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Abstract
This research investigates public attitudes towards humanitarian intervention, first whether support is higher than alternative uses of force, and second how much the humanitarian aspect of these interventions matter relative to other characteristics such as multilateralism and strategic interests. It answers these questions with a survey experiment that compares support for humanitarian intervention with baseline intervention scenarios and also probes the mechanisms through which humanitarian interventions generate support.

We develop and test three categories of mechanisms: 1) internalized humanitarian norms, 2) instrumental signals about risk and cost, and 3) strategic interests. Our findings suggest that the public is more favorably disposed toward humanitarian intervention, with most of that increase in support resulting from the view that there is a moral obligation to intervene to defend women and children, which offers support for the internalization of norms mechanism. Perceptions that humanitarian intervention will be either less costly or have important strategic consequences were far less consequential.

The findings have important implications for theories about post-Cold War intervention norms as well as for the circumstances under which states use military force.