moral, legal, and instrumental—and use an experimental survey with 3,000 U.S. respondents to test how ordinary citizens make trade-offs among multiple competing imperatives relevant for decision making in war. Our design is the first to isolate to what extent substantive legal demands, instrumental military imperatives, and specific moral principles are reflected in respondents' preferences. Although all logics have some resonance, we find that respondents' preferences are remarkably consistent with several core demands of international law even though respondents are not told that the legality of the use of force is at stake. Only the imperative to minimize U.S. military casualties overwhelms both legal and moral demands.*

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In war, moral principles about the permissibility of killing and instrumental military imperatives often directly contradict each other. International law, meanwhile, makes distinct substantive demands for how force must be used that accommodate instrumental and moral imperatives to some extent, but track neither in full. To what extent do ordinary citizens' attitudes toward the wartime use of force reflect substantive demands of international law, specific moral principles, or instrumental considerations?

We articulate three logics of support for the use of force: an instrumental logic focused on maximizing military effectiveness, a moral logic concerned with minimizing individual rights violations, and a logic that reflects the substantive demands of international law. We evaluate the relative importance of these logics in a study of respondent preferences in the United States, the democratic state to have used force in its international affairs most often in the twenty-first century. Studies have highlighted that public opinion is crucial

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for war-related decision making in the United States (Croco 2011; Tomz and Weeks 2013; Tomz, Weeks, and Yarhi-Milo 2020). However, existing studies disagree on what explains attitudes toward war (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017; Sagan and Valentino 2017). Moreover, it is poorly understood how citizens make the complex trade-offs that decision making in war in reality requires.

We conduct a combined vignette and conjoint survey experiment with 3,000 U.S. citizens that varies a war's cause and the attributes of individual attacks and strategies for fighting the war. The results suggest that respondents' attitudes reflect three substantive demands of international law: Respondents prefer attacks against military objects and combatants to attacks against civilian objects and noncombatants (legal rule of distinction). They seek to minimize foreign civilian casualties (legal rule of necessity). Moreover, the role of the war's cause in shaping respondents' preferences for how the war is fought accords with the independence of *jus ad bellum* from *jus in bello*. Although the instrumental imperative of maximizing military effectiveness is also reflected in respondents' preferences, it is not their overriding concern, as the instrumental logic would predict. Only the imperative to minimize U.S. military casualties overwhelms legal demands if they directly compete.[1]

Preferences that track these three legal demands likely reflect normative concerns, that is, respondents' beliefs about right and wrong. Respondents' preference for minimizing civilian casualties might even be expressing what they perceive as a moral imperative. However, a moral logic that is concerned with minimizing individual rights violations also makes two distinct demands that are not reflected in and diverge from international law. According to the now dominant moral theory of justified killing in war, referred to as reductive individualism,[2] respondents should take account of foreign civilians' contribution to the war, which determines their moral liability to harming. We do not find consistent support for this expectation. Moreover, the justice of the war's cause should affect respondents' preferences for how the war is fought. Although respondents generally support the use of force more in a war with a just cause, the latter does not alter how respondents evaluate the attributes of strategies and attacks in the way the moral logic predicts.

[1]The study does not seek to investigate the mechanism of how international law can leave an imprint in individuals' preferences, but we highlight a plausible mechanism in the last section.

[2]For the argument that reductive individualism is the "new orthodoxy" among moral theories of permissible killing in war, see Benbaji and Statman (2020), Pattison (2018), and Renzo (2018). We give further reasons for our focus on this moral theory below.

Our findings show that U.S. respondents integrate instrumental and normative considerations when deciding whether to support the use of force. Their normative considerations, however, more clearly resemble three substantive demands of international law rather than the fundamental moral principles associated with reductive individualism. This is to our knowledge the first study to suggest that ordinary U.S. citizens' preferences reflect demands consistent with international law even when they are not told that the legality of the use of force is at stake.

Support for the Use of Force in the United States

According to a rich literature on U.S. public opinion, support for the use of force in the United States mostly follows an instrumental logic (Drezner 2008). The U.S. public is described as "prudent" (Jentleson and Britton 1998) and its support for the use of force as based on an "expected utility calculation" (Johns and Davies 2017; Record 2002). By this, scholars mean that U.S. citizens support likely successful wars (Boettcher and Cobb 2009; Eichenberg 2005; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005/2006), prefer minimal U.S. military casualties (Gartner 2008; Gartner and Segura 1998), and show considerably less concern for deaths among foreign civilians (Press, Sagan, and Valentino 2013; Sagan and Valentino 2017). At the same time, we have reason to believe that normative considerations about right and wrong also shape attitudes toward the use of force. For instance, scholarship has demonstrated that individuals' general foreign policy postures are related to their deep value commitments (Kertzer et al. 2014; Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017). We know much less about the precise content of these normative concerns or their relative importance for respondents' preferences.

A number of studies have shown that foreign civilian casualties have some influence on support for the use of force (Johns and Davies 2017; Press, Sagan, and Valentino 2013; Sagan and Valentino 2017).[3] However, the substantive insight that these studies afford into the *relative* importance of sparing civilians compared to instrumental considerations is limited by designs in which each respondent faces only a dichotomous choice between sparing civilians and either military effectiveness (Press, Sagan, and Valentino 2013) or sparing U.S. troops (Sagan and Valentino 2017). Moreover, these

[3]A recent study shows that the imperative to spare civilians drives support for humanitarian interventions (Kreps and Maxey 2018).

studies generally conceptualize sparing civilians as demanded by a social or international norm (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, p. 892), neglecting moral principles.

A moral theory that demands that we wage war without violating the rights of individuals against whom we fight requires that not all civilians ought to be protected equally (Fabre 2012; Frowe 2011). Instead, according to reductive individualism, the prevailing moral theory of justified killing in war, civilians' moral liability to harming depends on their contribution to the war and the justice of a war's cause. To our knowledge, only two studies have inquired into the public resonance of the notion that civilians' contribution to the war should determine their liability to harming. An investigation of public opinion in Israel found differences in respondents' willingness to support an attack depending on the description of the victims, though the authors were unable to establish whether it was the designation of victims as "civilians" or their described contribution to the war that drove preferences (Benbaji, Falk, and Feldman 2015, p, 24). A recent study by Sagan and Valentino did not find that civilians' moral liability mattered for respondents' willingness to support attacks (Sagan and Valentino 2018). Neither of these studies compares the relative importance of individualist moral principles to instrumental considerations for attitudes toward the use of force.

The relative resonance of principles enshrined in international law remains likewise poorly understood. Since roughly the 1991 Gulf War, the selection of targets in U.S. command centers has been guided by international law (Fazal 2018). U.S. soldiers are trained in the laws of war, targets and strategies are vetted for compliance (Dickinson 2010; Dill 2015). This subjection of warfare to law has gone hand in hand with U.S. policy makers' increasingly referring to international law in order to render the use of force acceptable to the U.S. public (Brunnee and Toope 2012; Nuñez-Mietz 2018). Ample experimental research has established that framing the use of force as legal increases U.S. public support (Chaudoin 2014; Chilton and Versteeg 2016; Tomz 2008; Wallace 2013, 2019).[4] This is an important finding. However, it remains unclear whether it is the content of particular rules that appeals to respondents or the fact that these rules are declared legal (Berinsky 2007; Kreps and Wallace 2016).

Whether respondents prefer the use of force when it conforms to the law's substantive demands, but when law is *not* mentioned explicitly, is so far unstudied. Answering this question is important because the legality of high-profile attacks and wars tends to be intensely contested in public discourse. As a result, ordinary citizens are likely confronted with competing arguments about legality in real-world politics. Explicitly priming legality thus gives different insights from studying whether the use of force that conforms to the law's substantive demands is more likely to meet with ordinary citizens' support before they encounter different claims of (il)legality. It is the latter that we do here.

[4]These framing effects are weaker when individuals have strong prior beliefs about an issue (Grieco et al. 2011).

Three Logics of Support for the Use of Force

When it comes to the use of force, legal demands, moral imperatives about the permissibility of killing, and instrumental military considerations are not mutually exclusive. Some instrumental considerations are morally relevant. Following moral principles can sometimes be useful for winning a war. Moreover, the laws of war to some extent accommodate moral principles and instrumental imperatives. Law, for instance, prohibits direct attacks against civilians, who are often less morally liable to harming than combatants. Moreover, law permits attacking objects if this affords a definite military advantage toward victory. A law-conforming attack may therefore sometimes be less morally wrongful and more instrumentally effective compared to one that violates international law. If decision makers choose between two attacks or two strategies for fighting a war, it may therefore not always be possible to tell whether a choice in favor of the lawful attack or strategy really reflects a preference alignment with legal demands, moral principles, or instrumental considerations.

At the same time, on the battlefield, moral principles about the permissibility of killing and instrumental military imperatives frequently diverge. For instance, as further explained below, reductive individualism demands paying attention to the liability of the civilians that are at risk of being harmed in an attack, liability depending on the civilians' contribution to the war, and whether the war they contribute to is just. If a decision maker chooses an attack that risks harming civilians who contribute to an unjust war over an attack that endangers civilians who do not, this may interfere with the instrumental imperative to maximize the attack's contribution to victory. International legal rules, meanwhile, make distinct demands that differ from both moral and instrumental considerations. For instance, the legal rule of distinction demands that attackers never directly target civilians even

if the civilians contribute to an unjust war or if targeting civilians maximizes military effectiveness.[5]

Choosing the morally least wrongful attack or strategy for fighting a war does therefore not necessarily imply choosing the most instrumentally effective attack or strategy. Neither the morally least wrongful nor the instrumentally most effective attack or strategy may conform to international law. This allows us to articulate three distinct logics of support for the use of force, which we refer to as instrumental, moral, and legal. Each logic consists of expectations for whether and how various attributes of individual attacks or overall war strategies, for instance the target of attack or the likelihood that a strategy will lead to victory, should influence preferences for or against an attack or strategy. The three logics also differ in whether the attributes should interact with each other and whether their effect should depend on the cause of the war. The next three sections introduce the three logics.

A Legal Logic

We derive the legal logic of support for the use of force from international treaty law. The law's substantive demands for permissible conduct on the battlefield, the *jus in bello*, are enshrined in the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions. The three crucial rules of distinction, necessity, and proportionality all have the status of customary international law, meaning they bind all states regardless of whether they have ratified the treaty. Distinction demands that soldiers direct attacks only against combatants or military objects, never against civilians or civilian objects. If the legal logic explains support for the use of force, we therefore expect that respondents prefer military to civilian targets, whether the target of attack is an object or a person. The target should be the attribute of the attack that is respondents' overriding concern. Any civilian casualties that are expected to arise as a side effect of an attack against a military target must be minimized as much as possible according to the legal rule of necessity.[6] We therefore expect that respondents prefer attacks and strategies with lower projected civilian casualties. Whether the civilians that are expected to perish in the attack contribute to the enemy's war should have no effect on attack support as law treats all civilians as equally worthy of protection, unless they "directly participate in hostilities." The legal rule of proportionality further requires that civilian casualties that cannot be avoided must be proportionate to the military advantage that an attack is expected to yield.[7] The negative effect of the expected number of civilian casualties should thus be weaker the higher an attack's contribution to victory. Moreover, the war's cause should not affect what attacks or strategies respondents prefer. According to the legal logic, the *jus in bello*, that is, how a war ought to be fought, is independent from the *jus ad bellum*, meaning the justice or legality of a war's cause.

A Moral Logic

The moral logic of support for the use of force that we articulate is concerned with minimizing morally wrongful killing. We derive our expectations from the reductive individualist theory of justified conduct in war (Fabre 2012; McMahan 2009). Its central proposition is that we must wage war without violating the rights of the individuals against whom we fight. We focus on this particular moral theory because reductive individualism theorizes permissible conduct in war based on fundamental moral principles that govern killing in general (Lazar 2016). These moral principles have been suggested to inform individuals' attitudes toward the permissibility of killing in peacetime (Cushman, Young, and Hauser 2006; Mikhail 2007), thus allowing us to shed light on the extent to which these proposed "everyday moral commitments" inform attitudes toward war.

Reductive individualists have challenged the previously dominant articulation of permissible conduct in war by Michael Walzer. We do not separately test the resonance of what is often referred to as conventional just war theory in this article because according to its most influential proponent, it is not a general moral theory of permissible killing, but a theory specifically about waging war (Walzer 1977, p. 20). Moreover, because it is derived from a close study of how wars have historically unfolded, conventional just war theory incorporates instrumental military imperatives alongside moral considerations (Lazar 2016; Morkevicius 2018).[8] As Walzer

[5]According to international law, individuals retain their status as civilians regardless of their conduct. Civilians only loose their immunity from attack if they directly participate in hostilities, most often this means they take up arms.

[6]This rule is sometimes referred to as the principle of precautions in attack.

[7]The First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions prohibits attacking a target if the civilian casualties would be "excessive" to the anticipated military advantage. This language is meant to express the principle of proportionality.

[8]In this respect, conventional just war theory resembles the laws of war, which likewise have their roots in what Walzer calls "the war convention," that is, how states have customarily conducted wars. Reductive individualism, in contrast, is a purely prescriptive

puts it, conventional just war theory is descriptive as well as prescriptive (Walzer 1977, p. 14).[9]

According to the individualist moral principle of distinction, civilians are morally liable to harm if, and in as much as, they contribute to a morally unjustified threat. We therefore expect that respondents prefer attacks, which risk harming civilians who contribute more to the enemy's war over attacks that risk the lives of those who contribute less or not at all. This preference should, however, hold only in a war with a just cause in which civilians "on the other side" contribute to an unjustified threat. Furthermore, it is only morally permissible to kill civilians who are innocent bystanders if this is unintended and necessary in the pursuit of a war's just cause (moral principle of necessity). We therefore expect that respondents prefer attacks with fewer projected civilian casualties, but the negative effect of the number of civilian casualties should be weaker the more civilians contribute to the war. This preference should only hold if the United States has a just cause and the adversary's civilians contribute to an unjustified threat.[10] If the United States lacks a just cause, respondents should prefer attacks and strategies for fighting the war that minimize casualties among morally nonliable individuals, which is *prima facie* every person on the other side regardless of their contribution to the war. In general, if the United States lacks a just cause for war, respondents should support attacks and strategies less.[11]

An Instrumental Logic

What imperative or utility an instrumentally rational actor maximizes in war is in principle subject to that actor's preferences. Our understanding of an instrumental logic of support for the use of force therefore relies on the prevailing theory of U.S. public opinion. This theory holds that U.S. respondents' support for the use of force depends on a war's expected benefits, defined as success in achieving a war's goals, and its expected costs, defined in terms of U.S. military casualties (Gartner and Segura 1998; Mueller 1973).[12] The likelihood of a war's success, it is argued, weakens the negative effect of U.S. casualties on support (Eichenberg 2005; Gartner 2008; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005/2006). According to this logic, we expect that the contribution of an attack to victory and the likelihood that a strategy will allow the United States to achieve the war's goals should be respondents' overriding concerns. Preplanned air attacks rarely put U.S. soldiers in harm's way. However, "troops in contact situations" on the ground do risk U.S. soldiers' lives. When it comes to strategies for fighting the war, respondents are therefore expected to prefer strategies that minimize casualties among U.S. soldiers. In accordance with the argument that "victory has many friends" (Eichenberg 2005), we further expect that the negative effect of casualties among U.S. troops on support for the use of force is weaker the more likely a strategy is to successfully achieve the war's goals. A rich, though largely separate literature further suggests that U.S. citizens prefer strategies with lower economic costs (Caverley 2014; Flores-Macías and Kreps 2017; Kreps 2018). Because existing studies tend to focus on one or the other type of cost, we have no firm expectations regarding the relative influence of economic costs versus U.S. casualties on support for the use of force.

Summary of Expectations

Tables 1 and 2 summarize our main expectations for individual preplanned attacks and for overall war strategies. For each logic, the tables outline whether a particular projected consequence of an attack or strategy should have a positive, negative, or no effect on support for its execution should respondents adhere to that logic. In short, the civilian or military status of a target of attack is relevant only from a legal point of view.[13] An attack's

moral theory articulating fundamental principles, which are meant to govern all killing (Pattison 2018).

[9]An important recent study compares the resonance of conventional just war theory and reductive individualism, focusing on the moral status of combatants, an issue we largely bracket here (Sagan and Valentino 2019).

[10]It can be morally relevant whether civilians contribute to an unjust war because they fervently support it or because they have no choice. We nonetheless bracket civilians' mental states because it would be highly unrealistic to suppose that the United Sates has information about the motives or intentions of specific civilians in the country under attack. Moreover, even if we assumed that civilians are not responsible for their contribution to an unjust war (they are "innocent threats"), it would still be more wrongful to kill civilians who do not contribute to the unjust war and who are innocent bystanders.

[11]A fuller reductive individualist account of killing in war is included on p. 24 in the Supporting Information (SI). There we explain why we prioritize the implications of specific principles in the articulation of firm expectations regarding respondents' attitudes.

[12]This literature is mostly concerned with U.S. wars abroad that do not put U.S. civilians at risk.

[13]As further explained below, we avoided choosing civilian objects on which an attack would have obvious moral costs regardless of the projected civilian casualties, such as hospitals or schools. We further chose objects and persons whose legal status does not necessarily align with the instrumental military value of attacking them.

TABLE 1 Attacks: Summary of Expectations

	Attack Attribute			
Logic	**Military target**	**Contribution to victory**	**Expected civilian casualties**	**Civilians' contribution to war**
Instrumental	–	Positive	–	–
Moral	–	–	Negative	Positive[a]
Legal	Positive	Positive	Negative	–

[a]Effect only obtains when United States has just cause.
Note: This table summarizes our main expectations for the effects of attack attributes on respondents' attack support. For each logic, the table shows whether a particular projected consequence of an attack should have a positive, negative, or no effect on support for the attack being carried out.

contribution to victory is the overriding concern from an instrumental point of view. Civilians' contribution to the war matters only according to the outlined moral logic. Civilian casualties should negatively affect attack support from both the moral and legal point of view. However, from a legal point of view this attribute should matter less the more an attack contributes to victory. From the moral point of view, in contrast, civilian casualties should matter less the more these civilians contribute to an unjust war.

When it comes to strategies for fighting a war, our dominant expectation from the legal and moral point of view is that civilian casualties negatively influence support for the use of force. Only from a moral point of view should the negative effect of civilian casualties depend on the justice of the war's cause. From an instrumental perspective, U.S. troops and economic costs negatively affect support for a strategy, whereas the likelihood of success has a positive impact.[14]

Survey Sample and Design

To test our hypotheses, we conducted an online survey experiment in August 2017 via YouGov on a sample of 3,000 adult U.S. citizens. All hypotheses were registered prior to receiving the data. Our sample was drawn from a large pool of opt-in respondents via YouGov's matched sampling procedure, which uses the American Community Survey (ACS) to draw the target sample and construct the sampling frame.[15] Our final, weighted sample has the same distributions as the sampling frame—which is a stratified sample of the full 2012 ACS sample—in terms of gender, race, age, education, ideology, party identification, and census region. The poststratification weights adjust for slight imbalances, but do not affect our results.[16]

We combine a vignette experiment with a conjoint design. Each respondent reads one of three prime vignettes that describes a war the United States wages against a hypothetical enemy. The primes vary the war's cause. The conjoint design investigates respondents' support for individual attacks (attack support) and overall war strategies (strategy support) in light of their projected consequences. The combination of the conjoint with a vignette experiment allows us to explore potential interactions between a war's cause and respondents' preferences for how a war is fought. For the conjoint experiment, respondents are asked to assess pairs of attacks and strategies with randomly varying attributes that affect their legal conformity, moral wrongfulness, and instrumental effectiveness. This allows us to estimate the relative resonance of the three logics outlined above.

Each respondent is first randomly assigned to read one of three prime vignettes. In vignette 1, the United States wages a war that responds to an imminent threat of an armed attack by a terrorist group on the territory of a hypothetical state called Esor ("imminent threat prime"). Resort to force is *prima facie* morally justified[17] and permissible under international law. States have a right to

[14]As the first study to test the relevance of foreign military casualties for war support, we do not articulate firm expectations regarding the effect of this attribute. The SI includes a complete list of hypotheses in tables S18 and S19 on p. 22–23.

[15]The ACS is a representative survey run by the U.S. Census bureau and based on a selection of 3.5 million addresses each year. https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/.

[16]Page 1 of the SI includes more information on the sampling process. Tables S14, S15, S16, and S17 on p. 18–21 in the SI replicate our main results based on the unweighted sample.

[17]To characterize the resort to force as fully justified, the scenario would have to specify the projected consequences of the U.S.

TABLE 2 Strategies: Summary of Expectations

	Strategy Attribute				
Logic	**US troops[a]**	**Enemy troops[a]**	**Enemy civilians[a]**	**Economic costs**	**Likelihood of success**
Instrumental	Negative	–	–	Negative	Positive
Moral	–	–	Negative[b]	–	–
Legal	–	–	Negative	–	–

[a]Projected casualties.
[b]Effect weaker when United States has just cause and stronger when it lacks a just cause.
Note: This table summarizes our main expectations for the effects of strategy attributes on respondents' strategy support. For each logic, the table shows whether a particular projected consequence of a strategy should have a positive, negative, or no effect on support for the strategy being pursued.

resort to force in self-defense against an imminent armed attack.[18] In vignette 2, the United States wages the same war though intelligence suggests that the same terrorist group does not pose an imminent threat ("no imminent threat prime"). Here the United States lacks a just cause for invading Esor according to both moral principles and international law.[19] The control group reads a neutral vignette containing no information regarding the presence or absence of an imminent threat. The verbatim instructions are included in Table 3. Importantly, none of the vignettes explicitly inform our respondents whether the portrayed war would be legal or just.

After reading the vignette, respondents receive a question about its content and, if they answer wrongly, are asked to reread the vignette. Thereafter, we ask two questions on a 7-point scale: (1) the extent to which the respondents support the invasion and (2) the extent to which they consider the hypothetical terrorist group a threat. Although the legal and the moral logics both point toward stronger support for the U.S. resort to force in the "imminent threat" prime group, the logics make divergent predictions for whether this alters the effect of certain attack and strategy attributes on respondents' support, as outlined above.

The survey then proceeds to the second experimental part for all respondents. Respondents are invited to imagine that U.S. intelligence services have compiled information about potential attacks in Esor and that the U.S. regional command has drawn up potential strategies for waging the war. Respondents are asked to indicate their preferences for specific strategies and attacks. We use a conjoint design to investigate respondents' preferences. Conjoint experiments allow for a simultaneous test of multiple hypotheses about individual and interactive attribute effects and disaggregate multidimensional treatments into their distinct components. Respondents are presented with profiles to chose from or rate, and all profile attributes vary randomly from one profile to the next (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015; Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). By randomly generating each attack and strategy profile, and by ensuring the orthogonality of attributes in expectation, we are able to isolate the effect of each individual attribute (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014).

We rely on a paired conjoint design, which has been shown to perform well compared to real-world benchmarks (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015), with a forced choice and a rating outcome (see also Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016). Accordingly, respondents assess several, in terms of their attribute combinations randomly generated pairs of attacks and strategies in two ways: First, they are asked to choose one attack/strategy over the other (forced choice outcome). Second, as respondents might be forced to choose profiles they do not at all support, respondents are also asked to indicate their support for each attack/strategy on a scale from 1 to 7 (rating outcome). Each respondent has an equal probability of being presented with five pairs of attacks or five pairs of strategies first. We also randomize, in each profile pair, the order in which the attacks/strategies are rated after the forced choice.

The attributes of the attacks and strategies are summarized in Tables 4 and 5. Consistent with our

invasion. As those vary in one of the conjoint experiments, we omit this information from the vignette.

[18]Legal majority opinion now endorses such a right even in response to an armed attack by a nonstate actor, such as a terrorist organization, if the territorial state is unwilling or unable to prevent the attack (Hakimi 2015).

[19]Both groups of respondents might believe that Esor has supported terror attacks in the past. This would not provide legal grounds for invading Esor, but it might be considered morally relevant. Crucially, the absence/presence of a forward-looking threat still makes resort to force morally more permissible and less wrongful in the "imminent threat prime" than the "no imminent threat prime."

TABLE 3 Randomly Assigned Vignettes Varying the War's Cause

Intro (all)	*Please imagine that a country called Esor existed and that the following events are taking place in the real world today:* The United States has long accused the government of Esor of supporting and harboring terrorists on its territory. The government of Esor is generally unwilling to interfere with the terrorists' activities.
Imminent threat prime	U.S. intelligence services currently have credible intelligence that the Esor-based terrorists are about to launch a major attack against the United States. U.S. troops have therefore invaded Esor. The goal of the United States' military campaign is to prevent the imminent attack, topple Esor's government and install a new regime in Esor which will not tolerate the presence of terrorists.
No imminent threat prime	U.S. intelligence services have no intelligence to suggest that the Esor-based terrorists pose a threat against or plan to attack the United States. U.S. troops have nonetheless invaded Esor. The goal of the United States' military campaign is to topple Esor's government and install a new regime in Esor which will not tolerate the presence of terrorists.
Control	U.S. troops have invaded Esor. The goal of the United States' military campaign is to topple Esor's government and install a new regime in Esor which will not tolerate the presence of terrorists.

Note: This table shows the vignettes that respondents in the three prime groups were assigned to read prior to the conjoint experiment. Each respondent was assigned to read one of the three vignettes. All vignettes describe the U.S. invasion of the hypothetical country Esor. The imminence of the threat to the United States, that is, the cause of the war, varies by prime group.

theoretical expectations, the attacks differ according to whether the target is civilian (a civilian member of Esor's government, a civilian power plant, and a radio broadcasting station) or military (a high ranking military commander and a military power plant) and whether it is an object or person. We further vary the projected contribution of the attack to victory, the expected number of civilian casualties, and the contribution that the civilians, expected to perish in the attack, make to the enemy's (Esor's) war.

We do not impose restrictions on the possible attribute combinations, as we do not rule out any combinations to plausibly occur in reality, though some occur more likely or more frequently than others.[20] Figure 1 shows one example of a realizable pair of attacks with one of many possible attribute configurations as presented to our respondents.

The strategies vary according to the overall projected consequences of the war. Specifically, we randomly vary—again without restrictions on the attribute configurations that can be realized—the projected casualties among U.S. troops, Esor's troops, Esor's civilians; the projected economic costs of the war; and the likelihood of victory.

The scales of U.S. and civilian casualties and the economic costs mimic previous U.S. wars, namely, World War II, the Vietnam War, the 1991 Gulf War, and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.[21] They reflect the higher risk these wars have posed to foreign civilians compared to U.S. military personnel. U.S. military casualties are included in the strategy, but not the attack profiles because U.S. soldiers have a minimal risk of dying in preplanned air attacks. Figure 2 shows one possible example of a strategy pair as presented to our respondents.

We estimate the "average marginal component effect" (AMCE), that is, the marginal effect of each attribute averaged over the joint distribution of the other attributes (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). Hypotheses that imply that an effect varies between different prime groups or that the effect of a particular attack/strategy attribute depends on values of other attributes are tested with interactions. In the analysis below, we mainly focus on the AMCE and differences in AMCEs across prime groups. Tests that center on the

[20]Despite their legal status, the United States has, in the past, attacked civilian power plants, for instance in the 1991 Gulf War (Gellman 23 June 1991). It targeted media installations and civilian leaders in Iraq in 2003 (Human Rights Watch 2003).

[21]Our scales track estimates. Particularly in the case of civilian casualties, these estimates are contested.

TABLE 4 Attack Attributes (Conjoint Profiles, Independent Randomization)

Attribute	Levels
Target of attack	Target a civilian member of Esor's government to undermine the political leadership's ability to govern the state Target a high-ranking military commander in Esor's armed forces to undermine the military leadership's command and control over the troops Target power plant that services civilian homes in Esor to undermine civilian morale in Esor by "switching off the lights." Target a power plant that services one of Esor's military bases to degrade Esor's military capabilities Target a radio broadcasting station to undermine popular support for Esor's government by stopping the dissemination of pro-government news
Contribution of attack to victory	Low—insignificant contribution to victory Medium—moderate contribution to victory High—significant contribution to victory Very high—crucial contribution to victory
Projected civilian casualties	0–2 civilian deaths 20–22 civilian deaths 200–220 civilian deaths 2,000–2,200 civilian deaths
Civilians' contribution to the war	The civilians do not actively support Esor's war against the United States The civilians make a minor contribution to Esor's war against the United States, for instance, by producing food supplies for Esor's troops The civilians make a vital contribution to Esor's war against the United States, for instance, by working in munitions factories

Note: This table lists all attack attributes and possible attribute levels that were used to produce the attack profiles. Respondents were presented with randomly generated attack profiles in the conjoint experiment.

interaction between conjoint attributes are presented in the SI.[22]

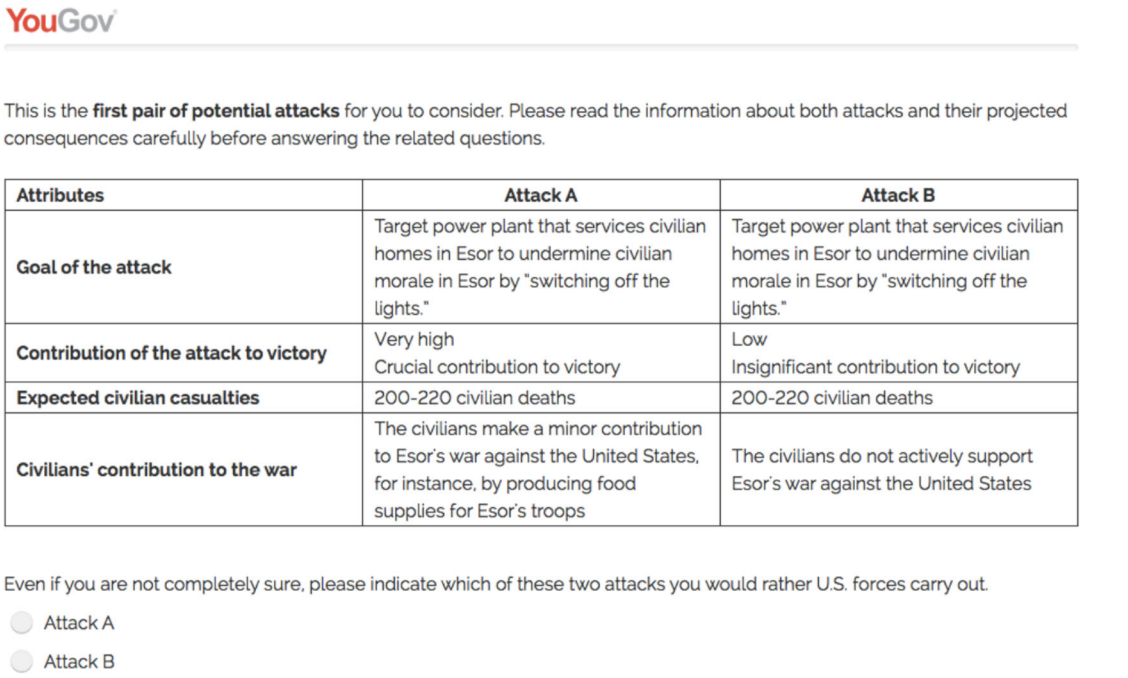
The combination of a vignette and a conjoint design mirrors real-world decision making, in that the assessment of attack and strategy options takes place against the backdrop of the war's cause, which tends not to vary over time. Our design thus mimics the fact that decision making about the resort to war (primes) and the conduct of a war (attack and strategy profiles) are in fact subject to separate, though not fully insulated processes.[23] Apart from our distinct theoretical focus and the setup of our design, we depart from prior experimental work on attitudes toward force by avoiding the explicit association with a real-world empirical scenario such as a potential conflict with Iran (Sagan and Valentino 2017) or the threat posed by Al-Qaida (Press, Sagan, and Valentino 2013). We use a hypothetical country, named Esor, as the target of a U.S. invasion, because our goal is to test the relative resonance of the three logics, rather than attitudes toward particular countries or wars. Of course, our respondents inevitably make real-world associations (Dickinson, Zhang, and Caughey 2018). We tentatively assess such associations at the end of the survey, but do not find patterns that would suggest that these associations drive our results.[24] Moreover, as outlined above, unlike previous studies we do not investigate whether respondents can be primed with explicit legal or moral claims. The experiment never mentions international law or morality.

[22]We estimate two distinct quantities: The "average component interaction effect," ACIE (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014), on p. 10–13 in the SI, and the "average marginal interaction effect," AMIE (Egami and Imai 2019) on p. 15 in the SI. We also present the marginal means for the different prime groups (Leeper 2018; Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020) on p. 16 in the SI.

[23]The President in consultation with the U.S. Congress decides on the resort to force. Since the 1991 Gulf War, military theater commanders "own" the war plan.

[24]See Tables S10, S11, and S12 on p. 8, Figures S15, S16, and S17 on p. 7, and Figures S18, S19, and S20 on p. 9 in the SI.

FIGURE 1 Example of an Attack Pair


YouGov

This is the **first pair of potential attacks** for you to consider. Please read the information about both attacks and their projected consequences carefully before answering the related questions.

Attributes	Attack A	Attack B
Goal of the attack	Target power plant that services civilian homes in Esor to undermine civilian morale in Esor by "switching off the lights."	Target power plant that services civilian homes in Esor to undermine civilian morale in Esor by "switching off the lights."
Contribution of the attack to victory	Very high Crucial contribution to victory	Low Insignificant contribution to victory
Expected civilian casualties	200-220 civilian deaths	200-220 civilian deaths
Civilians' contribution to the war	The civilians make a minor contribution to Esor's war against the United States, for instance, by producing food supplies for Esor's troops	The civilians do not actively support Esor's war against the United States

Even if you are not completely sure, please indicate which of these two attacks you would rather U.S. forces carry out.

Attack A

Attack B

Note: This figure shows two randomly generated attack profiles as presented to our respondents. Respondents saw five examples of such pairs of attacks. The figure also shows the forced choice question.

Results

We begin by evaluating the influence of the war's cause, that is, the presence or absence of an imminent threat, on overall support for the U.S. military campaign against Esor and respondents' threat perception. This effect can be interpreted as indicative of the treatment take-up in the distinct prime groups. Figure 3 plots the coefficients of a linear regression without intercept, indicating the average outcome for each prime group. It also plots the 95% confidence intervals (CIs). The 7-point outcome variable has been rescaled to vary between 0 and 1. As expected, we find that respondents who read the "imminent threat" prime are more supportive of the invasion of Esor and perceive the Esor-based terrorists as more of a threat. The difference between this group and the control group is substantively large and significant (support for war, 0.154, CI = [0.115, 0.193]; threat perception, 0.191, CI = [0.157, 0.225]). Respondents who read the "no imminent threat" prime support the invasion less and perceive the Esor-based terrorists as less threatening, albeit with a smaller difference to the control group (support, −0.098, CI = [−0.135, −0.060]; threat, −0.096, CI = [−0.130, −0.062]). Respondents are more supportive of a war with a morally just and legal cause.

Turning to the questions for conjoint analysis, we regress the forced choice outcome and the rating outcome (rescaled to vary between 0 and 1) on a set of dummy variables representing each attribute level, with one omitted level as the reference category for each attribute. As every respondent is presented with multiple pairs of attacks/strategies, standard errors are clustered by respondent. The regression coefficients for the dummy variables represent the marginal average effect of a given attribute value relative to the baseline category. For the attacks, Figure 4 plots the estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned attribute levels on the average change in the probability that an attack will be chosen when it contains the respective attribute value instead of the baseline category (forced choice outcome). The baseline category is represented by the dot on the vertical gray line, missing the horizontal line. The 95% CIs are indicated by the horizontal lines.

Figure 4 shows that a military as opposed to a civilian target increases the probability of an attack being preferred. A military object or person instead of a civilian government member as a target increases the support for an attack by about 8 (military commander, 0.075, CI = [0.053, 0.098]) to 10 (military power plant, 0.101, CI = [0.078, 0.124]) percentage points. An object with a civilian, but more contested status (the radio broadcasting

FIGURE 2 Example of a Strategy Pair

YouGov

This is the **first pair of strategies** for you to consider. Please read the information about both strategies and their projected consequences carefully before answering the related questions.

Attributes	Strategy A	Strategy B
Casualties among U.S. troops	2,000	200
Casualties among Esor's troops	2,000	200,000
Casualties among Esor's civilians	3,000,000	30,000
Cost of the war per year in % of GDP	36%	36%
Likelihood of defeating Esor and achieving the war's goals	40%	40%

Even if you are not completely sure, please indicate which of these two strategies you would rather U.S. forces pursue.

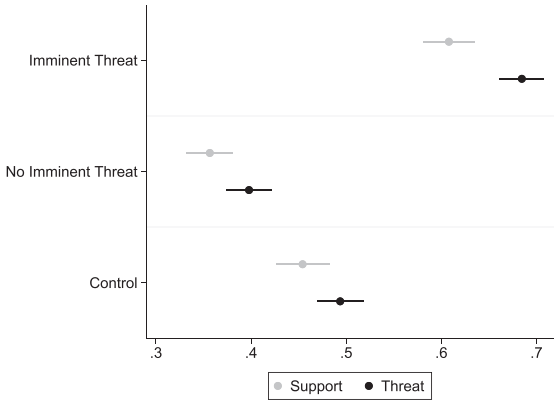
Strategy A

Strategy B

Note: This figure shows two randomly generated strategy profiles as presented to our respondents. Respondents saw five examples of such pairs of strategies. The figure also shows the forced choice question.

station) has a small positive effect of 3 percentage points (0.026, CI = [0.003, 0.050]). Moreover, a very high contribution to victory increases the probability that an attack is preferred by about 20 percentage points (0.196, CI = [0.173, 0.219]), compared to an attack of low military value. Our results also reveal that the expectation that an attack will kill 2,000 as opposed to no or very few civilians reduces the probability of a target being chosen by about 30 percentage points (−0.309, CI = [−0.332, −0.286]). The civilians' contribution to the war does not affect attack support.[25] There is no clear effect for either the interaction between civilian casualties and their contribution to the war,[26] or the interaction between projected civilian casualties and the contribution of an attack to victory.[27]

FIGURE 3 Perceived Threat and Support for Resort to Force in Prime Groups



Note: This figure illustrates the level of perceived threat and support for resort to force in the different prime groups, as indicated by respondents after reading the initial vignette, on a 7-point scale (rescaled to vary from 0 to 1). For each outcome, the figure plots the coefficients of a linear regression on the three prime group indicator variables. The gray dots indicate, for each prime group, the average level of support for the U.S. invasion of Esor. The black dots indicate the average extent to which the Esor-based terrorists are perceived as a threat in each group. The horizontal bars mark 95% confidence intervals.

The rating results are shown in Figure 5 and are substantively similar to the ones for the forced choice. The only noteworthy difference is that a vital civilian contribution to the war compared to no support has a small positive effect here (0.021, CI = [0.008, 0.034]).

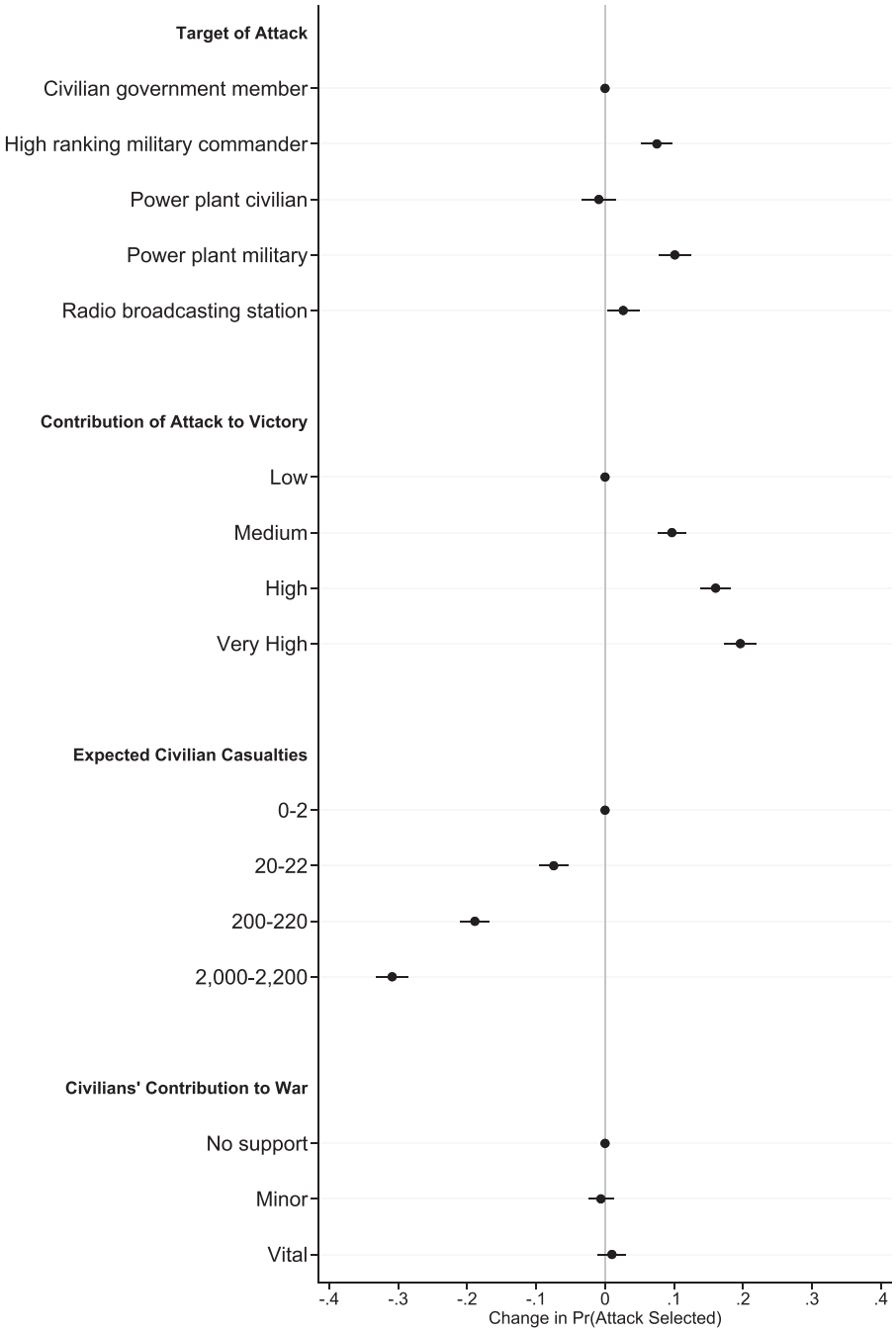
These results suggest that respondents are sensitive to instrumental considerations by preferring attacks with a higher contribution to victory. However, this is by no means their overriding concern as an instrumental logic of support for the use of force would suggest. Civilian

[25]These results are robust to Bonferroni corrections for multiple comparisons associated with levels of the same attribute, with the exception of the effect of the broadcasting station.

[26]See Figures S23 and S24 on p. 11 and Figures S25 and S26 on the ACIEs on p. 12, and Table S13 on the AMIEs on p. 15 in the SI.

[27]See Figures S21 and S22 on the ACIEs on p. 10, as well as Table S13 on the AMIEs on p. 15 in the SI.

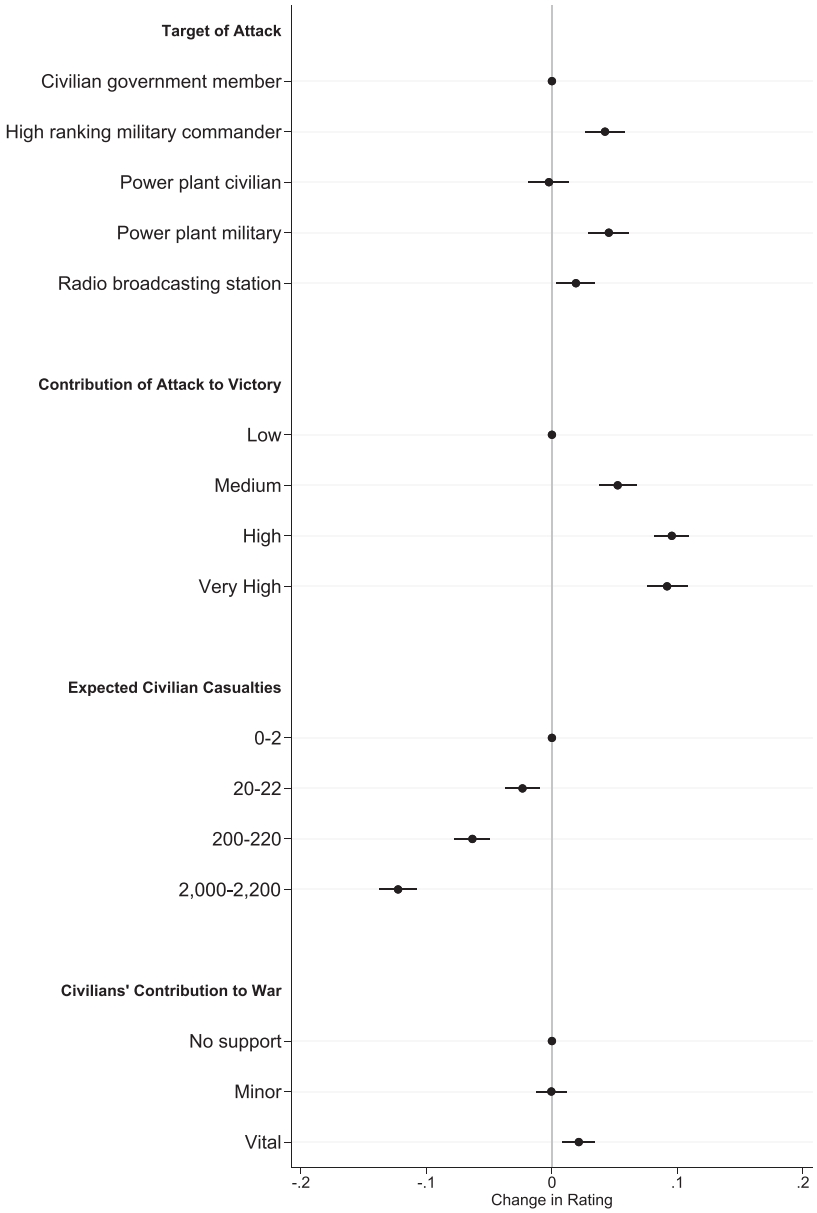
FIGURE 4 Attacks: Forced Choice Outcome (AMCEs)



Note: This figure shows the estimated effects of the randomly assigned attack attribute values on the probability of an attack being preferred. The estimates are based on a regression of the binary outcome variable on indicator variables representing the values of each attribute. Standard errors are clustered by respondent. The dots without horizontal bars denote the reference category for each attribute. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

casualties have a large negative effect on attack support. The results, moreover, indicate a clear preference for military targets, be they objects or persons. In accordance with the legal logic, respondents prefer straightforward military to civilian objects and a combatant to a civilian person as targets of attack. Even though the target of attack does not appear to be respondents' overriding concern, as demanded by international law, neither instrumental nor moral considerations can account for respondents' clear preference for targets that accord with

FIGURE 5 Attacks: Rating Outcome (AMCEs)



Note: This figure shows the estimated effects of the randomly assigned attack attribute values on the rating outcome. The estimates are based on a regression of the 7-point rating outcome variable (rescaled to vary from 0 to 1) on indicator variables representing the values of each attribute. Standard errors are clustered by respondent. The dots without horizontal bars denote the reference category for each attribute. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

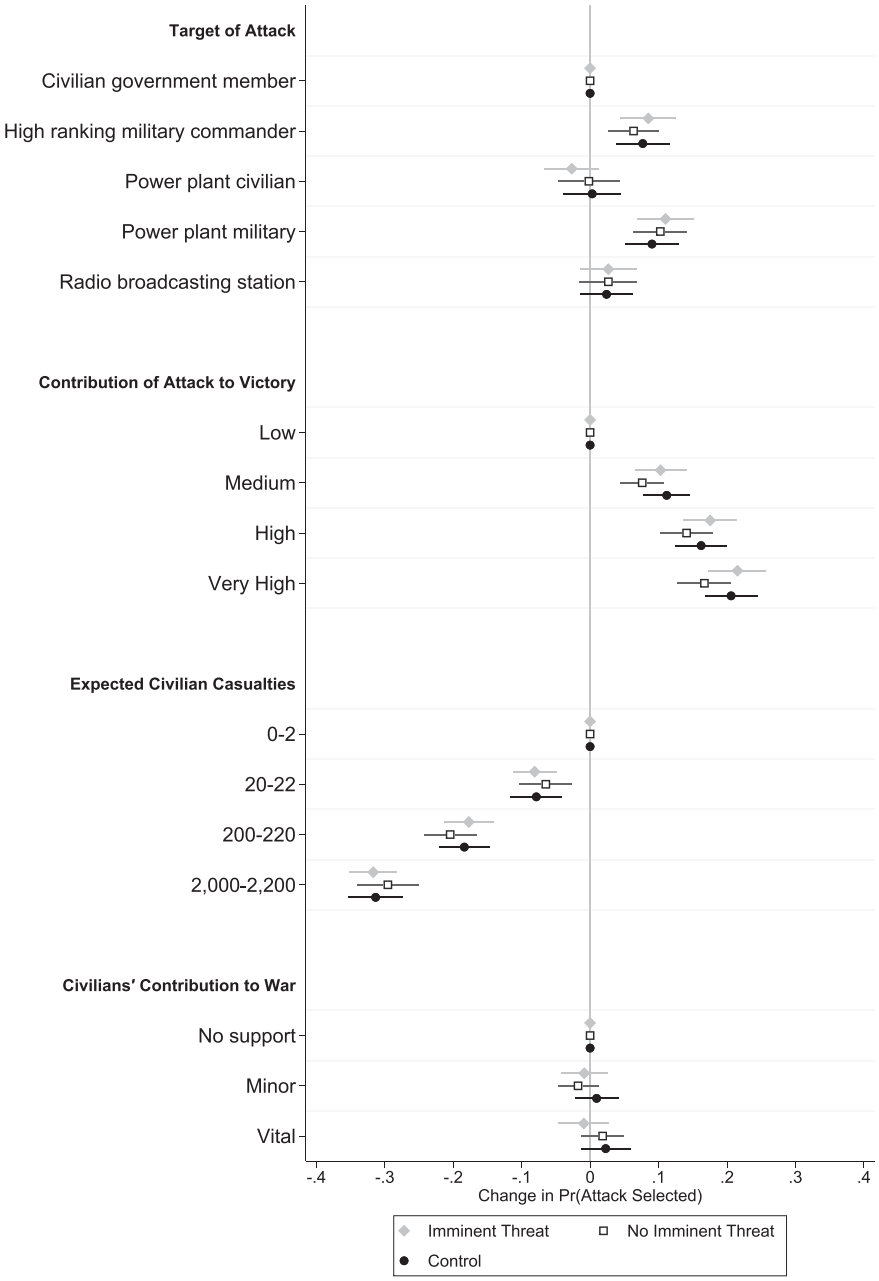
the substantive demand of the legal rule of distinction over those that do not.[28]

Next, we evaluate the relevance of the war's cause for attack support.[29] Figure 6 plots the coefficients separately

[28]As outlined above, we find no clear support for the legal proportionality rule according to which the effects of civilian casualties should be mitigated by an attack's contribution to victory. The same holds true for the moral expectation that respondents' preferences for attacks with fewer civilian casualties are dependent on the civilians' contribution to the war.

[29]Recall that each respondent is randomly assigned to only one prime group. We hence explore differences in attribute effects between the three prime groups.

FIGURE 6 Attacks: Forced Choice Outcome by Prime (AMCEs)



Note: This figure shows the estimated effects of the randomly assigned attack attribute values on the probability of an attack being preferred by prime group. The gray diamonds represent the estimates for respondents in the "imminent threat" group, the white squares the estimates for respondents in the "no imminent threat" group, and the black dots the ones for respondents in the control group.

for respondents in each prime group (forced choice outcome). It shows that contrary to the expectations associated with the moral logic the war's cause has little effect on how different attributes influence the likelihood that respondents prefer an attack. This is in spite of the higher tendency of respondents in the imminent threat group to support attacks, and the opposite tendency in the no imminent threat group, compared to the control group (see Figures S10 and S11 on p. 3 in the SI), consistent with moral demands.[30] Some attributes have a

[30]See also Figure S30 depicting group-specific marginal means on p. 16 in the SI.

TABLE 5 Strategy Attributes (Conjoint Profiles, Independent Randomization)

Attribute	Levels
Casualties among U.S. troops	200
	2,000
	20,000
	200,000
Casualties among Esor's troops	200
	2,000
	20,000
	200,000
Casualties among Esor's civilians	3,000
	30,000
	300,000
	3,000,000
Economic costs of the war per year in % of GDP	1%
	6
	36
Likelihood of defeating Esor and achieving the war's goals	40
	60
	80

Note: This table lists all strategy attributes and possible attribute levels that were used to produce the strategy profiles. Respondents were presented with randomly generated strategy profiles in the conjoint experiment.

smaller effect on the rating outcome in the "no imminent threat" group or a larger effect in the "imminent threat" group, but not in morally meaningful and thus hypothesized ways.[31]

We now turn to the results for respondents' forced choice between strategies for waging the war, which are illustrated in Figure 7. We find that U.S. military casualties have a large negative effect on strategy support. The prospective loss of 200,000 as opposed to 200 military casualties among U.S. troops reduces the probability of a strategy's being preferred by more than 30 percentage points (-0.325, CI $= [-0.349, -0.301]$). We deliberately chose different scales for foreign civilian and U.S. military casualties to mimic the proportions of past U.S. wars. It is nonetheless noteworthy that 3,000,000 foreign civilian casualties have roughly the same support-depressing effect as 20,000 U.S. military casualties, about 20 percentage points. Put bluntly, the prospect of 200,000 U.S. military casualties has a much larger support-depressing effect than 3,000,0000 projected foreign civilian casualties. Our results further indicate that enemy military casualties do not affect strategy support. In addition, we find that economic costs are of some yet arguably less concern than the human costs of war, as is the projected likelihood of a strategy's success. An 80% probability of winning the war as opposed to 40% increases the probability of a strategy being preferred by 13 percentage points (0.129, CI $= [0.109, 0.149]$). A projected cost of 36% of the gross domestic product (GDP) as opposed to 1% decreases support by 8 percentage points (-0.078, CI $= [-0.098, -0.059]$). Whereas the instrumental imperative to minimize U.S. military casualties clearly looms large, there is no significant interaction effect between U.S. military casualties and the strategy's likelihood of success, contrary to what the instrumental logic of support for the use of force predicts (see Figures S27 and S28 on p. 13 as well as Table S13 on p. 15 in the SI).

Again, we have substantively similar findings for the rating outcome, depicted in Figure 8. The projected military casualties among Esor's troops now have a positive effect (0.033, CI $= [0.019, 0.047]$), but only for 200,000 casualties as opposed to 200.[32]

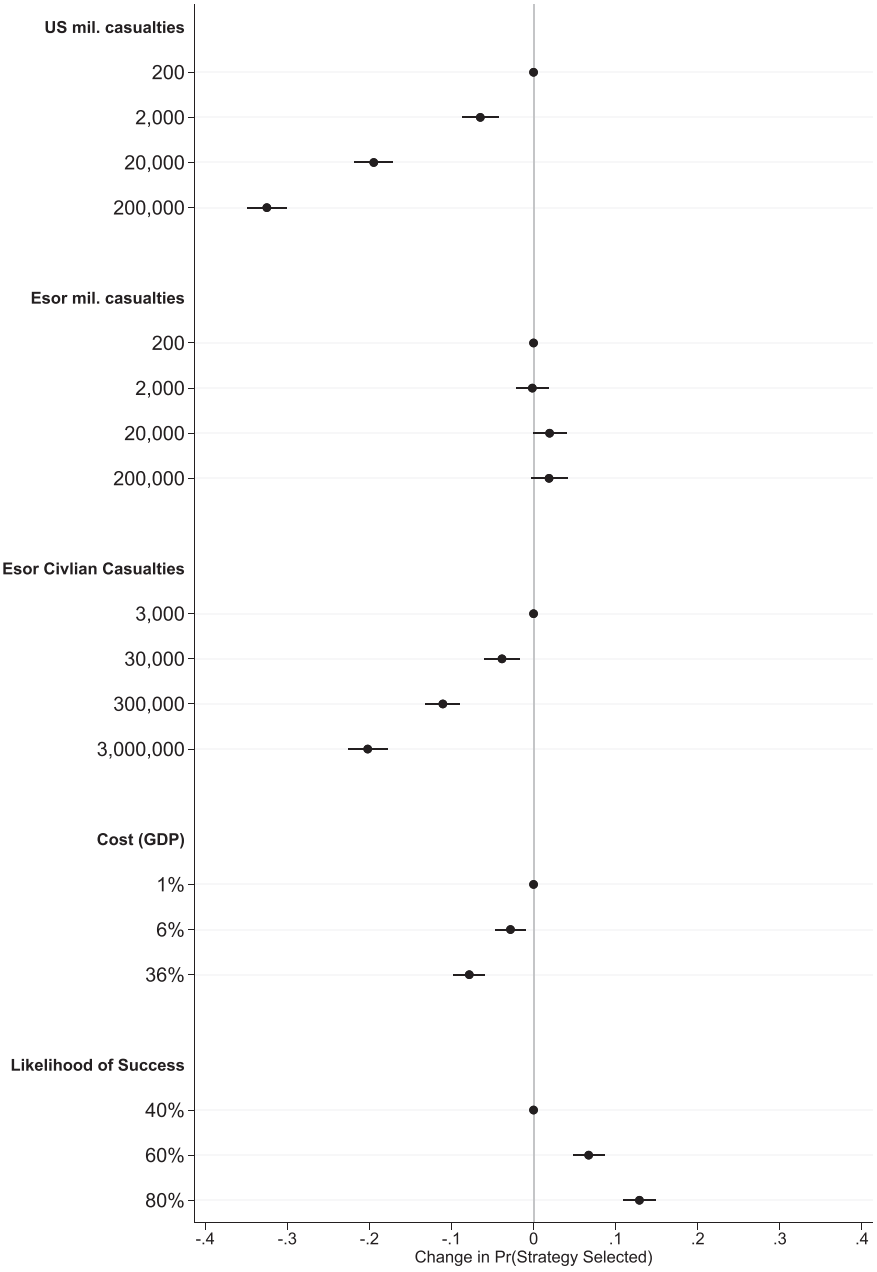
When it comes to the war's cause, Figure 9 shows that, contrary to the demands of the moral logic, the effect of the strategy attributes, specifically of civilian casualties, on respondents' forced choice outcome does not significantly differ across prime groups. Some other attribute effects are slightly stronger in the "imminent threat" prime group for the rating outcome, compared to the other groups, but not in morally meaningful, hypothesized ways (see Figure S14 on p. 6 in the SI). At the same time, in line with the moral logic, respondents have a clearly higher tendency to support strategies for waging a war that responds to an imminent threat, compared to the neutral or no imminent threat scenario (see Figure S10 on p. 3 and Figure S13 on p. 5 in the SI).[33] These results paint a remarkably nuanced picture regarding the relevance of a war's cause for respondents' preferences. The rating outcome for both attack and strategy support suggests that respondents remain acutely aware of the cause for which the United States resorted to force, as they show more support for attacks and strategies under conditions of imminent threat, as predicted by the moral logic. At the same time, however, the justice of the cause does not consistently influence respondents' evaluation of the attack and strategy attributes in ways the moral logic would demand, that is, it does not change the effects

[31] See Figure S12 on p. 4 in the SI.

[32] The reported results are again largely intact after application of Bonferroni corrections for comparisons related to the same attribute.

[33] See also Table S9 on p. 4 as well as Figure S32 depicting group-specific marginal means on p. 16 in the SI.

FIGURE 7 Strategies: Forced Choice Outcome (AMCEs)

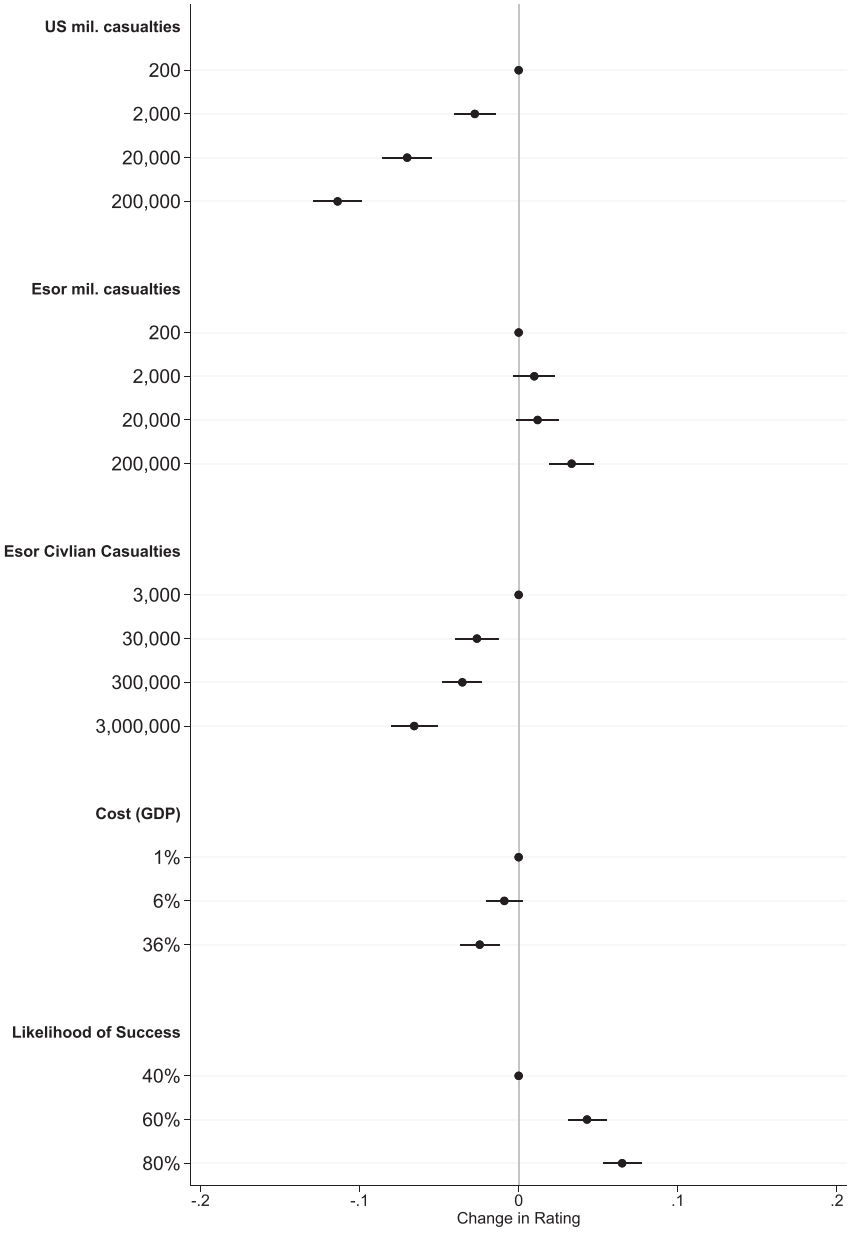


Note: This figure shows the estimated effects of the randomly assigned strategy attribute values on the probability of a strategy being preferred. The estimates are based on a regression of the binary outcome variable on indicator variables representing the values of each attribute. Standard errors are clustered by respondent. The dots without horizontal bars denote the reference category for each attribute. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

of civilians' contribution to the war on attack support and of civilian casualties on strategy support. Instead, respondents' preferences are consistent with a legal logic of support for the use of force, according to which the effect of these attributes should not depend on the cause of the war (independence of *jus in bello* from *jus ad bellum*).

As mentioned, our respondents' preferences are also consistent with two other legal demands. In particular, respondents distinguish between military and civilian targets of attack (distinction) and they seek to minimize foreign civilian casualties largely without regard to the civilians' contribution to the war (necessity). This is true even though the prime vignettes do not mention

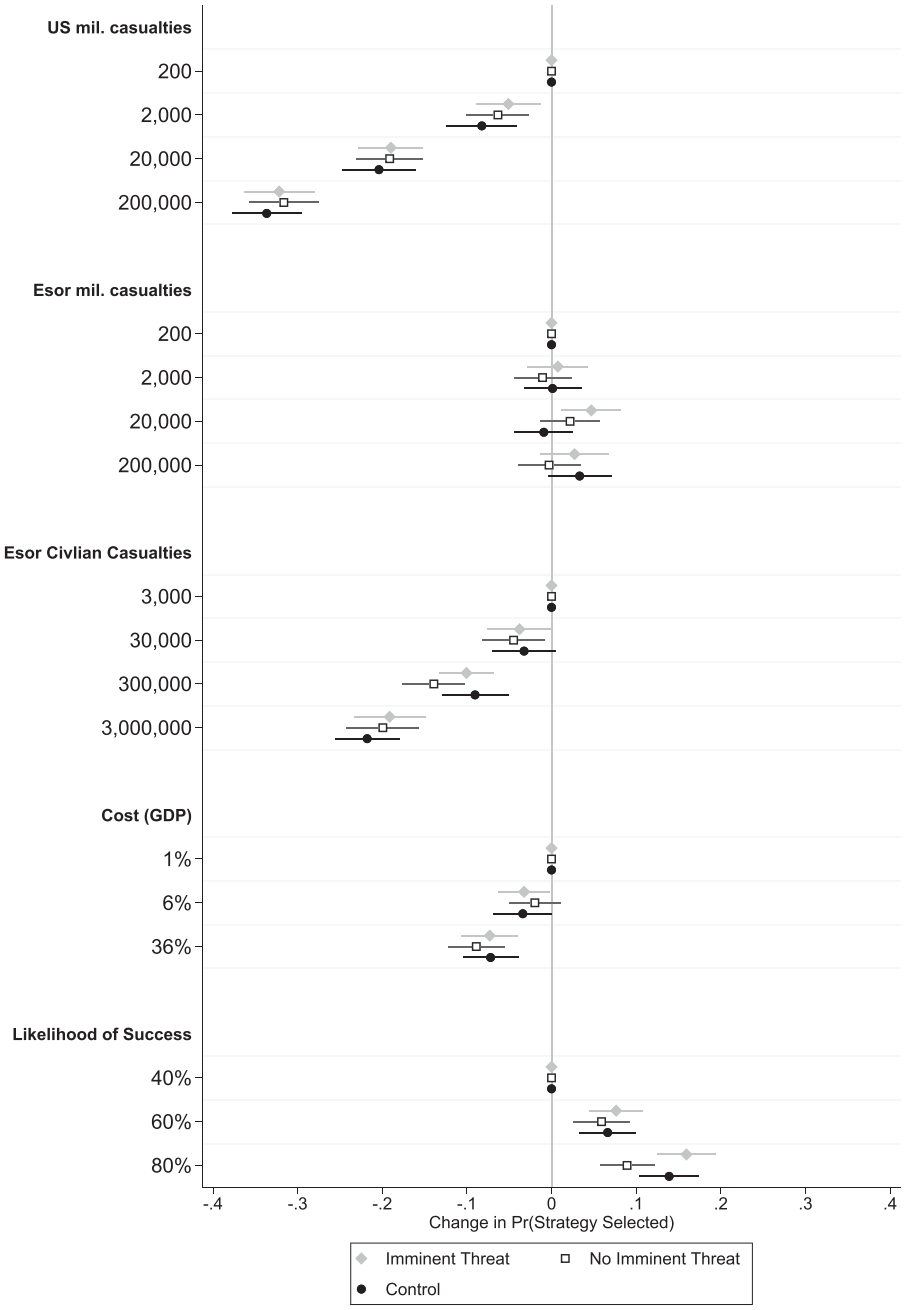
FIGURE 8 Strategies: Rating Outcome (AMCEs)



Note: This figure shows the estimated effects of the randomly assigned strategy attribute values on the rating outcome. The estimates are based on a regression of the 7-point rating outcome variable (rescaled to vary from 0 to 1) on indicator variables representing the values of each attribute. Standard errors are clustered by respondent. The dots without horizontal bars denote the reference category for each attribute. Horizontal bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

international law. As outlined above, we do not expect our respondents to explicitly draw on legal reasoning, and we find little evidence that this is the case. Answers to a question about international law at the very end of the survey (answer distribution shown in Table 6) tentatively suggest that the majority of respondents knows that legal rules about conduct in war exist. However, they either do not know what the rules demand (45%) or declare to know only "a little" about their content (26%). Although self-reported indications of knowledge, and of course all questions potentially affected by the experimental components, should be interpreted with caution, these answers support the notion that it is the substantive content of the tested legal rules that resonates with our respondents, rather than their legality.

FIGURE 9 Strategies: Forced Choice Outcome by Prime (AMCEs)



Note: This figure shows the estimated effects of the randomly assigned strategy attribute values on the probability of a strategy being preferred by prime group. The gray diamonds represent the estimates for respondents in the "imminent threat" group, the white squares the estimates for respondents in the "no imminent threat" group, and the black dots the ones for respondents in the control group.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our results lend partial support to all three tested logics. Yet, the most striking finding relates to the remarkable congruence of our respondents' preferences, specifically their attack support, with core demands of international law. Notably, these legal demands diverge from the tested moral principles and instrumental imperatives. That respondents seek to minimize civilian casualties with little regard for the civilians' contribution to the war or the justice of the war's cause means that respondents'

TABLE 6 Familiarity with International Law

There are rules of international law about how wars must be conducted, known as International Humanitarian Law. They include the Geneva Conventions. How familiar are you with these rules of international law?

	Number	Share	Cumulative share
Know these rules exist but not what they demand	1345	44.8	44.8
Know a little about what these rules demand	781	26.0	70.9
Have never heard of such rules	659	22.0	92.8
Know a lot about what they demand	215	7.2	100.0
Total	3,000	100.0	

Note: This table shows respondents' self-reported knowledge of international law. It features the verbatim question and the number and share of respondents choosing each answer category.

attitudes depart from the moral logic articulated here. That civilian casualties have a large effect on attack support suggests that our respondents' preferences defy a strictly instrumental logic. Instead, these effects accord with the distinct demands of international law to never direct attacks against civilian objects or persons, regardless of the military effectiveness of such attacks (legal rule of distinction) and to spare all civilians as much as possible, regardless of their moral liability to harm (legal rule of necessity). We find no clear evidence for a resonance of the proportionality rule, which suggests that legal demands are reflected unevenly in individuals' attitudes, highlighting an avenue for future research.

Our respondents are more supportive of a war with a just and legal cause, that is, a war that responds to an imminent threat. This is compatible with legal as well as moral demands. The effect of the cause on preferences for how the war is fought, however, is remarkably nuanced. In accordance with moral demands, we find that respondents are more supportive of attacks and strategies for fighting a just war. However, the war's cause largely fails to alter the effect of civilian casualties and civilians' contribution to the war on respondents' preferences in the way that the moral logic demands. Instead, the results here are suggestive of a resonance of the legal independence of *jus in bello* from *jus ad bellum*.

Crucially, our findings do not imply that respondents are somehow "irrational" or reject instrumental reasoning when deciding whether to support the use of force. The military effectiveness of attacks does affect our respondents' preferences. Respondents, it seems then, integrate instrumental with normative concerns about right and wrong. Their normative concerns for how a war ought to be fought, however, resemble more closely the legal demands of distinction and necessity rather than the moral principle that civilians' liability should determine how a war is conducted. Future research should investigate why in the context of war respondents show relatively little concern for the moral liability of the individuals who are harmed.[34]

When it comes to strategy support, the instrumental imperative to protect U.S. soldiers looms much larger than normative demands. At the same time, we find that other instrumental imperatives, such as a strategy's likelihood of success and the economic costs of a war, prove less relevant. Having to make multiple trade-offs also means respondents' aversion to U.S. military casualties is not lessened by the expected success of the war. The nuanced picture that emerges when individuals have to make multiple trade-offs in their preferences for how force is used suggests that when soldiers are out of harm's way (attack support), attitudes resemble a logic consistent with core legal demands. When U.S. soldiers' lives are at stake (strategy support), attitudes more closely resemble an instrumental logic.

Although it is in keeping with prior theorizations of U.S. public opinion that instrumental considerations matter for U.S. citizens' attitudes toward the use of force, the resonance of important legal principles is a novel finding with theoretical implications that require further exploration. Our respondents are largely unaware of the precise content of international law on the use of force (cf. Table 6). Neither do we explicitly frame attacks as (il)legal. Instead, this is the first study to show that ordinary citizens prefer attacks that comply with core legal demands, even when they are not told that the legality

[34]We are aware of only one study that has attempted to compare attitudes toward harming in wartime and in peacetime (Watkin and Laham 2019). It found that respondents pay less attention to the intentionality of harming in war, a result that does not explain but is compatible with our finding that respondents neglect the individual moral liability of civilians.

of the use of force is at stake. One potential mechanism to explain the resonance of legal principles is that a legalized public discourse can lead to an "internalization" of some of the law's substantive demands. According to the constructivist theory of norm diffusion, norms that are publicly drawn upon to legitimize behavior can influence the prevailing standard for appropriate conduct (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). An important recent study shows that policy makers now rely more on legal rules than on moral principles to legitimize the use of force to the public (Nuñez-Mietz 2018). At the same time, our study was not designed to test the mechanism of *how* certain demands have come to resonate with ordinary citizens' preferences. We can therefore not assert that certain elements of public discourse have causally changed attitudes, which is a possibility that further research could evaluate. As internalization is not a conscious process, it cannot itself be easily made visible. However, future research could investigate whether the resonance of certain legal demands varies with individuals' exposure to the evocation of the same rules in public discourse.[35]

Although the average effects we identify may of course hide important heterogeneity among subjects (Abramson, Kocak, and Magazinnik 2019), they are nevertheless highly informative of respondent preferences in politically meaningful ways (Bansak et al. 2020). From a strategic perspective, our finding that U.S. respondents' attitudes for how wars are conducted resonate with crucial legal demands is acutely relevant today. Despite the omnipresence of international law in U.S. public discourse on the use of force, a recent relaxation of rules of engagement in Afghanistan and a dramatic rise in civilian casualties in some combat theaters (Sullivan 18 March 2018) may augur a waning of the U.S. commitment to international law. In this article, we relied on the theory prevailing in the literature to define an instrumental logic of support for the use of force as focused on maximizing the likelihood of victory and minimizing U.S. troop fatalities. However, what counts as an instrumental imperative on the battlefield in democratic contexts partly depends on public preferences. Our study thus indicates that compliance with certain legal rules may also be a crucial instrumental imperative.

[35] Alternatively, future research could build on our findings and investigate to what extent negotiation records of the relevant legal treaties reveal the drafters' attempt to accommodate what they perceive as publicly internalized norms.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A: Sample
Appendix B: Additional Information on Main Results
Appendix C: Real-world Associations
Appendix D: Attribute Interactions and Prime Groups
Appendix E: Robustness Checks
Appendix F: Comparison of Results with Pre-Analysis Plan
Appendix G: Moral Logic: Additional Considerations