

Mixed Messages: Foreign Military Training and Conflict Between Norms

Renanah M. Joyce¹

Harvard Kennedy School

November 14, 2021

Abstract

The United States regularly seeks to promote the norms of respect for human rights and deference to civilian authority in the militaries that it trains. Yet norm-abiding behavior often does not follow from liberal foreign military training. Existing explanations ascribe norm violations either to insufficient socialization or to interest misalignment between providers and recipients. In contrast, I argue that one reason violations occur is because liberal training imparts conflicting norms. How do militaries respond when they confront the dilemma of conflict between the norms of respect for human rights and civilian control of the military? The U.S. policy expectation is that trained militaries will prioritize human rights over obedience to civilians. I argue that policy expectations rest on faulty assumptions and wishful thinking. When liberal norms clash, military members will fall back on a third norm of cohesion that is consistent with interests. I explore the effects of norm conflict on military attitudes using an experiment embedded in a survey of a military built from scratch under American tutelage—the Armed Forces of Liberia. The results provide preliminary evidence that norm conflict weakens support for human rights and democracy. Surprisingly, these results are strongest among soldiers with more U.S. training.

¹ Grand Strategy, Security, and Statecraft Fellow, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. renanahjoyce@gmail.com. Comments welcome. Please do not cite or distribute without permission.

Introduction

On April 14, 1979, the “rice riots” broke out in Monrovia, Liberia. Several thousand protestors took to the streets, seething in frustration and desperation over a governmental proposal to increase the price of rice, on which most Liberians relied for subsistence.² As a group of demonstrators marched towards the president’s Executive Mansion, President William Tolbert personally ordered soldiers to fire into the crowd.³ Over 40 protestors were killed in the ensuing chaos. While the soldiers obeyed Tolbert’s order, the command to shoot their fellow Liberians sparked deep animosity and contributed to a bloody coup the following year.⁴

The rice riots illustrate the conflict that can occur between the two liberal norms of respect for human rights and civilian control of the military. Sometimes political leaders, who militaries are expected to obey, order them to harm the population, which militaries are expected to protect. When the rice riots broke out in 1979, the United States had been training the Liberian military for 18 years. The goal was to create a disciplined, democratic force, which meant training the military both to respect human rights and to obey civilian authority.⁵ Tolbert’s fateful order put these norms in conflict with each other, presenting the military with a dilemma. This article explores the impact of norm conflict on military decision-making. How do militaries respond when they confront this dilemma?

² Falling prices of Liberia’s two main export commodities—iron and rubber—had shocked the Liberian economy, motivating the price hike. See the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Liberia and Ghana—Policy Challenges in West Africa*, S. Rep. No. 97-272 (1982), p. 2.

³ Carey Winfrey, “After Liberia’s Costly Rioting, Great Soul-Searching,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 1979, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/05/30/archives/after-liberias-costly-rioting-great-soulsearching-personally.html>.

⁴ The Advocates for Human Rights, *A House with Two Rooms: Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia Diaspora Report* (Saint Paul, Minn.: DRI Press, 2009), pp. 83–85; and William O’Neill, “Liberia: An Avoidable Tragedy,” *Current History* Vol. 92, No. 574 (1993), p. 213.

⁵ For background on the U.S. Military Mission to Liberia and its goals, see the U.S. Agency for International Development, *Evaluation of the Public Safety Program for the Republic of Liberia* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1972), p. 100.

Liberal great powers fail to acknowledge this dilemma even as they seek to spread liberal ideas globally through foreign military training. Foreign military training is a flexible form of security assistance that seeks to modify recipient militaries' behavior by increasing warfighting capacity and transmitting a set of professional norms or ideas about standards of appropriate behavior.⁶ Norm content and emphasis varies across providers, time, and space. For liberal democratic providers like the United States, these norms include civilian control of the military and respect for human rights.⁷ The theory and empirics that follow focus on the United States as a key liberal power. While the argument applies to all liberal providers, and all great powers use training as part of their security assistance repertoire, the United States is the largest provider.⁸ In 2018, for example, the United States spent over \$775 million to train nearly 63,000 military students from 155 countries.⁹

Today, nearly half of all countries receiving U.S. military training in a given year receive training ostensibly designed to promote these two norms as a primary foreign policy objective.¹⁰ A mix of idealistic and strategic motives explains this emphasis. Imparting liberal norms is

⁶ This definition of norms follows Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* Vol. 52, No. 4 (1998), pp. 891. I use "norm" and "idea" interchangeably following Amitav Acharya, "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism," *International Organization* Vol. 58, No. 2 (2004), pp. 239–75.

⁷ For an overview of human rights and related concepts, including the role of civilian control of the military, see the Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Management*, Ed. 40, Ch. 16, <https://www.dscu.mil/pages/resources/greenbook.aspx>.

⁸ On repertoires of statecraft, see Stacie E. Goddard, Paul K. MacDonald, and Daniel H. Nexon, "Repertoires of Statecraft: Instruments and Logics of Power Politics," *International Relations* Vol. 33, No. 2 (2019), pp. 304–21.

⁹ In contrast, Canada—another liberal provider with a commitment to norms promotion—trained around 1,500 personnel from 56 countries that year. See Directorate of Military Training and Cooperation, *2017-2018 Annual Report* (2018), <http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.850576/publication.html>. The U.S. data are from the Departments of Defense and State, *Foreign Military Training: Joint Report to Congress*, Vol. I, Sec. III (2019), <https://www.state.gov/reports/foreign-military-training-and-dod-engagement-activities-of-interest-2018-2019/>. The annual Foreign Military Training Reports (FMTRs) exclude training conducted with NATO allies, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

¹⁰ Based on a coding of foreign policy objectives in the annual FMTRs.

partially bound up in global democracy promotion, with explicit efforts to liberalize militaries through security assistance proliferating after the Cold War.¹¹ But imparting liberal norms also serves strategic purposes. Shaping how partner militaries think offers the allure of a cheap way to gain voluntary policy compliance.¹² Training also helps to inculcate a shared military identity and common skills and communication, indirectly strengthening a third norm of cohesion. Training thus offers to reduce the costs of security management by creating more competent, cohesive, disciplined, and loyal partners.¹³

The empirical record, however, suggests that training often fails to deliver on its promises of liberal norm change. Security assistance frequently seems to produce non-compliant, norm-violating militaries that conduct coups and abuse human rights.¹⁴ Policymakers and scholars

¹¹ Efforts to reform and liberalize military partners grew out of debates over international human rights compliance in the 1970s. See Eric Rittinger, “Arming the Other: American Small Wars, Local Proxies, and the Social Construction of the Principal-Agent Problem,” *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 61, No. 2 (2017), pp. 396–409. After the end of the Cold War, use of security assistance to promote liberal norms and build democratic defense institutions became widespread. For example, see Alexandra Gheciu, “Security Institutions as Agents of Socialization? NATO and the ‘New Europe,’” *International Organization* Vol. 59, No. 4 (2005), pp. 973–1012; Thomas Bruneau and Harold Trinkunas, “Democratization as a Global Phenomenon and Its Impact on Civil-Military Relations,” *Democratization* Vol. 13, No. 5 (2006), pp. 776–90; and Hari Bucur-Marcu, *Essentials of Defence Institution Building* (Vienna and Geneva: andesverteidigungsakademie and Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2009).

¹² This fits with the logic of “socialization as hegemonic power” outlined in G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, “Socialization and Hegemonic Power,” *International Organization* Vol. 44, No. 3 (1990), pp. 283–315. Because countries typically enter into training arrangements voluntarily, providers hope that institutional change in the target military will be cheaper and more effective than efforts to change regimes by force. On the latter, see Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten, “Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization,” *International Security* Vol. 37, No. 4 (2013), pp. 90–131; and Alexander B. Downes and Lindsey A. O’Rourke, “You Can’t Always Get What You Want: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Seldom Improves Interstate Relations,” *International Security* Vol. 41, No. 2 (2016), pp. 43–89.

¹³ The U.S. military, for example, fears that human rights abuses perpetrated by its proxies can create backlash for U.S. interests. See Government Accountability Office, “Security Assistance: U.S. Agencies Should Improve Oversight of Human Rights Training for Foreign Security Forces,” GAO-19-554 (2019), p. 2. Similarly, coup-prone militaries may contribute to political instability, raising the specter of costly military intervention.

¹⁴ On security assistance and coup propensity, see Jesse Dillon Savage and Jonathan D. Caverley, “When Human Capital Threatens the Capitol: Foreign Aid in the Form of Military Training and Coups,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 54, No. 4 (2017), pp. 542–57; Talukder Maniruzzaman, “Arms Transfers,

offer divergent explanations for shortcomings. Policymakers and some scholars suggest that norm violations result from insufficient investment in training or inadequate emphasis on socialization.¹⁵ Most scholars, however, favor rationalist arguments that point to interest misalignment between providers and recipients.¹⁶ While these arguments ascribe norm violations to different mechanisms, they share a common assumption that socialization never occurred in the first place. This overlooks the dilemma of conflict that can arise between socialized norms.

In this article, I argue that norm conflict can weaken military support for liberal norms, creating the conditions under which perverse behavioral outcomes can occur in spite of socialization. The implicit expectation in U.S. policy, should norm conflict arise, is that militaries will privilege human rights over civilian authority, temporarily defying civilian leaders to protect the higher order of rights “rooted in natural law.”¹⁷ This policy assumes that trained militaries share this rank-ordering, will choose human rights easily, and that conflict will not

Military Coups, and Military Rule in Developing States,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 36, No. 4 (1992), pp. 733–55; and T. Y. Wang, “Arms Transfers and Coups d’État: A Study on Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 35, No. 6 (1998), pp. 659–75. On security assistance and human rights abuses, see Wayne Sandholtz, “United States Military Assistance and Human Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 38, No. 4 (2016), pp. 1070–1101; and Patricia L. Sullivan, Leo J. Blanken, and Ian C. Rice, “Arming the Peace: Foreign Security Assistance and Human Rights Conditions in Post-Conflict Countries,” *Defence and Peace Economics* Vol. 31, No. 2 (2020), pp. 177–200.

¹⁵ Simon J. Powelson, “Enduring Engagement Yes, Episodic Engagement No: Lessons for SOF from Mali,” M.A. thesis, Naval Postgraduate School (2013); Tomislav Z. Ruby and Douglas Gibler, “US Professional Military Education and Democratization Abroad,” *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 16, No. 3 (2010), pp. 339–64.

¹⁶ Eli Berman and David A. Lake, eds., *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence Through Local Agents* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2019); Stephen Biddle, “Building Security Forces & Stabilizing Nations: The Problem of Agency,” *Daedalus* Vol. 146, No. 4 (2017), pp. 126–38; Daniel Byman, “Friends Like These: Counterinsurgency and the War on Terrorism,” *International Security* Vol. 31, No. 2 (2006), pp. 79–115; and Walter C. Ladwig, “Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency: U.S. Involvement in El Salvador’s Civil War, 1979–92,” *International Security* Vol. 41, No. 1 (2016), pp. 99–146.

¹⁷ See Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Management*, p. 16-1.

damage either norm.¹⁸ If anything, conflict might clarify norms and promote socialization.¹⁹

I contend that these assumptions rest on shaky foundations. Rather than strengthening liberal norms, I argue that conflict can make them less salient and undermine their power as restraints on decision-making.²⁰ Norm conflict invites cost-benefit calculations, because norms are no longer taken for granted; conflict creates openings to pursue self-interest.²¹ Weighing costs and benefits creates incentives for militaries to fall back on cohesion, a norm that is tied to interests. Fraught domestic crises that pit liberal norms against each other may further increase the salience of cohesion. Rank-ordering happens, but not in the direction that the United States expects; in moments of norm conflict, militaries will prioritize cohesion instead.

Once militaries prioritize cohesion, they will choose to do whatever best serves the organization, whether that involves violating human rights, civilian control, or both norms. I thus seek to explain shifts in military support for norms, rather than behavioral outcomes in any given political context. Rather than predicting specific instances of disobedience or abuse, I examine the conditions under which norm violations become possible and shed light on the links between socialization efforts, attitudes, and ultimate behavior.²² Norm conflict can weaken liberal norms

¹⁸ Jonathan Baron and Mark Spranca, “Protected Values,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* Vol. 70, No. 1 (1997), pp. 1–16; Jonathan Baron and Sarah Leshner, “How Serious Are Expressions of Protected Values?” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied* Vol. 6, No. 3 (2000), pp. 183–94; and Philip E. Tetlock, “Thinking the Unthinkable: Sacred Values and Taboo Cognitions,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* Vol. 7, No. 7 (2003), pp. 320–24.

¹⁹ Antje Wiener, *A Theory of Contestation* (Berlin, Heidelberg: Imprint: Springer, 2014); Antje Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); and Acharya, “How Ideas Spread.”

²⁰ Thomas M. Dolan, “Unthinkable and Tragic: The Psychology of Weapons Taboos in War,” *International Organization* Vol. 67, No. 1 (2013), pp. 37–63; and Vaughn P. Shannon, “Norms Are What States Make of Them: The Political Psychology of Norm Violation,” *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 44, No. 2 (2000), pp. 293–316.

²¹ Dolan, “Unthinkable and Tragic,” p. 48; Tetlock, “Thinking the Unthinkable,” p. 324; and Baron and Leshner, “How Serious Are Expressions of Protected Values?”

²² For a similar approach to the study of individual military decision-making, see Eric Hundman and Sarah E. Parkinson, “Rogues, Degenerates, and Heroes: Disobedience as Politics in Military Organizations,” *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 25, No. 3 (2019), pp. 645–671.

and frustrate socialization over the long run.²³

As a plausibility probe of the competing claims, I use experimental evidence from a survey of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), which the United States rebuilt after Liberia's civil war ended in 2003. American trainers heavily emphasized liberal norms, making Liberia a most-likely case for norm socialization. More than 30 elite-level interviews conducted with U.S. officials, trainers, and Liberian military officers augment the survey. The survey experiment presents soldiers with a scenario in which a political leader orders the military to put down protests with force, pitting the norms of civilian control and respect for human rights against each other. The scenario thus provides an experimental "stress test" of competing norms.²⁴

I find evidence that when soldiers hear this scenario, their willingness to choose between liberal norms decreases and they express more concern for maintaining cohesion. Liberal training conditions this response, but in unexpected ways: soldiers with more U.S. training express *less* willingness to prioritize human rights and lose more support for democratic norms. Importantly, the survey evidence also shows that soldiers with more U.S. training express the strongest support for liberal norms in the absence of norm conflict, undermining the alternative argument that socialization never happened.

These findings shed light on a pathway by which norm violations can happen even in the presence of socialization. By highlighting a previously unrecognized dilemma in the model of civil-military relations that liberal powers seek to export, I contribute to studies that explore

²³ Jeffrey S. Lantis and Carmen Wunderlich, "Resiliency Dynamics of Norm Clusters: Norm Contestation and International Cooperation," *Review of International Studies* Vol. 44, No. 3 (2018), pp. 570–93; and Diana Panke and Ulrich Petersohn, "Why International Norms Disappear Sometimes," *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 18, No. 4 (2012), pp. 719–42.

²⁴ Scott D. Sagan, Benjamin A. Valentino, Charli Carpenter, and Alexander H. Montgomery. "Does the Noncombatant Immunity Norm Have Stopping Power? A Debate," *International Security* Vol. 45, No. 2 (2020), pp. 174–175.

contradictions and complexity in military norms,²⁵ as well as studies that examine the interaction of norms and interests in shaping behavior.²⁶ Liberal great powers typically treat the norms of civilian control of the military and respect for human rights as mutually reinforcing even though they often are not, particularly in weak democracies. My findings suggest that norm conflicts can have a corrosive effect on military support for the norms in question. The assumptions underlying a major component of U.S. foreign policy may be flawed, suggesting the need to fundamentally re-evaluate the approach to norms transmission.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, I describe liberal powers' efforts to impart ideas about civilian control of the military and respect for human rights to the militaries that they train. Second, I lay out my argument about the implications of conflict between these norms, situating it within the literatures on norm contestation, psychology, and sociology. Third, I discuss case selection and the research design. Fourth, I present the experimental results and explore mechanisms. I conclude with a discussion of theoretical extensions and implications for policy.

Foreign Military Training and Norm Diffusion

Since the end of the Cold War, norms promotion has occupied increasing ground in foreign military training by liberal democratic powers.²⁷ British policy, for example, has stated that

²⁵ Risa Brooks, "Paradoxes of Professionalism: Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in the United States," *International Security* Vol. 44, No. 4 (2020), pp. 7–44.

²⁶ Charli Carpenter and Alexander H. Montgomery, "The Stopping Power of Norms: Saturation Bombing, Civilian Immunity, and U.S. Attitudes toward the Laws of War," *International Security* Vol. 45, No. 2 (2020), p. 147; Shannon, "Norms are What States Make of Them"; Ward Thomas, *The Ethics of Destruction: Norms and Force in International Relations* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001); and Sonia Cardenas, "Norm Collision: Explaining the Effects of International Human Rights Pressure on State Behavior," *International Studies Review* Vol. 6, No. 2 (2004), pp. 213–32.

²⁷ Bruneau and Trinkunas, "Democratization as a Global Phenomenon and Its Impact on Civil-Military Relations." Although this article focuses on liberal norms promotion, illiberal providers also use security

“support to build the capacity of security forces must be matched with efforts to build accountability, legitimacy and respect for human rights.”²⁸ Similarly, Canada’s Military Training and Cooperation Program seeks to “promote Canadian democratic principles, the rule of law and the protection of human rights.”²⁹ For its part, the United States likewise emphasizes human rights and civilian control of the military.³⁰ The Obama administration articulated a goal of U.S. security sector assistance as promoting “universal values, such as good governance, transparent and accountable oversight of security forces, rule of law... and respect for human rights.”³¹ As of 2017, U.S. law requires that *all* efforts to build foreign military capacity include at least some training on “observance of and respect for the law of armed conflict, human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, and civilian control of the military.”³²

Importantly, there is regional variation in where the United States emphasizes norms training. This training tends to occur in places where policymakers believe that more liberal and professional militaries are key to long-term political stability and democracy, or where they need to couch security assistance in liberal values to sell U.S. involvement.

assistance to impart norms. For example, China cites its foreign assistance training as one way that it promotes human rights—defined as “the rights to subsistence and development.” People’s Republic of China, “Progress in Human Rights Over the 40 Years of Reform and Opening Up in China,” December 12, 2018, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/12/13/content_281476431737638.htm.

²⁸ British Government, “Building Stability Overseas Strategy,” July 1, 2011, p. 12, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-stability-overseas-strategy>.

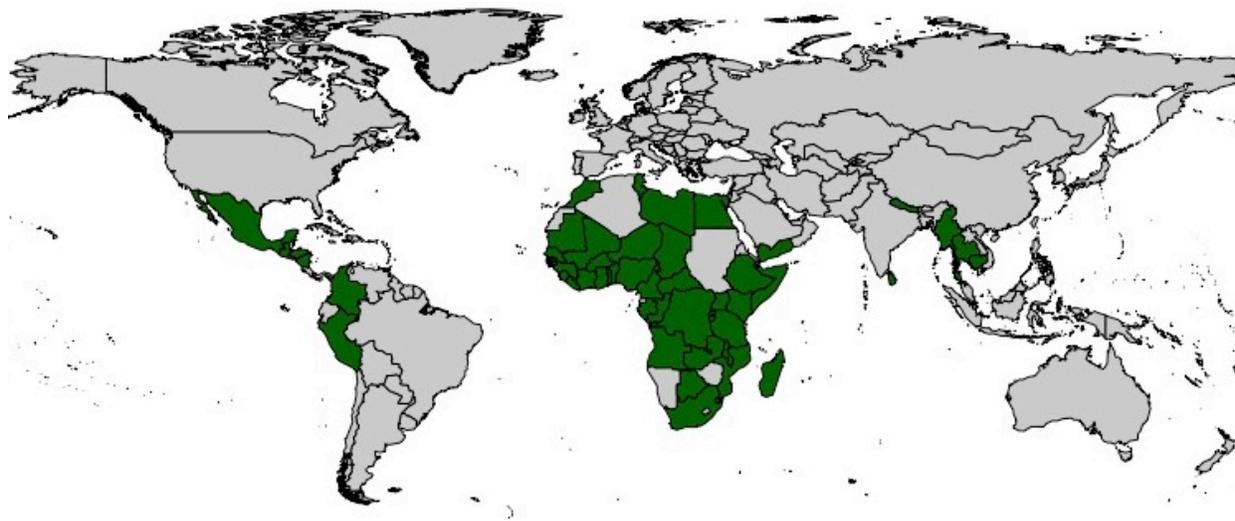
²⁹ Directorate of Military Training and Cooperation, *2017-2018 Annual Report*.

³⁰ DSCU, *Security Cooperation Management*, p. 16-1. The norm of civilian control has a long-standing place of privilege in American civil-military relations, dating to the Declaration of Independence. Norms protecting human rights and enshrining the law of armed conflict (e.g., noncombatant immunity) have grown stronger in the U.S. military and in its training since the aftermath of the Vietnam War. On U.S. military norms, see Colin H. Kahl, “In the Crossfire or the Crosshairs? Norms, Civilian Casualties, and U.S. Conduct in Iraq,” *International Security* Vol. 32, No. 1 (2007), pp. 7–46; on U.S. foreign military training, see Rittinger, “Arming the Other.”

³¹ The White House, “Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Sector Assistance Policy,” April 5, 2013, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=747214>.

³² 10 U.S. Code Section 333, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/333>.

Figure 1: Recipients of U.S. Military Norms Training in 2018



Note: The dark-shaded countries represent recipients of U.S. military norms training in 2018.

Figure 1 depicts the 62 countries where imparting the norms of civilian control of the military and respect for human rights was a primary foreign policy objective of U.S. training in 2018.³³ Africa features prominently, where nearly 90 percent of countries receive norms training each year.³⁴ This suggests that norms training plays a role in U.S. strategy in places where it would like to delegate security management and avoid intervention.³⁵ Because military training also imparts human capital and technical skills, the United States hopes to simultaneously create more competent and more liberal forces that are capable of providing security while avoiding

³³ This is a conservative estimate because it only counts countries where the stated foreign policy objectives in the FMTRs included norms—not countries receiving training for a different objective that had a normative component tacked on to satisfy a legal requirement.

³⁴ In Africa, the United States has intentionally privileged training over other forms of security assistance. See Jim Mannion, “Cohen rules out U.S. military role in African crises,” *Agence France Presse – English*, February 11, 2000, Nexis Uni. The data support this claim: the correlation between arms and training in Africa is essentially zero and the dollar value of training typically exceeds that of arms transfers in a given year. See [author].

³⁵ In regions where the United States has more strategic interests, its emphasis on civilian control of the military and respect for human rights wanes; for example, it tends to emphasize more oblique norms of “professionalism” in the Middle East and Asia.

repressive and corrupt behavior that can jeopardize stability.

Foreign military training is the preferred tool to impart norms. Whereas other forms of security assistance like arms transfers may come with conditions to modify behavior or extract policy concessions, training seeks to change military preferences primarily through socialization. Training offers opportunities for teaching and persuasion, which can be powerful in shaping professional worldviews.³⁶ “Professional training,” according to Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “actively socializes people to value certain things above others.”³⁷ Trainers use their professional expertise, information, and resources to promote certain norms while discouraging others.³⁸ Consistent messaging over time plays a role; as a military instructor tasked with training the new AFL put it, “You tell somebody something long enough, they’ll believe it. You have to capture their mind for their body to follow.”³⁹ Additionally, training offers opportunities for interpersonal interaction and relationship formation, which may help foster shared preferences.⁴⁰

Training takes diverse forms. Military officers attending regional seminars or courses in U.S. military schools are exposed to liberal norms through programs like the International Military

³⁶ Gheciu, “Security Institutions as Agents of Socialization?”; Jeffrey T. Checkel, “Socialization and Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 54, No. 5 (2017), pp. 592–605; Devorah Manekin, “The Limits of Socialization and the Underproduction of Military Violence: Evidence from the IDF,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 54, No. 5 (2017), pp. 606–19; Amelia Hoover Green, *The Commander’s Dilemma: Violence and Restraint in Wartime* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018); Alastair Iain Johnston, “Treating International Institutions as Social Environments,” *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 45, No. 4 (2001), pp. 487–515; and James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 30.

³⁷ Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” p. 905. On foreign military training as a way to socialize professional norms, see Theo Farrell, “World Culture and Military Power,” *Security Studies* Vol. 14, No. 3 (2005), pp. 448–88; Robert M. Price, “A Theoretical Approach to Military Rule in New States: Reference-Group Theory and the Ghanaian Case,” *World Politics* Vol. 23, No. 3 (1971), pp. 399–430; Ruby and Gibler, “U.S. Professional Military Education and Democratization Abroad”; and Alexander Wendt and Michael Barnett, “Dependent State Formation and Third World Militarization,” *Review of International Studies* Vol. 19, No. 4 (1993), pp. 321–47.

³⁸ Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” p. 899.

³⁹ Zoom interview with former DynCorp instructor D, June 12, 2021.

⁴⁰ Carla Martinez Machain, “Exporting Influence: U.S. Military Training as Soft Power,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720957713>.

Education and Training program.⁴¹ Tactical training can also include a normative component. For example, when the U.S. military trains African counterterrorism forces to go into the bush, they spend up to a week on human rights in the context of targeting practices.⁴² Finally, trainers try to tailor application of norms to the local context. In Liberia, advisors from the Michigan National Guard sought to explain human rights in terms such as “it’s wrong to shoot individuals with 50-caliber bullets.”⁴³

But U.S. training imparts more than liberal norms—it also helps to cultivate cohesion, which refers to the bonds that enable military forces to operate in a unified, group- and mission-oriented way.⁴⁴ The imperative to preserve these bonds functions as a norm that motivates soldiers to prioritize loyalty and commitment to their unit, the military, and shared goals. While cohesion can sometimes demand self-sacrifice for the group or for strategic goals, it is nonetheless almost always in the individual’s best interest to pursue.⁴⁵ Indeed, at the military institutional level,

⁴¹ DSCU, *Security Cooperation Management*, p. 16-1. The Defense Department conducts norms training around the world as well as in the United States. For example, the Defense Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS) conducts over 100 events globally each year on “human rights, international humanitarian law, and the law of armed conflicts.” See the DIILS website, “About DIILS,” <https://globalnetplatform.org/diils/about-diils/>.

⁴² Telephone interview with Defense Department official, November 30, 2018.

⁴³ Telephone interview with Michigan National Guard trainer, October 13, 2014. This is an application of U.S. doctrine on the principle of humanity, which proscribes “the use of weapons that are calculated to cause superfluous injury.” Joint Chiefs of Staff, Legal Support to Military Operations, Joint Publication 1-04 (Washington, D.C.: 2016), p. II-2.

⁴⁴ Terence Lee, “Military Cohesion and Regime Maintenance: Explaining the Role of the Military in 1989 China and 1998 Indonesia,” *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 32, No. 1 (2005), p. 84; and Defense Management Study Group on Military Cohesion, *Cohesion in the U.S. Military* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1984), ix. Cohesion has affective and instrumental dimensions, encompassing how military members feel about each other and their organization, as well as their commitment to shared goals. Some scholars distinguish between these dimensions, calling the former “social cohesion” and the latter “task cohesion.” See Guy L. Siebold, “The Essence of Military Group Cohesion,” *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 33, No. 2 (2007), pp. 286–95, and Anthony King, “The Existence of Group Cohesion in the Armed Forces,” *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 33, No. 4 (2007), pp. 638–45 for a debate. In this article, I focus primarily on the instrumental dimensions, i.e., task cohesion.

⁴⁵ Cohesion increases the likelihood of mission success and survival in combat situations and is “mutually beneficial” to group members. See Guy L. Siebold, “Key Questions and Challenges to the Standard Model of Military Group Cohesion,” *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 37, No. 3 (2011), p. 459; and Robert

cohesion represents a core interest. “Cohesion, discipline, and morale within the corps” are key to the military’s self-preservation as well as its ability to secure other organizational interests.⁴⁶ As David Pion-Berlin et al. note, “preservation of institutional unity has always been the centerpiece of military interests.”⁴⁷ Thus, cohesion represents both a military norm and interest. Because the theory and tests that follow focus on individual decision-making, I treat cohesion as a norm, albeit one that is aligned to interests in ways that are hard to fully separate.⁴⁸

Cohesion comes from multiple sources, including training and operational practices.⁴⁹ Training fosters a common military identity, skills, and modes of communication that help to create cohesion over time.⁵⁰ Cohesion is not taught as a principle to follow (e.g., “do not abuse civilians”); rather, it is instilled through training and practices that emphasize solidarity, shared identity, and teamwork to accomplish goals. While U.S. training does not explicitly seek to impart cohesion the same way as liberal norms, it does increase capacity for teamwork and

J. MacCoun, Elizabeth Kier, and Aaron Belkin, “Does Social Cohesion Determine Motivation in Combat?” *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 32, No. 4 (2006), p. 652.

⁴⁶ Eva Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring,” *Comparative Politics* Vol. 44, No. 2 (2012), p. 131.

⁴⁷ David Pion-Berlin, Diego Esparza, and Kevin Grisham, “Staying Quartered: Civilian Uprisings and Military Disobedience in the Twenty-First Century,” *Comparative Political Studies* Vol. 47, No. 2 (2014), p. 247.

⁴⁸ The social psychology and military sociology literatures often treat cohesion as a process of integration or a pattern of bonding. See, for example, Noah E. Friedkin, “Social Cohesion,” *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 30 (2004), pp. 409–25. Treatment of cohesion as a norm or interest is more common to the political science literature.

⁴⁹ On training, operational practices, and cohesion, see Anthony King, “The Word of Command,” *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 32, No. 4 (2006), pp. 493–512; MacCoun, Kier, and Belkin, “Does Social Cohesion Determine Motivation in Combat?”; Uzi Ben-Shalom, Zeev Lehrer, and Eyal Ben-Ari, “Cohesion during Military Operations,” *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 32, No. 1 (2005), pp. 63–79; and Elizabeth Kier, “Homosexuals in the U.S. Military: Open Integration and Combat Effectiveness,” *International Security* Vol. 23, No. 2 (1998), pp. 5–39. Policies around recruitment and promotion can also foster or undermine cohesion. See, for example, Theodore McLaughlin, “Loyalty Strategies and Military Defection in Rebellion,” *Comparative Politics* Vol. 42, No. 3 (2010), pp. 333–50; and Lee, “Military Cohesion and Regime Maintenance.” Additionally, time in service and membership in a stable group can strengthen cohesion. See Siebold, “The Essence of Military Group Cohesion.”

⁵⁰ Anthony King, “On Combat Effectiveness in the Infantry Platoon: Beyond the Primary Group Thesis,” *Security Studies* Vol. 25, No. 4 (2016), pp. 699–728; and Kier, “Homosexuals in the U.S. Military.”

unified action. Thus, U.S. training indirectly imparts a third norm, cohesion, and strengthens organizational interests.

EXPLAINING NORM VIOLATIONS

The return on investment for efforts to impart norms often appears meager. Evidence suggests that U.S.-trained militaries regularly launch coups, subvert rule of law, and prey on the people they are supposed to protect.⁵¹ Infamously, the U.S. Army’s School of the Americas—created in 1946 to educate Latin American military officers on “the virtues of democratic civilian control over the armed forces”—produced a generation of coup-makers instead.⁵²

The international relations (IR) literature offers contrasting explanations for norm violations. One set of arguments suggests that the problem is insufficient training or attention to norms.⁵³ As the head of U.S. Africa Command said after American-trained soldiers were implicated in the 2012 coup in Mali: “We didn’t spend, probably, the requisite time focusing on values, ethics and military ethos.”⁵⁴ In this view, norm violations reflect failure to successfully socialize militaries to new norms in the first place. A second set of arguments points to misaligned interests between the provider and the recipient, using a principal-agent framework to explain the problem.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Savage and Caverley, “When Human Capital Threatens the Capitol”; and Sandholtz, “United States Military Assistance and Human Rights.”

⁵² “School of the Dictators,” *New York Times*, September 28, 1996, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/28/opinion/school-of-the-dictators.html>.

⁵³ Powelson, “Enduring Engagement Yes, Episodic Engagement No”; Ruby and Gibler, “US Professional Military Education and Democratization Abroad;” Carol Atkinson, “Constructivist Implications of Material Power: Military Engagement and the Socialization of States 1972-2000,” *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 50, No. 3 (2006), pp. 509–37; Edin Mujkic, Hugo D. Asencio, and Theodore Byrne, “International Military Education and Training: Promoting Democratic Values to Militaries and Countries throughout the World,” *Democracy and Security* Vol. 15, No. 3 (2019), pp. 271–90.

⁵⁴ Tyrone C. Marshall Jr., “Africom Commander Addresses Concerns, Potential Solutions in Mali,” *American Forces Press Service*, January 24, 2013, <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=119103>.

⁵⁵ For an overview of principal-agent theory, see Jean-Jacques Laffont and David Martimort, *The Theory of Incentives: The Principal-Agent Model* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Gary J.

Security assistance providers function as principals that arm and equip weaker states to act as agents on their behalf, but divergent priorities and asymmetric information lead to agent shirking and non-compliance.⁵⁶ These studies suggest that norms transmission, if attempted at all, will be anemic compared to the powerful interests motivating behavior.

Both explanations over-simplify decision-making in different, but problematic ways. The first perspective, which emphasizes socialization, discounts the power of interests in motivating behavior. It also fails to consider which norms will exercise the most influence over decision-making. Conversely, the rationalist perspective discounts the role of norms in shaping preferences and constraining behavior. In contrast, I treat military decision-making as the joint product of norms and interests, contributing to scholarship that examines the conditions under which utilitarian or normative considerations govern decision-making.⁵⁷ Next, I look at the ways that conflict between liberal norms can weaken support for those norms and open a pathway for other norms, more consistent with utilitarian considerations, to dominate.

Miller, "The Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models," *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 8, No. 1 (2005), pp. 203–25.

⁵⁶ These studies focus on explaining why the United States often fails to achieve its goals working with proxy forces in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency campaigns. See Berman and Lake, *Proxy Wars*; Biddle, "Building Security Forces & Stabilizing Nations"; Stephen Biddle, Julia Macdonald, and Ryan Baker, "Small Footprint, Small Payoff: The Military Effectiveness of Security Force Assistance," *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 41, No. 1–2 (2018), pp. 89–142; Byman, "Friends Like These"; Barbara Elias, "The Big Problem of Small Allies: New Data and Theory on Defiant Local Counterinsurgency Partners in Afghanistan and Iraq," *Security Studies* Vol. 27, No. 2 (2018), pp. 233–62; Ladwig, "Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency"; Walter C. Ladwig, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counterinsurgency* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); and Stephen Tankel, *With Us and against Us: How America's Partners Help and Hinder the War on Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). Strategic interests may also prevent the United States from censuring norm-violating militaries. See Stephanie Burchard and Stephen Burgess, "U.S. Training of African Forces and Military Assistance, 1997–2017: Security versus Human Rights in Principal–Agent Relations," *African Security* Vol. 11, No. 4 (2018), pp. 339–69.

⁵⁷ On the need for "both/and" arguments, see Michael Zürn and Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Getting Socialized to Build Bridges: Constructivism and Rationalism, Europe and the Nation-State," *International Organization* Vol. 59, No. 4 (2005), p. 1046.

Theorizing Liberal Norm Conflict

My argument for shifts in military support for norms begins with the premise that norms mediate decision-making by serving as social constraints that people follow for psychological and sociological reasons.⁵⁸ Non-conformity with group norms can lead to social sanctions and shaming,⁵⁹ violating personal beliefs can affect self-esteem.⁶⁰ People thus forego naked pursuit of self-interest to maintain positive self-image and social standing. Similarly, collective actors (e.g., states) comply with norms to legitimate their behavior in the eyes of other actors and minimize resistance.⁶¹

Determining which rules to follow, however, is not always clear-cut. There are many different norms with potentially countervailing implications for behavior—what Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro call the “ubiquity” of norms problem.⁶² The problem of conflicting norms has been well-noted in the literatures on law, sociology, and IR.⁶³ The IR literature, for example, has

⁵⁸ Social constraints are not easily shrugged off—otherwise they would not be constraints—but people can instrumentally select norms in ways that best accommodate interests, as the argument below outlines.

⁵⁹ Samuel A. Stouffer, “An Analysis of Conflicting Social Norms,” *American Sociological Review* Vol. 14, No. 5 (1949), pp. 707–717; Checkel, “Socialization and Violence”; Philip E. Tetlock, “Social Functionalist Frameworks for Judgment and Choice: Intuitive Politicians, Theologians, and Prosecutors,” *Psychological Review* Vol. 109, No. 3 (2002), pp. 451–71.

⁶⁰ Dolan, “Unthinkable and Tragic,” p. 42; Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Tetlock, “Social Functionalist Frameworks for Judgment and Choice.”

⁶¹ Ian Hurd, “Breaking and Making Norms: American Revisionism and Crises of Legitimacy,” *International Politics* Vol. 44, No. 2–3 (2007), pp. 194–213; Martha Finnemore, “Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity: Why Being a Unipole Isn’t All It’s Cracked up to Be,” *World Politics* Vol. 61, No. 1 (2009), pp. 58–85.

⁶² Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, “Norms, Identity and Their Limits: A Theoretical Reprise,” in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 486.

⁶³ For example, see Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions on the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Oscar Schachter, *International Law in Theory and Practice* (Norwell, Mass.: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991); Stouffer, “An Analysis of Conflicting Social Norms”; James G. March, *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations* (Bergen, Norway: Universitetsforlaget, 1976); March and Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions*; Jeffrey W. Legro, “Which Norms Matter? Revisiting the ‘Failure’ of Internationalism,” *International Organization* Vol. 51, No. 1 (1997), pp. 31–63; and Wayne Sandholtz,

explored the tension between the norm of state sovereignty and humanitarian norms such as the “responsibility to protect.”⁶⁴ Moreover, following certain norms may come at a cost to other values, even if the decision is not framed as a choice between them.⁶⁵ As Jon Elster put it, “In some contexts, following the lodestar of outcome-oriented rationality is easy compared with finding one’s way in a jungle of social norms.”⁶⁶

Surprisingly, scholars and policymakers have neglected the problem of norm conflict at the heart of liberal civil-military relations.⁶⁷ In the liberal formulation, the norms of human rights and civilian authority are mutually reinforcing. The empirical record underscores this assumption: where the United States provides norms training, it typically bundles both norms as a package deal. Almost every country in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, receives military training on both norms every year.⁶⁸

Liberalism’s inherent support for civilian control of the military assumes that it represents the best way to protect both human rights and democracy.⁶⁹ Although these norms usually are mutually reinforcing in strong democracies, they can come into conflict in weak or non-

“Dynamics of International Norm Change: Rules against Wartime Plunder,” *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 14, No. 1 (2008), pp. 101–31.

⁶⁴ Jennifer M. Welsh, “Norm Contestation and the Responsibility to Protect,” *Global Responsibility to Protect* Vol. 5, No. 4 (2013), pp. 365–96.

⁶⁵ An example occurred in 1994 when the State Department legal counsel advised against jamming Rwandan hate radio broadcasts over concerns about international broadcasting agreements and U.S. commitment to free speech. Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

⁶⁶ Jon Elster, *The Cement of Society: A Study of Social Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 100.

⁶⁷ An important exception is Jesse Savage and Jonathan Caverley who, although skeptical about socialization, note “the tension built within the stated goals of promoting both human rights and civilian supremacy.” Savage and Caverley, “When Human Capital Threatens the Capitol,” p. 544.

⁶⁸ Based on coding of annual country-level training objectives from the FMTRs.

⁶⁹ Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Management*, p. 16-5. This belief is deeply ingrained in American political thought—among the grievances cited in the Declaration of Independence was the presence of standing armies on American soil that were not subordinate to civilian authorities.

democracies. In other words, this assumption may fail in precisely the places where norms training is most prevalent—weak democracies and fragile states. These states often lack strong legal institutions to rein in executive leaders, and their militaries often lack robust military justice systems to establish the legality of orders. Despite Eric Nordlinger’s warning that “liberalism’s abiding and indiscriminate preference for civilian control is a debatable issue,” the problem of norm conflict in liberal civil-military relations has avoided scrutiny.⁷⁰

When situations arise with conflicting implications for behavior, militaries thus face consequential choices without clear answers. The following section examines competing predictions about the effects of norm conflict on military decision-making.

MILITARY RESPONSES TO NORM CONFLICT

How will militaries respond to conflict between the norms of respect for human rights and civilian control? Although U.S. policy discourse rarely broaches the problem of norm conflict, there is an implicit policy expectation, should contradictions arise, that the military will temporarily prioritize human rights over deference to civilian authority. This expectation derives from liberal understandings of natural law; as the Defense Department notes, “the English philosopher John Locke believed that human rights, not governments, came first in the natural order of things.”⁷¹ Given that orders to abuse human rights violate natural law, such orders presumably are illegal and the military is justified to disobey. This understanding reflects a long tradition in U.S. military norms, which holds that military personnel must disobey orders that are “manifestly illegal.”⁷² Less clear is whether officers should obey orders they perceive as immoral

⁷⁰ Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 8.

⁷¹ Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Management*, p. 16-1.

⁷² For an overview of the manifest illegality principle, see James B. Insko, “Defense of Superior Orders

but not necessarily illegal.⁷³ Still, the preference ordering is clear: people first, governments second. If norms conflict, the military should choose human rights over civilian control.

There is some evidence that the United States tries to impart this rank-ordering of norms. In testimony before Congress, the commander of U.S. Africa Command said, “We recognize building legitimate defense institutions is critical for African governments that prioritize the security of their citizens *over that of the state*” (emphasis added).⁷⁴ Interview evidence suggests that American officers at least occasionally socialize other militaries to follow only legal orders. For example, the AFL’s top officers, intensively trained by the United States, say that the United States prepared the AFL to be “very bold” in telling the president or the minister of defense when they were asking the military to do something they could not or should not do. In contrast, an AFL officer said, other actors in Liberia lacked “courage” to defy illegal orders.⁷⁵

The policy expectation that militaries will choose human rights makes two assumptions. First, it assumes that choosing between conflicting norms is easy. At the individual level, people are presumed to choose between norms and values with relative ease. Although people may resist substituting deeply held values for less important ones, when the choice is between two important values, they can frame the problem as a “tragic tradeoff” and avoid damage to self-esteem or social standing.⁷⁶ Moreover, the choice of which norm to privilege ought to be

before Military Commissions,” *Duke Journal of Comparative & International Law* Vol. 13, No. 2 (2003), pp. 389–418.

⁷³ Lindsay Cohn, Max Margulies, and Michael A. Robinson, “What Discord Follows: The Divisive Debate over Military Disobedience,” *War on the Rocks*, August 2, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/08/what-discord-follows-the-divisive-debate-over-military-disobedience/>.

⁷⁴ U.S. Africa Command, *Testimony of Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser, Commander, United States Africa Command*, 115th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: 2018), p. 5.

⁷⁵ Interview with AFL officer C, Monrovia, July 20, 2017. Interviews with U.S. instructors and a review of the civics curriculum confirm that instructors conveyed this rank-ordering in Liberia. Zoom interview with former DynCorp instructor A, May 27, 2021; and Zoom interview with former DynCorp instructors B and C, June 5, 2021.

⁷⁶ Philip E. Tetlock, Ori V. Kristel, S. Beth Elson, and Melanie C. Green, “The Psychology of the

facilitated by the presence of a blueprint for prioritization (“people first”).

The second assumption is that norm conflict will not damage either norm. Rank-ordering norms in a crisis should not make the violated norm any less salient; rather, it is temporarily downgraded to accommodate the more important principle in that moment.⁷⁷ If anything, the process of adjudicating between the norms might strengthen them. Research on norms contestation suggests that norm conflicts can drive violations, but these violations ultimately strengthen socialization in the long-term by clarifying ambiguity and resolving conflict.⁷⁸

Insomuch as liberal powers think about other norms and interests, they treat them as unproblematic for crisis decision-making. Norm conflicts are not viewed as problematic for cohesion; if anything, cohesion should make militaries more unified in doing the right thing. Properly socialized military personnel, according to the liberal training logic, should be willing to make costly choices. In other words, liberal normative considerations continue to guide decision-making.

Counter to U.S. policy expectations, I argue that these assumptions rest on shaky foundations. Instead, I expect that when liberal norms clash, military members will fall back on a third norm of cohesion that is always consistent with group interests. Rank-ordering of norms happens, but not in the direction that the United States expects. Rather than choosing human rights over civilian control, military decision-making is less likely to be constrained by *either*

Unthinkable: Taboo Trade-Offs, Forbidden Base Rates, and Heretical Counterfactuals,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* Vol. 78, No. 5 (2000), pp. 853–70; Baron and Leshner, “How Serious Are Expressions of Protected Values?”; Philip E. Tetlock, Barbara A. Mellers, and J. Peter Scoblic, “Sacred versus Pseudo-Sacred Values: How People Cope with Taboo Trade-Offs,” *The American Economic Review* Vol. 107, No. 5 (2017), pp. 96–99; Sonia Cardenas, “Norm Collision”; and Dolan, “Unthinkable and Tragic.”

⁷⁷ This assumption is shared in the psychology literature on value tradeoffs. See Baron and Spranca, “Protected Values,” p. 1; and Dolan, “Unthinkable and Tragic,” p. 47.

⁷⁸ Wiener, *A Theory of Contestation*; Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations*; Acharya, “How Ideas Spread.”

liberal norm.

Norm conflicts make it more likely that soldiers will fall back on cohesion in at least two different ways. First, conflict makes the contested norms less salient during the crisis. The assumption that conflict does not adversely affect norms misses the alternative possibility that ambiguities and conflicts in meaning make norms easier to ignore instead.⁷⁹ Scholarship has shown that norm conflicts can weaken support for prohibition norms in warfare.⁸⁰ Contestation eliminates the “taken for granted” quality of norms; once challenged, norms may no longer “operate as either a focal point for mutual expectations or as a naturalized guide for behavior.”⁸¹ Conflict between liberal norms invites cost-benefit calculations because the norms are no longer taken for granted. Choices to protect civilians and disobey leaders—or conversely, to obey leaders and brutalize civilians—can be costly choices that jeopardize different interests. Weighing costs and benefits thus creates incentives to instrumentally select a norm to follow that best serves interests. Militaries have such a norm to fall back on: cohesion, which is neither inherently liberal nor in potential conflict with self-interest.

Second, liberal norm conflicts are often situations that threaten cohesion as well. Crises that pit political leaders against the population, with the military in the middle, are fraught situations that can threaten cohesion. Disagreement over whether to obey or disobey orders may create fears of splits in the ranks.⁸² Individuals may be reluctant to make choices that they perceive as

⁷⁹ Shannon, “Norms are What States Make of Them.”

⁸⁰ Dolan, “Unthinkable and Tragic”; Carpenter and Montgomery, “The Stopping Power of Norms”; Sagan and Valentino, “Revisiting Hiroshima in Iran”; and Scott D. Sagan, Benjamin A. Valentino, Charli Carpenter, and Alexander H. Montgomery, “Does the Noncombatant Immunity Norm Have Stopping Power? A Debate,” *International Security* Vol. 45, No. 2 (2020), pp. 170–86.

⁸¹ Hurd, “Breaking and Making Norms,” p. 197.

⁸² Incentives to avoid fracturing the ranks explain a range of military behaviors, including how relatively small numbers of soldiers can haul the rest of the institution behind them in coup attempts. See Barbara Geddes, “A Game Theoretic Model of Reform in Latin American Democracies,” *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 85, No. 2 (1991), pp. 371–392; Barbara Geddes, “What Do We Know About

potentially divisive and harmful to cohesion.⁸³ Indeed, insights from the literature on military obedience show that militaries often weigh cohesion above other priorities when deciding whether to obey or defect during crises.⁸⁴ The psychological dynamics explored here explain how cohesion comes to dominate decision-making. Structurally, cohesion becomes more salient even as the clashing liberal norms become less salient.

Prioritizing cohesion offers military members a way to behave normatively while protecting their interests and preserving the organization. This explains both the ascendance of cohesion and interests to the forefront of decision-making and the descendance, even if temporary, of regard for liberal norms. This does not mean that cohesion is fundamentally at odds with liberal norms, nor does it automatically predict norm violations. Rather, conflict between liberal norms creates the conditions that make violations possible. By vitiating liberal normative restraints, military crisis decision-making will be driven by whatever best serves cohesion, which may involve violating human rights, civilian control, or both norms. While this argument seeks to explain changes in support for norms rather than specific behavioral outcomes, I return to the implications for behavior below.

Finally, several factors may exacerbate the effects of norm conflict. First, the liberal preference ordering of “people first, governments second” is not always well-socialized in practice. U.S.-trained militaries are not taught to choose human rights nearly as systematically as

Democratization After Twenty Years?” *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1999), pp. 115–44; and S. E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1988).

⁸³ Baron and Spranca, “Protected Values.”

⁸⁴ See, for example, Lee, “Military Cohesion and Regime Maintenance”; Zoltan Barany, *How Armies Respond to Revolutions and Why* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016); Julien Morency-Laflamme, “A Question of Trust: Military Defection during Regime Crises in Benin and Togo,” *Democratization* Vol. 25, No. 3 (2018), pp. 464–480; and McLaughlin, “Loyalty Strategies and Military Defection in Rebellion.”

the rhetoric suggests. One reason is the policy tendency to engage in wishful thinking that denies the possibility of value tradeoffs between human rights and civilian control.⁸⁵ In private conversations, U.S. military officers have described this potential for norm conflict as a “conundrum” or “third rail” in security assistance, admitting that they try to avoid addressing it. When civilians order the military to do things that are illegal, U.S. advice tends to be inchoate—“54 different answers.”⁸⁶ Another reason may be divergent preferences between the U.S. military and its own civilian leaders; the Defense Department’s public Lockean position has been undercut in private rhetoric expressed by different U.S. presidents.⁸⁷ Bureaucratic silos may also play a role: U.S. training on civil-military relations is developed and administered by different entities than those conducting training on human rights, leading to coordination problems.

Second, militaries with histories of factionalism or civil war may be even more prone to prioritizing cohesion. Not only are these militaries likely to be more sensitive to the risk of internal rifts, but they also often lack robust military justice systems and bodies of doctrine capable of evaluating the legality of orders and providing guidance for action. The case of Liberia illustrates. When asked in the survey what the Liberian military’s motto, “A Force for Good,” meant to them, many soldiers in the sample gave definitions that emphasized cohesion: “A force that can’t ever be factionalized,” “United,” and “Here to stay.”

⁸⁵ Baron and Spranca, “Protected Values,” p. 1; Robert Jervis, “Understanding Beliefs,” *Political Psychology* Vol. 27, No. 5 (2006), pp. 641–63; and Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁸⁶ Telephone interview with Defense Department official, November 30, 2018.

⁸⁷ An example of private rhetoric is President Reagan’s position on denying arms to El Salvador over human rights abuses committed in their civil war: “We don’t throw out our friends just because they can’t pass the ‘saliva test’ on human rights.” President Ronald Reagan, “Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting,” February 6, 1981, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. III: Soviet Union, January 1981-January 1983 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2016), Doc. 15.

HYPOTHESES

In summary, I predict that norm conflict will weaken support for liberal norms, undermining their robustness by making them less salient in crises.⁸⁸ Rather prompting soldiers to choose human rights over civilian control, as the United States expects, moments of norm conflict are more likely to undermine support for both norms and prompt flight to a third norm of cohesion, which is consistent with interests. This argument produces the following hypotheses:

H1: Moments of norm conflict reduce soldiers' willingness to prioritize human rights over civilian control.

H2: Moments of norm conflict reduce soldiers' support for democratic norms.

H3: Moments of norm conflict increase soldiers' prioritization of cohesion.

In contrast, U.S. policy expectations predict that soldiers experiencing norm conflict will choose to prioritize human rights. Although this choice temporarily rank-orders human rights over civilian control, norm conflicts might even enhance—or at least not undermine—support for democratic norms. This suggests the following hypotheses:

H4: Moments of norm conflict increase soldiers' willingness to prioritize human rights over civilian control.

H5: Moments of norm conflict increase soldiers' support for democratic norms.

Finally, I consider how liberal foreign military training might condition how militaries respond to norm conflict. On the one hand, to the extent that training promotes liberal norms and actively socializes a norm hierarchy of “people first,” then U.S. training should strengthen the

⁸⁸ In the exploratory analyses that follow, I look at individual-level compliance and support as one dimension of norm robustness. Other dimensions beyond the scope of this article include “concordance, third-party reactions to norm violations... and implementation.” See Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann, “Norms under Challenge: Unpacking the Dynamics of Norm Robustness,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* Vol. 4, No. 1 (2019), p. 2.

propensity to prioritize human rights. On the other hand, training helps to create cohesion over time. Not only does training cultivate a common identity, teamwork, and solidarity at the individual level, it increases military autonomy and indirectly gives rise to organizational interests. Training thus might strengthen cohesion at the expense of liberal norms should norm conflict arise. These alternatives suggest the final two hypotheses:

H6a: Soldiers with U.S. training will be less likely to prioritize human rights or support liberal norms in moments of norm conflict.

H6b: Soldiers with U.S. training will be more likely to prioritize human rights and support liberal norms in moments of norm conflict.

SCOPE CONDITIONS AND CAVEATS

Before turning to the empirical analyses, I consider the conditions under which norm conflicts are more likely to occur and where their effects are more likely to be severe. The first two scope conditions are regime type and institutional strength—the likelihood and severity of norm conflict may increase in weak democracies. First, states that are democratic or pseudo-democratic tend to at least pay lip service to both norms. These are also the states that are most likely to receive norms training, meaning that the seeds of the dilemma are present.⁸⁹ Second, new or weak democracies with transitional institutions are often prone to preference divergence between the government and the population, creating situations that may prompt elites to try and use the military against the population.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Other mechanisms can drive norm violations, but for norm conflict to occur both norms must be present to some degree—otherwise there is no contradiction.

⁹⁰ Indeed, cases of political upheaval in the developing world often feature embattled governments ordering militaries to repress protests, forcing the military to choose sides. Coups occurred in Nigeria in the 1960s, for example, after military commanders had to choose between fighting to “maintain the government in power or overthrowing it themselves.” Nordlinger, *Soldiers and Politics*, p. 91.

Moreover, such states typically have weak institutions and fragile rule-of-law. Strong courts, legislatures, and military justice systems both constrain rulers from making illegal orders and create accountability and guidance for militaries. This is one reason why norm conflicts surface less frequently in established democracies and, if they do, why their effects are likely to be less severe. For example, when U.S. President Donald Trump suggested in 2018 that soldiers would shoot in response to rocks thrown by migrants along the Mexican border, military leaders and analysts quickly emphasized that such a disproportionate response would be illegal.⁹¹ Even if norm conflicts vitiate normative considerations, institutions restrain behavior. The U.S. Uniform Code of Military Justice, for example, provides legal guidance for military decision-making. Robust legal institutions capable of adjudicating between such conflicts, however, are almost always missing in the weak states where the most norms training occurs.

Militaries' mission orientations may also affect the likelihood of norm conflict and the severity of its effects. Militaries with internal security orientations are far more likely to face scenarios where norm conflict can surface.⁹² Conversely, established democracies generally avoid using the military for domestic law enforcement. Tension between respect for human rights and civilian control of the military would not seem as remote in the U.S. context if the U.S. military were used for law enforcement, a problem foreseen by the Posse Comitatus act of 1878 that banned use of the military in policing functions. Even still, the United States has had

⁹¹ The Associated Press, "Equating Rocks with Rifles, Trump Proposes Radical New Rules of Engagement for Troops Along Border," *Military Times*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/11/01/equating-rocks-with-rifles-trump-proposes-radical-new-rules-of-engagement-for-troops-along-border/>; Tara Copp, "Here are the Rules of Engagement for Troops Deploying to the Mexican Border," *Military Times*, November 2, 2018, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/11/02/here-are-the-rules-of-engagement-for-troops-deploying-to-the-mexican-border/>; and "Equating Rocks with Rifles."

⁹² This might also affect the degree to which norm conflict is perceived, which is an important question for future research.

flashpoints historically where states used their national guards to repress protests and resist implementation of desegregation laws.⁹³ More recently, the potential for this problem surfaced in 2020 with debate over the role of the military in containing nation-wide protests against police brutality and systemic racism. After the president deployed 1,600 active-duty troops to Washington, D.C., in June 2020, one analyst wrote: “Such action weakens the fundamental contract between the military and the American people.”⁹⁴

Finally, a caveat is in order. The theoretical argument presented here concerns the micro-foundations of military decision-making and the conditions under which norm violations occur. It is not a theory of military behavior—the argument does not predict *which* norms will be violated in a given crisis, only that conflict weakens norms, making it more likely that norm violations will occur. To explore the empirical implications, the analyses that follow look at the pathways by which individual shifts in attitudes occur.

The decision to focus on attitudinal shifts, rather than behavioral outcomes, has theoretical justification and academic precedent. First, studying how beliefs and attitudes change is valuable in its own right. We cannot assume that beliefs change just because behavior changes (or vice versa). Robert Jervis has noted that while beliefs often drive behavior, “such a correspondence is not automatic.”⁹⁵ By studying each stage separately, we can better assess whether and how

⁹³ For example, the events of May 4, 1970, when members of the Ohio National Guard fired on anti-war student protestors at Kent State University, killing four and injuring nine. See Jerry M. Lewis and Thomas R. Hensley, “The May 4 Shootings at Kent State University: The Search for Historical Accuracy,” Kent State University website, <https://www.kent.edu/may-4-historical-accuracy>. In 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower deployed Army troops to Little Rock after the governor called on the Arkansas National Guard to block school integration. See Jonathon Berlin and Kori Rumore, “12 Times the President Called in the Military Domestically,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 27, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-national-guard-deployments-timeline-htlmstory.html>.

⁹⁴ Paula Thornhill, “‘Beyond the Beltway’—What’s the Civil-Military Crisis?” *War on the Rocks*, June 17, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/beyond-the-beltway-whats-the-civil-military-crisis/>.

⁹⁵ Jervis, “Understanding Beliefs,” p. 657.

changes in attitudes affect behavior.⁹⁶ This is particularly important when dealing with complex social processes such as military behavior in domestic crises. This approach has precedent in the psychology literature, which tends either to study attitude changes as the dependent variable, or the effects of attitudes on behavior as independent or intervening variables.⁹⁷

While this article focuses on the effects of norm conflict on military attitudes toward norms, rather than behavioral outcomes, a large psychology literature shows that attitudes are strong predictors of intentions, which in turn shape behavior.⁹⁸ Studies in this vein have shown that when people have competing attitudes, they act in line with the strongest attitude.⁹⁹

We can use these insights to consider the predicted behavioral implications, although direct tests remain an important step for future research. On the one hand, the U.S. policy expectation is that militaries will continue to prioritize liberal norms, which should in turn continue to shape behavior in benign ways. Even if prioritizing human rights means defying civilian orders, we would expect to see fewer abuses and less intervention if the policy expectation is correct that

⁹⁶ Jack Levy also calls for two-stage approaches that measure both belief and behavior change. See Jack S. Levy, “Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield,” *International Organization* Vol. 48, No. 2 (1994), pp. 279–312.

⁹⁷ Alice H. Eagly, “Uneven Progress: Social Psychology and the Study of Attitudes,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* Vol. 63, No. 5 (1992), p. 705.

⁹⁸ The theory of reasoned action and its extension, the theory of planned behavior argue that attitudes and norms shape intentions, which are the immediate predictors of behavior. See Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, *Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975); and Icek Ajzen, “The Theory of Planned Behavior,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Theories of Cognitive Self-Regulation* Vol. 50, No. 2 (1991), pp. 179–211. The theory of planned behavior has been used to predict a wide range of behaviors from road rage to vaccination. See, for example, Haozhe Cong, Xiaomeng Shi, Jill Cooper, Zhi Ye, Zijian Suo, Xinwei Zhao, Zhirui Ye, and Cong Chen, “Road Rage in China: An Exploratory Study,” *Journal of Transportation Safety & Security* Vol. 13, No. 5 (2021), pp. 503–24; and Liora Shmueli, “Predicting Intention to Receive COVID-19 Vaccine among the General Population Using the Health Belief Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior Model,” *BMC Public Health* Vol. 21, No. 1 (2021), pp. 1–13. Other models linking attitudes to behavior include Alice H. Eagly and Shelly Chaiken, *The Psychology of Attitudes* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Harcourt, Brace, & Janovich, 1993).

⁹⁹ Andrew R. Davidson and Diane M. Morrison, “Predicting Contraceptive Behavior from Attitudes: A Comparison of Within- Versus Across-Subjects Procedures,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* Vol. 45, No. 5 (1983), pp. 997–1009.

temporarily choosing human rights does not erode the norm of civilian control. On the other hand, if norm conflict reduces support for liberal norms and soldiers prioritize cohesion instead, the potential for norm-violating behavior increases. Cohesion is not inherently incompatible with liberal norms and does not automatically predict violations. But it does predict that soldiers will do whatever best serves cohesion, whether that means violating one or both liberal norms.

A broad comparative literature picks up the question of behavioral outcomes, asking when militaries repress revolutions or defect from the regime instead.¹⁰⁰ These works examine how the regime and the opposition can activate different military interests and identities.¹⁰¹ Many studies suggest that the decision to defect or to obey hinges on military cohesion and whether militaries think that repression will undermine cohesion.¹⁰² In short, this literature explains the paths that behavior can take once cohesion is a dominant factor in military decision-making. My study is antecedent and explores the micro-foundations of decision-making to explain how cohesion comes to occupy a central place in military concerns, over and above liberal normative

¹⁰⁰ Note that revolutions are an extreme case; my argument does not require revolutionary moments, just a conflict between the imperatives to protect people and to obey political leaders, which could happen during unrest short of widescale rebellion.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Aurel Croissant, David Kuehn, and Tanja Eschenauer, “The ‘Dictator’s Endgame’: Explaining Military Behavior in Nonviolent Anti-Incumbent Mass Protests,” *Democracy and Security* Vol. 14, No. 2 (2018), pp. 174–99; Holger Albrecht and Dorothy Ohl, “Exit, Resistance, Loyalty: Military Behavior during Unrest in Authoritarian Regimes,” *Perspectives on Politics* Vol. 14, No. 1 (2016), pp. 38–52; Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East”; Michael Makara, “Coup-Proofing, Military Defection, and the Arab Spring,” *Democracy and Security* Vol. 9, No. 4 (2013), pp. 334–359; and Lee, “Military Cohesion and Regime Maintenance.”

¹⁰² See Lee, “Military Cohesion and Regime Maintenance”; Barany, *How Armies Respond to Revolutions and Why*; Morency-Laflamme, “A Question of Trust”; and McLauchlin, “Loyalty Strategies and Military Defection in Rebellion.” David Pion-Berlin et al. and Eva Bellin suggest that militaries are more likely to disobey orders when they worry that repression will undermine cohesion. Pion-Berlin, Esparza, and Grisham, “Staying Quartered”; and Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East.” The implication is that cohesive militaries will be more likely to repress, but this is not necessarily true. Cohesion could also make units more likely to defy orders. See Jesse Paul Lehrke, “A Cohesion Model to Assess Military Arbitration of Revolutions,” *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 40, No. 1 (2014), pp. 156–157; and Siebold, “The Essence of Military Group Cohesion,” p. 293.

considerations.¹⁰³

Finally, cases in Tunisia and Egypt tentatively illustrate the divergent behavioral outcomes. In Tunisia, mass protests in 2011 jeopardized Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's grasp on power. Rather than repress the protests, the military withdrew support from the regime, allowing Ben Ali to fall—but the decision to prioritize human rights did not correspond to reduced support for civilian control.¹⁰⁴ In short, the behavioral outcomes aligned to U.S. expectations. Egypt's case initially followed a similar trajectory. When protests erupted against Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the chief of staff of the armed forces assured the U.S. military “that the armed forces would defend Egyptian institutions, not individuals, and would not open fire on civilians.”¹⁰⁵ Yet after Mubarak's fall and democratic elections in 2012, the military intervened again a year later, seizing power. Under General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, elected president in 2014, human rights abuses soared, pointing to an erosion of both norms. The argument advanced here shows a causal pathway by which norm conflict may have created the conditions that allowed interests to dominate the Egyptian military's decision-making. The Egyptian case is noteworthy because it serves as a behavioral model for other militaries. In an interview with two AFL officers, I asked directly what they might do if the norms of human rights and civilian control came into conflict. Without pausing, they answered: “Egypt.”¹⁰⁶ They were referring to the Egyptian military in 2011, but the answer is troubling when we take a longer-term view of outcomes in Egypt.

¹⁰³ Cohesion is a group-oriented norm, while liberal norms tend to be individually held beliefs. The micro-foundations explored here also suggest that norm conflict could activate tension between individual and group norms, an important question for future research.

¹⁰⁴ David Kuehn, “Midwives or Gravediggers of Democracy? The Military's Impact on Democratic Development,” *Democratization* Vol. 24, No. 5 (2017), pp. 786. For a discussion of the case, see Risa Brooks, “Abandoned at the Palace: Why the Tunisian Military Defected from the Ben Ali Regime in January 2011,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 36, No. 2 (2013), pp. 205–20.

¹⁰⁵ Scott Shane and David D. Kirkpatrick, “Military Caught Between Mubarak and Protesters,” *New York Times*, February 10, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/11/world/middleeast/11military.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with AFL officers A and B, Monrovia, July 19, 2017.

Research Design

To explore the hypotheses, I designed an experiment embedded in a survey of active-duty AFL personnel across military bases in Liberia. The experiment primes soldiers in the treatment group to think about norm conflict by asking them to consider a scenario in which the president orders the military to put down protests with force. The scenario asks soldiers to evaluate the commander's response, rather than asking them for their preferences directly, thus helping to avoid potentially biased responses.¹⁰⁷

Liberia represents an environment where we might expect liberal norm conflict not only to occur but also to lead to pernicious outcomes. Dysfunctional civil-military relations contributed to 14 years of civil war that ravaged the country between 1989 and 2003.¹⁰⁸ Today, Liberia is a transitional democracy; elections in 2017 marked the first peaceful transition of power in over 70 years.¹⁰⁹ Rule of law has yet to fully mature; as of 2017, the AFL still lacked a functioning military justice system.¹¹⁰ But while Liberia is a typical case for liberal norm conflict, it is not an

¹⁰⁷ The alternative would be to ask people directly what they would do in such a situation. This could result in biased estimates if people perceived truthful answers as socially undesirable. See Theresa DeMaio, "Social Desirability and Survey Measurement: A Review," in *Surveying Subjective Phenomenon*, ed. C. Turner, and E. Martin (Thousand Oaks, Cali.: Sage, 1984). Another problem is that people may not correctly identify their true preferences. See Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions," *The Journal of Business* Vol. 59, No. 4 (1986), pp. S251–78; Amos Tversky and Richard H. Thaler, "Anomalies: Preference Reversals," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1990), pp. 201–11.

¹⁰⁸ For background on civil-military relations prior to the 1980 coup that put Sgt. Samuel Doe in power, see the Central Intelligence Agency, "Liberia," National Intelligence Survey (Washington, D.C.: 1973). For background on the war, as well as historical U.S. security assistance in Liberia, see Josef Teboho Ansonge and Nana Akua Antwi-Ansonge, "Monopoly, Legitimacy, Force: DDR-SSR Liberia," in Melanne A. Civic and Michael Miklaucic, eds., *Monopoly of Force: The Nexus of DDR and SSR* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 2011).

¹⁰⁹ "White House: Liberia Transfer of Power a 'Major Milestone,'" *Reuters*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-liberia-election-usa/white-house-liberia-transfer-of-power-a-major-milestone-idUSKBN1EN1K7>.

¹¹⁰ Interview with UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) officials A and B, Monrovia, July 17, 2017.

easy case for the theory. After the war, the United States rebuilt the AFL from scratch.¹¹¹ The U.S. training program heavily emphasized norms, socializing the Liberian military to respect human rights and civilian authority. The program architects believed that liberal norms were key to preventing a repeat of the brutal civil war; by trainers' accounts, the message fell on receptive ears.¹¹² The war had shattered old norms and AFL recruits were eager for change, making Liberia a most-likely case in which to find liberal norms take root. Interviews with the AFL leadership further revealed that the United States tried to instill a preference ordering among the norms, teaching the AFL only to obey legal orders.

Two additional criteria make Liberia a valuable case for assessing the effects of U.S. training. First, the high level of U.S. involvement helps to shed light on causal pathways. Cases with “extreme” values on independent variables are useful for illustrating mechanisms.¹¹³ Second, exposure to post-war U.S. training varied across recruits, who joined the military in eight waves. The variation comes from the nature of the army-building program, which tapered off partially by design and partially because it ran out of money before completion.¹¹⁴ In the end, roughly one-third of the force received the full U.S. training sequence; one-third received partial U.S. training; and one-third received no U.S. training. I leverage this variation, described in detail below, to explore differences in experimental treatment effects across levels of training.

¹¹¹ The United States and UN divided post-conflict security sector reform in Liberia, with the United States supporting military reform and UNMIL supporting police and rule-of-law reform. As a result, I focus here on U.S. efforts to rebuild the AFL. For more information on UN efforts, see UNMIL, “Background,” <https://unmil.unmissions.org/background>.

¹¹² Zoom interview with former DynCorp instructor A, May 27, 2021; Zoom interview with former DynCorp instructors B and C, June 5, 2021.

¹¹³ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005); Jason Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹¹⁴ The program was funded by a one-time appropriation from Congress. When the money ran out, the program ended. Telephone interview with State Department official A, August 21, 2014; and Sean McFate, *Building Better Armies: An Insider's Account of Liberia* (Carlisle, Penn.: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2013), p. 30.

I partnered with a local survey firm, Q&A, to administer the survey in December 2017.¹¹⁵ The survey was conducted among 270 AFL respondents, using a multistage sampling process that involved drawing a random sample of respondents from every unit roster on bases across the country.¹¹⁶ While the sample is small, it would have been difficult to obtain a larger one due to the size of the AFL, which is less than 2,000 personnel. According to roster numbers, the sample represented around 15 percent of the force; because of the small size, however, I treat the results that follow as a plausibility probe of the argument. The survey sample is representative of the force, with AFL recruitment batch, rank, and gender distributions tracking closely to the population. Ranks in the sample ranged from private to colonel; the median rank was specialist and the median age was 37 years old.¹¹⁷

EXPERIMENT DESIGN

I designed the experiment to prime respondents to conflict between the norms of human rights and civilian control. Respondents who were randomly assigned to the treatment group heard the following scenario: “After a big tariff increase, local business owners go on strike and there are protests in the streets. The Liberian National Police are managing it, but the president wants to send a forceful message and calls on the military to intervene to stop the protests. The military commander refuses to send soldiers into the streets to stop the protests.” Immediately afterwards, as part of the treatment condition, respondents were asked to choose the statement

¹¹⁵ Two factors drove the survey’s timing: the 2017 elections and the March 2018 closure of UNMIL. December 2017 represented a window of opportunity to evaluate the effects of training on the AFL after the main effort had ended but before the political status quo changed.

¹¹⁶ See the supplementary materials for additional details on the sampling procedure.

¹¹⁷ There were only two general officers in the military at the time of the survey, both of whom participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Summary statistics are in the supplementary materials.

closest to their own opinion about the case: “The military should not have intervened, it was an illegal order”; “The military should have intervened, it was a legal order”; or “It does not matter, as long as the military follows the commander’s orders and sticks together.”

To ensure that the treatment scenario represented a salient example of norm conflict, I worked with AFL leadership to design the scenario. They identified this scenario as a clear example of an illegal order that soldiers ought to refuse to obey.¹¹⁸ The AFL’s constitutional role is modeled after that of the United States, with similar restrictions on military involvement in domestic law enforcement.¹¹⁹ Moreover, this scenario has historical precedence as a civil-military flashpoint in Liberia, as evidenced by the 1979 rice riots.¹²⁰

Respondents who were randomly assigned to the control group did not hear any scenario. Because the treatment condition includes a follow-up question that I use to construct a measure of prioritizing cohesion (described below), respondents in the control group received a similarly structured question about a topic unrelated to human rights, civilian control, or cohesion. They were asked to choose the statement closest to their own opinion about AFL participation in international peacekeeping:¹²¹ “International peacekeeping should be a primary mission for the

¹¹⁸ In fact, the scenario was based on a real (but unpublicized) dispute between AFL and Liberian political leadership that occurred in 2017.

¹¹⁹ The 2008 National Defense Act states: “At no time during peacetime... shall the AFL engage in law enforcement within Liberia.” In emergencies, the AFL may assist law enforcement “only as a last resort, when the threat exceeds the capacity of law enforcement agencies to respond.” The scenario notes that the police are “managing” the situation, which AFL leaders felt sent a clear signal that the order was illegal.

¹²⁰ Real-world events can interfere with treatment effects, particularly if events are frequent or have lasting effects. While the rice riots were important, they occurred 38 years prior to the survey, before the median respondent was born. To the extent that effects persisted, it is unclear in what direction they might affect results. “Pretreatment” through real-world events can lead to underestimating treatment effects. See Brian J. Gaines, James H. Kuklinski, and Paul J. Quirk, “The Logic of the Survey Experiment Reexamined,” *Political Analysis* Vol. 15, No. 1 (2007), pp. 12–15. If anything, the events of 1979 might make respondents more attuned to human rights, biasing results in favor of policy expectations.

¹²¹ International peacekeeping is not controversial in the Liberian context. It is an AFL mission outlined in the 2008 National Defense Act, although opinions vary over whether it should be a primary or secondary mission.

AFL”; “It is okay to contribute to international peacekeeping occasionally, but not as a primary mission”; or “It does not matter, as long as the military executes the mission successfully.”

After hearing the scenario (or control prompt), respondents were asked a series of questions designed to probe their support for liberal norms. First, I tested respondents’ willingness to prioritize human rights. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the following statement on a scale from 1 (“Not at all”) to 4 (“A lot”): “The military should follow an approach that prioritizes the security of the people over the security of the government.”¹²²

Second, I tested respondents’ support for democracy and its alternatives, such as military rule, which represents a rejection of liberal civilian authority. For these questions, I used standardized language from Afrobarometer public opinion surveys that have been conducted several times in Liberia.¹²³ Respondents were asked whether they would disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: “Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office”; “The army comes in to govern the country”; and “Elections and the House of Representatives are abolished so that the president can decide everything.” For each alternative, respondents expressed disapproval or approval on a scale from 1 (“Strongly disapprove”) to 5 (“Strongly approve”). Next, respondents were asked to choose the statement closest to their own opinion from three options: “Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government”; “In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable”; and “For someone like me, it doesn’t matter what kind of government we have.” Because these response options are

¹²² I use the term “security of the people” to capture the concept of human rights because the Liberian and U.S. militaries talk about the military’s role in protecting human rights in similar terms. Interview with AFL Deputy Chief of Staff, Monrovia, July 20, 2017; and U.S. Africa Command, *Testimony of Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser*, p. 5.

¹²³ See Afrobarometer Data, “Liberia Round 6,” 2015, <http://www.afrobarometer.org>. Afrobarometer considers respondents as “fully demanding democracy” when they explicitly support democracy *and* reject its alternatives.

categorical, the results that follow use a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the respondent chose the first option and 0 otherwise.

To evaluate whether respondents prioritized cohesion after hearing the scenario, I code a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the respondent chose the third response option to the treatment question (“It does not matter, as long as the military follows the commander’s orders and sticks together”) or control question (“It does not matter, as long as the military executes the mission successfully”). These options sought to capture a rough measure of prioritizing cohesion in each case. Because the treatment and control questions are not worded identically, this measure cannot provide conclusive evidence of causality. However, it can offer suggestive evidence about the effects of norm conflict on preferences over cohesion. I also use additional tests, presented below, to further explore how perceptions of cohesion shape preferences. Figure 2 summarizes the treatment and control conditions and Table 1 summarizes the outcome measures.

Figure 2: Experiment Design

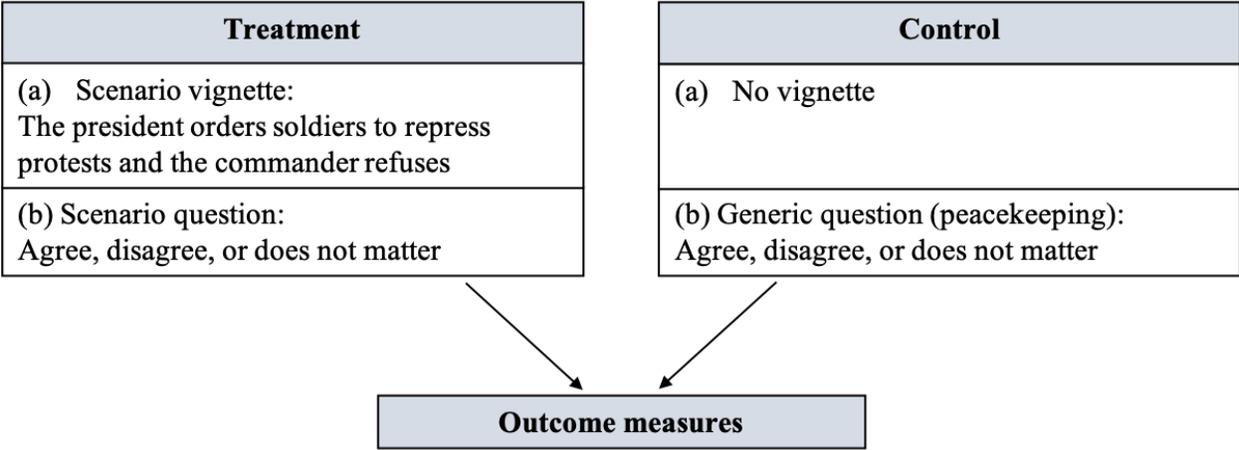


Table 1: Outcome Measures

Concept	Variable	Type	Value
Human rights	Prioritize security of the people	Scale	1 (not at all) to 4 (a lot)
Civilian control	Always prefer democracy	Binary indicator	1 = yes, 0 = no
	Support army rule	Scale	1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
	Support one-party rule	Scale	1 to 5
	Support one-person rule	Scale	1 to 5
Cohesion	Prioritize cohesion	Binary indicator	1 = yes, 0 = no

MEASURING U.S. TRAINING

To evaluate the conditional effects of foreign military training on how soldiers respond to norm conflict, I leverage individual-level data on exposure to U.S. training. The U.S. program to rebuild the AFL began in 2006, with recruits entering the new force in eight groups called “batches” between 2006 and 2015.¹²⁴ The first batch of recruits was a “proof of concept” class or, as the instructors called them, the “guinea pigs”;¹²⁵ 105 soldiers entered basic training in July 2006 and 102 graduated five months later.¹²⁶ The entire batch moved together through 11 weeks of Initial Entry Training (IET), four weeks of Advanced Individual Training, and a four-week Basic Non-commissioned Officer Course (BNOC).¹²⁷ Eleven candidates with bachelor’s degrees proceeded to an additional six-week Officer Candidate School (OCS), forming the fledgling AFL officer corps. The second batch entered basic training in July 2007.

The active period of U.S. training ran from 2006 to 2008 and was primarily executed by two firms, DynCorp International and Pacific Architects & Engineers (PAE).¹²⁸ The early training

¹²⁴ The majority of soldiers were inducted in batches 2-5, with smaller classes in batches 1 and 6-8.

¹²⁵ Interview with AFL Deputy Chief of Staff, Monrovia, July 20, 2017.

¹²⁶ Telephone interview with former U.S. Embassy official, June 13, 2017.

¹²⁷ Mark Malan, *Security Sector Reform in Liberia: Mixed Results from Humble Beginnings* (Carlisle Barracks, Penn.: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2008), pp. 33–34.

¹²⁸ The State Department awarded a contract to DynCorp and PAE to conduct the training, in part because

heavily emphasized liberal norms. As one of the program designers put it, “Early planners at DynCorp believed that after 14 years of civil war, most Liberians knew how to fire an AK-47 but did not know when or at whom.”¹²⁹ To remedy this imbalance, DynCorp brought in Liberian academics, international organizations, and other experts to conduct three weeks of intensive training on the laws of war, civil-military relations, and human rights that “dwarfed all other training.”¹³⁰ The three-week curriculum was the first casualty of funding shortfalls,¹³¹ but norms training continued alongside technical training from basic training through OCS.¹³²

AFL officers recalled basic training as “culture shock.”¹³³ They described some of the ideas they were exposed to in basic training as “intriguing” while other ideas seemed “goofy”—for example, doing push-ups as punishment for not shining boots. Eventually, however, the need for discipline and teamwork began to make sense.¹³⁴ As the soldiers went through basic training, their American instructors “kept beating it into [their] heads that the military’s role was to serve the population, subject to civilian control.”¹³⁵ This emphasis was “surprising”; there was “a lot of new doctrine being preached.”¹³⁶ Yet it pushed them to ask: “Why did the former AFL conduct itself the way that it did?”¹³⁷

the firms emphasized their commitment to norms training. Interview with former DynCorp official A, Washington, D.C., June 28, 2017. For detailed accounts of the program, see McFate, *Building Better Armies*; and Malan, *Security Sector Reform in Liberia*.

¹²⁹ McFate, *Building Better Armies*, p. 85. Other program architects confirmed this belief. Zoom interview with former DynCorp official C, May 14, 2021.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ The State Department ordered DynCorp to pare down the curriculum after batch 1 as a cost-saving measure. Interview with former DynCorp official B, Monrovia, December 14, 2017. Also see McFate, *Building Better Armies*, p. 87.

¹³² Interview with AFL officers A and B, Monrovia, July 19, 2017.

¹³³ *Ibid.* Basic aspects of soldiering were new to most recruits because of the decision to disband the old AFL and extensively vet new recruits. As a result, relatively few recruits had prior combat experience either as rebels or as government forces.

¹³⁴ Interview with AFL Deputy Chief of Staff, Monrovia, July 20, 2017.

¹³⁵ Interview with AFL Chief of Staff, Monrovia, July 18, 2017.

¹³⁶ Interview with AFL officers A and B, Monrovia, July 19, 2017.

¹³⁷ Interview with AFL Deputy Chief of Staff, Monrovia, July 20, 2017.

Importantly, exposure to U.S. training varied across the recruitment batches, which allows me to test for heterogeneous treatment effects. Batches 1 through 3 received the full U.S. training sequence, while the middle batches (4-5) received varying amounts of training within and between batches.¹³⁸ The final three batches received no U.S. training.¹³⁹ By 2009, all training responsibilities had transitioned to Liberian lead, with DynCorp in an observation role only for batch 6. Four years later, the AFL managed its own recruitment and basic training for batch 7, followed by the final batch in 2015.

The amount and quality of training that the Liberian-led batches received plummeted after batch 5; the emphasis on norms dropped off as well. The emphasis on norms had been rooted in the trainers' beliefs about the causes and effects of Liberia's war, and faded as the Americans cycled out. A larger problem was the lack of Liberian resources or capacity to train on their own. Because the Liberians were not prepared to field their own BNOC or OCS classes, batches 6-8 failed to produce more than a handful of NCOs and officers. In 2017, a U.S. military training team went to Liberia to help design new OCS and BNOC courses. They found only one working computer on the training base. All prior curricula had vanished.¹⁴⁰

For the tests that follow, I operationalize U.S. training in two ways. In the main results, I collapse the *Batch* variable into a dummy *Training* variable that takes a value of 1 if the respondent joined the AFL in batches 1-5 (any U.S. training) and 0 otherwise. Robustness tests reported in the supplementary materials use a trichotomous *Training* variable that takes a value

¹³⁸ Batches 1-3 received the entire sequence from IET through OCS, with most soldiers then attending military occupational specialties (MOS) training and basic officer leader courses in the United States. Batches 4-5 had an abridged sequence, with BNOC dropping out for officers and fewer soldiers receiving additional training. Interview with AFL officers A and B, Monrovia, July 19, 2017.

¹³⁹ Nor did they receive comparable training from any other international actors.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with mobile training team members A and B, Monrovia, July 14, 2017. The first Liberian-led OCS class graduated in July 2017, but the Liberian government refused to commission any of the graduates, a decision that onlookers felt reflected a lack of confidence in the training.

of 0 if the respondent is in batches 6-8 (no training); 1 if in batches 4-5 (partial training); and 2 if in batches 1-3 (full training).

Results

BASELINE RESULTS

As a first cut at the analyses, I conduct difference-in-means tests across the experimental groups. These tests compare average responses across the treatment and control groups, which allows us to evaluate the effects of hearing the norm conflict scenario. Because my argument and policy expectations make opposing predictions, all of the hypothesis tests are two-tailed. Table 2 reports the results.¹⁴¹

The results show that respondents who are exposed to norm conflict—the treatment—are less likely to support prioritizing human rights. Hearing the scenario about the government ordering the army to repress protests corresponds with a nearly 0.25 unit decrease in a four-point scale for prioritizing human rights. This finding is consistent with H1, which predicts that moments of norm conflict will reduce soldiers' willingness to prioritize human rights over civilian control. It contradicts the policy expectation laid out in H4, which is that soldiers ought to be *more* willing to prioritize human rights. Figure 3 graphs the distribution of support for prioritizing human rights across experimental conditions.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Because two of the outcome measures are binary variables, I run these models using robust standard errors to account for heteroskedasticity. The results are consistent with an alternative specification of a logistic regression model, which is reported in the supplementary materials.

¹⁴² Because the missingness rate is very low, I drop these observations from the sample, following Cyrus Samii, "Perils or Promise of Ethnic Integration? Evidence from a Hard Case in Burundi," *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 107, No. 3 (2013), p. 566.

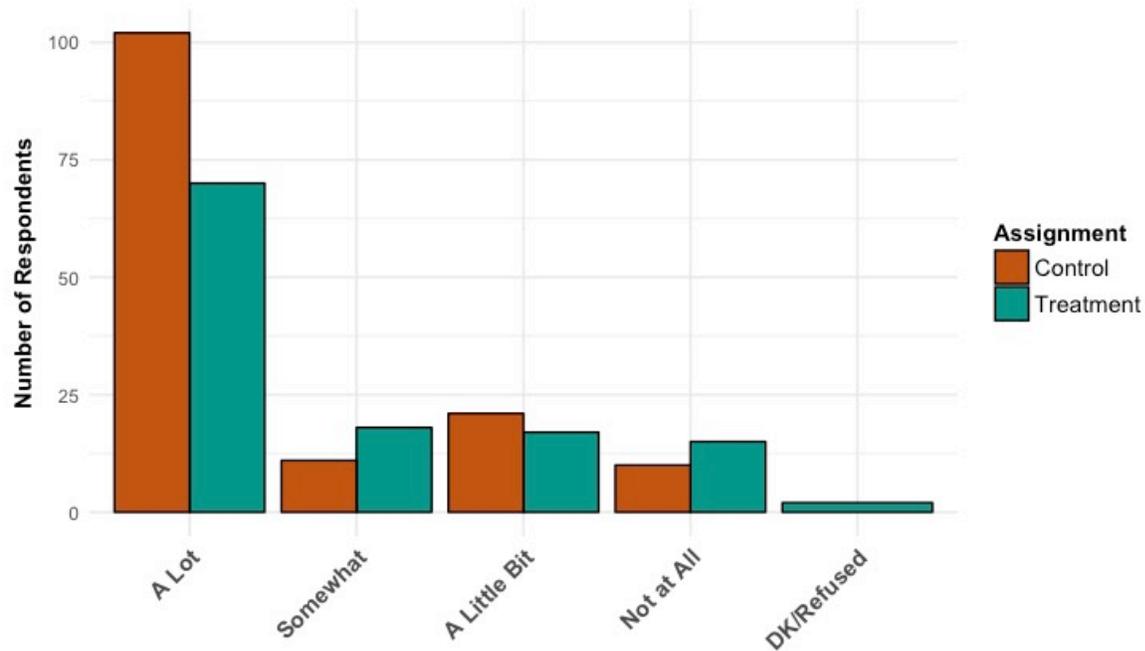
Table 2: Difference in Means for Respondents Assigned to Treatment and Control

Variable	Control Mean	Treat. Mean	Diff.	St. Error	p-value
Prioritize human rights	3.42	3.19	-0.232	0.128	0.07
Support army rule	2.42	2.60	0.171	0.175	0.33
Support one-party rule	1.73	1.62	-0.112	0.117	0.34
Support one-person rule	1.44	1.45	0.012	0.085	0.89
Prefer democracy	0.812	0.806	-0.006	0.048	0.90
Prioritize cohesion	0.15	0.30	0.146	0.050	0.00

The results also suggest that exposure to norm conflict drives soldiers to prioritize cohesion. The likelihood of prioritizing cohesion doubles moving from no conflict (control) to conflict (treatment). This provides additional support for my argument, consistent with H3, which predicts that moments of norm conflict will lead soldiers to prioritize cohesion. Because of how this measure is constructed, however, these results must be interpreted with caution. Additional tests below further probe the relationship between norm conflict and cohesion, lending additional evidence that a connection exists.

The other variables, which measure support for democratic norms, are not significantly different across treatment and control groups. I argue that norm conflict will weaken support for democratic norms (H2), while policy expectations predict that conflict will sharpen support for them (H5). The signs of the baseline results are generally in the expected direction—respondents exposed to norm conflict are slightly more likely to support army rule and one-person rule, and slightly less likely to always prefer democracy—but none of these effects are statistically distinguishable from zero. In short, the results do not clearly support either hypothesis.

Figure 3: Distribution of Support for Prioritizing Human Rights



One interpretation of these null results for H2 is that while moments of norm conflict produce immediate decisions over which norms to prioritize, norm support erodes more slowly over time.¹⁴³ Another possibility is that subsequent acts of norm violation weaken norm support, as soldiers attempt to minimize cognitive dissonance caused by divergence between beliefs and behavior. If prioritizing cohesion leads soldiers to defy civilian orders, for example, then we might expect to see a sharper drop in support for democratic norms. Because the survey only measures shifts in support for norms in the immediate moment of conflict, assessing the effects of subsequent behavior on attitudes remains an important question for future investigation.

Overall, these preliminary results provide mixed support for my argument. The results suggest that moments of norm conflict lead to two key shifts in support for norms: they reduce

¹⁴³ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

soldiers' willingness to prioritize human rights and increase their inclination to prioritize cohesion, although the effects on support for democratic norms are muted. Importantly, these shifts in support for norms undercut two policy assumptions. First, liberal training policy hinges on the expectation that soldiers will prioritize human rights when faced with norm conflict; if anything, the opposite is true. Second, liberal policy ignores the possibility that soldiers will prioritize cohesion, but the results suggest that soldiers may choose this norm instead. While cohesion itself does not automatically predict violation of human rights or civilian control, it creates the conditions under which one or both norm violations can occur. These initial comparisons, however, mask variation across subgroups that I explore next.

CONDITIONAL EFFECTS OF TRAINING

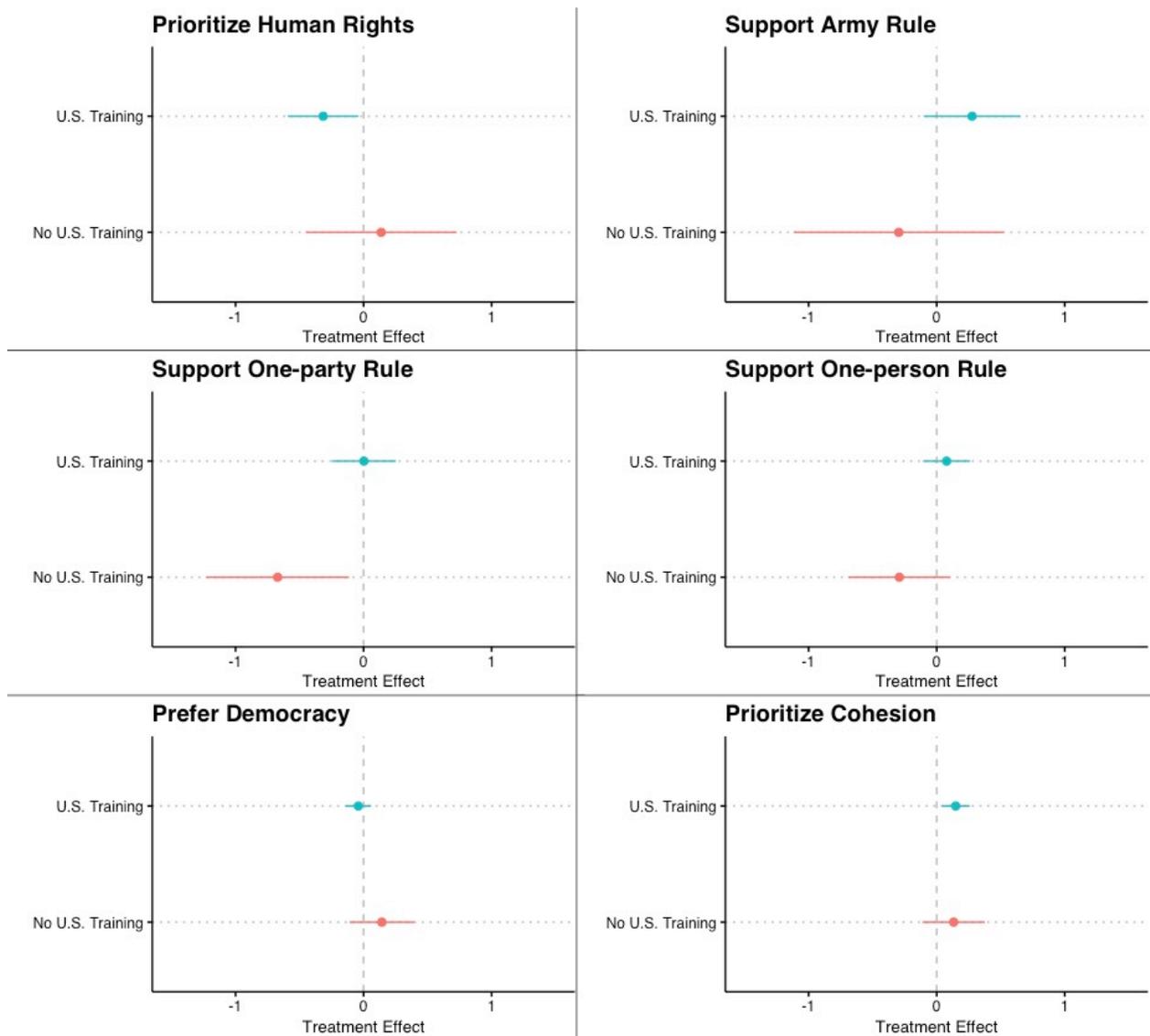
To examine how U.S. training affects response to norm conflict, I compare differences in means across treatment and control groups again, this time conditioned on level of prior training. As a reminder, I use the *Training* dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the respondent was in an AFL recruitment group that had U.S. training and 0 otherwise.¹⁴⁴ Figure 4 presents the results.

The results suggest that U.S. training leads soldiers to react *less* in line with policy expectations and more in line with my argument. Respondents with U.S. training are significantly less likely to express willingness to prioritize human rights after hearing the norm conflict scenario. They are somewhat less likely to express absolute support for democracy and somewhat more likely to express support for army rule, although these results are not statistically distinguishable from zero. In contrast, respondents without U.S. training are significantly less likely to express support for one-party rule and somewhat less likely to support one-person rule.

¹⁴⁴ Additional tests reported in the supplementary materials use the trichotomous training variable.

Finally, U.S.-trained respondents are significantly more likely to emphasize cohesion when exposed to norm conflict. Even though not all of the differences are statistically significant, the pattern of coefficients is consistent across measures and provides support for H6a, which predicts that U.S. training will make respondents less willing to prioritize liberal norms.

Figure 4: Effects of Norm Conflict, Conditioned on Level of Training



Note: Figure 4 graphs the contrasts between treatment and control groups for soldiers with and without U.S. training. Results shown with 95 percent confidence intervals.

It is possible that these results are an artifact of small sample size, because there were only 49 respondents in the “no U.S. training” category.¹⁴⁵ More likely, however, is that it reflects growing identification with the military institution associated with training and time in service. People who have been in the military longer, receiving more training and socialization, perceive a higher need to protect the organization and become more likely to prioritize cohesion. If this is the case, then the apparent willingness to prioritize human rights among the least-trained soldiers might reflect less loyalty to the military institution—a quality that would, paradoxically, make them worse soldiers. It is also worth considering that militaries are hierarchical institutions: leaders give orders and the rank-and-file obey. In the Liberian case, respondents with more U.S. training are also more likely to have command roles. In a crisis, these respondents would be the decision-makers issuing orders. The fact that they were less willing to prioritize human rights or support liberal norms when exposed to the norm conflict scenario has troubling implications for behavioral outcomes in a real-world crisis.

Exploring the Mechanisms

EFFECTS OF TRAINING WITHOUT NORM CONFLICT

Next, I conduct additional tests designed to probe the mechanisms and rule out alternative explanations, including that socialization never happened and time in service alone explains attitudes toward norms. First, respondents in the survey sample with the most U.S. training are also the soldiers with the most time in service; in other words, U.S. training is collinear to tenure in the military. Rather than U.S. training conditioning the effects of norm conflict, it is possible

¹⁴⁵ Of the 49, 27 were assigned to the control group and 22 were assigned to the treatment group.

that tenure in the military conditions attitudes towards norms. If that is the case, then the findings may reflect the failure of training to impart norms in the first place, in line with prevailing arguments about the causes of norm violations among U.S.-trained forces.

To test this alternative explanation, I evaluate the relationship between U.S. training and support for liberal norms in the absence of norm conflict. To do so, I limit the survey sample to respondents who were randomly assigned to the control group and did not hear the norm conflict scenario ($n = 144$). I then estimate models that regress the outcome measures on U.S. training, using the *batch* variable that ranges from batch 1 to batch 8. For ease of interpreting the results that follow, I flip the values of the variable so that higher values indicate earlier batches that received more training.

Each model includes three control variables. The first control variable, *Education*, is included because it could affect both support for liberal norms and exposure to training—for example, soldiers must meet certain English language proficiency standards to qualify for training in the United States. Education also determines eligibility for the officer corps, where soldiers receive additional training. The second control variable, *Wealth*, is an index variable of personal assets commonly used to proxy for wealth.¹⁴⁶ As with education, wealth could affect political preferences as well as the types of education, employment, and training opportunities to which people have access. The third control variable is *Rank*, a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the respondent is in the officer corps. Officers receive different training opportunities and often come from different social backgrounds than rank-and-file soldiers, which could similarly affect attitudes towards norms.

¹⁴⁶ Both control variable questions use standardized language from the Afrobarometer surveys.

Table 3: Training and Support for Liberal Norms

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	<i>OLS</i> Human rights	<i>OLS</i> Army rule	<i>OLS</i> One-party rule	<i>OLS</i> One-person rule	<i>LPM</i> Democracy
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Training	0.078* (0.046)	-0.155** (0.068)	-0.110** (0.047)	-0.106*** (0.033)	0.050*** (0.018)
Education	-0.036 (0.075)	-0.100 (0.110)	0.025 (0.076)	0.075 (0.053)	-0.018 (0.028)
Wealth	0.097 (0.101)	-0.165 (0.147)	0.085 (0.102)	0.007 (0.072)	0.039 (0.045)
Rank	-0.215 (0.378)	0.172 (0.549)	-0.472 (0.382)	-0.484* (0.268)	-0.274 (0.181)
Constant	2.998*** (0.521)	4.221*** (0.767)	1.895*** (0.534)	1.520*** (0.374)	0.584** (0.238)
Observations	144	139	140	140	144

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3 presents the results of ordinary least squares regressions; for the democracy model, because of the binary outcome measure, I use a linear probability model with robust standard errors.¹⁴⁷ The results show that soldiers with more U.S. training are significantly *more* likely to express support for liberal norms than soldiers with less U.S. training. As soldiers move from batch 8 (no training) to batch 1 (full training), they are also much more likely to express willingness to prioritize human rights over regime security. Yet these are the very same soldiers who express less support for norms in the presence of norm conflict. These results help us to

¹⁴⁷ The results are robust to an alternative specification as a logistic regression model, reported in the supplementary materials.

reject the alternative explanation that socialization never happened in the first place. They also help us to reject the argument that tenure in the military alone shapes attitudes towards norms, at least not in ways that are inherently antithetical to liberal norms.

One issue that complicates the ability to interpret these results is that assignment to U.S. training was not random.¹⁴⁸ As a result, it could be that age or time effects also explain variation in attitudes across batches. For example, respondents who joined in batch 1 would have been closer to the war chronologically and thus more affected by it. Age could have a similar effect, with older respondents' preferences shaped by longer exposure to conflict. Two factors help to mitigate these concerns. First, because of the timeline of the U.S. program, batches 1 to 6 were recruited and trained within a narrow window (2006-2009). The largest gap was between batch 6 and batch 7 (2009-2013). Second, the AFL is relatively homogenous in terms of age. In a country with 60 percent of the population under the age of 25, the median AFL soldier is 37 years old. The reason is linked to mass disruption of education during the war—the AFL has struggled to recruit younger people who can meet its literacy requirements.¹⁴⁹ As a result, 87 percent of the survey sample was over the age of 30, reducing concerns over age effects.¹⁵⁰

Another potential inferential issue is that people who joined in earlier batches may have already left the military, leaving behind those most committed to military service and introducing

¹⁴⁸ Assignment to the norm conflict treatment was random, which means that the distribution of covariates across treatment and control groups should be similar. Balance statistics, presented in the supplementary materials, confirm that the distribution of covariates is similar across treatment levels.

¹⁴⁹ For example, all 25,000 applicants to the University of Liberia in 2013 failed the entrance exam due to lack of a “basic grasp of English.” See David Smith, “All 25,000 candidates fail Liberian university entrance exam,” *The Guardian*, August 27, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/27/all-candidates-fail-liberia-university-test>.

¹⁵⁰ The most direct way to mitigate concerns is to include age directly as a control variable, but this is problematic because age is highly correlated with batch ($r = 0.52$). As a result, I exclude age from the primary models, but include it in robustness checks reported in the supplementary materials. The results are largely robust to controlling for age.

selection bias as a result. This is unlikely for two reasons. First, the AFL lacks formal processes for separating from the force; soldiers' initial contracts are automatically renewed, which has kept people in who otherwise might have left.¹⁵¹ Second, the distribution of batches across the survey sample tracks closely to the initial distribution of batches at the force level based on batch graduation figures. This suggests that attrition has not disproportionately affected earlier batches.¹⁵²

Finally, I consider other alternative arguments. In particular, it could be that U.S. training emphasized civilian control, cohesion, or command and control over human rights, explaining the decreased support for prioritizing human rights among earlier cohorts. While the survey experiment does not allow for testing these alternatives directly, qualitative evidence suggests that U.S. training did not emphasize civilian control, cohesion, or command and control over human rights.

When it came to civilian control and respect for human rights, the program designers regarded the norms as mutually reinforcing, but in practice emphasized human rights because they perceived it as the greater problem in the aftermath of war.¹⁵³ Interviews with AFL officers likewise revealed an independently minded military not unduly subordinate to civilian control. Liberian officers expressed some contempt for what they saw as political efforts to control the military in inappropriate ways. As one officer put it, civilians “need to go to school” to get a full

¹⁵¹ Soldiers who want to leave must resort to going absent without leave (AWOL). Zoom interview with former DynCorp official D and former U.S. government official, June 4, 2021.

¹⁵² Additionally, the survey data show that respondents in the U.S.-trained batches (1 to 5) are somewhat more likely to anticipate leaving the AFL in the next five years, suggesting that commitment to military service is not higher among those remaining in the early batches.

¹⁵³ Zoom interview with former DynCorp official C, May 14, 2021; Zoom interview with former U.S. military official, May 24, 2021; Zoom interview with former DynCorp official D, May 27, 2021; and Zoom interview with former DynCorp instructors B and C, June 5, 2021.

understanding of what civilian control means.¹⁵⁴ “They don’t want the AFL to be too powerful,” he said, “but we control the weapons.” In terms of cohesion, interviews with program designers and trainers did not reveal an emphasis on cohesion over liberal norms. The program designers assumed that cohesion would develop organically if they selected good recruits from an ethnically diverse cross-section of the population. Thus, the main strategy for fostering cohesion was to conduct country-wide recruitment to ensure a representative force, before training began.¹⁵⁵ For their part, the military trainers did not view cohesion as a norm to be taught in the same way as liberal norms, but rather attempted to foster teamwork and solidarity in the training, with an emphasis on a shared military identity rather than ethnic or tribal identification.¹⁵⁶ The trainers did not emphasize blind obedience or command and control in the training either. As one of the drill instructors put it, “If jumping off that cliff was going to kill you, but somebody gave you an order to jump off that cliff, what are you going to do?”¹⁵⁷

NORM CONFLICT AND COHESION

Finally, I conduct two additional tests to explore the relationship between norm conflict and prioritization of cohesion. While each test individually represents a plausibility probe of the argument, the cumulative effect helps to increase confidence in the overall findings.

First, I examine the conditional effects of treatment given prior perceptions of unit-level cohesion. Before exposure to treatment, all respondents were asked a series of questions

¹⁵⁴ Interview with AFL officer C, Monrovia, July 20, 2017. This perception is widespread. Nearly two-thirds of the survey sample disagreed when asked if civilians and military share a common understanding of civil-military relations in Liberia.

¹⁵⁵ Zoom interview with former DynCorp official B, May 24, 2021; Zoom interview with former U.S. military official, May 24, 2021.

¹⁵⁶ Zoom interview with former DynCorp instructor D, June 12, 2021.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

designed to probe their perceptions of cohesion and belonging in their units. Drawing on the military sociology literature on cohesion,¹⁵⁸ respondents were asked whether they agreed with three statements: “Everyone in this unit works together to achieve our missions”; “If this unit were in combat, any soldier would be willing to risk his life to help another”; and “Soldiers in this unit treat each other equally regardless of their tribe or religion.” The first two statements differentiate between trust in shared competencies, skills, and common goals (task cohesion) and interpersonal bonds (social cohesion), in line with distinctions drawn in the literature, while the third statement was designed to capture perceptions of ethnic divisions or exclusionary practices at the unit level (equality), which is also known to affect the quality of cohesion.¹⁵⁹ Answers ranged from 1 (“Strongly agree”) to 5 (“Strongly disagree”).

Figure 5 displays the conditional treatment effects of unit-level cohesion.¹⁶⁰ The solid lines graph the effects of assignment to treatment or control conditioned on prior perceptions of cohesion; the shaded areas indicate the 95 percent confidence intervals. The results show a striking pattern: soldiers who perceived weak task or social cohesion in their units (i.e., who strongly disagreed that their units were cohesive) were significantly more likely to select the third response option (“It does not matter, as long as the military follows the commander’s orders

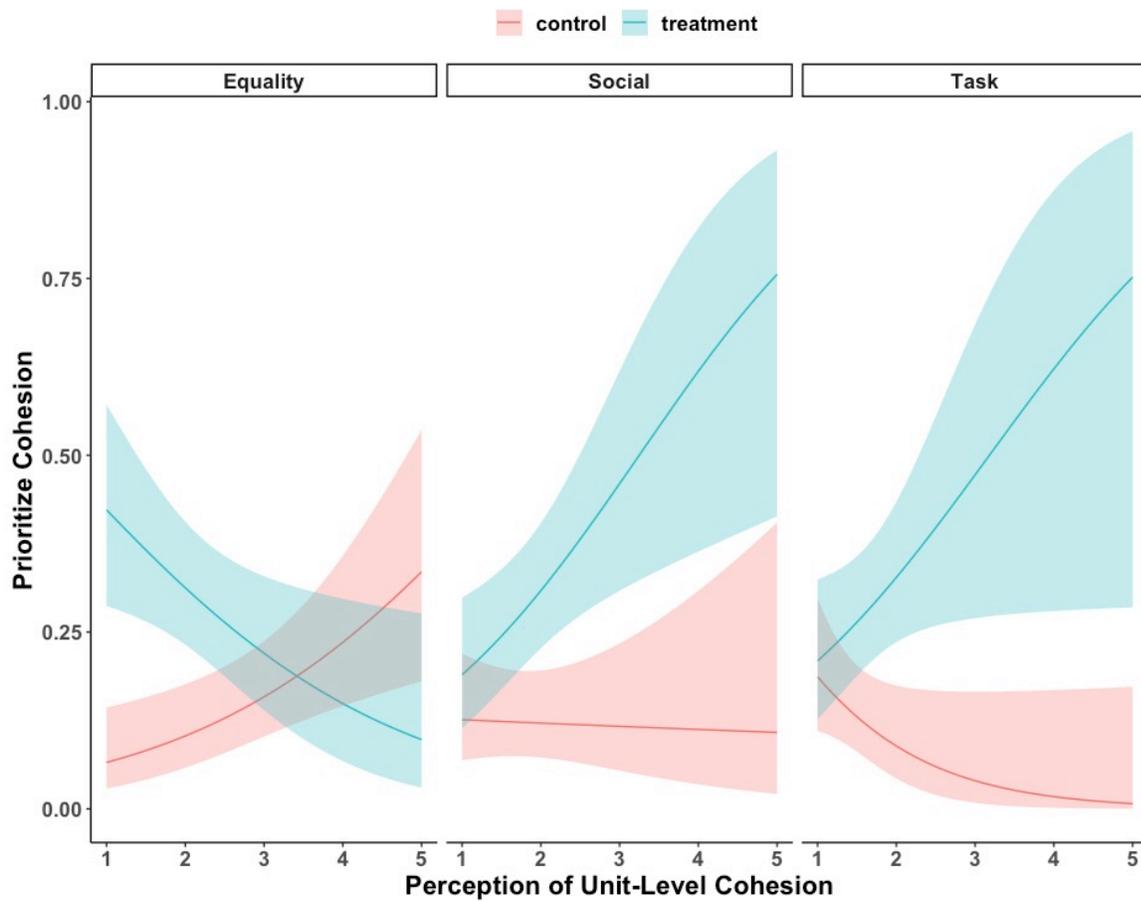
¹⁵⁸ Seminal works include Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 12, No. 2 (1948), pp. 280–315; and Samuel A. Stouffer, *The American Soldier* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949). Contemporary studies include Anthony King, “The Word of Command,” *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 32, No. 4 (2006), pp. 493–512; Siebold, “The Essence of Military Group Cohesion”; Siebold, “Key Questions and Challenges to the Standard Model of Military Group Cohesion”; and Mark Vaitkus and James Griffith, “An Evaluation of Unit Replacement on Unit Cohesion and Individual Morale in the U. S. Army All-Volunteer Force,” *Military Psychology* Vol. 2, No. 4 (1990), pp. 221–39.

¹⁵⁹ On different dimensions of cohesion, see Ben-Shalom, Lehrer, and Ben-Ari, “Cohesion during Military Operations”; King, “The Word of Command”; and Charles Kirke, “Group Cohesion, Culture, and Practice,” *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 35, No. 4 (2009), pp. 745–53. On exclusionary identity politics and military cohesion, see Jason Lyall, *Divided Armies: Inequality and Battlefield Performance in Modern War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020).

¹⁶⁰ Because the outcome measure is a binary variable, I use logistic regression. See the supplementary materials for the models used to generate the conditional treatment effects.

and sticks together”) when exposed to the norm conflict scenario. This finding suggests that soldiers who are worried about cohesion in the first place are more likely to interpret norm conflicts as posing a threat to cohesion. Surprisingly, however, the effect flips when the question concerns equality. Soldiers who perceived inequitable treatment in their units were significantly less likely to select the third response option. The implication is that soldiers who experience exclusionary treatment at the unit level may be alienated from the military organization and thus less vested in its survival.

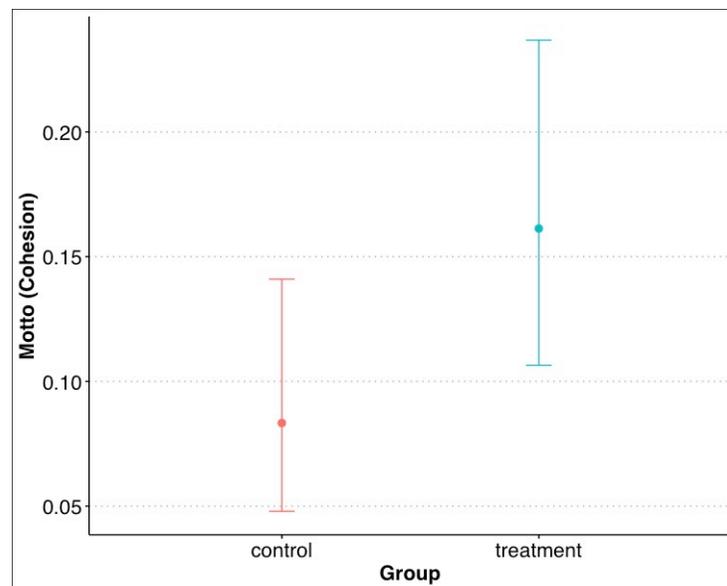
Figure 5: Conditional Treatment Effects of Unit-level Cohesion



Note: Results shown with 95 percent confidence intervals.

As a final test, I look at how exposure to the norm conflict scenario shaped respondents' thinking about military priorities. After the outcome measures, all respondents were asked an open-ended question: "What, if anything, does the AFL motto 'A force for good' mean to you?" I code these open-ended responses to create a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the response used key words or phrases that invoked cohesion.¹⁶¹ Figure 6 shows the difference in means across treatment and control groups with 95 percent confidence intervals. Respondents in the treatment group were more likely to give an answer that highlighted cohesion. While the confidence intervals overlap, model A10 (in the supplementary materials) shows that the difference is significant at $p < 0.054$. This provides further evidence that norm conflict heightens soldiers' prioritization of cohesion.

Figure 6: Motto Difference in Means



Note: Results shown with 95 percent confidence intervals.

¹⁶¹ Examples included terms such as "here to stay," "unity," "forever," or "together." A full list of responses that were coded 1 for prioritizing cohesion is in the supplementary materials.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that a potential conflict exists between the norms of respect for human rights and civilian control of the military. Liberal powers use military training to inculcate these norms around the world, yet policymakers have neither confronted the reality of this dilemma nor thought seriously about its effects. The implicit policy expectation is that if conflict arises, well-trained, liberally oriented militaries will prioritize human rights. Such a choice should be easy to make and benign in its effects on the norms in question. Using experimental data from the Liberian armed forces, I present preliminary evidence that challenges this sanguine perspective. First, in contrast to U.S. policy expectations, norm conflict tends to reduce soldiers' willingness to prioritize human rights. Second, norm conflict seems to increase their prioritization of cohesion. Third, inasmuch as U.S. training shapes responses to norm conflict, it seems to make these effects stronger. Taken together, the results shed light on a pathway by which liberal norms lose their influence on decision-making relative to other norms aligned to interests, creating opportunities for norm-violating behavior.

Using survey experiments solves some inferential problems, such as internal validity, while introducing other ones, such as external validity.¹⁶² Random assignment to treatment or control groups is the main way to address internal validity, because it helps to establish that other, unobserved variables are not driving results. External validity, on the other hand, concerns how

¹⁶² Another consideration is construct validity, or whether variables measure the right things. One way to solve this problem is to use different measures and treatments. See Rose McDermott, "Experimental Methodology in Political Science," *Political Analysis* Vol. 10, No. 4 (2002), p. 334. Of note, the AFL experiment uses an indirect approach to elicit truthful responses, asking soldiers to evaluate the commander's actions. Future experiments could ask soldiers directly how they would respond. This would shed new light not only on norm conflict, but also on command dynamics.

results generalize beyond the study. One key concern about external validity is whether the sample accurately represents the population of interest.¹⁶³ Because of random selection, we know that the sample accurately reflects the AFL population, but what of other militaries? The AFL is unique in two ways—first, in that it was rebuilt from scratch, with few members having previous military experience, and second, in the timing of norms transmission, which occurred in tandem with basic training. Foreign military training likely affects individuals differently when they come from intact militaries with stronger pre-existing norms and when norms training occurs after early, formative socialization experiences.¹⁶⁴ These factors do not necessarily affect the dynamics of norm conflict, but they could make it harder for norms to stick in the first place, diluting the effects of training.

These questions point to a limitation of survey experiments, which can only be conducted in one context at a time. The solution is replication and extension of the experiment across time and space.¹⁶⁵ To establish generalizability, future research should also explore how different structural and environmental conditions affect how soldiers respond to norm conflict.¹⁶⁶ Liberia represents an environment characterized by weak rule-of-law that nonetheless aspires to keep the military out of domestic law enforcement, following an American model. Future work could look at this problem in countries where the military has an internal security mandate; it is also

¹⁶³ Susan D. Hyde, “Experiments in International Relations: Lab, Survey, and Field,” *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 18, No. 1 (2015), pp. 403–24.

¹⁶⁴ On timing of socialization experiences, see Alastair Iain Johnston, “Conclusions and Extensions: Toward Mid-Range Theorizing and beyond Europe,” *International Organization* Vol. 59, No. 4 (2005), pp. 1013–44.

¹⁶⁵ McDermott, “Experimental Methodology in Political Science,” pp. 335–336; Rose McDermott, “Internal and External Validity,” in James N. Druckman, Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, and Arthur Lupia, *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁶⁶ Jason Barabas and Jennifer Jerit, “Are Survey Experiments Externally Valid?” *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 104, No. 2 (2010), pp. 226–42.

worth replicating in contexts with strong rule-of-law.¹⁶⁷ Another question concerns the duration of effects, which has implications for real-world outcomes. How long do the effects of norm conflict persist? Do norms bounce back after the crisis passes or does conflict contribute to permanent erosion of the norms? Finally, connecting attitudinal shifts to behavioral outcomes is an important step for future work. The evidence presented here sheds light on the micro-level dynamics that explain shifts in military support for norms; this experimental work can complement and inform other approaches to link attitudes to behavior.

This study also has implications for policy. When the United States, like other liberal powers, builds military capacity in weak states, it uses training to promote norms of restraint, thus hoping to solve the dilemma of how to increase capacity while maintaining civilian control and protecting human rights. My findings suggest that training militaries might just give them more to lose in crises and encourage norm-violating behavior. This does not mean that U.S. training is *worse* than other training—military training in general may increase soldiers’ prioritization of cohesion under pressure and may drive norm violations via other mechanisms.¹⁶⁸ But it does suggest that U.S. training can backfire in ways unique to liberal security assistance; it also suggests that the United States puts false confidence in the power of norms to restrain the militaries that it trains. More training is not the solution. Instead, liberal providers should focus on the institutions that help to regulate military behavior. Rather than doubling down on individual or unit-level training with norms tacked on, providers should put more emphasis on

¹⁶⁷ For example, scholars have suggested that even in the United States where civil-military norms are strongly entrenched, a situation in which the military was forced to disobey orders could hollow out norms. As Richard Betts and Matthew Waxman note in their discussion of the nuclear launch process, “A refusal by uniformed officers to comply would deeply damage the hallowed norms of civilian control of the military.” Richard K. Betts and Matthew C. Waxman, “The President and the Bomb: Reforming the Nuclear Launch Process,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 97, No. 2 (2018), pp. 121–122.

¹⁶⁸ Future research could compare responses to norm conflict among militaries trained primarily by the United States, other liberal providers, and illiberal providers.

building civilian and defense legal institutions that reduce uncertainty and guide behavior.

Liberal providers could also do more to clarify norm hierarchies. To the extent that clear guidelines for behavior exist and clear blueprints for decision-making are promulgated (e.g., “people first, governments second”), some of the problems associated with norm conflict may be mitigated. But to do so will require two changes in policy. First, policymakers will have to admit that the rank-ordering exists. Second, they must modify training curricula to address it directly. These changes are not without costs—they take away flexibility in the event that norm conflicts occur. The United States might not always *want* foreign militaries to side with the population, particularly if it means defying a friendly regime. This is an inescapable tradeoff.

Finally, it is worth considering whether the problem of norm conflict gives some providers an advantage over others when it comes to shaping military behavior. China, for example, is a major training provider in Africa. China does not emphasize human rights in its training; instead, it puts a strong and singular value on the norm of civilian (party) control.¹⁶⁹ Future research should explore whether there is an “authoritarian advantage” when it comes to foreign military training. The United States prides itself on promoting values in and through security cooperation, a feature that it views as a comparative global strength. Protecting those values means acknowledging their limits and dilemmas.

¹⁶⁹ African military officers report that up to half of their training time in China comprised classroom indoctrination to Chinese political values. Author discussions with AFL personnel in Monrovia, December 2017.