



PEOPLE ON WAR

PERSPECTIVES FROM 16 COUNTRIES



ICRC

Alongside the global People on War initiative undertaken by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 16 countries, several smaller-scale People on War surveys were conducted by eight International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners in their own countries. See their websites for more information: the Australian Red Cross, Canadian Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, Finnish Red Cross, Italian Red Cross, Netherlands Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross and Swedish Red Cross.



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INTRODUCTION

BY PETER MAURER, ICRC PRESIDENT

Listening to people's views is an essential part of our work on the front lines. The 2016 People on War report, based on a global survey carried out from June to September by WIN/Gallup International and its local partners, reflects the opinions of 17,000 people in 16 countries. The findings are both reassuring and troubling.

This report comes at a critical time. The past two decades have been wracked by armed conflict, with devastating consequences. Today's conflicts are tearing apart vast swathes of the world. As the survey reveals, a growing number of people have become resigned to the death of civilians as an inevitable part of warfare. Meanwhile, the effectiveness and relevance of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, whose rules seek to protect civilians, detainees and people wounded during conflict, are being questioned perhaps more than at any time in recent history. These are worrying trends.

But at the same time, there is almost universal agreement that everyone has the right to health care during conflicts. An equally overwhelming majority condemn and reject attacks on hospitals, ambulances and health-care workers.

I have visited conflict zones in Syria, Yemen, Nigeria and Afghanistan and seen for myself the brutal effects of attacks on civilians and on hospitals and other critical services. The people I spoke to echoed many of the views highlighted in this report. The majority of those surveyed in countries affected by conflict believe that there must be limits on how wars are fought. The results seem to indicate that those who have experienced the worst of war believe that rules can save lives. These findings should inspire all of us to do more to ensure that the rules of war are respected.

It also appears that people believe military leaders and fellow combatants have the strongest influence on how fighters behave. This underlines the importance of the ICRC's unique role in engaging in dialogue with all sides and raising awareness of the laws of war – also known as international humanitarian law. However, if we are to strengthen belief in the law, States must ensure that all those who violate it are held accountable.

The rules of war establish limits. Wars without limits are wars without end. And wars without end mean endless suffering. We must never allow ourselves to become numb to human suffering.





MY PERSPECTIVE

BY GILES DULEY, PHOTOJOURNALIST

For a decade I've worked as a photographer documenting the devastating effects of war on civilians. From Angola to Gaza, Iraq to Cambodia, I've witnessed how modern warfare destroys bodies, minds and lives.

In 2011, whilst working in Afghanistan, my own story was to echo those I'd been documenting. In Kandahar I stepped on a landmine. The incident nearly killed me, leaving me a triple amputee.

I spent a year in hospital recovering from my injuries. My life had changed beyond all recognition; I was told I would never again walk or live independently. Yet miraculously, eighteen months later, I was back working. And I began to realize that my injury had in fact given me a gift: it had given me greater empathy and understanding for those I photograph.

One of the most important things in my work is taking the time to really listen to the personal stories of people affected by conflict. The 2016 People on War report provides an important insight into how war is perceived and what more needs to be done to limit the effects of war on civilians.

After my recovery I returned to Afghanistan. At the ICRC limb-fitting centre there I met seven-year-old Ataullah, who was being fitted with a prosthetic leg. A few months earlier, he'd stepped on a landmine on his way to school, losing an arm and a leg. It was painful to watch a boy, who should be playing with his friends, struggle to even take a few steps.

Why do I still do the work I do? It's simple: because of children like Ataullah. As I was taking his photograph, I reflected on the pain I'm in each day, both physical and mental, and questioned why a boy should have to go through what I do, simply because he was walking to school.

Every day there are thousands of children who could be injured like Ataullah. At a time when so many regions are in conflict and codes of conduct are increasingly ignored, we must shine the spotlight on the importance of respecting the laws of war to protect the lives of civilians.



It's essential that the rules of war are respected to prevent the suffering of civilians.

PEOPLE ON WAR 2016

Between June and September 2016, over 17,000 people in 16 countries were asked about their views on a range of issues relating to war. The survey was carried out by WIN/Gallup International and their partners in the respective countries. Some of the exact questions as asked in the survey are reproduced in the following pages, alongside infographics showing the breakdown of the respondents' responses. A number of the same questions were also asked in the last People in War survey, which was conducted almost 20 years ago in 1999, enabling some comparisons over time to be made.

KEY FINDINGS

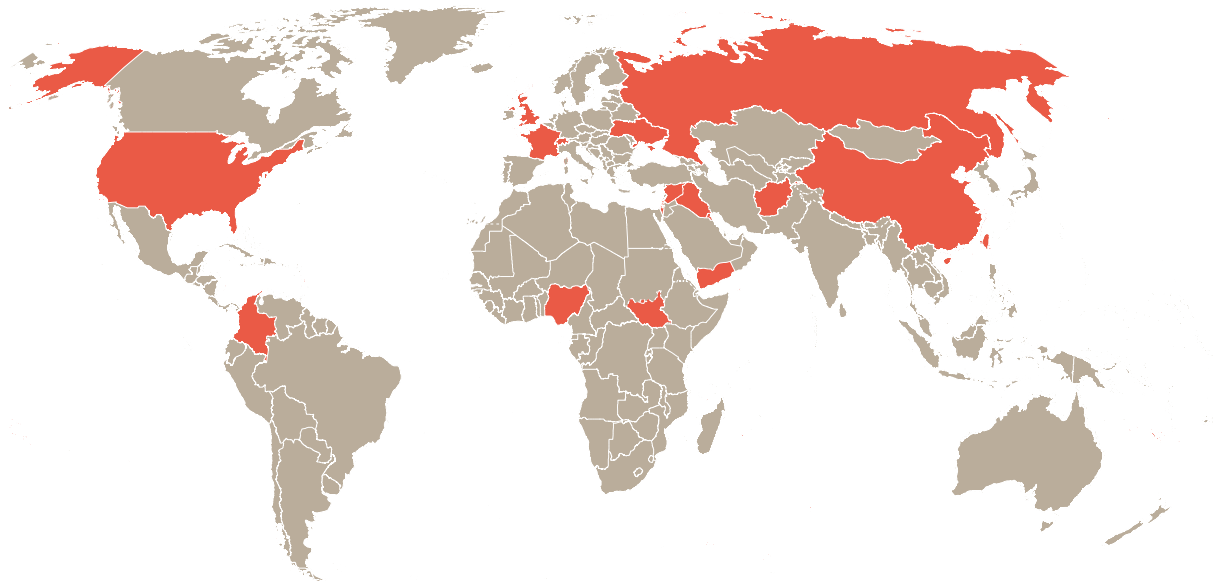
- People living in countries affected by war believe the law matters. Over two thirds of all respondents think it still makes sense to impose limits on war. Almost half of those surveyed in conflict-affected countries still believe the Geneva Conventions prevent wars from getting worse.
- The survey results highlight that violence against health care is unacceptable. Over three quarters of those surveyed believe that attacking hospitals, ambulances and health-care workers is wrong.
- Compared to 1999, there is a higher degree of acceptance amongst people living in the P5 countries and Switzerland that the death of civilians in conflict zones is an inevitable part of war.
- Over the past two decades, there has been a shift in public attitudes towards torture. Two thirds of all those surveyed in 2016 say torture is wrong. But when asked specifically about whether an enemy combatant can be tortured, fewer people disagree than in 1999. In addition, there is a significant increase in the number of people who don't know or prefer not to answer.
- There is a disconnect between public opinion and the policies and actions of States and armed groups. Violations of the laws of war – including the targeting of civilians, humanitarian workers and hospitals – are continuing, yet the survey results clearly show that the majority of people understand that these practices are wrong and that civilians and health-care workers and facilities should be protected.

CALLS TO ACTION

- All parties to a conflict, including non-State armed groups, are reminded of their obligations under international law to respect and ensure respect for human life and dignity. Support for parties to an armed conflict should depend on their compliance with the law.
- States and armed groups need to show greater political will to find ways to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law, including by holding those who violate the law to account.
- The denial of medical treatment to the wounded and sick in armed conflict is a violation of the laws of war. All parties to conflict should bear in mind that the way they behave or treat people, including wounded enemy fighters, matters and can impact the way in which communities recover once the fighting is over.
- Torture is illegal and unacceptable under any circumstances. All parties must respect the law. Torture is an affront to humanity and does not make our societies safer. Those who torture need to be prosecuted and punished.

For more information:
www.icrc.org/peopleonwar

COUNTRIES WHERE PEOPLE WERE SURVEYED



AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan has suffered decades of conflict and instability. For over 30 years, the ICRC has been supporting communities and health-care facilities, running physical rehabilitation centres, and visiting detainees and helping them maintain contact with their families.

CHINA

China is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.¹ The ICRC's regional delegation for East Asia has been located in Beijing since 2005.

COLOMBIA

After more than five decades of armed conflict, Colombia still faces a huge task in meeting the needs of a population scarred by violence. The ICRC has been working with conflict-affected communities for over 40 years.

FRANCE

France is a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a member of NATO.² The ICRC has had an office in Paris since 1996.

IRAQ

For decades, Iraq has been affected by cycles of fighting, refugee crises and sectarian violence. The ICRC has been working in Iraq since 1980, focussing on detainee welfare, missing people and support for civilians affected by violence.

ISRAEL

Israel has been locked in conflict with Palestine since its creation in 1948. The ICRC has been present there since 1967; its teams in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv focus on civilian protection and detainee welfare in Israeli and Palestinian jails.

NIGERIA

Millions of people in Nigeria are affected by the conflict in the Lake Chad region, communal clashes or urban violence. ICRC teams in Nigeria protect and assist people affected by violence, particularly in the north east.

PALESTINE

Long-standing conflict with Israel continues to affect the daily lives of Palestinians. The ICRC's work in the occupied territories focusses on the protection of civilians living under occupation and the welfare of detainees in Israeli and Palestinian jails.

RUSSIA

Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. The ICRC has had a regional delegation in Moscow since 1992.

SOUTH SUDAN

Since gaining independence in July 2011, South Sudan has been wracked by conflict and political instability. The ICRC helps conflict-affected communities, reunites families separated by the violence and visits places of detention.

SWITZERLAND

Switzerland is the birthplace of the ICRC and the Geneva Conventions and is home to many international institutions. The ICRC's headquarters are in Geneva.

SYRIA

(SYRIANS IN LEBANON)³
Conflict in Syria and the ensuing migration crisis have spilled over into Lebanon. The number of Syrians living there is currently estimated at 1.5 million. The ICRC is assisting Syrian and host communities across the country.

UKRAINE

Eastern Ukraine has been affected by hostilities for over two years. Conflict continues to impact the lives of the civilian population.

UNITED KINGDOM

The United Kingdom is a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a member of NATO. The ICRC has had a mission in London since 2003.

UNITED STATES

The United States is a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a member of NATO. The ICRC has had a regional delegation in Washington D.C. since 1995.

YEMEN

Yemen has endured violence and political instability for over 50 years. The resurgence in armed conflict since March 2015 has claimed thousands of civilian lives and displaced millions more. The ICRC has been present in Yemen since 1962.

Throughout this report, the survey results are grouped as follows:

- P5 countries and Switzerland:⁴ the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) and Switzerland
- Countries affected by armed conflict: Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Israel, Nigeria, Palestine, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen

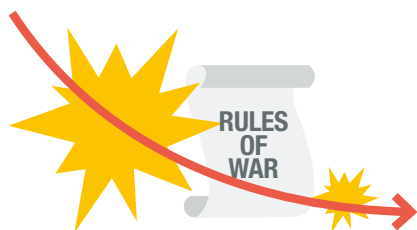
¹ UN Security Council: The United Nations Security Council is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.

² NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization. An alliance of countries from North America and Europe committed to fulfilling the goals of the North Atlantic Treaty.

³ Owing to operational considerations, the survey was not conducted in Syria; Syrian voices were included by carrying out the survey in Lebanon.

⁴ Whether they are involved in armed conflict or not.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE RULES OF WAR

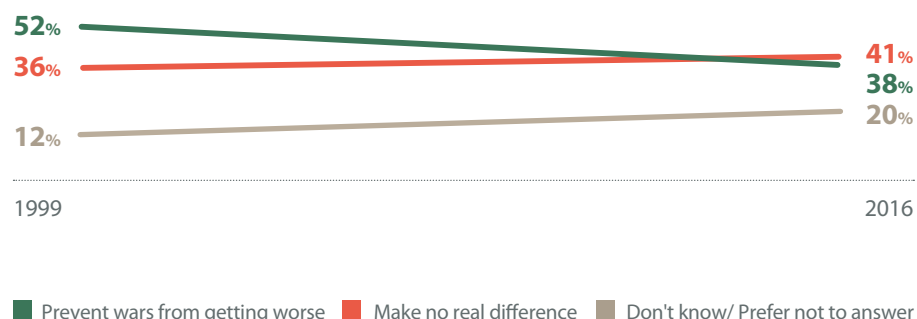


Do you think the Geneva Conventions prevent wars from getting worse or do they make no real difference?¹

Since 1999, the number of people who believe the Geneva Conventions prevent wars from getting worse has significantly decreased. However, in 2016 almost half of those surveyed in conflict-affected countries still believe the Geneva Conventions are effective.² The number of people who don't know or who prefer not to answer has risen in the last two decades.

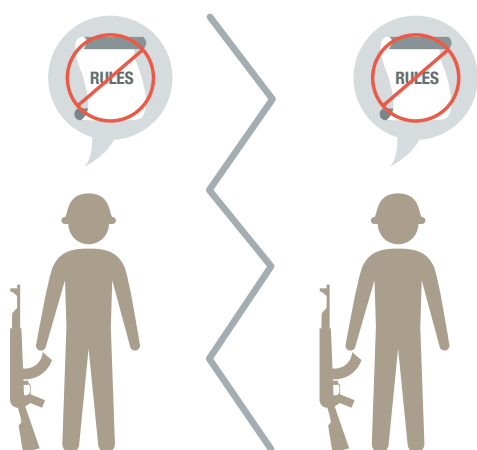
¹ This question was only answered by people aware of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions.

² 49% of people living in countries affected by armed conflict responded that the Geneva Conventions prevent wars from getting worse.

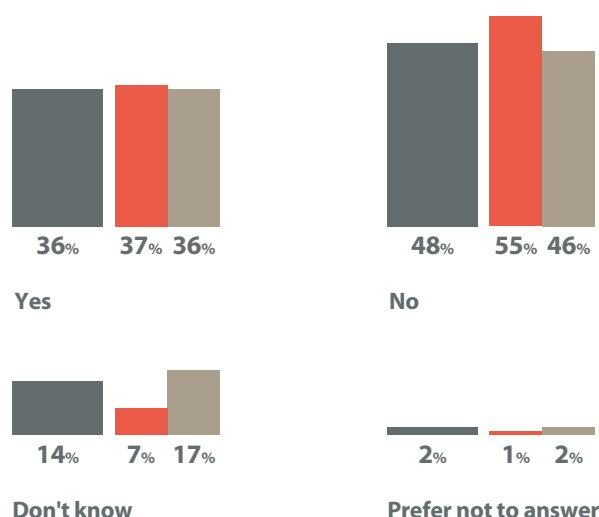


If combatants do not respect the laws of war, does that give combatants on the opposing side the right to disrespect them also?

Almost half of all respondents think that a lack of respect from one side does not give the other side the right to do the same. This is particularly true in conflict-affected countries.



■ Global
■ Countries affected by armed conflict
■ P5 countries and Switzerland

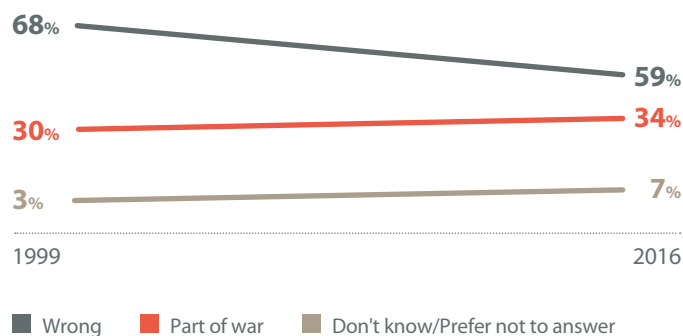


BEHAVIOUR IN WAR

What about attacking enemy combatants in populated villages or towns in order to weaken the enemy, knowing that many civilians would be killed – is that wrong or just part of war?

Almost 6 out of 10 of all respondents think this practice is wrong. This is a decrease of almost 10% since 1999. There is a stark contrast between the views of those in conflict-affected countries, where nearly 8 out of 10 of people believe this is wrong, and those in the P5 countries and Switzerland, where only half of respondents share this view.¹

¹ In the 2016 survey, 78% of people living in countries affected by armed conflict and 50% of people living in the P5 countries and Switzerland responded that it was wrong.

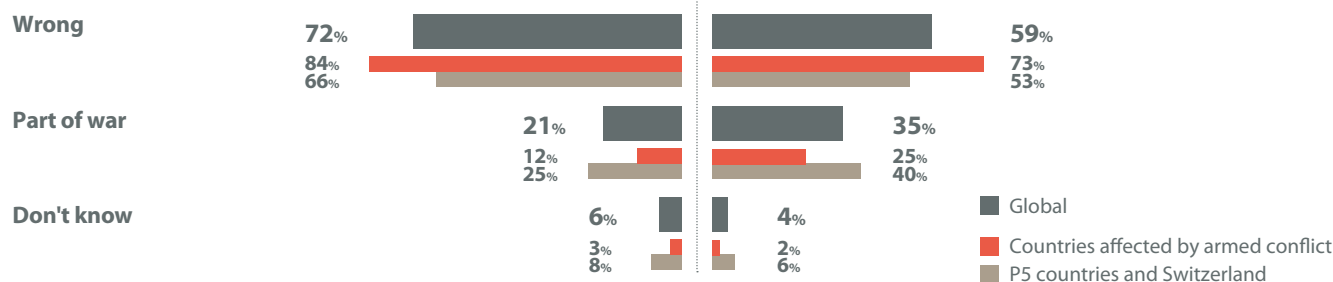


What about attacking religious and historical monuments in order to weaken the enemy – is that wrong or just part of war?

Overall, the majority of respondents believe it is wrong, particularly those in countries affected by conflict.

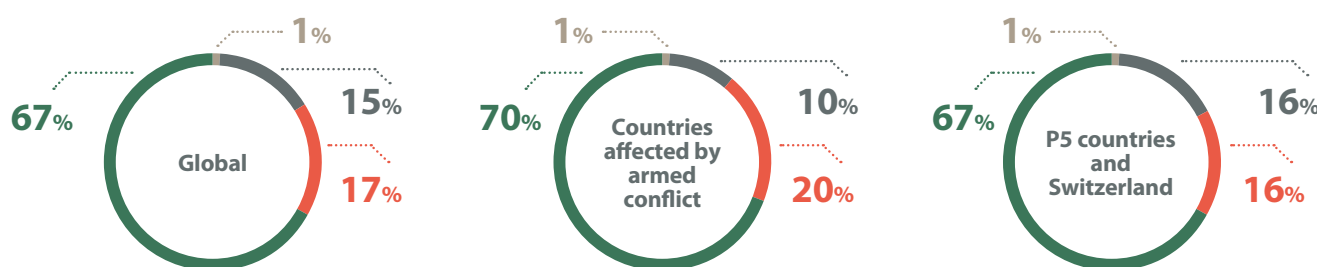
Humanitarian workers are sometimes injured or killed as they are delivering aid in conflict zones – is that wrong or just part of war?

Overall, only 59% of people believe it is wrong. In the P5 countries and Switzerland, just over half of people surveyed believe it is wrong, while 40% think it is part of war.



The 1949 Geneva Conventions were adopted just after World War II, nearly 70 years ago. Warfare today is very different, does it still make sense to impose limits on war?²

Overall, over two thirds of respondents think it still makes sense to impose limits on war. The number is slightly higher in conflict-affected countries.



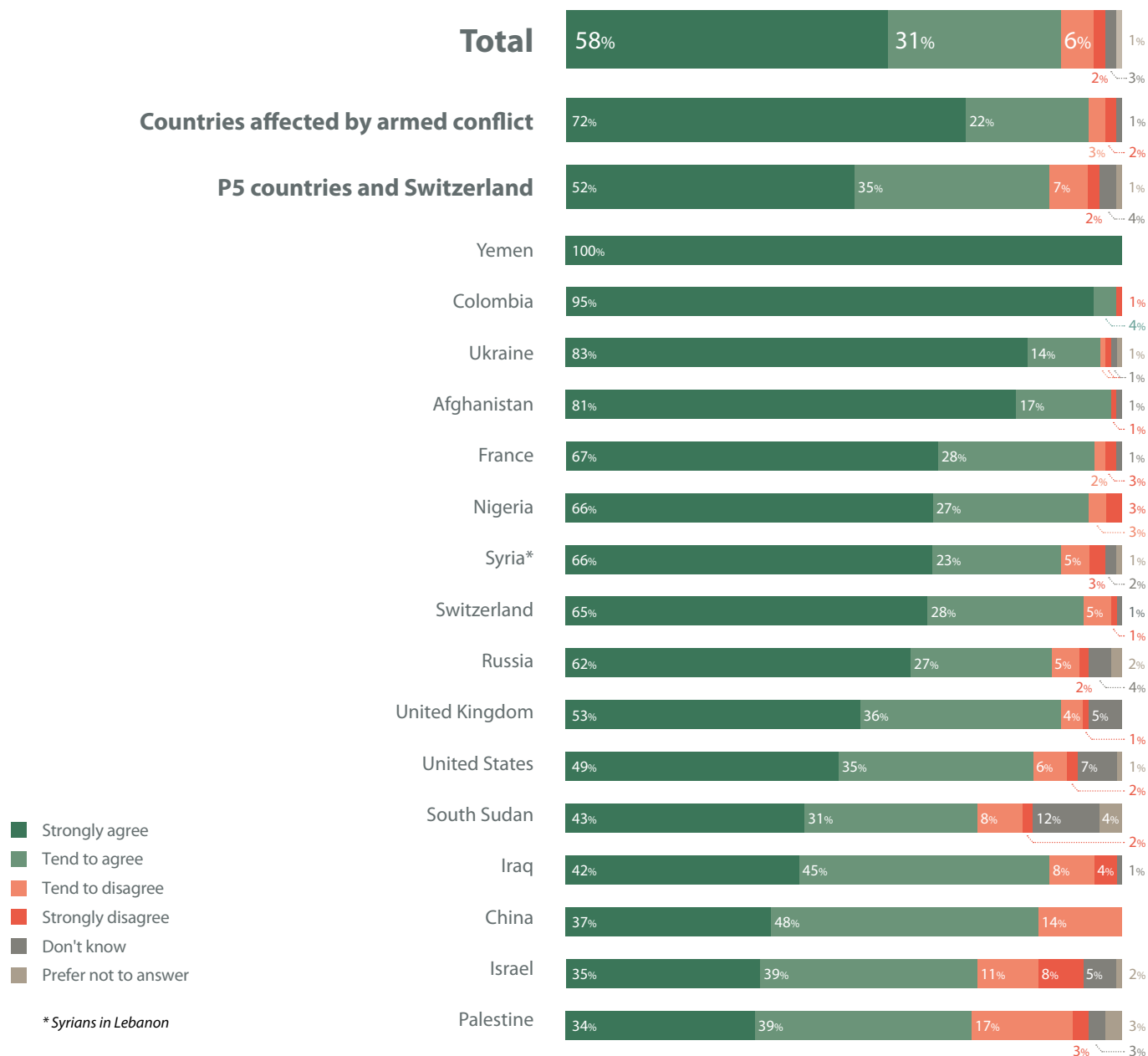
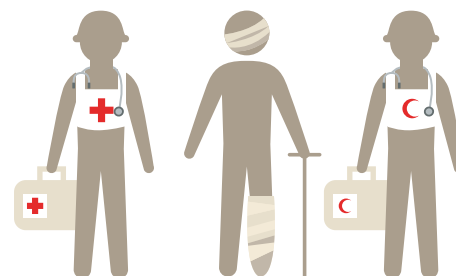
■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know ■ Prefer not to answer

² This question was asked only to the 67% of people who said they were aware of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions.

HEALTH CARE IN DANGER

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Everyone wounded and sick during an armed conflict has the right to health care.

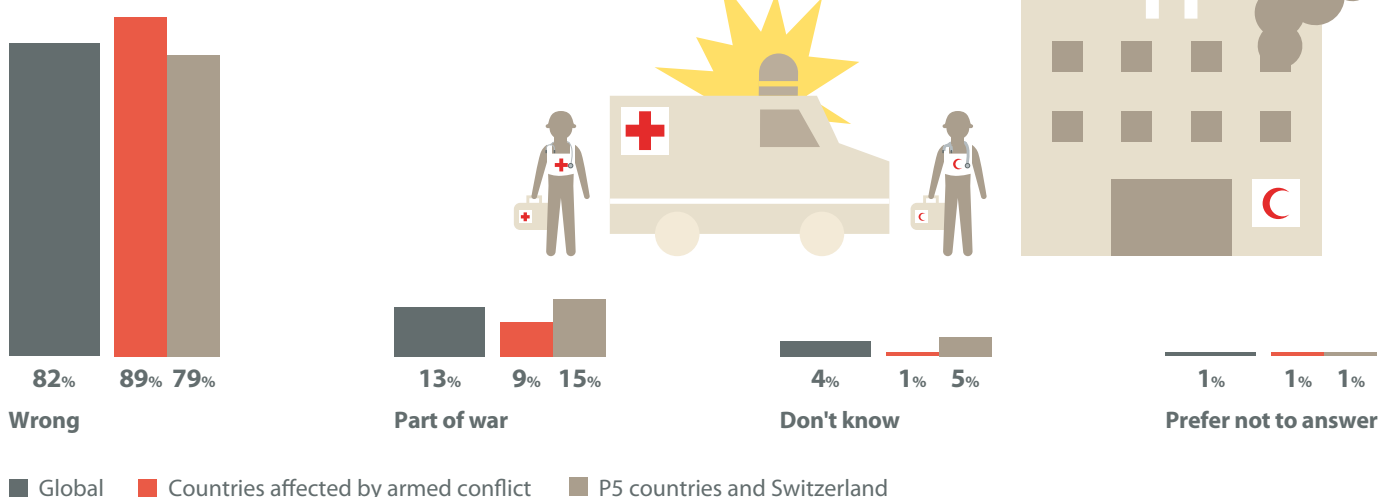
Almost 9 out of 10 of those surveyed agree that everyone wounded and sick in armed conflict has the right to health care. Almost all of those asked in conflict-affected countries say they agree.



HEALTH CARE IN DANGER

What about attacking hospitals, ambulances and health-care workers in order to weaken the enemy – is that wrong or just part of war?

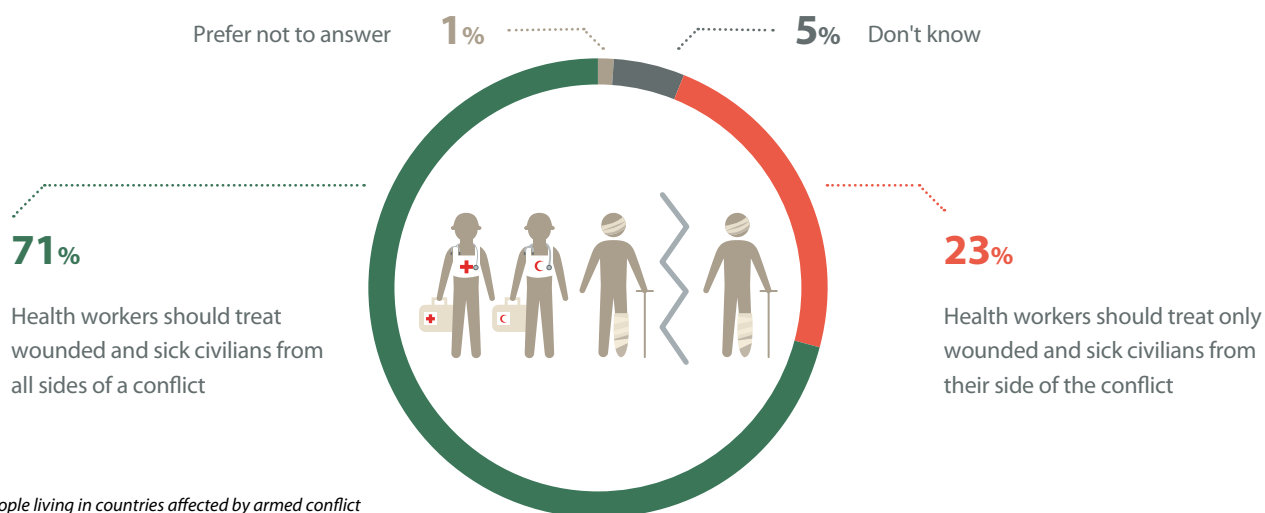
Over 8 out of 10 of all those surveyed, but especially those in conflict-affected countries, believe this is wrong.



In the context of an armed conflict, what best describes your personal views?

- Health workers should treat only wounded and sick civilians from their side of the conflict.
- Health workers should treat wounded and sick civilians from all sides of a conflict.

Overall, 7 out of 10 people believe health workers should treat wounded and sick civilians from all sides of a conflict. Yet, at the same time, almost a quarter of those surveyed believe that health workers should only treat those from their own side. This is slightly more the case in conflict-affected countries.*

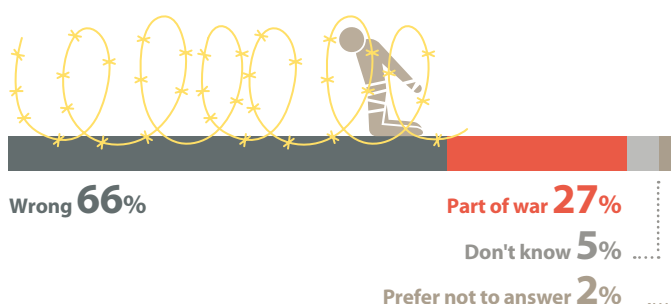


* 25% of people living in countries affected by armed conflict responded that health-care workers should treat only those from their own side.

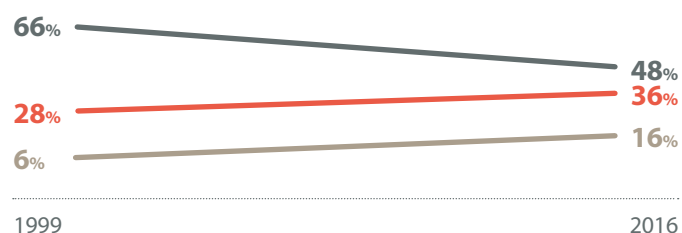
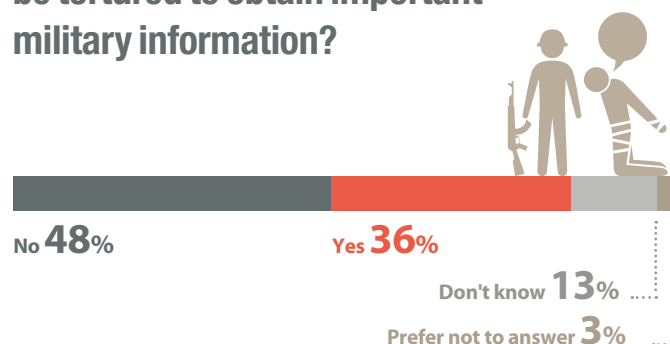
TORTURE

Two thirds of all those asked say torture is wrong. But, compared to 1999, significantly more people in 2016 believe that an enemy combatant can be tortured for information. Meanwhile, the number of those who don't know or who prefer not to answer has also gone up significantly. In terms of attitudes to torture, the survey revealed a diverse range of views across the 16 countries, as illustrated in the tables below. A significantly higher proportion of people in conflict-affected countries agree that a captured enemy combatant can be tortured.

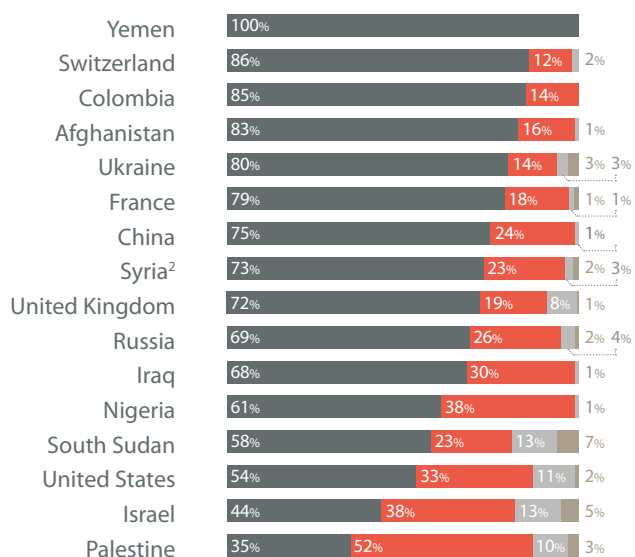
What about torture – is that wrong or part of war?¹



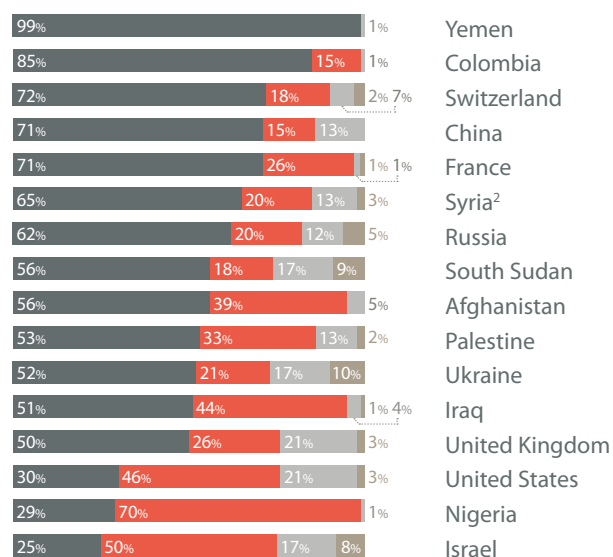
Can a captured enemy combatant be tortured to obtain important military information?



¹ A comparison between 1999 and 2016 is not possible because this question was not asked in the original survey.



² Syrians in Lebanon



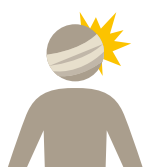
■ Wrong ■ Part of war ■ Don't know ■ Prefer not to answer

■ No ■ Yes ■ Don't know ■ Prefer not to answer

TORTURE

How do you think torture affects the individuals involved?

When asked about the various effects of torture, an overwhelming majority acknowledge that there are consequences of some kind. Significantly, a high number of respondents said that both those being tortured and those inflicting the torture were affected.



61%

It leaves physical and psychological scars on the person who is tortured.



43%

It dehumanizes its victims and those inflicting the torture.



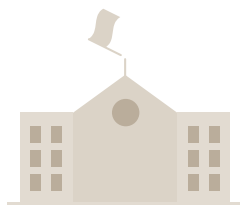
40%

It takes a psychological toll on the torturer.



31%

It damages a society's reputation.



27%

It undermines the integrity of a society's political system.



4%

None of the above

4%

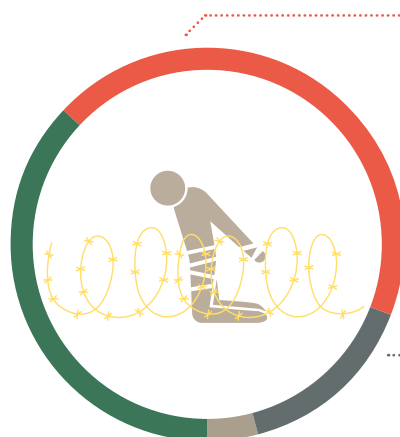
Prefer not to answer

Does your opinion change if you are told that torture is considered to be illegal, since it is banned by the UN Convention against Torture, which has been ratified by 159 countries, including your country?*

Even after being informed that torture is prohibited by law, almost 60% of those surveyed still continue to believe that the torture of an enemy combatant is sometimes or always acceptable.

44%

No, I still think torture is sometimes acceptable.



37%

Yes, I didn't realize my country had agreed to ban torture.

15%

No, I think torture is always acceptable. It's part of war.

4%

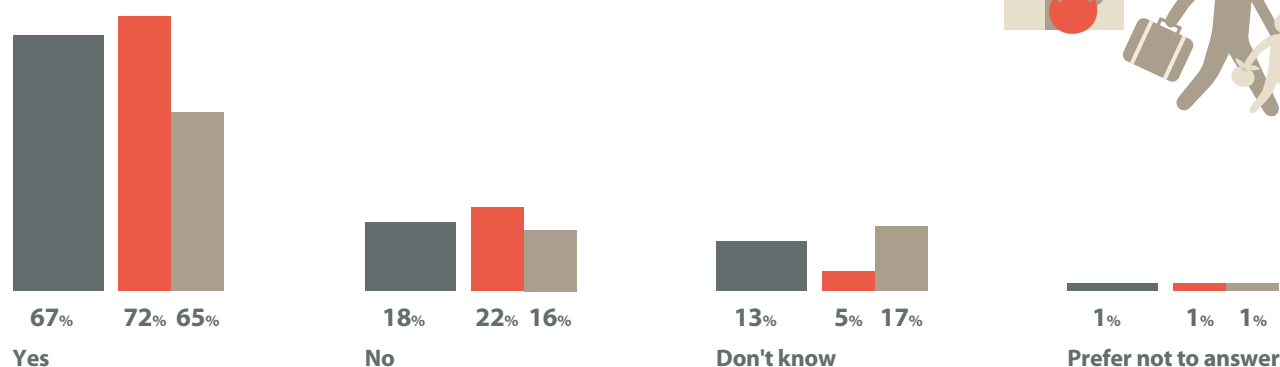
Prefer not to answer

*This question was only asked to those who responded that it was acceptable for captured enemy combatants to be tortured.

MIGRATION

If the laws of war were better respected by combatants, do you think civilians would be less inclined to flee their countries?

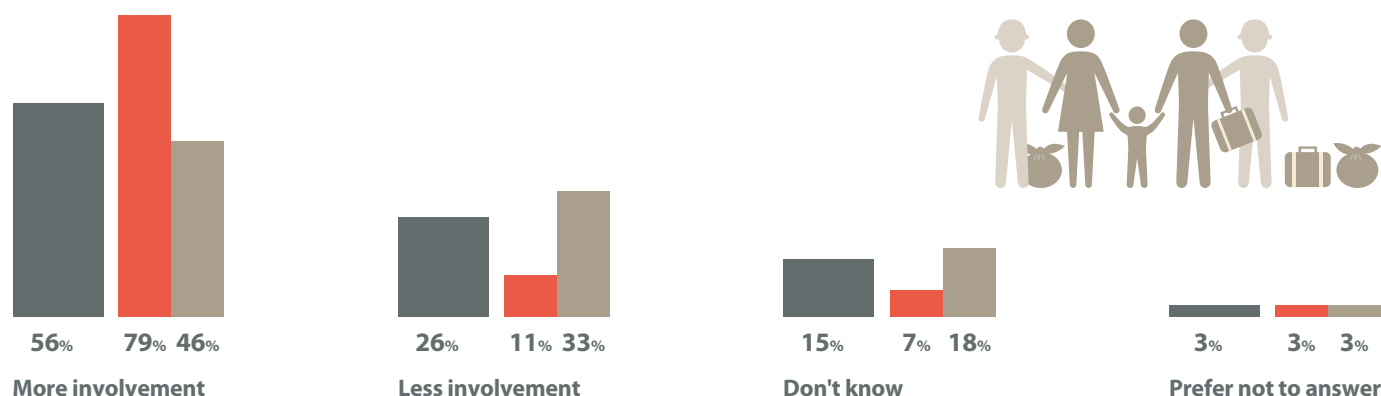
Over two thirds of all respondents think civilians would be less inclined to flee. This number is significantly higher in countries affected by armed conflict.



■ Global ■ Countries affected by armed conflict ■ P5 countries and Switzerland

Would you like to see more or less humanitarian assistance from your country to help people who have fled their countries due to conflict?

In total, over 50% of respondents would like to see more involvement. But there is a strong contrast between the results from the P5 countries and Switzerland, where only 46% favour more assistance when it comes to migration, and conflict-affected countries, where 79% of people think more assistance should be provided.

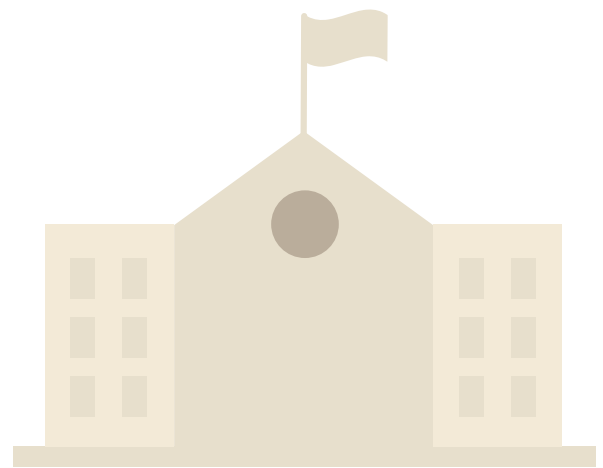
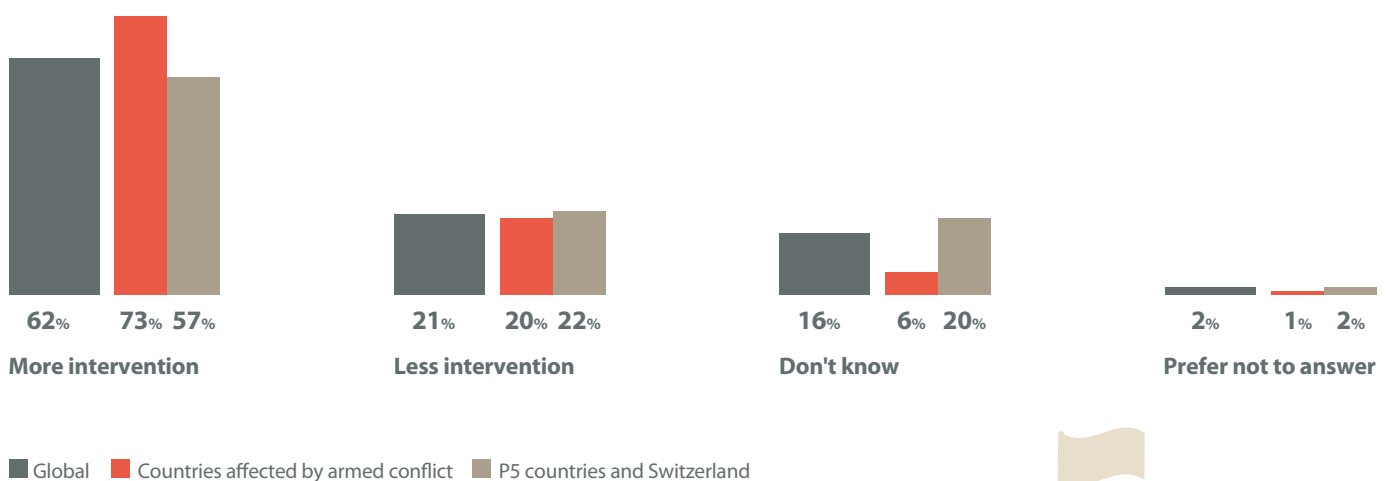
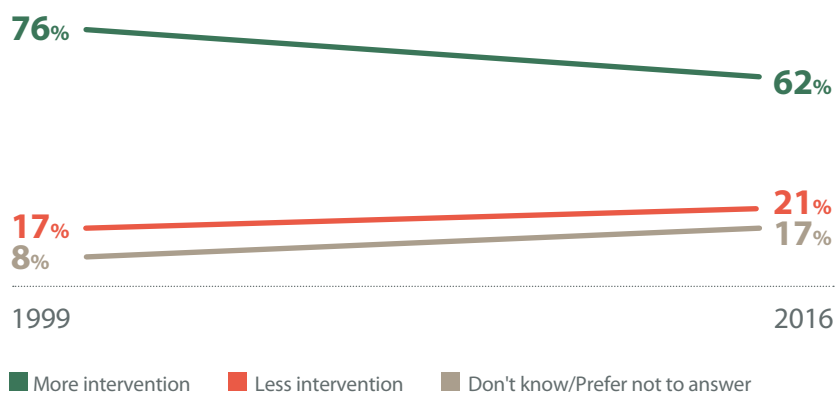


If the rules of war were respected, fewer people would flee their countries.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

In the future, would you like to see more or less political intervention from the international community to help stop violations of the laws of war?

A significantly higher proportion of people surveyed in 2016 in conflict-affected countries want to see more political intervention to help stop violations of the laws of war. But overall, the proportion of people in favour of more political intervention has decreased significantly since 1999.



REDUCING VICTIM NUMBERS

Here is a list of some different ways to reduce the number of victims of war. Rate each option below on the scale of not very important, a little important, somewhat important and extremely important.

The options "extremely important" and "somewhat important" are reflected in the percentages below.



74%

Increasing the effectiveness of laws and rules that limit what combatants can do in war



74%

Increasing accountability for atrocities through international courts



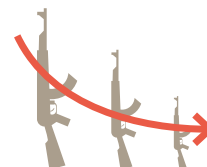
71%

Increasing the accuracy of weapons to reduce the unintended casualties



69%

Increasing the news coverage of these wars so that atrocities are exposed



58%

Decreasing the numbers of weapons available to soldiers and fighters in the world

Almost three quarters of all respondents think that increasing the effectiveness of the rules of war and accountability through the international courts helps to reduce the number of victims of war. In contrast, when asked how or what influences the behaviour of combatants, respondents rated the threat of punishment by international courts as the lowest factor. Military leaders and fellow combatants were considered most influential when it comes to the behaviour of combatants.

From the list below, who or what influences the behaviour of combatants in times of war? Rate each option below on the scale of no influence, weak influence, strong influence and very strong influence.

The options "very strong influence" and "strong influence" are reflected in the percentages below.



81%

Military leaders



67%

Fellow combatants



55%

Community leaders



55%

Religious leaders



50%

Threat of punishment by international courts



50%

Threat of punishment by national courts



Respect for the rules of war can reduce the number of victims.

THE LAWS OF WAR ARE CLEAR

ON TORTURE

Torture and all other forms of ill-treatment are absolutely prohibited by international treaty and customary law. This applies to every State and to all parties to armed conflicts. There are no exceptions, whatever the circumstances. Whole communities are impacted by the corrosive effects of torture on society, especially when it goes unpunished, generating hatred and triggering a cycle of violence. What's more, research shows that torture does not work, as the "information" that is obtained is generally not reliable.

ON HEALTH CARE

Everyone has a right to health care in armed conflict, regardless of what side they are on or their political or other affiliation. Attacks on medical personnel, facilities and vehicles are illegal under the rules of war. Medical personnel must not be targeted for caring for sick and wounded enemies. The doctor treating your enemy is not your enemy. A wounded or sick prisoner must be provided with appropriate medical care.

ON CIVILIANS

The deliberate targeting of civilians is prohibited, and so are indiscriminate attacks against populated towns and villages. Every possible precaution must be taken to avoid harming civilians and their houses, or destroying their means of survival, such as water sources, crops, livestock, etc. Civilians have a right to receive the help they need, and the targeting of aid workers and medical personnel is prohibited.

ON MIGRATION

People in conflict-affected countries do not flee their homes on a whim. There is a direct correlation between flagrant violations of the laws of war and forced displacement. Migration policies should be like humanitarian policies, i.e. founded on the principle of humanity. Vulnerable migrants need particular assistance, regardless of their legal status or the term used to refer to them. Detention of migrants should be a last resort, and States must respect the principle of non-refoulement (a person should not be sent back to somewhere where their fundamental rights are threatened).



The way people are treated in armed conflict matters and can impact the way in which communities recover once the fighting is over.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

People on War 2016 reflects the perspectives of people in 16 countries. It is not an academic study, but an indication of what people in countries affected by armed conflict and those in the five permanent members of the Security Council and Switzerland think about a range of issues related to war.

- The survey was conducted in the 16 countries between June and September 2016 through online, face-to-face and computer-assisted telephone interviews of approximately 800, 1,000 or 5,000 adults aged 18 to 70; the methodology, timing and sample size depended on the country.
- Random sampling was used in 15 countries. Owing to operational considerations, the survey was not conducted in Syria. Instead, the respondents were Syrians currently living in Lebanon. WIN/Gallup International's local partner in Lebanon used the seed contact and snowballing approach to locate and survey Syrians in Lebanon.
- Results were weighted to ensure a representative sample of the population under review.
- The numbers presented have been rounded out and their sum in graphs and tables (based on the actual numbers before rounding) might not correspond to the manual addition of rounded numbers.
- Results that show meaningful, statistically significant differences (which is tested based on calculations of proportion and sample size) are indicated within the text accompanying the data visualizations.
- More detailed information on the methodology, e.g. the complete survey questionnaire, sample sizes, methodology and locations per country, can be found on www.icrc.org/peopleonwar.

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



ICRC