International Law, Elites, and Public Support for Drone Strikes

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Abstract
While covert action was long outside the reach of international legal constraints, international organizations (IOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have increasingly sought to bring covert action under the umbrella of international laws governing the use of force. We examine one target of these efforts, the use of armed drones for counterterrorism. Does the public—which influences state practice and in turn customary international law—privilege concerns about effectiveness or international legal commitments in their support for armed drones? The case represents a consequential but difficult test for international law insofar as domestic political elites have largely been unified in their support for the policy, media accounts of drone strikes have heavily favored the government's perspective, and the U.S. public has held fairly strong, favorable views towards the use of drones. Employing an experiment embedded in a survey of a nationally representative sample of the United States, we find that the public is moved in their support for drone strikes by legal principles dealing with violations of sovereignty and civilian protections than by more strategic questions of military effectiveness. We further show that these effects are rooted in the normative dimensions of international legal commitments rather than more instrumental considerations. Our findings have implications for understanding the relationship between legal principles and national security, as well as the role of domestic factors in international legal compliance.

At a press conference in 1974, President Ford was asked about the international legality of U.S. covert actions to overthrow another country. Ford responded "I'm not going to pass judgment on whether it's permitted or authorized under international law. It's a recognized fact that…such actions are taken in the best interests of the countries involved."[1] Covert action, defined under American law as "an activity or activities…to influence the political, economic, or military conditions abroad, where it is intended that the role of the United States Government will not be apparent or acknowledged publicly,"[2] has historically occupied an uneasy position under international law, if not being removed from it altogether. In recent decades, however, international organizations (IOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have sought to bring covert action more firmly under the umbrella of international laws governing the use of force, putting pressure on leaders to be seen as acting in ways that are compatible with their legal obligations.[3]

The most consequential target of these efforts has been the use of drones, also known as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), for counterterrorism operations. Between 2009 and 2013, the United States conducted about 400 strikes against suspected terrorists outside active battlefields in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, killing more than 4,000 individuals.[4] While these strikes are shrouded in secrecy, increased scrutiny by IOs and NGOs has increasingly brought the question of compatibility with international law into the public debate. The United Nations has urged that "the limitations posed by international law on the use of lethal force, as for any other lethal weapon, are strictly adhered to and not weakened by broad justifications of

[1] Quoted in Reisman 1992, 7.
[2] Erwin 2013.
[3] This is consistent with a trend toward wanting to be seen in conformity with increasingly codified rules governing the use of force, Fazal 2012.
[4] Data from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, available at http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/category/projects/drones/drones-yemen/.

drone strikes."[5] NGOs have joined in these criticisms on similar legal grounds, with Amnesty International stating that it "is deeply concerned that targeted killings by US drones occurring outside the conditions of armed conflict violate the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of life and may constitute extrajudicial executions."[6] Despite providing few details on the program, the United States has fiercely defended itself, arguing that "to the extent these reports claim that the U.S. has acted contrary to international law, we would strongly disagree…the administration has repeatedly emphasized the extraordinary care that we take to make sure counter-terrorism actions are in accordance with all applicable law."[7]

While the use of drones for the purposes of counterterrorism has become a "key feature of the administration's foreign policy,"[8] a number of important international legal questions have gone unanswered, with scholars tending to focus instead on matters of ethics,[9] or military effectiveness.[10] As international legal scholar Ohlin puts it (forthcoming), "the literature has lagged behind in not questioning how basic principles of the law of war— whose architecture depends on the link between individual combatants and the political entities they fight for— apply in covert action." Similarly underdeveloped is whether international law affects public opinion in this context. In particular, does the populace tend to adopt President Ford's position, choosing not to pass judgment on the compatibility of covert actions with international law and instead taking a more instrumental view of whether these strikes are militarily effective? The answer to this question has important implications, as how the public evaluates the applicability of international law in such novel contexts can influence how countries such as the United States

[5] UN 2013.
[6] Amnesty International 2013.
[7] PBS 2013.
[8] Singer 2013.
[9] Strawser 2013.
[10] Cronin 2013; Johnston 2012.

employ force. These attitudes become a basis for state practice, which in turn can shape customary rules, one of the main sources of international law.[11]

In many respects, concerns about international legal compliance should have little impact on public support for the use of drones for counterterrorism. The threat of terrorism has been shown to generate fear, anxiety, and risk aversion,[12] reactions that tend to make individuals more suspicious of upholding international law.[13] In addition, given the secrecy surrounding drone strikes, the government enjoys a stark informational advantage over the details of the program.[14] Moreover, with only limited exceptions, domestic political elites have largely offered unified support for the policy.[15] To the extent that individuals take their cues from domestic elites,[16] an enduring bipartisan consensus presents formidable obstacles for the contrary positions put forward by critics. In line with this political consensus, available polling data correspondingly points to consistently favorable support among the public, suggesting entrenched views impervious to outside critiques rooted in international legal compliance.[17]

By contrast, employing an experiment embedded in a survey of a nationally representative U.S. sample, we find the public's views toward drones are moved more by legal principles dealing with violations of sovereignty and civilian protections rather than questions of military effectiveness. We further show that the sources of public opposition are deeply rooted in the normative basis of international legal appeals related to a logic of appropriateness rather than more consequentialist considerations. Given that covert action represents in many ways a least

[11] Brownlie 2008, 4-12.
[12] Huddy et al. 2005.
[13] Kerzter and McGraw 2012.
[14] Baum and Potter 2008.
[15] McKelvey 2012.
[16] Berinsky 2009; Zaller 1992.
[17] Sniderman and Bullock 2004, 337.

likely case for the influence of international law on public attitudes,[18] our study offers confirmatory evidence of the public's responsiveness to international legal commitments. As "covert action has quickly moved from the exception to the rule,"[19] understanding the basis of public support has important implications for whether it will be used in ways that are compatible with international law, or rather will be driven more by narrower concerns of national security.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section outlines the evolving relationship between international law and covert uses of military force. Second, we develop several theoretical expectations about the responsiveness of public attitudes toward international law versus military effectiveness in the context of drone strikes. Third, we emphasize how the use of force represents a particularly difficult test for the effect of international law, and its largely non-governmental proponents, in the debate about drones. Fourth, we outline the main experimental design and data collected. Fifth, we discuss the empirical results from the analysis, including a follow-up experiment that further probes the normative versus instrumental mechanisms advanced. The final section discusses the implications of the findings and suggests avenues for future research.

Covert Action and International Law

Implied in President Ford's original remarks is the long-held view that covert action favors the national security interests of great powers over international law. As Reisman argues, with the end of the Cold War "there can be little question that the essential structure of that system, established after the Second World War, is changing."[20] Scholars have argued that the end of the Cold War ushered in broad normative changes about how states use military force,

[18] Gerring 2007, 232.
[19] Ohlin, forthcoming.
[20] Reisman 1992, 16.

from a system largely based on self-interest carried out unilaterally to one where states intervene collectively for the protection of civilians.[21] Congruent with these evolving norms on the use of force more generally, covert action began to come out of the international legal shadows. Indeed, change already began concertedly by the mid-1980s when Nicaragua took the United States' to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for arming counterrevolutionaries in violation of Nicaraguan sovereignty. Based on arguments that the ICJ did not have jurisdiction, the United States refused to participate in the proceedings or abide by the court's judgment that it had violated international law and should thus pay reparations to Nicaragua.[22] Nonetheless, the fact that covert action was brought to the court began a shift from understanding such actions as a domain that "did not involve a need for legal justification"[23] to one which could be "subject to the Charter principles governing the use of force."[24] As Gray notes, the ICJ viewed provisions of the UN Charter, in particular, the non-intervention principle enshrined in Article 2 (4), as "dynamic rather than fixed…capable of change over time through state practice."[25] How states interpret Article 2(4) and self-defense under Article 51, and apply these in covert settings came to be seen as affecting customary international law.

Mapped onto evolving interpretations of international law in the context of covert action are shifts in the nature of covert action itself. While serving largely a regime change function during the Cold War,[26] covert action has since evolved in two main ways that affect the applicability of international law. First, the line between traditional military operations and covert action has become increasingly porous, with the military and intelligence personnel

[21] Finnemore 2003.
[22] Keohane et al. 2000, 477.
[23] Gray 2008, 106.
[24] Reisman 1992, 114.
[25] Gray 2008, 8.
[26] Downes and Lilley 2010.

collaborating on operations dealing with the targeting of suspected terrorists.[27] Missions conducted under the auspices of the military have more explicitly been expected to adhere to international laws on the use of force,[28] suggesting that the turn to hybridized covert operations might be expected to hew more closely to international law than traditional Cold War-era covert actions.[29]

Second, rather than discrete instances of regime change, drone strikes diverge from Cold War behavior in that these operations are part of a larger policy of armed force—with hundreds taking place in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia—that has become subject to public sanction. As former CIA Director, Michael Hayden put it, "it's clear to me now that in liberal democracies the security services don't get to do what they do without broad public understanding and support…no president can do something repeatedly over a long term without that broad popular support."[30] Public censure about a particular covert action in the past likely mattered little, as they were generally one-off events, but with more than 400 drone strikes in the past five years, the policy has become part of a much wider and indeed public foreign policy debate.

Taken together, this discussion points to an important role for public attitudes in what has become a signature piece in American counterterrorism policy. Covert action, one of the last redoubts in terms of its commitment to international law, has faced increasing pressure to adhere to international legal commitments. State practice on covert operations has meanwhile come out from the shadows; operations that were once carried out entirely by intelligence services are increasingly conducted in conjunction with traditional military forces that are unequivocally bound by international laws governing the use of force. As these operations have become more

[27] Priest and Arkin 2011.
[28] Wall 2011.
[29] Ohlin forthcoming.
[30] Quoted in Hopkins 2013.

public and frequent, the role of public sanction has also become increasingly salient. To the extent that public approval shapes the incentives leaders face for implementing particular foreign policies,[31] then public attitudes regarding the applicability of international law to this new form of warfare has the potential to shape American state practice and, in turn, the interpretation of international law more broadly.

Debates about the Use of Drone Strikes for Counterterrorism

The question of whether legal commitments, especially when faced with competing questions of military effectiveness, can be persuasive among the public, is the question to which we now turn. We show first why the particular issue of drones would present an entrée for the potential influence of persuasion about international legal commitments, thereby more closely following a logic of appropriateness. Second, we argue that intergovernmental and non-governmental groups in particular may be in a promising position to shape public opinion through such legal persuasion.

Competing Visions of Consequences and Appropriateness

A number of scholars have cited "the importance of values, beliefs, and other predispositions in structuring mass attitudes."[32] Policies pitting two different values against each other can "open a 'central' route to persuasion"[33] by raising the salience of one value over another. Questions of military force, and drones in particular, are especially prone to exhibiting this dynamic of value conflict, embodying tensions between the two divergent visions of human behavior, the logics of consequences and appropriateness. The logic of consequences assumes

[31] Holsti 2004.
[32] Alvarez and Brehm 1998, 419-420.
[33] Alvarez and Brehm 1995, 1059.

actors generally perform cost-benefit calculations preferring outcomes that maximize effectiveness and utility.[34] The second approach instead suggests that actors follow standards and institutional commitments that are seen as more "rule-based."[35]

On the one hand, even some critics have conceded that drones are tactically effective at eliminating suspected militants.[36] The U.S. government frequently points to the success of drone strikes in degrading al Qaeda's and similar organizations' capabilities with the killing of between 1,500-2,700 alleged militants and counting.[37] It speaks to administration's confidence that the White House has trumpeted drones as a "cure-all for terrorism."[38]

On the other hand, the use of force raises potential critiques about the appropriateness of drones that could also resonate with the public. Opponents have articulated these concerns specifically regarding the compatibility of U.S. strikes with two relevant bodies of international law rooted in just war theory: *jus ad bellum*—rules concerning the recourse to the use of force—and *jus in bello*—rules governing conduct in war.[39] In terms of *jus ad bellum*, critics charge that drone strikes in places like Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia are illegal since the United States is not directly at war with any of these states, but rather a non-state actor (Al-Qaeda or affiliates) operating within their territories.[40] Moreover, the UN Charter proscribes territorial aggression under Article 2(4), but makes an exception for self-defense (Article 51), which customary international law interprets as a threat that is "instant, overwhelming, and leaving no choice of means, and no moment of deliberation."[41] While the U.S. government argues that the targets of drone strikes constitute "a continuing, imminent threat," to the American people, it does not

[34] Press et al. 2013.
[35] March and Olson 1998.
[36] Cronin 2013.
[37] Byman 2013.
[38] White House 2013.
[39] Ohlin 2012.
[40] O'Connell 2011.
[41] *Caroline Case* 1838.

define "imminent," and legal scholars question whether the threat posed by many of the militants legally justify the recourse to force. According to one study, just 2% represented "high-level targets"[42] and most were "neither presently aggressing nor temporally about to aggress."[43]

Another strand of legal questions arises from whether the strikes are compatible with *jus in bello*. According to Article 48 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions (AP I), "the Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants." In addition to the principle of distinction, the other relevant *jus in bello* provision is that of proportionality. Article 51(5)(b) of AP I proscribes "an attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life…which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated."[44]

Critics have questioned U.S. commitment to both distinction and proportionality. In particular, criticism has arisen over the government's opaque system for judging whether individuals are direct participants, and therefore legitimate targets. The practice of "signature strikes" – targeting suspected militants on the basis of behavioral patterns similar to those of Al Qaeda or Taliban forces[45] – has especially drawn censure, since combatant status is inferred by association rather than by identities known with certainty beforehand. Lastly, strikes in areas with large numbers of civilians, such as funerals, have been characterized as causing harm that is disproportionate to the military value of the target.[46]

Although these competing values may open avenues for persuasion, it could still be the case that consequences trump appropriateness. A large body of existing work suggests that the

[42] Stanford and NYU 2012.
[43] Christopher 2012.
[44] Although the United States has not ratified AP I, the sections dealing with discrimination and proportionality are generally accepted as customary international law, including by U.S. armed forces. See the Customary International Humanitarian Law Database of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), available at http://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/Home.
[45] Greenwald 2012.
[46] ACLU et al. 2013; Amnesty International 2013.

public is swayed more by narrower questions of whether military force works. Several studies have shown that the single biggest determinant of support for the use of force is the belief a mission will be successful.[47] On the related question of actual conduct during wartime, expectations of the relative efficacy of different weapons systems have been found to drive support for their use over moral objections or possible civilian fatalities, even in cases like nuclear weapons.[48] Furthermore, while domestic audiences can be sensitive to casualties, existing research has overwhelmingly centered on deaths to their own troops rather than enemy soldiers or civilians.[49]

A closer look suggests that legal arguments may nonetheless be persuasive. Prohibitions under international law against certain practices can drastically reduce public support, and this dynamic can operate even in controversial cases, such as torture and the targeting of civilians.[50] International law, and the laws of war in particular, are also embedded within a larger normative framework that emphasizes particular moral imperatives of abiding by international legal commitments.[51] International law has developed a unique heritage that differentiates legal principles from other types of rules.[52] Legal rules more broadly have achieved a set of attributes that create a stronger sense of legitimacy not only among elites actors but also the wider public,[53] who come to see as legitimate those practices that are legal and moral.[54] Indeed, in the context of drones, the moral dimension does appear to resonate with the wider public. When asked, over

[47] Gelpi et al. 2009, 21-22; Eichenberg 2005. Gelpi et al. 2009, 132-133, also note that beliefs over whether the leadership "did the right thing" in resorting to force can also matter a great deal. The authors acknowledge that respondents' underlying reasons are ambiguous and may include both instrumental and normative rationales.
[48] Press et al. 2013.
[49] For example, Gartner and Segura 1998; Mueller 1973.
[50] Chilton 2014; Tomz 2008; Wallace 2013.
[51] Reus-Smit 2004, 21-24.
[52] Franck 1990, 185.
[53] Fuller 1969, 46.
[54] Zemans 1983; Andenaes 1966.

80% of U.S. respondents repeatedly expressed their concerns over the risks posed by drones to civilians,[55] hinting at the potential for legal critiques to impact public support.

Who Frames: The Potential Influence of IOs and NGOs on Public Opinion

A second point about the resonance of legal commitments deals with the question of which actors channel these arguments. IOs and NGOs are the two main groups that have levied criticisms about the legality of drone strikes. In many respects, these groups are likely to be seen as credible and persuasive on the topic of drones. Druckman defines credible elites as those whom audiences believe have knowledge germane to the topic and are trusted in terms of sharing relevant information.[56] The UN, as an IO, is likely seen as especially credible because the public tends to look to it for a "second opinion" about military operations.[57] Its heterogeneous representation means that positions the organization takes are more likely to be seen as reflecting an independent consensus, conferring a status as a trusted arbiter over the wisdom of the use of force.[58] Of course, IOs are not without limits and can often display their own biases and pathologies.[59] On the whole, the UN is nonetheless often able to act as an "opinion leader,"[60] providing outside information about the potential risks or deficiencies for a particular foreign policy and shaping attitudes about the appropriateness of particular foreign policies. In the case of drones, the United Nations has a Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, as well as one tasked with Counterterrorism and on Extra-Judicial Killings, which periodically release statements about the legality and effectiveness of relevant operations and policies.[61]

[55] Pew Research 2013a; CBS/NYT 2013.
[56] Druckman 2001, 1045. See also Page et al. 1987.
[57] Grieco et al. 2011.
[58] Chapman and Reiter 2004; Thompson 2006.
[59] Chapman 2011; Barnett 2002.
[60] Chapman and Wolford 2010, 229.
[61] UN 2013.

NGOs are also likely to assume a credible position on the use of force. According to Keck and Sikkink, these actors "'frame' issues to make them comprehensible to target audiences, to attract attention and encourage action."[62] Similar to IOs, NGOs can exhibit their own deficiencies in their ability to influence state practices, sometimes even having counterproductive effects.[63] Despite some exceptions, human rights organizations have generally been shown to be "makers and shapers" of public opinion by shaming state practices, checking government assertions, and bringing transgressions to light. Several scholars show empirically, for example, that negative publicity by human rights groups increased individuals' opposition to their governments' policies.[64] In the context of drones, this suggests that groups such as Human Rights Watch, or Amnesty International, which have been active critics on issues concerning the use of drones, would help to diminish public support these strikes.[65]

In short, we expect that being transmitted by groups such as IOs and NGOs, who are likely to be influential in this context, will enhance the persuasiveness of legal arguments among the populace. In particular, because of their relative expertise in areas of humanitarian issues and international norms, the effects of IO and NGO voices should be especially apparent when they deploy messages related to the appropriateness (or lack thereof) of drone strikes under international law.

The Challenge for International Law

Although a number of scholars have found that international law affects public support for particular policies, existing research has tended to focus on issues such as political economy

[62] Keck and Sikkink 1998, 90.
[63] Hafner-Burton 2008.
[64] Auderson 2012; Davis et al. 2012.
[65] ACLU et al. 2013; Amnesty International 2013; HRW 2013.

and human rights.[66] Some studies have addressed the use of force but not in the context of international law,[67] or have found that individuals' commitment to international norms more generally buckled under the weight of military utility.[68] Not only is existing research mixed in terms of how international law affects public attitudes, it may not necessarily be applicable in the context of how such commitments apply outside the context of armed conflict, as we outlined earlier. Before proceeding with the empirical analysis, we point to two reasons why this case is likely to be a difficult test for the resonance of international law.

Evidence of Consistent, Strong Public Support

Far from being condemned, by most measures the public appears to be strongly, favorably, and consistently disposed toward the merits of the U.S. government's drone program. As Sniderman and Bullock suggest, the more stable and consistent are individuals' positions on a topic, the more likely that they are "congruent with underlying basic orientations," which also means that they are less apt to change in the face of potential criticisms.[69]

Figure 1 below summarizes results from a series of polls involving national U.S. samples between 2011 and 2014, which examine support for drone strikes against terrorists overseas.[70] While there are no discernable temporal trends, what is clear is that support for drone strikes is generally high, averaging more than 63% across all surveys and reaching well over 70% in

[66] Chaudoin 2014; Tomz 2008; Wallace 2013.
[67] Tomz and Weeks 2013.
[68] Press et al. 2013.
[69] Sniderman and Bullock 2004, 337.
[70] The full set of questions is included in supplementary appendices.

several instances.[71] This broad-based approval is impressive given other policies related to the War on Terror, such as the treatment of detainees, have garnered much weaker support.[72]

[Figure 1 about here]

Despite some differences in terms of sampling methods, question wording, and answer options, this first cut indicates broad agreement amongst the public concerning the merits of drone strikes, suggesting critics face a difficult job in fostering a groundswell of domestic opposition to the government's practices. These strong levels of support are in many respects consistent with research suggesting that concerns over security threats lead citizens to express greater support for more aggressive policies.[73] Set within the larger War on Terror, drone strikes would also seem to fit well with desires for "bashing the foreigners" in a particularly violent manner, which have often been found to resonate with domestic audiences.[74]

The Dominance of Government Voices in Media Accounts of Drones

Another factor that might minimize the persuasiveness of arguments about international law's applicability to covert action is that critics challenge a government voice that dominates debates over the use of force. First, opposition within the branches of government over drones has remained fairly muted, allowing for a more unified, and thus credible message. Republican lawmakers have enthusiastically denounced the Obama administration across a wide range of issues, yet almost universally praised the president's expansion of drone strikes. Even notable cases of dissent like Senator Rand Paul's filibuster of March 2013 focused more on the targeting

[71] In order to maintain a sufficient degree of comparability, we excluded questions focusing on the use of drone to target U.S. citizens, or conducted on U.S. soil. Not surprisingly, the latter type of scenarios yielded lower support overall.
[72] Gronke et al. 2010.
[73] Huddy et al. 2005; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009, 85-87.
[74] Russett 1990, 20.

of U.S. citizens and potential strikes on U.S. soil. The core of the program centered on the widespread targeting of foreign militants was largely left untouched. Even here, senior members of Paul's own party denounced Paul's actions and came out firmly in favor of White House policy.[75] Given that the public often relies on cues from domestic elites, the consensus across both parties further provides the government a firm basis for influencing how the public views the use of drones.[76]

Second, when it comes to matters of foreign policy, the government typically possesses an informational advantage over competing actors both domestic and international.[77] This asymmetry is particularly stark concerning classified programs like drone strikes, where details concerning the number, accuracy, and circumstances of attacks remain closely held and selectively released. While several independent projects have sought a more open accounting of the U.S. drone program, they remain at an inherent disadvantage to official sources.[78]

To assess the prevalence of the government position relative to critics, we conducted a content analysis of U.S. newspapers and measure the relative frequency of different elite voices on stories involving drones. The analysis covers the period January 2009-December 2013, which coincides with President Obama's entry into office, alongside the increasing salience of drones in the public discourse. Data were gathered using the Factiva archive service compiled by Dow Jones & Company, which covers several thousand U.S. newspapers.[79]

We identified all news stories dealing with drones that also involved the U.S. government, and compared to those mentioning the UN and NGO actors respectively given their

[75] Stevenson and Parker 2013.
[76] Berinsky 2009; Zaller 1992.
[77] Baum and Potter 2008; Western 2005.
[78] Notable examples of nongovernmental efforts to track drone strikes include the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Drone Wars UK, and Amnesty International.
[79] For further information, see http://www.dowjones.com/factiva/.

role as notable critics of the drone program. We designed the content analysis to offer as conservative a test as possible for the prominence of the U.S. government relative to alternative voices.[80]

Figure 2(a) displays the absolute frequency by month of news stories on drones that mentions each of the three elite sources. The figure shows several ebbs and flows in the media's coverage with a discernable increase from 2011 onwards as more details of the drone program emerged. Despite some of these rises and declines in overall coverage, government sources remained by far the most common voice for each and every month. NGO and UN voices did become more pronounced in the latter half of 2013, likely resulting from the release of several strident critiques,[81] although references to government sources generally rose in lockstep.

[Figure 2 about here]

Providing a different view, Figure 2(b) instead reports the percentage of the relevant set of drone stories in U.S. newspapers that featured each of the three main categories of elite sources.[82] Figure 2(b) confirms the overwhelming presence of government voices in discussions of drones in U.S. newspapers. Regularly more than 80% of all drones news articles involving elite voices contained a reference to at least one governmental source. The peak came in December 2009 when almost 98% of stories included a government source, while the lowest point three years later in December 2012 still involved the government in an impressive 65% of all stories. By contrast, the proportion of items featuring the United Nations or NGOs was generally between 40% and 60% lower than that garnered by the government.

[80] Due to space constraints we discuss the full research protocol in further detail in supplementary appendices.
[81] Walsh and Mehsud 2013.
[82] Because a single news story could include two or more elite sources, the sum of percentages across the three categories for some months may add up to more than 100%.

In sum, the combination of consensus among domestic political elites, impressive existing levels of public approval, and predominance of government voices all suggest a difficult test for outside criticisms about the compatibility of drone strikes with international law. However, should international law change mass attitudes around an issue so central to national security, this would provide even stronger evidence of the transformative potential of international legal principles on domestic politics.

Experimental Design

To test the influence of international law versus effectiveness on public support for drone strikes, we carried out an experiment embedded in a U.S. national survey. The experiment described below was included in a survey fielded by GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks) from September 6-23, 2013.[83] Of those invited to participate, 2,394 agreed to do so, producing a final completion rate of 64.6%. Unlike many other survey firms, GfK uses addressed-based sampling methods to generate a probability sample of the U.S. population, and then administers the survey to recruited panelists over the Internet.

The survey instrument involved a modified 3x3 design, which includes nine separate treatment groups, along with a control group receiving no additional prompts, for a total of ten experimental conditions (see Table 1 below).[84] Randomizing survey participants to one of these experimental conditions makes it possible to assess the independent effect of both the nature and

[83] Data collected by Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences, NSF Grant SES-0818839, Jeremy Freese and James Druckman, Principal Investigators.

[84] We chose not to adopt a full factorial design allowing combinations of every treatment condition, since this would involve 27 experimental groups in addition to the baseline control. We opted for a 3x3 design to maximize statistical power, and offer an initial analysis of several competing frames and elite voices in light of the dearth of experimental research on drones.

source of arguments on public attitudes toward drones. Supplementary appendices discuss the full design and survey instrument.

[Table 1 about here]

All subjects were given the same background information: "There has been a lot of recent discussion about the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, also known as drones, by the United States to target suspected militants." While the control group only received this initial generic prompt, other groups were randomly assigned additional information based on the following two treatments.

For the first treatment, we varied the particular issue frame to evaluate two competing values underlying the use of drones: the logic of consequences, which here corresponds to whether the strikes are effective at eliminating militants; or the logic of appropriateness, associated more closely with international legal prohibitions. We disaggregated legal matters into either concerns over breaches of the target country's sovereignty (*jus ad bellum*), or taking appropriate steps to prevent civilian deaths (*jus in bello*). Given the often-heated claims regarding civilian casualties from drone strikes, we purposefully chose more measured language that, if anything, should offer an underestimate of the potential effects of civilian concerns on support for drones.

In the second set of treatments, we varied the source of the argument across one of three different actors to assess whether theoretically credible elite sources shift the perceived importance of competing values. For the government voice we chose the Joint Chiefs of Staff because we expect that members of the military establishment would be seen as especially credible. As Gelpi et al. note, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are "'experts' on the use of force who are likely to be viewed as less biased than other potential message senders, making them more likely

to influence respondents' attitudes."[85] Gallup routinely ranks the military as the most trusted institution in the United States, which should make this an even more difficult test for challengers such as IOs and NGOs.[86] We selected the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and Counterterrorism as our IO source given its prominence in evaluating the merits of U.S. drone policies. For our NGOs treatment we focused on Human Rights Watch (HRW) also for reasons of external validity, namely that is that it has been one of the visible groups discussing the U.S. drone program.

Following Chong and Druckman, we include "pro" and "con" frames for each of the competing logics depending on the elite source in question.[87] For external validity, the government was associated with taking the "pro" side of military effectiveness and compliance with international laws, while the UN and NGO cues are associated with the "con" side that strikes are ineffective and violate sovereignty or civilian protections. Although these actors could hold values of consequences and appropriateness in tension, they have exhibited remarkable consistency in their assertions that drones are *either* effective and legal, *or* ineffective and illegal. We therefore chose not to manipulate the direction or intensity of issue positions taken by each actor, but recognize these would be interesting questions for further research.[88] Assessing other government actors and some of cleavages that have emerged in terms of support among Republicans and Democrats would also be valuable for testing theories of elite consensus,[89] though the government has generally remained unified in its support on this issue.

[85] Gelpi et al. 2009, 118. For other studies that use the Joint Chiefs of Staff, see Druckman 2001 and Press et al. 2012.
[86] Gallup 2014.
[87] Chong and Druckman 2007, 642.
[88] For a similar discussion in the context of partisan position taking on domestic public policy issues, see Druckman et al. 2013, 61-62.
[89] Zaller 1992.

After reading the background information and relevant additional prompt, respondents were asked to indicate their level of approval for the use of drone strikes on a five-point scale, ranging from strongly approve to strongly disapprove. The rate of nonresponse was very low at around 1%. Levels of support for drone strikes across all respondents were in line with many past polls on this issue, and closely mirror those from several surveys conducted by the polling firm YouGov summarized earlier in Figure 1. Among all groups, 48% approved the use of drone strikes against suspected militants, 20% disapproved, and the remaining respondents neither approved nor disapproved.

Of course, experimental methods are not without their deficiencies, especially on questions of external validity, for example whether participants respond differently in laboratory or similarly controlled settings than when confronted with real world conditions.[90] We addressed these concerns in two main ways. Unlike student or online convenience samples, the GfK panel offers a much more representative sample of the U.S. adult population. Comparisons across a wide range of socio-demographic characteristics revealed our sample deviated on average by only around 2% from standard U.S. population benchmarks.[91] Our study thus likely offers a more convincing window into the thinking of the U.S. citizenry toward drones.

A related concern deals less with the nature of the scenario than with whether participants react differently in an experimental setting compared to the real world. While such problems with external validity may be more sizable in situations where respondents are asked to evaluate hypothetical scenarios,[92] this is less of a worry in our study. First, we explicitly designed elements of our scenario to closely follow those actually taking place in recent debates over the

[90] McDermott 2002, 37-38.
[91] Data for the U.S. benchmarks come from the September 2013 update of the Current Population Survey (CPS). Further details are provided in supplementary appendices.
[92] See the discussion in Levendusky and Horowitz 2012, 327-328.

use of drone strikes. In addition, our questions on support for drones borrow extensively from actual survey items asked in recent polls. As with any experimental study we cannot completely eliminate concerns of external validity, yet our analysis yields several key findings (and non-findings) on the determinants of support for drones, and offers a firmer basis for further inquiry.

Experimental Results

Figure 3 below shows how each of our experimental conditions affects public opinion toward drones. Each column represents the change in the percentage of respondents approving the use of drone strikes for the relevant treatment group compared to those in the control baseline who were only given the generic background information.[93]

[Figure 3 about here]

In general, when evaluating various arguments concerning the merits of drone strikes, individuals appear moved more by a logic of appropriateness centered on international law than one of consequences. References by either the IO or NGOs to drone strikes violating the sovereignty of target states are associated with a drop of between 6-8% in approval for drones. Similar declines are evident when respondents are told drone strikes do not take necessary measures to prevent the deaths of civilians. The size of both effects is in line with related studies examining the impact of international legal principles on public attitudes toward human rights, such as torture.[94] Consistent with general public concerns about the danger of civilian deaths mentioned earlier, the findings here indicate that awareness of the actual threat posed to

[93] Specifically, each column is calculated by taking the difference in percent support for drone strikes between the relevant treatment group compared to the control. Percentages are calculated by aggregating responses across the two levels of approval (approve strongly / approve somewhat) and disapproval (disapprove strongly / disapprove somewhat) respectively. For ease of presentation, we excluded respondents who neither approved nor disapproved of drone strikes, but the overall pattern continues to hold when including the middle answer category.
[94] Wallace 2013.

noncombatants leads to a modest but still significant decrease in support for drones. Taken together, the evidence suggests that prospects for noncombatant casualties shape public support for the use of drones. Compared to the declines resulting from IO or NGO criticisms, assurances by the Joint Chiefs that the government is complying with international legal matters of sovereignty or civilian protections are associated with smaller and less significant rises of around 1% in support for drones. The contrasting effects suggest that the public is much more swayed by arguments that legal principles related to the logic of appropriateness are being breached, while relatively unaffected by claims these same elements are being followed.

Across all three elite sources, however, claims for or against the military effectiveness of drone strikes have a fairly minor impact. While IO or NGO criticisms are still associated with a decline in support, the size of the effect is around half of that found for the sovereignty or civilian frames. The boost associated with government praises of the efficacy of the strikes in eliminating militants is larger than when defending the sovereignty or civilian dimensions, but is still relatively small, with a rise in approval of less than 3%. The combined findings thus point to international legal considerations centered on more critical positions concerning sovereignty and civilians, having a stronger influence compared to instrumental motives on public attitudes towards drones.

To assess the treatments in a more precise manner, Table 2 estimates a series of ordered probit regression models using the full five-point measure of support for drone strikes as the dependent variable, where higher values indicate greater levels of approval.[95] The first column reports the results from a model using all nine issue-source treatment conditions with the control group representing the excluded category. The second model includes a number of common

[95] All analysis conducted using Stata 13. Because all expectations for the effects of each issue frame are unidirectional, one-tailed tests are reported.

individual covariates to adjust for any minor remaining imbalances among the experimental groups, as well as to provide some comparison to prior research on public opinion and the use of force.[96]

[Table 2 about here]

Consistent with the initial findings, both models show that international law continues to have the strongest impact on support for drone strikes, but is limited to the "con" positions. Both the UN and NGO treatments dealing with violations of sovereignty are in the expected negative direction, and both achieve at least a 10% level of statistical significance in the fully specified Model 2. For civilian protections, UN and NGO criticisms decrease support for drone strikes and both effects are statistically significant across all models. All of the pro-frames involving the Joint Chiefs improve support for drones as expected, but none of the coefficients attain standard thresholds of statistical significance. Similarly, across all three elite voices, instrumental prompts dealing with eliminating militants (whether supportive or critical) have little discernable impact on how respondents evaluated the merits of drone strikes, except slightly in the case of NGOs.

The remaining covariates in Model 2 show that several of the individual background traits are in line with past research on foreign policy preferences. Men generally proved to be more enthusiastic supporters of drone strikes, which is consistent with prior studies pointing to a gender gap over the use of force and drones in particular.[97] Older and wealthier respondents are also more supportive of drone strikes on average, though education has a weaker effect overall. Given the generally greater support of right-leaning respondents toward more aggressive foreign policies,[98] respondents identifying more strongly with the Republican Party were more likely to

[96] Berinsky 2009; Holsti 2004. Details for the coding of background covariates are provided in supplementary appendices.
[97] Eichenberg 2003; Pew Research Center 2013b.
[98] Rathbun 2007.

favor drone strikes. Similarly, veterans registered greater approval for drone strikes compared to other civilians, which follows past research showing the impact of prior military experience on support for military force.[99] Lastly, those expressing a greater general interest in politics and political affairs were actually more likely to support drone strikes. On the other hand, politically active respondents are less supportive of drone strikes, which is in line with the fact that most public demonstrations have involved those protesting *against* the use of drones.[100]

The significance of the IO and NGO legal coefficients is especially notable because the international law treatments were designed to be subtle—for example, that the strikes "do not take necessary measures to prevent the death of civilians" as opposed to bluntly stating that civilians are being actively killed. We sought to bias against large findings, but we nonetheless observed significant constraining effects for international law. Moreover, as noted earlier the topic of drones should pose difficulties for arguments rooted in international law and the broader logic of appropriateness. National security represents a hard test for norms-based arguments,[101] and counterterrorism in particular should be a least likely case for observing the effect of norms. Yet even here, UN and NGO voices appeared influential, especially on the question of civilian consequences of drone strikes and compatibility with sovereignty in foreign countries.

Who advances these various arguments also appears to be extremely important. The public was responsive to arguments by either intergovernmental or non-governmental sources, with small though statistically insignificant differences between the effects of arguments made

[99] Feaver and Gelpi 2004.
[100] We tested for possible conditional relationships between the treatments and various individual characteristics. Small differences were sometimes evident, such as more pronounced constraining effects in the sovereignty and civilians treatments for Republican and male respondents. Given these two groups are generally more supportive of drones, the results offer promising evidence that arguments linked to the logic of appropriateness might have a greater impact on those segments of the public initially most skeptical of limiting military force. For a similar argument in the context of international law and support for torture, see Wallace 2013. However, these interactive effects were fairly weak and not consistently significant across different model specifications, and thus only suggestive.
[101] Katzenstein 1996; Price 1998.

by the IO actor, the UN, versus those made by the NGO actor, HRW.[102] Our results further offer micro-level support for arguments that IOs and NGOs can effect change through naming-and-shaming against countries committing humanitarian violations,[103] in this case by directly influencing the views of the offending government's own citizenry. In contrast, the U.S. government's voice, channeled through the Joint Chiefs of Staff, appears to have little influence on public attitudes. By design, however, the elite sources were associated with particular issue frames, meaning that individuals could have been responding just as much, if not more, to the content of a given argument as its source.

To better evaluate the role of the particular elite source, we included a follow-up question in the same survey asking respondents to offer their feelings on the credibility of the particular voice using a similar five-point scale. Because the control condition received no specific elite source, respondents in this group were not presented this item. Those in the treatment groups were, in turn, only asked to evaluate the credibility of the elite source to which they were exposed.

Figure 4 shows the absolute percent of respondents believing the government (Joint Chiefs), IO (UN), or NGO (HRW) is a credible source on the topic of drone strikes, separated by each issue frame. In general, there is a clear divergence in the credibility of the government and that of either the UN or HRW. Across all three issue frames at least 70% of respondents found the government a credible voice, with the highest levels reserved for arguments made about the military effectiveness of drone strikes. While the UN was fairly comparable to the government on issues of sovereignty (68% versus 72%), likely because of its reputation and relative expertise in this area, the organization's credibility was much lower across the civilian and effectiveness

[102] Wald tests performed on the models in Table 2 indicate the hypothesis that the UN and NGO coefficients were equal for each issue frame could not be rejected.
[103] Hafner-Burton 2008; Lebovic and Voeten 2009.

frames. HRW was generally viewed as the least credible source except for a narrow advantage over the UN on civilian matters, but in all instances with ratings around or below 50%,[104] perhaps reflecting some of the broader skepticism toward the motives of NGOs.[105]

[Figure 4 about here]

The results from Figures 3 and 4 suggest an apparent paradox between the credibility of an elite voice, and the public's willingness to change their views on drones based on frames promoted by that same source. One possibility might be the presence of ceiling effects. Given the high overall support for drone strikes among the U.S. public discussed earlier, the favorable government message (legal or effectiveness-based) may have little ability to raise approval much further.[106] While several past polls do point to significant majorities of approval, the inclusion in our question of a middle answer option suggests substantially less overall support and a great deal (over 30% of respondents) without strong views toward drone strikes in either direction. High levels of preexisting support would also not account for why the legal messages deployed by IO and NGO voices were so much more influential than ones rooted in military utility. A straightforward ceiling effect thus does not seem to offer a convincing account of the findings (or non-findings) for any of the treatments.

Another possible reason for this apparent paradox may be that the public sees the baseline control condition as already largely incorporating government assertions about the drone program. As Gaines et al. suggest, if "research hypotheses have merit, the effects they simulate are likely to have occurred in the real world. In effect, some respondents are likely to have been

[104] While absolute levels of credibility differ by partisanship, with Republican respondents especially skeptical of NGOs, the same pattern where the government is viewed more credibly compared to other actors holds when looking at Republican and Democrat subsamples separately.
[105] Cooley and Ron 2002.
[106] Edwards and Swenson 1997.

contaminated by prior exposure to the treatment."[107] They go on to show that the more prior exposure to the treatment in the real world, the less significant the treatment effect will be in the experiment.[108] This interpretation appears consistent with the findings from the media content analysis displayed earlier in Figure 2, which showed an overwhelming preponderance of government voices in the drone debate. As a result, the public's initial understanding of the drone program is thus likely closer to that of the government, which may be why approval from those respondents in the Joint Chiefs treatments is relatively indistinguishable from the control group.[109] By the same token, this means that criticisms of drone strikes by the UN and NGOs incorporated into our survey experiment are likely providing newer information to respondents, and as expected shaping support for drones to a greater extent,[110] even though these actors' voices may not be seen to be quite as credible.

Further Testing the Impact of Appropriateness

Our tests so far provide initial evidence that individuals are moved more by international law-based arguments about sovereignty and protecting civilians than consequences-based arguments about the effectiveness of drone strikes. It is nonetheless possible that individuals are concerned about sovereignty and civilian deaths for more instrumental reasons. Members of the public, for example, may believe that the repercussions from violating sovereignty or civilian

[107] Gaines et al. 2006, 12.
[108] Ibid, 13.
[109] One further issue raised by the content analysis is whether our overall experimental results are driven by the particular timing when our survey was fielded. We do not believe this is a significant concern for several reasons. First, while the volume of news coverage was higher during the period of our survey compared to several earlier periods, the *relative* coverage of the government compared to other sources remained fairly stable. Second, evidence from polls conducted by other organizations discussed in Figure 1 earlier show no clear temporal trends in overall support for drones, suggesting that any biases due to the timing of our survey are unlikely to be pronounced.
[110] Page et al. 1987.

norms are counterproductive to larger U.S. strategic objectives.[111] We conducted a follow-up study to further unpack the reasoning underlying the impact of international law on public attitudes, in particular rationales rooted more in the normative versus instrumental functions of international legal commitments. The survey was fielded from November 20-23, 2013, and recruited 601 respondents online using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (mTurk) service. While mTurk samples are generally less representative than those drawn from GfK or similar national panels, they fare better than other common convenience samples.[112] Moreover, past research shows studies using mTurk generate comparable treatment effects in many instances to those employing more representative subject pools.[113]

In the follow-up, we focused on the aspects of international law dealing with the killing of civilians, since noncombatants represent one of the most salient legal-based frames in contemporary debates over drones. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two groups: the control group receiving the same general background discussion of drones as in the original experiment; and a treatment group highlighting civilian deaths resulting from U.S. strikes. For the treatment group, we chose slightly stronger language where respondents were told that drone strikes had led to civilian deaths (rather than the initial survey's focus only on taking necessary protective measures) to reflect the more strident tone of several NGO reports that had been released after our first survey.[114] Furthermore, since our first survey showed the particular elite source issuing the criticisms did not figure prominently, we fixed the source as generic "human

[111] For related arguments that the public follows more realpolitik than idealist tendencies, see Drezner 2008; Kertzer and McGraw 2012.
[112] As expected, the mTurk sample tended to be younger, male, and more educated compared to national benchmarks. See the supplementary appendices for further details.
[113] Berinsky et al. 2012.
[114] For example, Amnesty International 2013; HRW 2013.

rights groups," which also had the benefit of allowing us to limit the total number of experimental conditions.

Both experimental groups were then asked the same question measuring levels of approval for the use of drone strikes by the United States. As expected, respondents in the treatment group receiving the prompt that drone strikes harmed civilians were less likely to approve of drone strikes than those in the control group. The decline of 13% in support for drone strikes was actually more than double the effect from our initial experiment (6%), which employed a subtler civilian prompt. This difference points to the incentives NGOs may have to amplify or dramatize their critiques of government policies in the hope of generating stronger public reactions, though this finding is only suggestive given the different timing and samples used in each survey.[115]

Moving beyond raw support for drone strikes, we asked a series of follow-up questions intended to probe whether factors associated with either more normative or consequentialist thinking could be accounting for the effects of the international law civilian frame. To evaluate more normative considerations, we asked whether respondents believed that drone strikes are morally wrong, as well as whether drone strikes hurt the U.S. image in the world. To test instead whether concerns about civilians arise from more instrumental considerations, we also asked whether individuals believed drone strikes were counterproductive by helping to recruit new militants. Even though our initial experiment showed that the danger of fueling militant recruitment did not directly figure into public opinion toward drones, it may be that such concerns only become activated once respondents are exposed to information on legal violations

[115] Keck and Sikkink 1998, 19. Absolute levels of support were lower in the mTurk study, since several traits shown to affect attitudes toward drones (younger, lower household income, more Democratic) are generally over-represented in mTurk samples. Nevertheless, analysis from the first experiment indicated no consistent conditional effects between the civilian prompt and various individual characteristics.

of civilian immunity and the likely resulting grievances amongst local populations. Lastly, to get at possible questions of substitution between different types of military force, we asked respondents how much they would support using special forces in place of drones for more military missions, even if this would increase the risk of U.S. combatant casualties.[116]

Figure 5 displays the results from these additional questions. Because the items involve different wordings and answer choices, we report the mean value for each outcome across the control and civilian treatment conditions respectively.[117] Appropriateness-based concerns appear to figure most prominently in the public's evaluation of drones. As is evident in Figures 5a and 5b, respondents exposed to the prompt that drone strikes lead to civilian deaths were much more likely to believe drone strikes are morally wrong, and hurt the international image of the United States.[118] The treatment effects for these two more norms-based outcomes were statistically significant. By contrast, Figure 6c shows instrumental concerns continued to have little effect; hearing that civilians were being killed had no significant impact on the public's belief that drone strikes help militants in recruiting more members.

[Figure 5 about here]

To be sure, attempts at disaggregating considerations about appropriateness into component mediators in a way that privileges norms over interests have their limits, since instrumental calculations can still undergird concerns about normative values, including in the case of international legal obligations.[119] For example, individuals might worry that undertaking

[116] The full instrument for the follow up study is provided in supplementary appendices.
[117] The morality answer options are binary and draw on prior research from Tomz and Weeks 2013, while the remaining items use five-point scales measuring levels of (dis)agreement.
[118] Although the confidence intervals for the treatment and control conditions on the morality and U.S. image measures overlap slightly, following Schenker and Gentleman 2001, we find that the treatment effects nonetheless meet standard levels of statistical significance. The first differences between the treatment and control groups (with associated 95% confidence intervals in parentheses) for the morally wrong outcome is 9 (1, 17), and for the U.S. image outcome 0.2 (0.04, 0.37).
[119] Chong 2000, 4-5; Simmons 2010, 277.

actions that are immoral or harm the U.S. image could also undermine the country's ability to achieve its goals. As a first step in mediating between causal factors, however, these results point to first-order concerns about normative principles even if respondents are also considering the second-order instrumental consequences ensuing from normative transgressions. Indeed, there do appear to be some pragmatic limits to the public's attachment to normative ideals and their willingness to put these principles into practice. The greater awareness of the harm done to civilians by drone strikes does not make the public more willing to put their own troops in harm's way by relying to a greater extent on special forces (see Figure 6d).

To gain a further sense of how each of these considerations influenced the effect of the civilian treatment on support for drone strikes, we additionally conducted a mediation analysis.[120] We find evidence that the more normatively-based mechanisms have much stronger mediating effects. The morality and U.S. standing mediators accounted for 46% and 45% respectively of the total decline in support for drone strikes from respondents being informed of civilian deaths.[121] By contrast, the relative impact of the two more instrumental mechanisms was much weaker for concerns over recruitment (13%) or the potential substitution of special forces (3%). Taken together, the results from the follow-up experiment confirm that worries over civilian deaths markedly reduce support for drone strikes, and suggest this effect is rooted primarily in norms-based concerns rather than more instrumental calculations.

[120] Imai, Keele, Tingley and Yamamoto 2011. The analysis was implemented using the *mediate* package in Stata, Hicks and Tingley 2011.

[121] Because of some of the difficulties of simultaneously testing the effects of multiple mediators, mediation analysis was conducted on each mediator individually. Along with other standard concerns involving mediation analysis, the results should thus be taken as suggestive but nonetheless promising.

Conclusion

Our analysis points to the strong effect of international law, channeled either by IOs or NGOs, on public support for a key part of American foreign policy – the use of drone strikes against suspected militants. The reasoning behind the force of arguments involving legal principles like civilian protections appears to be more a function of normative concerns related to moral principles and U.S. standing in the world, rather than more instrumental considerations. The salience of international law, and the logic of appropriateness more broadly, is somewhat surprising given the issue area, which is one in which we might expect instrumental concerns about national security to not only compete with, but dominate over, values rooted in norms. That arguments about consequences have less effect on attitudes about drones may be, as our content analysis of U.S. newspapers suggests, the result of prior exposure to the government position as the prevailing voice in the marketplace.[122] This would seem to reinforce views on the government's privileged position in establishing the baseline view on questions concerning the use of force.[123] Yet dissenting voices from actors such as the UN and human rights NGOs still have significant sway in terms of the public's willingness to support drone strikes, a finding that extends previous work on the influential impact of IOs and NGOs on public opinion.[124] Importantly, however, the frame employed by these groups to attack the U.S. drone program proves to be crucial – criticisms focusing on the effectiveness of the strikes had little impact; only those highlighting normative principles embodied in international legal principles significantly altered public attitudes toward drone warfare.

[122] Gaines et al. 2006.
[123] Kaufmann 2004.
[124] Ausderan 2014; Davis et al. 2012; Grieco et al. 2011.

These findings have important implications for both theory and policy. In terms of theory, we help address unresolved questions about the evolving relationship between international law and conflict.[125] Even in the hard case of covert action in the pursuit of terrorists, international laws have important impacts on individuals' attitudes, especially the treatment of civilians in the context of conflict. The salience of these norms among the public is all the more surprising given the structural factors—strong existing support among the populace, elite consensus, and government dominance in the media—that should make it difficult for outside critics to move public attitudes in a more skeptical direction. The research also speaks to the literature on source credibility,[126] showing that whether a source is seen as credible is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for affecting attitudes about foreign policy options regarding drones. This finding offers some qualifications to existing arguments that "source credibility appears to be a prerequisite for successful framing."[127]

In terms of policy, our findings suggest that the campaigns pursued by IOs such as the United Nations, and NGOs like HRW and Amnesty International, are not in vain. These sources, even NGOs that are not necessarily seen as possessing levels of credibility rivaling those of the government, tend to move public attitudes about drones, especially when they focus on questions of civilian casualties and sovereignty as byproducts of strikes. This suggests that continued efforts by NGOs and IOs might help erode support for drone strikes, undermining the legitimacy and viability of the drone policy more generally.[128] Indeed, some accounts have suggested that

[125] Ohlin, forthcoming; Reisman 1992.
[126] Page et al. 1987.
[127] Druckman 2001, 1061.
[128] Aldrich et al. 1989.

government shifts in its tenor and policy on drones are the result of increasing scrutiny and criticism brought about by opponents.[129]

This research brings together literatures on international law, public opinion, domestic constraints in wartime, and the emerging technology of drones in the context of covert action, but is certainly not the last word at the intersection of these issues. Do these findings travel beyond democracies other than the United States, or do different political cultures mediate various types of arguments and elite sources in different ways?[130] A vote in December 2013 by Yemen's parliament calling for the halting of drone strikes specifically pointed to "preserving innocent civilian lives against any attack and maintaining Yemeni sovereignty,"[131] suggesting that several of the main legal arguments might resonate in other contexts.

While our experimental manipulations focused on a single U.S. government actor, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, numerous other official voices are active in the debate over drones. How might the persuasiveness and credibility of various government actors differ depending on the particular frame put forward justifying the use of drone strikes? Furthermore, events such as Senator Rand Paul's filibuster in March 2013, where he offered a lengthy critique of drone strikes, shows that the government is far from united in its views on certain components of the country's counterterrorism policy. Given the importance frequently placed on the role of elite cohesion,[132] future work would benefit from directly testing the impact of the level of consensus within both the government and non-governmental spheres on public opinion toward drones.

Moreover, while we focused on drones as the vehicle through which the government has targeted suspected terrorists, another study might investigate whether a more conventional

[129] Cortright et al. forthcoming; PBS 2013.
[130] While not employing an experimental design, recent work has begun looking at public attitudes toward drones in other countries, such as Pakistan (Fair et al. Forthcoming).
[131] El Dahan 2013.
[132] Berinsky 2009; Zaller 1992.

platform, such strikes by a manned aircraft, would elicit similar reactions. To what degree are individuals responding to the particular technology used, as opposed to the broader normative and instrumental considerations raised by targeting suspected militants? As a practical matter, we suggest that these two cannot be separated fully—indeed, the prevalence of drone strikes may have to do with the low-risk proposition of unmanned technology—but it would nonetheless be worthwhile to disaggregate and test the conceptual point about the relative impact of the technology versus the policy.

Similarly, in this study we considered international legal principles in concert with equivalent elements drawn from just war theory—whether related to sovereignty or protection of civilians. As an initial step, we made this choice because in the case of drones, international law and tenets of just war theory closely overlap, which is also reflected in the real-world policy debates we sought to capture through our experimental manipulations. Nonetheless, we are unable to say whether individuals are responding more to the codified law or the deeper norm itself. Future studies might disaggregate the two to assess whether individuals are moved by the legalization of international rules, or rather what they deem to be accepted moral practices.[133] Such an approach might be especially promising in other issue areas where codified international rules do not necessarily correspond perfectly with commonly accepted principles of just war theory, such as cluster munitions where a treaty based on just war principles of discrimination exists but has not been ratified by many countries, the United States included.[134]

In a corresponding manner, each issue frame and elite source was presented separately to respondents for purposes of feasibility. Yet future work could more closely reflect contemporary debate by combining legal and more effectiveness-based frames together to assess how

[133] Wallace 2013; Chilton 2014.
[134] Wiebe 2000.

arguments rooted in the logics of appropriateness and consequences may interact. We suggest these as additional avenues of research for gaining a fuller understanding of how the combination of international law, strategic calculations, and wide-ranging elite voices affect public attitudes toward foreign policy.

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Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Public Opinion Data on Support for Drone Strikes (2011-2014)

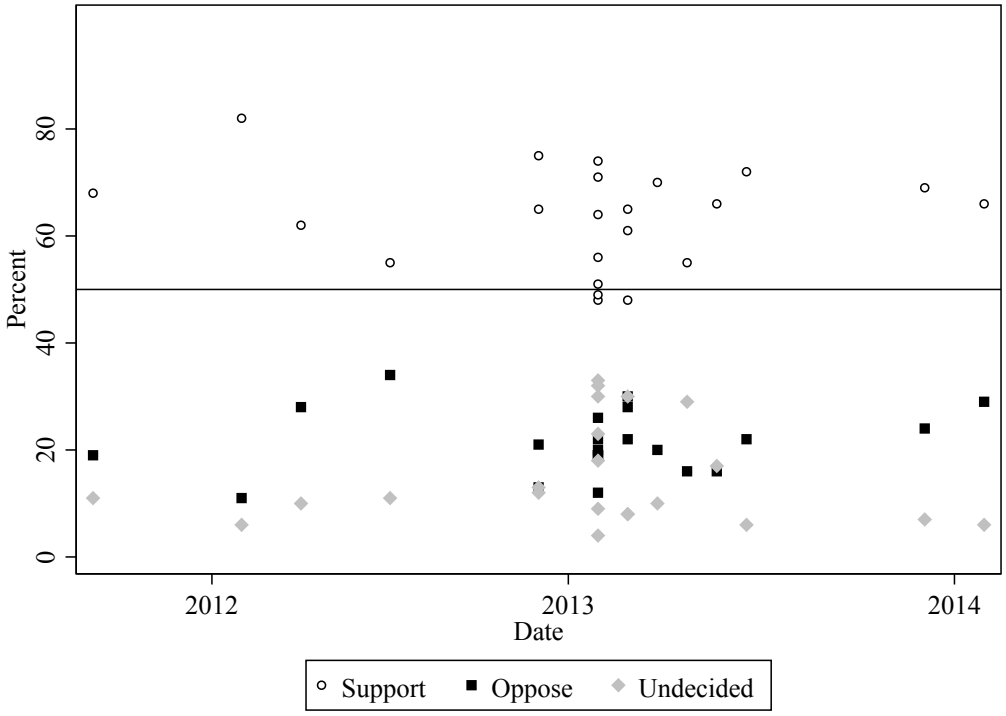
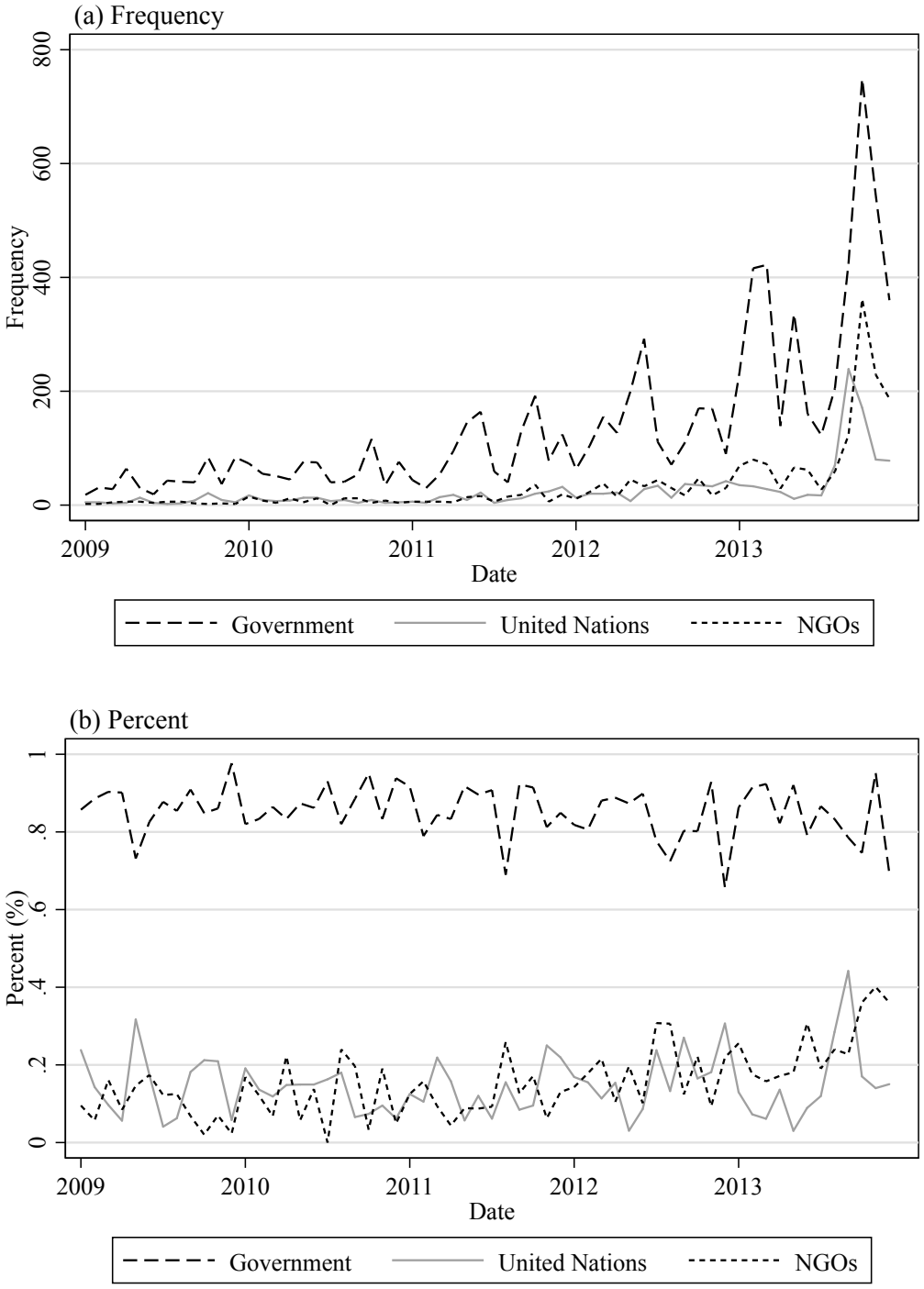


Figure 2: Elite Voices on Drones in U.S. Newspapers, 2009-2013



Notes: Data are aggregated by month and based on Factiva newspaper archives.
Lower figure reports for each elite category the percent of all news articles mentioning drones and each of the specified elite voices.

Figure 3. Support for Drone Strikes by Treatment Condition

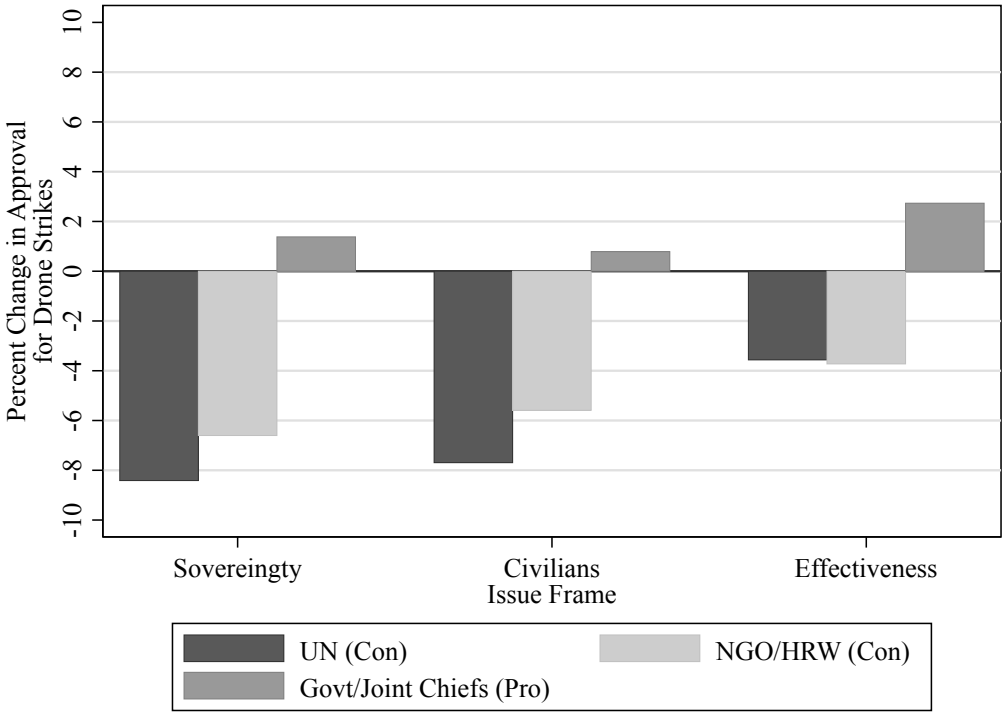


Figure 4: Credibility of Elite Source, by Issue Frame

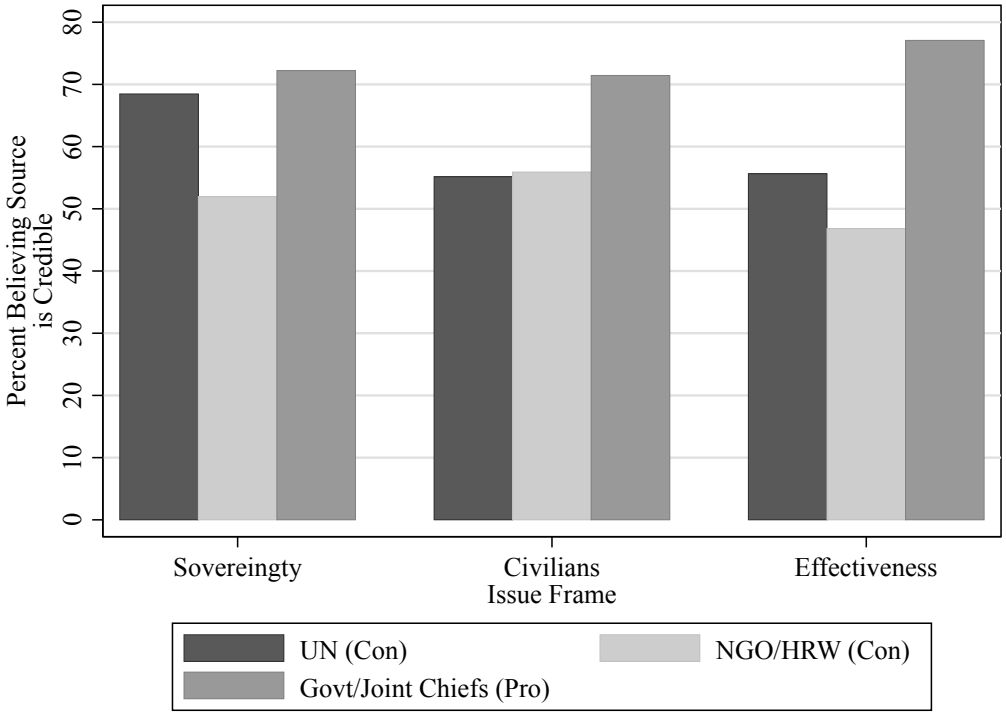
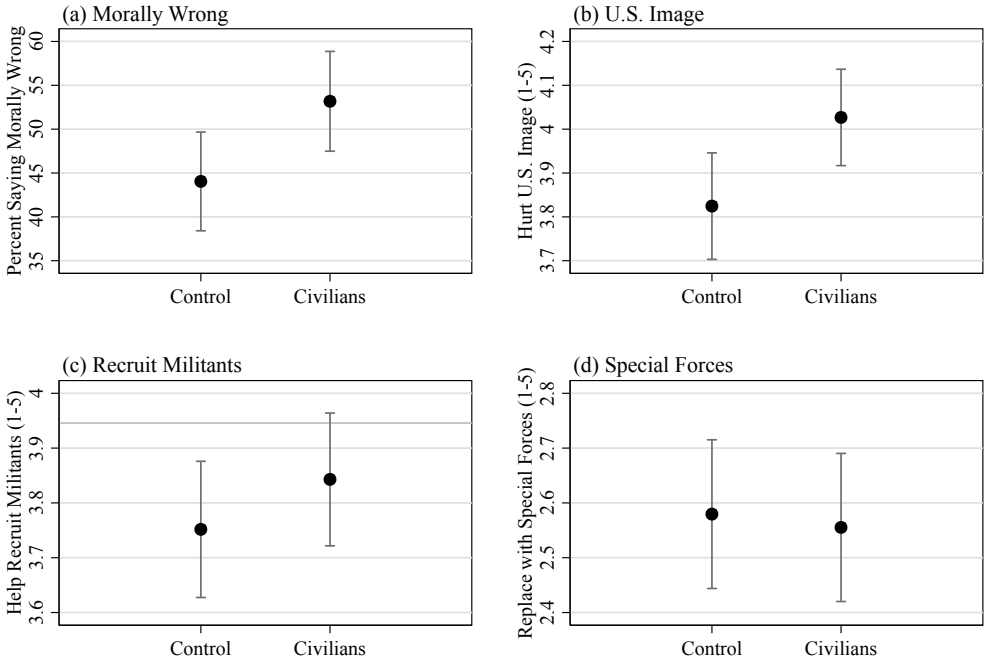


Figure 5: A Closer Look at Civilian Deaths and Support for Drone Strikes



Notes: Mean values diplayed for control and treatment conditions. Vertical lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Table 1. Experimental Groups

	Value		
Voice	**Logic of Consequences**	**Logic of Appropriateness**	
	Effectiveness	Sovereignty	Civilians
Govt/Joint Chiefs	Pro	Pro	Pro
United Nations	Con	Con	Con
NGO/HRW	Con	Con	Con

Notes: An additional baseline control group receives none of the source or issue frame treatments.

Table 2: Issues, Elites, and Support for Drone Strikes

	(1)	(2)
UN/Sovereignty (Con)	-0.11	-0.16+
	(0.10)	(0.10)
NGO/Sovereignty (Con)	-0.17*	-0.19*
	(0.10)	(0.10)
Govt/Sovereignty (Pro)	0.01	0.01
	(0.10)	(0.10)
UN/Civilians (Con)	-0.19*	-0.20*
	(0.10)	(0.10)
NGO/Civilians (Con)	-0.17*	-0.19*
	(0.10)	(0.10)
Govt/Civilians (Pro)	0.00	0.00
	(0.10)	(0.10)
UN/Effectiveness (Con)	-0.11	-0.10
	(0.10)	(0.10)
NGO/Effectiveness (Con)	-0.11	-0.13+
	(0.10)	(0.10)
Govt/Effectiveness (Con)	0.12	0.13
	(0.10)	(0.10)
Male		0.36**
		(0.05)
Age		0.10**
		(0.01)
Education		0.04+
		(0.03)
Income		0.08**
		(0.02)
Partisanship		0.02*
(Dem -> Rep)		(0.01)
Interest in Politics		0.08**
		(0.03)
Veteran		0.19**
		(0.07)
Activist		-0.09+
		(0.06)
Observations	2365	2324

Cell entries are ordered probit coefficients (cutpoints not shown).

Standard errors in parentheses.
+ p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01.
One-tailed tests.

Supplementary Appendices for "International Law, Elites, and Public Support for Drone Strikes"

The following is the list of appendices included below:

- Appendix A: Instrument for TESS/GfK Survey
- Appendix B: Instrument for mTurk Follow-up Survey
- Appendix C: Comparison of Survey Samples to Benchmarks of U.S. Adult Population
- Appendix D: Description of Dependent Variables and Additional Background Covariates
- Appendix E: Questions by Polling Organizations Regarding Drone Strikes
- Appendix F: Content Analysis of U.S. Newspapers on Elite Sources and Drones

Appendix A: Instrument for TESS/GfK Survey

The survey was fielded September 6-23, 2013 by the survey research firm GfK (formerly Knowledge Network) through funding provided by Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS).[1]

Background Information given to all respondents (control group only receives this prompt)
There has been a lot of recent discussion about the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, also known as drones, by the United States to target suspected militants.

Treatment groups then receive one of the following additional prompts that varies the issue frame (sovereignty / civilians / effectiveness), or elite source (UN / NGO / Government). Treatments involving the UN or NGO are associated with "con" issue frames (violating sovereignty; violating civilians; ineffective), and the government associated with "pro" issue frames (complying with sovereignty; complying with civilians; effective) respectively

International Law #1: Jus ad Bellum (Sovereignty)

IO Violate
The United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and Counterterrorism has indicated that these strikes violate international law because they break the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country where the attack takes place.

NGO Violate
The non-governmental organization (NGO) Human Rights Watch has indicated that these strikes violate international law because they break the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country where the attack takes place.

US Government Comply
The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has indicated that these strikes do not violate international law because they are an act of self-defense against individuals plotting attacks against Americans.

International Law #2: Jus in bello (Civilian Conduct)

IO Violate
The United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and Counterterrorism has indicated that these strikes violate international law because they do not take necessary measures to prevent the death of civilians.

[1] Data collected by Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences, NSF Grant SES-0818839, Jeremy Freese and James Druckman, Principal Investigators.

NGO Violate
The non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch has indicated that these strikes violate international law because they do not take necessary measures to prevent the death of civilians.

US Government Comply
The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has indicated that these strikes do not violate international law because they take necessary measures to prevent the death of civilians.

Military Effectiveness
IO Ineffective
The United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and Counterterrorism has indicated that the strikes trigger anti-US sentiment and help militants recruit new members, making Americans less safe.

NGO Ineffective
The non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch has indicated that the strikes trigger anti-US sentiment and help militants recruit new members, making Americans less safe.

US Government Effective
The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has indicated that the strikes have been instrumental in killing suspected militants and making Americans safer.

Respondents are then asked the following questions.

Question #1: Support for drones. The wording for the first question is the same for all respondents.
Do you approve or disapprove of the use of drone strikes by the United States?
Approve strongly / Approve somewhat / Neither approve nor disapprove / Disapprove somewhat / Disapprove strongly

Question #2: Credibility of the source. The wording for the second question differs based on the source of the elite source. Because the control group received no elite source, respondents in this group were not asked this question.

To what extent do you believe (the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and Counterterrorism / Human Rights Watch / the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) is a credible source on the topic of drone strikes?
Very credible / Somewhat credible / Neither credible nor not credible / Somewhat not credible / Not very credible

Appendix B: Instrument for mTurk Follow-up Survey

The follow-up survey was fielded November 20-23, 2013 with participants recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk).

Background Information given to all respondents (control group only receives this prompt)
There has been a lot of recent discussion about the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, also known as drones, by the United States to target suspected militants.

The instrument only involves a single treatment group, which receives the following additional prompt.
Several human rights groups recently reported that these drone strikes by the United States violate international law because they have killed many civilians.

All respondents are then asked the following questions.

Question #1: Support for drones
Do you approve or disapprove of the use of drone strikes by the United States?
Approve strongly / Approve somewhat / Neither approve nor disapprove / Disapprove somewhat / Disapprove strongly

Question #2: Morality
Do you think it is morally wrong for the United States to use drone strikes?
Yes, they are morally wrong / No, they are not morally wrong

Question #3: U.S. image
How much do you agree or disagree that drone strikes hurt America's image in the world?
Agree strongly / Agree somewhat / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree somewhat / Disagree strongly

Question #4: Recruitment
How much do you agree or disagree that drone strikes trigger anti-Americanism and help terrorists recruit new members?
Agree strongly / Agree somewhat / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree somewhat / Disagree strongly

Question #5: Special Forces
Do you approve or disapprove of replacing American drone strikes with alternatives that increase the risk of American casualties, such as sending in special forces?
Agree strongly / Agree somewhat / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree somewhat / Disagree strongly

Appendix C: Comparison of Survey Samples to Benchmarks of U.S. Adult Population

Table C1: Comparison of Characteristics of the National Population to the Sample for GfK Drones Experiment (September 2013)

	Adult U.S. Population (%)	GfK Sample (%)	Absolute Deviation (%)
Sex			
Male	48	50	2
Female	52	50	2
Average deviation			2
Age (years)			
18-24	11	10	1
25-34	17	15	2
35-44	16	17	1
45-54	18	18	0
55-64	17	20	3
65 or older	20	20	0
Average deviation			1
Education			
No high school diploma	11	7	4
High school diploma	31	33	2
Some college	29	26	3
College degree	30	33	3
Average deviation			3
Income			
Less than $10,000	6	4	2
$10,000-$24,999	16	12	4
$25,000-$49,999	25	23	2
$50,000-$74,999	19	20	1
$75,000-149,999	25	32	7
$150,000 or more	9	9	0
Average deviation			3
Marital Status			
Married	55	55	0
Not married	45	45	0
Average deviation			0
Race			
White	82	73	9
Non-White	18	27	9
Average deviation			9
Region			
Midwest	23	23	0
Northeast	20	19	1
South	32	36	4
West	25	23	2
Average deviation			2
Total average deviation			2

Note: Benchmarks for adult U.S. population drawn from the September 2013 series of the Current Population Survey (CPS).
Sums for particular variables may not equal to 100 percent because of rounding.

Table C2: Comparison of Characteristics of the National Population to the Sample for mTurk Follow-up Experiment (November 2013)

	Adult U.S. Population (%)	mTurk Sample (%)	Absolute Deviation (%)
Sex			
Male	48	60	12
Female	52	40	12
Average deviation			12
Age (years)			
18-24	11	29	18
25-34	17	48	31
35-44	17	14	3
45-54	18	6	12
55-64	17	4	13
65 or older	20	0.5	19.5
Average deviation			16
Education			
No high school diploma	11	3	8
High school diploma	30	10	20
Some college	29	45	16
College degree	30	44	14
Average deviation			15
Race			
White	82	78	4
Non-White	18	22	4
Average deviation			4
Region			
Midwest	23	22	1
Northeast	20	21	1
South	32	34	2
West	25	23	2
Average deviation			2
Total average deviation			11

Note: Benchmarks for adult U.S. population drawn from the November 2013 series of the Current Population Survey (CPS). Unlike for the GfK data, this table does not include values for income or marital status, since neither was asked in the mTurk survey.
Sums for particular variables may not equal to 100 percent because of rounding.

Appendix D: Description of Dependent Variables and Additional Background Covariates

DRONES APPROVAL: 1 = Disapprove strongly; 2 = Disapprove somewhat; 3 = Neither approve nor disapprove; 4 = Approve somewhat; 5 = Approve strongly.

CREDIBILITY: Credibility of elite source, where 1 = Not very credible; 2 = Somewhat not credible; 3 = Neither credible nor not credible; 4 = Somewhat credible; 5 = Very credible.

MALE: 1 = Male; 0 = Female.

AGE: 1 = 18-24 years; 2 = 25-34 years; 3 = 35-44 years; 4 = 45-54 years; 5 = 55-64 years; 6 = 65 years or older.

EDUCATION: 1 = Less than high school; 2 = High school; 3 = Some college; 4 = Bachelor's degree or higher.

INCOME: 1 = Less than $10,000; 2 = $10,000-$24,999; 3 = $25,000-$49,999; 4 = $50,000-$74,999; 5 = $75,000-$149,999; 6 = $150,000 or more.

MARRIAGE: 1 = Married; 0 = Not married.

WHITE: 1 = White; 0 = Non-white.

PARTISANSHIP: 1 = Strong Democrat; 2 = Not strong Democrat; 3 = Leans Democrat; 4 = Independent; 5 = Leans Republican; 6 = Not strong Republican; 7 = Strong Republican.

INTEREST IN POLITICS: 1 = Not at all interested; 2 = Slightly interested; 3 = Somewhat interested; 4 = Very interested.

VETERAN: Respondent's military background, where 1 = Some form of military experience (active duty in armed forces, previous active duty, or trained for national reserves or guard); 0 = Otherwise.

REGION: Region of the country in which the respondent lives, where 1 = Northeast; 2 = Midwest; 3 = South; 4 = West.

ACTIVIST: Political activism, where 1 = Engaged in any of the following activities over the previous 12-month period (attended a protest or rally, contacted a government official, volunteered or worked for a political campaign, donated to a campaign, served on a community board, or worked with others to solve a community problem); 0 = Otherwise.

Appendix E: Questions by Polling Organizations Regarding Drone Strikes

Table E1: Main Set of Questions on Public Support for Drone Strikes, 2011-2013

Polling Organization	Question Wording	Date(s) of Poll
Pew Social Trends	As you may know, the United States military has made increasing use of unmanned aircraft called 'drones' to launch aerial attacks in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Do you think the increased use of drones by the military is a good thing, or a bad thing?	July - September 2011
Pew Social Trends	As you may know, the United States military has made increasing use of unmanned aircraft called 'drones' to launch aerial attacks in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Do you think the increased use of drones by the military is a good thing, or a bad thing?	September 2011
ABC News/Washington Post	(Thinking about the following decisions of the Obama administration, please tell me whether you strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove, or strongly disapprove.)...The use of unmanned, drone aircraft against terrorist suspects overseas.	February 2012
Pew Global Attitudes Project	Do you approve or disapprove of the United States conducting missile strikes from pilotless aircraft called drones to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia?	March - April 2012
Public Life Religion & Politics	Do you approve or disapprove of the United States conducting missile strikes from pilotless aircraft called drones to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia?	June - July 2012
Fairleigh Dickinson University	In general, do you approve or disapprove of the U.S. military using drones to carry out attacks abroad on people and other targets deemed a threat to the U.S.?	December 2012
Fairleigh Dickinson University	In general, do you approve or disapprove of the C.I.A. using drones to carry out attacks abroad on people and other targets deemed a threat to the U.S.?	December 2012
CBS News	Do you favor or oppose the US (United States) using unmanned aircrafts or 'drones' to carry out bombing attacks against suspected terrorists in foreign countries?	February 2013
Pew Research Center	Do you approve or disapprove of the United States conducting missile strikes from pilotless aircraft called drones to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia?	February 2013

Table E1 continued

Polling Organization	Question Wording	Date(s) of Poll
Economist/ YouGov	Do you approve or disapprove of the Obama administration using drones to kill high-level terrorism suspects overseas?	February 2013
Economist/ YouGov	Do you approve or disapprove of the Obama administration using drones to kill high-level terrorism suspects overseas?	February 2013
Economist/ YouGov	Do you approve or disapprove of the Obama administration using drones to kill high-level terrorism suspects overseas?	February 2013
NBC News/Wall Street Journal	As you know, the United States has been targeting and killing suspected members of Al Qaeda and other terrorists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, and other countries. Many of these killings have been conducted using unmanned aircraft that are controlled remotely, also known as drones. Do you favor or oppose the use of unmanned aircraft, also known as drones, to kill suspected terrorists?	February 2013
Fox News	Do you approve or disapprove of the United States using unmanned aircraft called drones...to kill a suspected terrorist in a foreign country?	February 2013
Economist/ YouGov	Do you approve or disapprove of the Obama administration using drones to kill high-level terrorism suspects overseas?	March 2013
Pew Global Attitudes Project	Do you approve or disapprove of the United States conducting missile strikes from pilotless aircraft called drones to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia?	March 2013
Gallup	Do you think the US government should or should not use drones to...launch airstrikes in other countries against suspected terrorists?	March 2013
CBS News/New York Times	Do you favor or oppose the US using unmanned aircraft or 'drones' to carry out bombing attacks against suspected terrorists in foreign countries?	April 2013
Economist/ YouGov	Do you approve or disapprove of the Obama administration using drones to kill high-level terrorism suspects overseas?	May 2013
NBC News/Wall Street Journal	Do you favor or oppose the use of unmanned aircraft, also known as drones, to kill suspected members of Al Qaeda and other terrorists?	May - June 2013

Table E1 continued

Polling Organization	Question Wording	Date(s) of Poll
CBS News/New York Times	Do you favor or oppose the US using unmanned aircraft or 'drones' to carry out missile attacks against suspected terrorists in foreign countries?	May - June 2013
Quinnipiac University	Do you support or oppose the US using unmanned aircraft or 'drones' to carry out missile attacks against suspected terrorists in foreign countries?	December 2013
CBS News/New York Times	Do you favor or oppose the US using unmanned aircraft or drones to carry out missile attacks against suspected terrorists in foreign countries?	February 2014

Table E2: Questions on Public Concern over Civilian Deaths from Drone Strikes

Polling Organization	**Question Wording**	**Date(s) of Poll**
Pew Research Center	How concerned are you, if at all, about whether US (United States) drone strikes...endanger the lives of innocent civilians? Are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned or not at all concerned?	February 2013
CBS News/New York Times Poll	How concerned are you about US drone attacks killing or harming innocent civilians--very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned or not at all concerned?	May-June 2013

Appendix F: Content Analysis of U.S. Newspapers on Elite Sources and Drones

This appendix contains further details on the procedures for the content analysis of media coverage of drones discussed in the paper. We gathered data using the Factiva archive service compiled by the Dow Jones & Company, which covers several thousand U.S. newspapers.[2] The time period for the analysis covers January 2009 through December 2013.

To identify news stories dealing with drones, we used the following search terms (where "*" allows for any suffixes for the relevant term or phrase): "drone*" or "unmanned aerial vehicle*" or "UAV*". We chose to keep the search terms as broad as possible, since relevant stories on drone policies and practices may not specifically mention strikes, attacks, or killings.

We then employed a series of additional search terms to categorize stories as including references to each of the three broad categories of actors most relevant to debates over the use of drones – the U.S. government, the United Nations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Each category is discussed in turn below.

U.S. Government

Search terms for the U.S. government were as follows and include several common variants for relevant actors: "White House" or "Department of Justice" or "Justice Department" or "Attorney General" or "National Security Advisor" or "Department of Defense" or "Defense Department" or "Secretary of Defense" or "Joint Chiefs" or "Secretary of State" or "State Department" or "Department of State" or "CIA Director" or "Director of the CIA" or "Director of the Central Intelligence Agency" or "Central Intelligence Agency Director".

Our choice was to focus on the most prominent official sources. However, we decided to exclude from the analysis "Obama," "President," "government," or similar terms, as these often represent common targets of criticism from both the NGO and IO communities. We made this decision to avoid to the greatest extent possible inadvertently including in the category of government pronouncements stories that were in actuality solely condemning the administration's drone program.[3] Of course, on the flipside this means that a number of stories featuring the president and several other administration officials would go uncounted in the tally for the government category. Importantly, we made this choice to explicitly design a much more conservative test for the prominence of the government, since it likely provides an *undercount* of government sources, especially in light of President Obama's frequent and central public role in the unfolding drone debate over this time period.[4]

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[2] [2] For further information, see http://www.dowjones.com/factiva/.

[3] We followed a similar rationale in not including "CIA" as a standalone search term and instead specified the director of the agency, since news stories criticizing drones may sometimes refer to the CIA's program. More generally, the possibility still remains that stories critical of the government nonetheless are counted as part of the government category. Yet a similar situation should also exist for the United Nations and NGO categories, where news stories might similarly center on the U.S. government's response or condemnation of statements made by these actors. We thus believe that concerns over misattribution should not overly bias the results.

[4] See, for instance, the president's speech clarifying the administration's drones policies, "Remarks by the President at the National Defense University," Washington, D.C., May 23, 2013. Available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university.

United Nations
Search terms were much more straightforward for the United Nations category, as we chose to simply use the phrase "United Nations". This term captures stories involving the organization more broadly, but also specific officials (such as the Secretary General, or the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and Counterterrorism) since these officials are discussed in reference to their credentials from the United Nations.

NGOs
Search terms for the NGO category were as follows: "NGO*" or "non-governmental organization*" or "nongovernmental organization*" or "activist*" or "advocacy group*" or "human rights group*" or "human rights organization*" or "humanitarian group*" or "humanitarian organization*" or "Amnesty International" or "Human Rights Watch" or "Doctors Without Borders" or "Médecins Sans Frontières" or "American Civil Liberties Union".

We chose to focus on some of the most prominent NGO voices in the drone debate, but also allow for more generic labels for these and related actors.

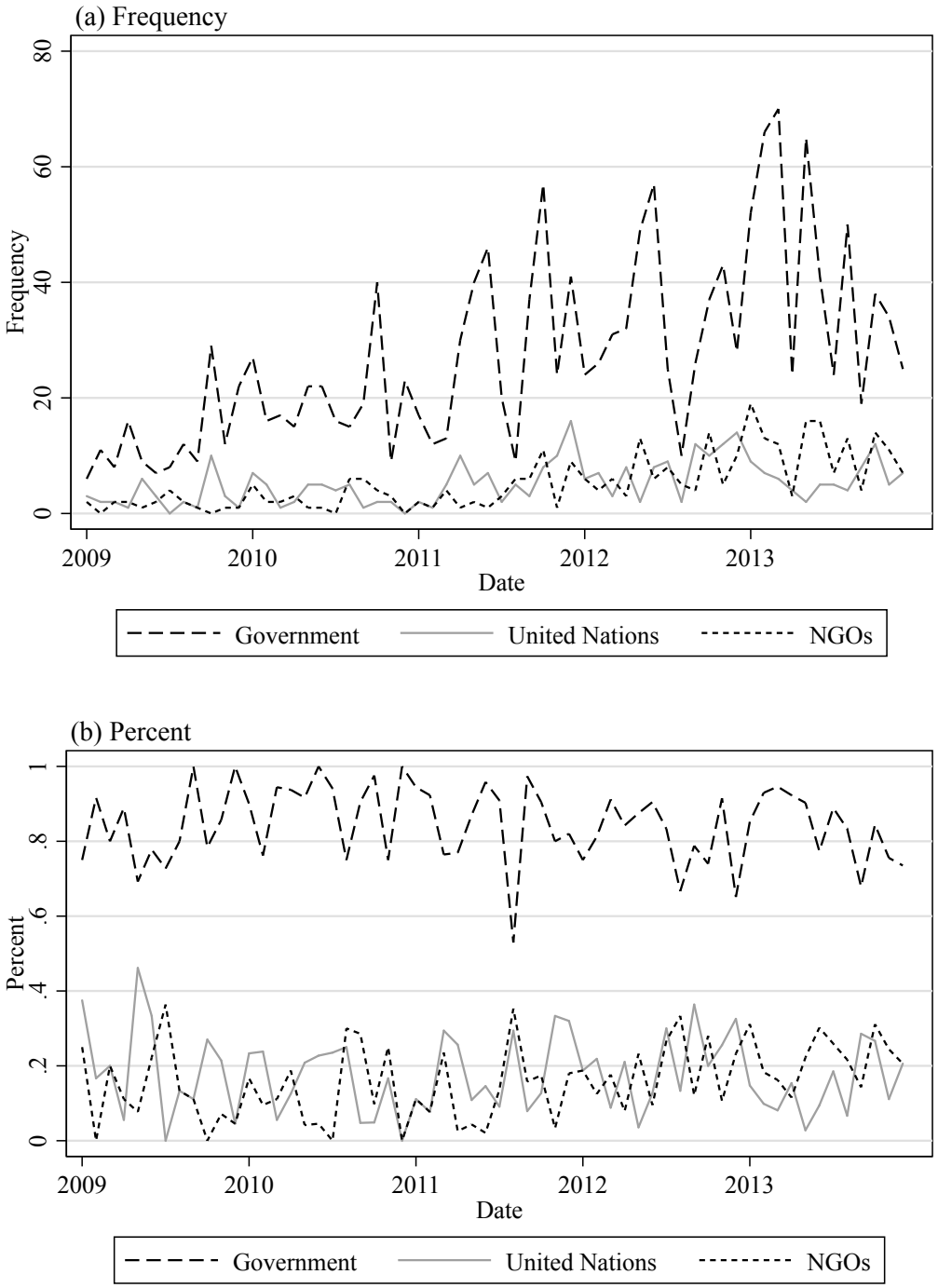
After identifying all relevant news stories, the raw data was aggregated into monthly counts of drones-related stories involving references to one of the three categories of actors respectively. While the analysis reported in the main paper involved all U.S. newspaper in the Factiva archives, we also conducted a supplementary analysis limited to three of the main national newspapers that have often been at the forefront in covering the drone debate in recent years – the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post. The results from this analysis are reported in Figure F1 below.

Compared to the broader set of U.S. news publications, Figure F1(a) indicates a similar though less dramatic upward trend in coverage of drones by these three major papers. While there are comparable rises and falls in news stories, there generally appears to be more consistent reporting of drone issues in these three papers, which is in line with their greater international and foreign policy focus.

Despite differences in the relative volume of reporting, the most striking similarly is that the U.S. government nonetheless remained the most dominant voice in the three main newspapers for each month over the period studied. Figure F1(b) indicates that the three newspapers devoted somewhat more attention to the views of non-state actors than the U.S. newspaper industry as a whole, in particular with regards to the United Nations.[5] Yet the U.S. government remains just as prevalent, with 80% or more of the news stories regularly involving a government source.[6]

[5] The average monthly percent of drone articles involving an elite voice that featured the United Nations was 18% for the three major newspapers compared to 15% for the larger set of newspapers, while coverage was fairly equivalent for NGOs at around 16% in each instance.
[6] In only one month (August 2011) did the percentage of stories involving the government fall anywhere near to 50%.

Figure F1: Elite Voices on Drones in Three Major U.S. Newspapers, 2009-2013



Notes: Data are aggregated by month and based on Factiva newspaper archives.
Newspapers included are the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post.
Lower figure reports for each elite category the percent of all news articles mentioning drones and each of the specified elite voices.