

Do all lives have the same value? Support for international military interventions as a function of political system and public opinion of target states

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Abstract

This research examined the support for international military interventions as a function of the political system and the public opinion of the target country. In two experiments, we informed participants about a possible military intervention by the international community towards a sovereign country whose government planned to use military force against a secessionist region. They were then asked whether they would support this intervention whilst being reminded that it would cause civilian deaths. The democratic or nondemocratic political system of the target country was experimentally manipulated, and the population support for its belligerent government policy was either assessed (Experiment 1) or manipulated (Experiment 2). Results showed greater support for the intervention when the target country was nondemocratic, as compared to the democratic and the control conditions, but only when its population supported the belligerent government policy. Support for the external intervention was low when the target country was democratic, irrespective of national public opinion. These findings provide support for the democracy-as-value hypothesis applied to international military interventions, and suggest that civilian deaths (collateral damage) are more acceptable when nondemocratic populations support their government's belligerent policy.

Keywords

democracy, group perception, public opinion, war support

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According to former United Nation Undersecretary-General Margaret Joan Anstee, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan was met with fierce opposition when, in 1999, he suggested that in certain cases UN “humanitarian intervention”—unsolicited armed intervention in a

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sovereign country in order to protect its population (Sunga, 2006)—was justified (Anstee, 2000). The opposition came not only from developing countries, who feared a new form of neo-colonialism, but also from developed countries, as exemplified by U.S. Senator Jesse Helms' address to the UN Security Council: "... a UN that seeks to impose its presumed authority on the American people, without their consent, begs for confrontation ... and eventual American withdrawal" (Anstee, 2000, p. 1). To which, Brian Urquhart, also a former UN Undersecretary-General, commented: "He did not say whether this doctrine should apply to other sovereign countries—Iraq or Serbia, for example" (Anstee, 2000, p. 1). Thus, the debate around the legitimacy of UN military interventions revolved around the question of the type of country in which such an intervention was deemed legitimate. Since then, the General Assembly of the United Nations has approved a resolution laying out the basis for the right of international forces to intervene if nations do not fulfill their "responsibility to protect their citizens" (ICISS, 2001; Warner & Giacca, 2009). However, several analysts have noted that it remains unclear when and how such interventions may be implemented (e.g., Hoge, 2008), as pointed out for instance by the recent crisis in Ivory Coasts (MacFarquhar, 2011). May this doctrine actually apply to some sovereign countries more than others?

While political, legal, economic, and military considerations are at the heart of this problem (e.g. Holzgrefe & Keohane, 2003; Welsh, 2004), social and psychological factors have been less taken into consideration despite the fact that they may influence the perceived legitimacy within the general public of international interventions. Indeed, even if not necessarily, humanitarian interventions frequently imply the use of military force and often result in "collateral" civilian suffering and death. On the one hand, support for international military interventions may introduce a dilemma between the respect of national sovereignty and the protection of threatened national populations. On the other hand, support for such interventions may introduce another

dilemma between saving lives and tolerating (or even condoning) the likely "collateral damage."

Notwithstanding the complexity of these situations, the present research aimed to investigate whether human lives in different conflict-ridden situations are perceived to have the same value or, in other words, whether all deaths are equally acceptable. In two experiments we tested the hypothesis that support for intervention of international forces that would likely cause civilian deaths depends on two key features of the target country: The nature of the political system (democratic or nondemocratic) and the support of public opinion (supporting or opposing its government's policy).

Support for military intervention

Past research has examined support for military intervention as a function of different individual- and group-level factors. Several studies have investigated individual differences in attitudes toward war as a function of dispositional and ideological factors such as moral values (Aquino, Reed, Thau, & Freeman, 2006; Cohrs, Moschner, Maes, & Kielmann, 2005), mortality salience (Pyszczynski et al., 2006), authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (McFarland, 2005; Motyl, Hart, & Pyszczynski, 2009), as well as political attitudes (Cohrs & Moschner, 2002; Herrmann, Tetlock, & Visser, 1999). Other studies have used cognitive factors such as need for closure (Federico, Golec, & Dial, 2005) and prior knowledge (Cohrs & Moschner, 2002) to investigate such attitudes. Group-level factors examining attitudes towards war include, for instance, national attachment, interests, and ethnocentrism (Federico et al., 2005; Herrmann et al., 1999; Liu et al., 2009; Louis & Taylor, 2002; Pratto, Glasford, & Hegarty, 2006), collective perceived vulnerability (Elcheroth, 2006; Spini, Elcheroth, & Fasel, 2008), perceived adversary's motivations and level of force used (Herrmann et al., 1999; Healy, Hoffman, Beer, & Bourne, 2002; Mann & Gaertner, 1991), the relative power of the countries

in conflict (Herrmann et al., 1999), and the existence of explicit or implicit alliances (Healy et al., 2002; Mann & Gaertner, 1991; Pratto, Glasford, & Hegarty, 2006).

However, only little research has experimentally studied the effect of the political characteristics of the countries involved in conflicts on attitudes towards military intervention (Healy et al., 2002; Herrmann et al., 1999; Mintz & Geva, 1993). Overall these studies show that the political system of hostile countries shapes individuals' perceived legitimacy of the use of military force by their own country. More specifically, these studies showed that participants support to a greater extent the use of force by their government in a hypothetical conflict when a fictional antagonistic country was described as nondemocratic rather than democratic (Mintz & Geva, 1993), and when the former victim of the fictional antagonistic country was democratic rather than nondemocratic (Herrmann et al., 1999; Experiment 2; see Healy et al., 2002, for alternative results in terms of expectancy violations and individual differences).

Why do people perceive the use of force as more appropriate when targeting a nondemocratic rather than a democratic country? Explanations for these findings focus for example on the existing alliances between democratic countries (i.e., their common interest and fate) and on the lack of incentives associated with the use of force against a democratic country (Healy et al., 2002; Herrmann et al., 1999; Mintz & Geva, 1993; see also Pratto et al., 2006). Others have argued that justice judgments made by people from powerful countries with belligerent intentions are driven by ingroup favoritism (Liu et al., 2009). However, if only utilitarian motives would actually explain the observed effects, one should observe similar findings for the use of force against both democratic and nondemocratic target countries, provided they are equally perceived as allies. Unfortunately, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of the political regime and the existence of alliances given that in most of these studies participants were citizens of democratic countries

(e.g., USA) and had to decide about the intervention of their own democratic government. Furthermore, research has also shown that nationals' attitude towards their own country's involvement in war is influenced by different justice concerns from those that shape attitudes of people in a targeted or noninvolved country (Liu et al., 2009).

In the present research we investigated an alternative explanation for the effect of the political system on support for military interventions that focuses on the general, not self-interested value attributed to democracy. We argue that beyond the existence of common interests and common fate, democratic countries may be a less appropriate target of international military interventions because democracy *as such* provides value and legitimacy to democratic governments and populations. Therefore, people may perceive them as less deserving of the harmful consequences of war.

The democracy-as-value hypothesis

Notwithstanding the fact that international humanitarian interventions such as those led by the UN may have "good" reasons to use military force against nations that do not protect their citizens, often they are also violent and harmful for the target population. However, as far as the target population is concerned, several findings in the study of intergroup relations suggest that individuals are convinced that "good" people do not deserve bad treatment (Crandall & Beasley, 2001; see also Feather, 1999). Similarly, negative stereotypes of victim groups make hostile behavior towards them acceptable, for example in ethnic violence (Brewer, 1999; Palmer, 1998; Petersen, 2002; Staub, 1989; Yzerbyt & Rogier, 2001). And prospects of losing and saving lives reflect an implicit hierarchy of groups, where preserving the lives of fellow national and ally soldiers is more important than preventing deaths among the enemy (Pratto et al., 2006). Overall, these findings suggest that support for international interventions may be driven by

the individuals' motivation to protect and enhance important values (see Rokeach, 1973; Schwarz, Struch, & Bilsky, 1990; Skitka, 2002; Tetlock, 1999), such as democracy.

According to the "Democracy-as-value" hypothesis, originated in the work of Falomir, Staerklé, Depuiset, and Butera (2005, 2007), democracy is an ideological belief system that provides value to democratic individuals, groups, and institutions, and grants legitimacy to their actions, whatever their action may actually be, just like other ideologies do (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lerner, 1977; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Weber, 1958). The study of democracy as a social and political value is therefore not the same as the study of democracy as a government system. Furthermore, although the value attributed to democracy may be more likely to occur among citizens of democratic countries, the spread of democracy as a universal value suggests that it may not be restricted to them (e.g., Sen, 1999; Shapiro, 2003; Shapiro & Hacker-Cordon, 1999). Indeed, people infer specific characteristics of a group and its members from the way the group functions; as a consequence, people perceive that democratic groups, as compared to nondemocratic groups, are intrinsically good, and that actions emanating from them seem more legitimate (Staerklé, Clémence, & Doise, 1998).

On the one hand, democracy has seemingly become a nonnegotiable value in today's world (Shapiro, 2003). At least in democratic countries—even if the recent events in the Arab world suggest that the value of democracy may not be restricted to them—people perceive democracy as the best possible political system (e.g., Magioglou, 2008; Staerklé, 2005). For one, people value democratic systems because procedural characteristics such as separation of political and legal powers (e.g., Tyler & Mitchell, 1994) and decision-making procedures (i.e., the right to voice and to vote; see Folger, 1977; Thibaut & Walker, 1975) make final decisions appear fairer and more legitimate than those obtained through nondemocratic procedures. In addition, a high moral value is associated with the abstract principles historically related to democracy, including

human rights, peace, and prosperity (e.g., Cohrs, Maes, Moschner, & Kielman, 2007; Doise, Spini, & Clémence, 1999) as well as individual freedom, independence, and autonomy (e.g., Beauvois, 2005; Sampson, 1988). Finally, people expect democracies to be inhabited by free, independent, and peaceful citizens, and ruled by a responsive and responsible government. Such a stereotypical expectation is mirrored in perceptions of non-democratic countries in which people expect to see a submissive and dependent citizenry that easily yields to the demands of a despotic, repressive, and ruthless government (Staerklé et al., 1998).

On the other hand, this high ideological value attributed to democracy leads to the perception of both the government and the people living in democracy as being inherently good and therefore not deserving of suffering (see Crandall & Beasley, 2001). In other words, people may perceive harmful actions perpetrated against democratic groups, as compared to nondemocratic groups, as less legitimate. Indeed, prior experimental research has shown that the democratic or nondemocratic structure of groups in conflict predicted the perceived legitimacy of aggressive intergroup behavior and collective punishments (i.e., the extent to which the whole group should be sanctioned in order to do justice; Falomir et al., 2005, 2007). More specifically, an aggression was perceived as the least illegitimate when it was perpetrated by a democratic group against a nondemocratic group (Falomir et al., 2005). Similarly, collective punishment against all members of a perpetrator group was perceived as the least legitimate when this group was democratic and the victim group was nondemocratic (Falomir et al., 2007).

To summarize, the democracy-as-value hypothesis suggests that the political regime of countries in conflict may also constitute a central contextual factor in people's support for military interventions. To keep this value-based hypothesis as free as possible from national allegiance, utilitarian motives, and the perceived existence of alliances, we used rather uninvolved participants such as university students from a neutral country

that would not participate in the events we ask subjects to evaluate. Such a third party perspective constitutes an appropriate approach to examine the general, not self-interested value for democracy. Accordingly, the present research asked uninvolved participants to evaluate the legitimacy of an international military intervention against a (democratic versus nondemocratic) target country.

Target country's public opinion toward belligerent government policies

Whereas the influence of public opinion on governments' decision to militarily intervene has received careful attention (e.g., Maoz & Russett, 1993; Reiter & Stam, 2002), no empirical research exists to our knowledge that addresses the influence of the target country's public opinion on observers' support for external military interventions. In order to fill this gap and provide a more direct test of the democracy-as-value hypothesis, the present research investigated the effect of the public opinion of the target country in the examined processes.

First, we reasoned that whether or not a population supports its government's aggressive policies (e.g., the use of disproportionate military force against a secessionist regional minority) may be used by observers as a cue to infer the perceived value of the country's population. As a consequence, if observers focus on possible civilian deaths of an external military intervention, the extent to which the target population supports or opposes its government may influence observers' support for such an intervention. More specifically, observers should support to a lesser extent such an intervention when the population opposes its government's belligerent intent.

Second, according to democracy-as-value hypothesis, we reasoned that the effect of the target country's public opinion on support for external military intervention should vary as a function of the political structure of the country. Past

research has shown that people from Western societies perceive democratic countries to be committed to peaceful solutions and that when in conflict, war is their last resort (e.g., Cederman, 2001; Healy et al., 2002; Reiter & Stam, 2002; Rummel, 1997); moreover, people perceive democratic populations as less belligerent and violent than nondemocratic populations (e.g., Staerklé et al., 1998). Accordingly, whether a population supports or opposes its government's belligerent actions constitutes an informative factor of the democratic quality of such a population, and hence its value. This understanding is of particular relevance for the present research because it allows a test of the democracy-as-value hypothesis through a factor that is independent from the perceived similarities between the government regimes of the target country and one's own country.

Hence, a nondemocratic population that supports its government's belligerent policies matches the stereotypical expectation of a submissive population that easily yields to a nondemocratic government, and thereby intensifies the perceived antagonism with democratic countries. If, on the contrary, the nondemocratic population opposes its government, it is no longer assimilated with its belligerent intentions and with the government itself. The nondemocratic population therefore shows a valued characteristic of democratic populations: Preference for peaceful solutions. Hence, international military interventions explicitly causing civilian deaths within a nondemocratic target country should appear as less legitimate when its citizenry opposes its government, compared to when it supports it. For democratic countries, however, we do not expect such an effect of public opinion, since according to the democracy-as-value hypothesis, democratic countries should be viewed as unacceptable targets of external military interventions in any case.

Overview and hypothesis

In the present research we investigated perceivers' support for an international military intervention

against a country whose government had belligerent intentions towards a secessionist region. Due to the specific characteristics of the scenario, we expected overall support for an external intervention within a sovereign country to be low. However, according to the democracy-as-value hypothesis, our main hypothesis is that support for an international intervention against a non-democratic country, as compared to a democratic country, should be higher when its population supports rather than opposes the belligerent policies of its government.

This hypothesis was tested in two experiments in which we confronted participants with a scenario that simulated a possible UN military intervention in a fictitious sovereign country that would ostensibly cause civilian deaths. We used the UN as an agent of the potential intervention in order to provide greater legitimacy to the intervention and to prevent participants from making specific inferences about the actual interest of an intervention perpetrated unilaterally or by specific multinational coalitions. We used a fictitious (but allegedly real) country newly created after the break-up of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The reason for this choice was that during the last two decades the former Soviet Union has split in to many new countries and we assumed that the Swiss population in general would not have precise information about all their names and political regimes. Accordingly, this region was particularly appropriate to experimentally manipulate the political system of the target country.

We informed the participants about an alleged conflict between two ex-Soviet states that gained political autonomy after the break-up of the USSR. One of these states, however, did not recognize the autonomy of the other, which officially was a semi-autonomous region within that state, and planned to re-annex it by force. We manipulated the political system of this country in both studies (democratic versus non-democratic). Experiment 1 additionally introduced a control condition without information on the political system. Public opinion toward

the belligerent government policies was measured in Experiment 1, and experimentally manipulated in Experiment 2. Finally, participants were to indicate the extent of their support for a UN military response taking into consideration that (a) the UN had no right of interference given that the situation occurred within the (contested) boundaries of a sovereign country, and (b) such a response would likely result in civilian casualties.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants and procedure The sample consisted of 55 participants (23 female and 32 male), recruited on the campus of a large Swiss University, with ages ranging from 17 to 36 ($M = 22.69$, $SD = 3.34$). Most of them were studying either economic and social sciences (60%) or political sciences (35%). We asked them to voluntarily participate in an opinion survey, and randomly assigned them to one of the three experimental conditions (political system of the target country: democratic versus nondemocratic versus control). At the end, the experimenter thanked the participants and provided careful debriefing.

Political system of the target country The cover story informed participants that Abazie annexed the Bachran state during the Soviet period. After the collapse of the USSR, Bachran asked for and obtained a *de facto* political autonomy, but Abazie and the international community did not recognize it. Recently, the Abazie government announced that its goal was to get back the Bachran territory by force through military intervention. Three pieces of information concerning both government and population were provided and constituted the manipulation of the political system of the target country: Democratic [non-democratic] countries were traditionally characterized with egalitarian [hierarchical] family and community structures, as being democratic

[nondemocratic] before the Soviet period, and as having democratic elections [takeover] after the Soviet period. Information about the family and community structures was intended to manipulate the political system not only in regards to the government but also the population. The cover story described Abazie (the target country) as either democratic or nondemocratic. Bachran (the secessionist region) was always described as nondemocratic, given that previous findings showed that democratic aggressors are relatively more condoned when the victim is nondemocratic (Falomir et al., 2007). The control condition did not provide information about the political systems. At the end of the study, as a manipulation check, two questions asked participants to indicate to what extent the Abazie population was (a) democratic and (b) egalitarian (from 0 = not at all; 10 = absolutely), and were aggregated into an average score ($r = .48, p < .001; M = 2.88, SD = 2.58$).

Support for UN military intervention The experiment asked participants to imagine that Abazie attacked and took over Bachran by force, and that the Bachran secessionist government asked the international community for help. Participants had to indicate to what extent they would support a UN military intervention despite the fact that the conflict took place within sovereign Abazie territory (i.e., without the right of interference). In order to focus participants on the harmful consequences for the population, they were reminded that a military intervention would cause massive civilian casualties among the Abazie population. Three questions assessed their support for the intervention on the basis of experts' estimation of number of civilian casualties among the Abazie population. Respondents had to indicate the extent to which they would support a UN military intervention against Abazie if estimations involved (a) between 100 and 500; (b) between 1,000 and 5,000, and (c) between 10,000 and 50,000 civilian casualties. Scales for the three items ranged from 0 (not at all) to 10 (absolutely). As expected, overall support

for the international military intervention was low ($M = 2.17, SD = 2.18; \alpha = .83$).¹

Perceived public opinion toward belligerent government policies Participants had to indicate the extent to which they considered that the population of Abazie supported the attack on Bachran planned by its government (0 = not at all; 10 = absolutely; $M = 6.11, SD = 2.71$). Given that perceived public opinion was obviously measured after the description of the conflict (and thus after the experimental manipulation), a precautionary analysis examined whether the manipulated political system of Abazie influenced perceived public opinion. The one-way ANOVA as a function of the target country's political system (democratic, nondemocratic, control) showed that perceived public opinion was independent of the country's political system, $F(2, 52) = 0.45, p = .63$.

Results

Following Aiken and West's (1991) suggestions for testing differences between experimental conditions in a multiple regression analysis, we computed two orthogonal contrasts. The first contrast compared the nondemocratic condition to the democratic and the control conditions, and the second contrast tested the residual by comparing these last two conditions (democratic versus control). The regression model included the two orthogonal contrasts, the standardized score for perceived public opinion, as well as the two interaction terms between public opinion and each contrast as predictor variables. Specific planned contrasts compared the relevant conditions with the control condition.²

Manipulation check The regression analysis on the perceived democratic nature of the Abazie population, $R^2 = .23, F(5, 49) = 2.99, p = .019$, showed a significant main effect of the first contrast ($\beta = .38, t(49) = 3.05, p = .004$). Participants perceived the population as less democratic and

egalitarian in the nondemocratic condition ($M = 1.44$, $SD = 1.65$) than in the control ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 2.59$) and democratic ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 2.53$) conditions. The second contrast was also significant ($\beta = .25$), $t(49) = 2.02$, $p = .048$, indicating that participants perceived the population as more democratic in the democratic than in the control condition. No other effects were significant, $t(49) < .80$. The manipulation of the political system of the country was therefore successful.

Support for UN military intervention The regression analysis, $R^2 = .35$, $F(5, 47) = 5.08$, $p = .001$, revealed a significant effect of the first contrast ($\beta = -.43$), $t(47) = 3.70$, $p = .001$; support for military intervention was higher in the nondemocratic condition ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 2.94$) than in the democratic ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.20$) and control ($M = 1.15$, $SD = 1.47$) conditions. Perceived public opinion ($\beta = .15$), $t(47) = 1.30$, $p = .20$, the second contrast's main effect ($\beta = .14$), $t(47) = 1.18$, $p = .24$, as well as their interaction ($\beta = .10$), $t(47) = 0.84$, $p = .40$, were not significant.

As expected, the interaction between the first contrast and the perceived public opinion was significant ($\beta = -.31$), $t(47) = 2.69$, $p = .01$. Indeed, when participants perceived public opinion as strongly supporting its government (+ 1 SD), support for the intervention was higher in the nondemocratic condition than in the control, $t(47) = 4.82$, $p < .001$, and in the democratic conditions, $t(47) = 3.14$, $p = .003$. This effect disappeared when participants perceived the population as opposing its government (-1 SD), $t(47) = 0.73$, $p = .47$, $t(47) = 0.58$, $p = .56$, respectively. Finally, the effect of perceived public opinion was significant in the nondemocratic condition ($\beta = .34$), $t(47) = 2.96$, $p = .005$, but not in the democratic ($\beta = .03$), $t(47) = 0.26$, $p = .79$, and in the control ($\beta = -.10$), $t(47) = 0.89$, $p = .38$, conditions. These findings are illustrated in Figure 1.

Discussion

This study confirmed our prediction. Support for international military intervention was overall low

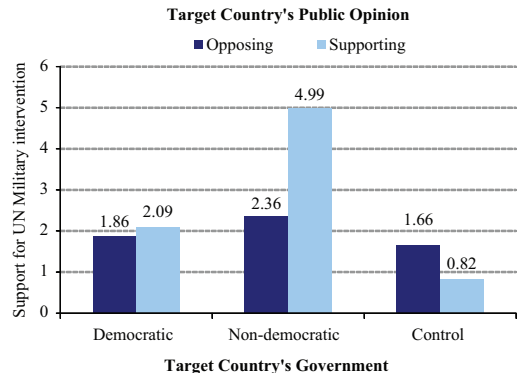


Figure 1. Support (estimated mean) for UN military intervention as a function of target country's political system and perceived public opinion toward belligerent government policy (+/- 1 SD ; Experiment 1)

and remained low regardless of perceived public opinion when the target country of the intervention was democratic. However, support for such intervention increased when a nondemocratic target population supported the belligerent policies of its government. Given that in the present experiment we measured rather than manipulated perceived public opinion toward the aggressive government policies, a second study was carried out in order to confirm the causal role of this factor.

Experiment 2

Method

Participants and procedure One hundred and twenty-two psychology students from a Swiss university participated in this study (85% of women; mean age 21 years; $SD = 2.89$). Unless otherwise indicated, procedure and material were similar to those used in Experiment 1. The experimental design randomly assigned participants to one of four experimental conditions, following a 2 (political system of the target country: Democratic versus nondemocratic) x 2 (public opinion: Opposition versus support). The main dependent variable was again the perceived legitimacy of international military intervention (from 0 = not at all; 10 = absolutely; $\alpha = .86$; $M = 1.50$, $SD = 2.11$). We

assessed the perception of the population in terms of its democratic and egalitarian structure as in Study 1 ($r = .75$; $M = 2.78$, $SD = 2.72$).

Public opinion toward belligerent government policies. After learning about the conflict, participants read that opinion polls indicated that about 90% of Abazia’s population was either in agreement (support condition) or in disagreement (opposition condition) with the government’s intention to re-annex the secessionist region by force. As a manipulation check, participants indicated at the end of the study the extent to which they considered that Abazia’s population supported the military intervention planned by their government (0 = not at all; 10 = absolutely; $M = 4.42$, $SD = 2.78$).

Results

All analyses were run following a 2 (political system: Democratic versus nondemocratic) x 2 (public opinion: Opposition versus support) ANOVA.

Manipulation checks The analysis performed on the perceived democratic nature of the population showed a significant effect of the political system, $F(1, 114) = 34.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .23$. Participants perceived the population as more democratic and egalitarian in the democratic condition ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 3.03$) than in the nondemocratic condition ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 1.64$). The effect of the population’s attitude was marginally significant, $F(1, 114) = 3.41$, $p = .07$, $\eta^2 = .02$, but the interaction between the two experimental factors did not reach the conventional level of significance, $F(1, 114) = 0.04$, $p = .83$. Overall, participants perceived the population as more democratic when it rejected its government’s belligerent policy ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 2.74$) than when it supported it ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 2.63$), suggesting that they tend to associate democracy with more peaceful attitudes. Regarding perceived public opinion toward government policy, the analysis

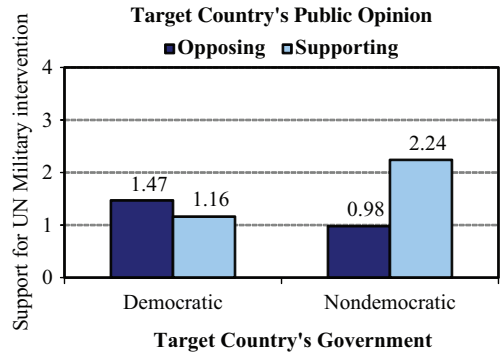


Figure 2. Support for UN military intervention as a function of target country’s political system and public opinion toward belligerent government policy (Experiment 2)

only showed a significant main effect of the manipulated public opinion factor, $F(1, 115) = 19.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$. Participants perceived the population as supporting the military policies of its government more in the support condition ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 2.59$) than in the opposition condition ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 2.59$). No other effects were significant, $F_s(1, 115) < 1.76$, $p_s > .10$.

Support for UN military intervention The ANOVA performed on the support for military intervention revealed that the two main effects were not significant, $F(1, 118) < 1.58$, $p > .23$. The predicted political system by public opinion interaction effect however was significant, $F(1, 118) = 4.25$, $p = .041$, $\eta^2 = .035$. This interaction is illustrated in Figure 2. Simple effects tests showed that, as expected, the opposition ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 2.20$) and support ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 2.16$) conditions did not differ for the democratic country, $t(118) = 0.55$, $p = .58$. When the country was nondemocratic, however, the perceived legitimacy of intervention was higher when the population supported the belligerent policies of its government ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 2.32$) than when the population opposed it ($M = 0.98$, $SD = 1.49$), $t(118) = 2.42$, $p = .017$. In the public opinion support condition, the support

for UN intervention was higher against a non-democratic than against a democratic state, $t(118) = 2.04$, $p = .043$, but this difference was not significant in the public opinion opposition condition, $t(118) = 0.88$, $p = .37$.

Discussion

This second study provided further evidence for our hypothesis. Again, UN military intervention attracted low support overall, but this support varied according to the country's political system and the support provided by its public opinion. As predicted, one condition stood out: Compared to the other three conditions, international military intervention appeared less illegitimate when carried out against a nondemocratic country in which public opinion supported the belligerent policy of its government. When the nondemocratic population opposed this government policy, UN intervention was as strongly rejected as the intervention against a democratic country. These results are thus consistent with those observed in the first experiment, but this time perceived public opinion was experimentally manipulated.

General discussion

Across the two studies we found that support for UN "humanitarian intervention" causing civil casualties was overall low, but varied, as predicted, as a function of the political system of the target country and of public support for the target government's belligerent policy. More specifically, participants considered international military intervention as less illegitimate when it was carried out against a nondemocratic country, as compared to a democratic country, but only if the nondemocratic population supported the belligerent policies of its government. To our knowledge, this is the first research investigating the effect of target country public opinion on observers' support for an external military intervention and thus contributes to our understanding of the perceived legitimacy of international military conflicts on several accounts.

Overall these findings provide evidence for the democracy-as-value hypothesis. In the present paradigm participants had to judge an international military intervention against a target country that was presumably existent, but actually unknown. As a consequence, participants' judgments cannot be based on utilitarian motives related to perceived or existent alliances between their own country and the target country. These findings rather point out the intrinsic value attributed to democracy and democratic populations. The political system of target countries constitutes a central element in legitimacy judgments of military interventions against this country's belligerent intention, and the present research shows that these judgments also depend on considerations about the population's attitude towards its government.

We expected that individuals would be motivated to protect populations from military harm, and participants overall rejected the external military intervention. However, we predicted that this protection would be greater to the extent that participants consider the target population as "worthy," depending upon two factors related to the target country: Namely its political system and its public opinion. In line with the democracy-as-value hypothesis, support for an external intervention was low when the target country was democratic, irrespective of national public opinion. This finding therefore suggests that under no circumstances did participants consider a democratic country to deserve the negative consequences of an external intervention.

International military intervention against nondemocratic countries, however, seemed to follow a more complex pattern. Indeed, whether respondents spared nondemocratic countries a potentially harmful military intervention depended on the perceived attitude of its population. When the nondemocratic population supported the belligerent intention of its own government, respondents seemed to deem this population as less worthy of protection and then rejected to a lower extent the military intervention causing civilian deaths. Much in line with old-fashioned colonialist representations of a superior West (Said, 1978), research has

shown that nondemocratic populations are likely to appear as antagonistic to democratic populations in terms of qualities deemed necessary for a democratic functioning of society, for example independence, individual autonomy, and rationality (Staerklé et al., 1998). Put otherwise, the perceived unity between a nondemocratic government and its population could make them more deserving of military intervention of international community. In order to enter the “moral community” of populations worthy of protection, they need to prove that they have the same qualities as democratic populations. Our findings have shown that this was the case when nondemocratic populations opposed their government’s belligerent policy.

Limitations and future research

Despite the reliability and consistency across experiments of the present findings, the present research suffered from some limitations. First, the fact that participants were university students from a democratic country prevents us from making general claims about the perceived legitimacy of UN interventions. However, it is worth noting that university students are potential future members of the political elite with a strong influence on political decisions; the use of this sample is therefore less problematic than in other studies.

Second, and in line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), one could argue that the similarity of the regime rather than the value of democracy may drive the present findings. Indeed, World War II constituted a turning point in the actual understanding of democracy mainly in Western countries, and democracy could therefore be considered as a value restricted to Western democratic countries. However, there are reasons to consider democratic principles as universal values (e.g., Sen, 1999; Shapiro & Hacker-Cordon, 1999). Indeed, more democratic forms of governance have spread around the world (United Nations, 2002), and the recent events in the Arab world would suggest that restricting the value of democracy to actual democratic countries is not

appropriate. Of course, this does not mean that we should expect exactly the same effect in any country, given that specific cultural, social, and political contexts may reduce the perception of democracy as a value, and that democracy and democracy’s internal criticism may take on many different forms. But this exception does not mean that this hypothesis is merely a similarity issue that one should restrict to Western liberal democracies. Furthermore, the fact that support for international military intervention also depends on that target country’s public opinion cannot be explained in terms of regime similarities. Accordingly, the present findings would benefit from further research examining perceived legitimacy of international military interventions across societies representing different political regimes, economic and military power, and cultural history.

Third, the present research studied the moderating role of the process variable (see Jacoby & Sassenberg, 2011). We assumed that the value attributed to the democratic population would drive the effect of the political system on the perceived legitimacy of an external international military intervention. Given that an important characteristic of democratic populations is that they allegedly support peaceful solutions, our approach consisted in investigating the moderating role of this feature, by measuring it and then experimentally manipulating it. However, future research is needed to confirm this hypothesis through additional moderation analyses, including other features of democratic populations such as individual freedom and political equality. Furthermore, our understanding of the activated processes would also benefit from mediation analyses examining whether perceived characteristics of the population (e.g., as more or less democratic and valued) or amoral disengagement processes (e.g., dehumanization of the target population; see Bandura, 1999; Cohrs, Maes, Moschner, & Kielmann, 2003) mediate the support for external military interventions as a function of the target country’s political system. Finally, another aspect that would benefit from further research regards the hypothesis that the conditional protection of national populations

depends on participants' motivation to protect and enhance the value of democracy itself.

Fourth, another issue deserving further research concerns the lack of differences between the democratic and control conditions in Experiment 1, which may be perceived as inconsistent with the democracy-as-value hypothesis. Indeed, results showed that when the target country was democratic, support for an external intervention was not lower than in the control condition in which the political system was not specified. Since participants were overall strongly opposed to any external intervention within a sovereign country (see also Liu et al., 2009), a floor effect may have prevented such a difference from occurring. However, one could also argue that the lack of differences between the democratic and control conditions would mean that participants assume that unfamiliar countries are more likely to be democratic rather than nondemocratic. Accordingly, future research should examine whether this effect constitutes a mere floor effect or reflects the overattribution of democratic features to unknown countries.

Finally, another issue deserving further investigation concerns the fact that the scenario used in both experiments sets a specific political context. First, in order to simplify the experimental paradigm, we always presented the secessionist region as nondemocratic across conditions and experiments. We based this decision on prior research which showed that the effect of the political structure of an aggressor country appeared only when the victim was nondemocratic (Falomir et al., 2005, 2007). In the present context, however, we cannot be sure whether a democratic secessionist would have altered the dynamics of the perceived legitimacy of an international military intervention. Future research is therefore needed to examine our hypothesis in a paradigm overcoming this limitation.

A second defining feature of our experimental context was that the cover story made explicit the risk of civilian "collateral damage" in the target country. Military intervention necessarily entails civilian risks and the tolerance for such collateral damage may strongly vary as a function of the

perceived public opinion. Since our scenario highlighted civilian casualties, we assumed that participants' support for military intervention would follow the protection of the valued population: Lower support when a "worthy" population opposed its belligerent government than when a less "worthy" population supported its government. However, one could easily make the opposite claim if the scenario does not highlight potential civilian casualties. In this case, the goal of liberating a nondemocratic population that opposes its belligerent government policy should become even more salient than the likely "collateral damage," and the support for a external military engagement should be higher. These alternative predictions constitute fruitful ground for future research and the development of the democracy-as-value hypothesis.

A last feature of the experimental scenario was the simplified descriptions of democratic and nondemocratic political systems. We operationally defined democracy in a clear-cut way with overt election procedures as well as cultural underpinnings of a democratic political system at the family and the community level. Certainly, democratic systems include a number of additional parameters which give rise to different degrees and types of democratic governance. We believe, however, that this simplification does not undermine our findings, and that the central story of our results relates to the profound antagonism between democratic and nondemocratic systems in the minds of people living in Western societies. Even when descriptions of political systems are overly simplified, respondents seem to have a fairly precise idea of what the implications of democracy are (Staerklé et al., 1998). Our research is a step toward showing the extent to which Western citizens rely on this fundamental antagonism between democratic and nondemocratic political systems in order to make up their minds about international policy issues.

Concluding remarks

This paradigm may be of particular relevance to the typical dilemma the UN face when considering

humanitarian interventions, as for instance in the Balkans war, in the conflicts between Georgia and North-Ossetia, in Sudan's Darfour or in Libya. However, as noted above, which UN military interventions are legitimate remains unclear (e.g., Hoge, 2008). On the one hand, the present findings might seem irrelevant concerning the debate about the legitimacy of UN decisions and resolutions (e.g., Caron, 1993; Hurd, 2008; Popovski & Turner, 2008), given that the Security Council decisions on the use of force are based on an international legal framework (see Cassese, 1999; Simma, 1999; the UN Charter; articles 39, 41, & 42; Voeten, 2005; Weston, 1991; see also Malone & Khong, 2003). On the other hand, however, the present findings suggest that notwithstanding its legal bases, the perceived public legitimacy of UN interventions appears to be variable, at least among citizens of Western countries, which is paradoxically understudied.

We opened this article with a question about whether UN military interventions may apply to some sovereign countries more than others. Unfortunately, our findings suggest that not all lives have the same value. At least in the eyes of Western citizens, we found that lethal international military interventions were perceived as more legitimate when targeting nondemocratic countries whose population supports their government's belligerent intentions, as compared to those interventions in which the government or the population are on the morally "right side." These findings provide convergent support to the Democracy-as-value hypothesis, and suggest that the perceived legitimacy of the use of force by the international community depends on the value attributed to the population that endures civilian casualties. These findings also suggest that international actors (e.g., governments and media) may discursively call upon the political structure of potential target countries in order to justify their belligerent intentions, since nondemocratic populations would be considered as less worthy victims whose fate is more likely to be ignored or denied (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

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Notes

1 In both experiments, initial analyses using these three measures as a within-subjects factor revealed a significant main effect of the within subjects factor: Experiment 1, $F(1,47) = 50.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = .52$; Experiment 2, $F(1,118) = 60.33, p < .001, \eta^2 = .33$. In both experiments, support for military intervention decreased as the number of civilian casualties increased (Experiment 1: $M = 3.54, M = 2.03$, and $M = 0.94$; Experiment 2: $M = 2.54, M = 1.26$, and $M = 0.71$). Since none of the interaction effects with this factor was significant (overall interaction effects: Experiment 1, $F(1,47) < 0.14, p > .72$, and Experiment 2, $F(1,118) = 2.17, p = .15$), we simplified the reported results by computing a mean score of support for military intervention.

2 In both experiments, participants strongly disagreed with the military intervention, which resulted in a floor effect and heterogeneity of variances. Precautionary analyses on transformed scores and excluding outliers confirmed the reliability of the observed findings; thus, we decided to present the analyses for the raw scores and the full sample. Across the two studies, differences in degrees of freedom appear as a function of missing values.

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