

# PEOPLE ON WAR

## Country report El Salvador

**ICRC worldwide consultation on the rules of war**

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Report by Greenberg Research, Inc.

EVEN WARS HAVE LIMITS EVEN WARS HAVE LIMITS EVEN WARS HAVE LIMITS EVEN WARS HAVE



INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

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## About the People on War project

To mark the 50th anniversary of the modern Geneva Conventions (on 12 August 1999), the ICRC launched its People on War project with the aim of building greater respect for fundamental humanitarian principles. At centre stage is a worldwide consultation giving the general public a chance to air their views on the many facets of war. The idea was that civilians and combatants alike would be able to share their experiences, express their opinions on what basic rules should apply in war, discuss why those rules sometimes break down and look at what the future holds.

With this in mind, the ICRC commissioned Greenberg Research, Inc. to design a research programme that would enable people to be heard in the most effective way possible. Under the guidance of Greenberg Research, ICRC staff and Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers carried out this consultation in 12 countries (Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Colombia, El Salvador, Georgia/Abkhazia, Israel, the occupied territories and the autonomous territories, Lebanon, Nigeria, Philippines, Somalia and South Africa), conducting in-depth, face-to-face interviews, group discussions and national public opinion surveys. Surveys on the basis of a questionnaire only were conducted in a further five countries (France, Russian Federation, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States) in order to reflect these people's perceptions of war.

Greenberg Research analysts then prepared a series of Country Reports on the basis of the findings. The reports open up this new, important discourse to a wider audience, while remaining conscious of the need to protect the safety of all those who participated.

By making this consultation public, the ICRC hopes to initiate a local and international debate on the humanitarian aspects of war - a debate that should be joined by the major political players, international and non-governmental organizations and aid specialists.

## Greenberg Research, Inc.

Greenberg Research is an opinion research firm that has worked for over two decades to help organizations and leaders around the world advance their goals in the face of rapid change. It specializes in using advanced methods of opinion research - surveys, focus groups and in-depth interviews - to help form strategies for political parties, corporations and non-governmental organizations.

Greenberg Research has extensive experience in Europe and the United States, but also in the Middle East, Asia, southern Africa and Central and South America. It has conducted research in war-torn, politically complex and remote settings. In its work for corporations and non-governmental organizations, it has explored a broad range of global issues, including landmines, genetic engineering, climate change, race and gender relations, trade and information technologies.

<p><b>The opinions expressed in this report are not those of the ICRC. The ICRC retained Greenberg Research, Inc. to design and oversee the People on War consultation. Greenberg Research compiled and analysed the results and is responsible for the content and interpretation.</b></p>
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## Country context

The civil war that tormented El Salvador throughout the 1980s was a struggle for political and economic control of a country long ruled by a landed, conservative oligarchy. Violent and sweeping, the war was prolonged by El Salvador's position as one of many nations used as a proxy for superpower influence during the Cold War. The conflict between the country's military and the communist-inspired anti-government forces (guerrillas) – funded and armed by the United States and the Soviet Union and its allies, respectively – left more than 75,000 dead and uprooted hundreds of thousands.<sup>1</sup> The country was left impoverished and deeply divided.

For decades, the oligarchy and a succession of military-backed governments maintained political control of the country. By the early 1970s, newly organized political parties began to pressure the government to institute democratic and economic reforms. Popular discontent grew and, by decade's end, a military junta ruled in conjunction with a number of appointed civilians. The regime, however, continued to employ armed force against anti-government demonstrators and nascent guerrilla forces, led by the *Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional* (FMLN).<sup>2</sup> The war began in earnest in 1981.

On one side of the conflict stood the Salvadoran army, which targeted both Salvadorans and foreigners believed to sympathize with the FMLN. El Salvador's "death squads" – gangs of paramilitaries that terrorized the countryside — killed an estimated 20,000 people between 1980 and 1982 alone.<sup>3</sup> The FMLN, for its part, attacked military and civilian targets alike. It used guerrilla tactics, destroying infrastructure in cities and launching rocket attacks on army bases and police stations.

Neither side was able to defeat its enemy. The stalemate was only broken with the end of the Cold War – and the withdrawal of active military support from the superpowers and their regional allies. After mediation by the United Nations (UN), the two sides signed a formal peace treaty in 1992. Under the terms of the pact, the army gave way to civilian leadership and the FMLN renounced violence and agreed to join a peaceful political process.

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<sup>1</sup> Brogan, P., *World Conflicts*, Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 1998, p. 473.

<sup>2</sup> The FMLN took its name from a communist activist who had been executed for his role in a failed Depression-era uprising by plantation workers against landowners.

<sup>3</sup> Brogan, P., *World Conflicts*, Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 1998, p. 476.

## Country methodology

The findings in this report are based on a consultation carried out by the ICRC in El Salvador. The project was overseen by a multinational research team from Greenberg Research, in conjunction with a local research partner, Gish, Paz & Associates, based in Guatemala City, Guatemala. Additional assistance was provided by the Salvadoran Red Cross. The El Salvador consultation consisted of three elements:

- Eight **focus groups** (FG) were recruited and professionally moderated by Gish, Paz & Associates using discussion guidelines developed by Greenberg Research. Focus groups were conducted in the capital city, San Salvador, and the rural communities of Chalatenango and Perquin. In each place, discussions were held with a range of people who had been involved in or directly affected by the conflict: women who had lived in conflict zones and women with missing family members (Perquin); ex-soldiers of the armed forces, medical personnel, male university students and NGO leaders (San Salvador); and male and female ex-FMLN combatants (Chalatenango). The focus groups were held between 20 and 26 May 1999.
- Twenty **in-depth interviews** (IDI), each lasting approximately 45 minutes, were conducted by professionally trained interviewers from Gish, Paz & Associates. Participants included union and political leaders, journalists, doctors, war-injured people and former hostages. The in-depth interviews took place between 27 May and 12 June 1999.
- A **quantitative national survey** was conducted among 1,001 respondents of at least 18 years of age selected using a stratified, multistage cluster sampling method that ensured an accurate representation of the national adult population. The survey was carried out by Gish, Paz & Associates between 22 and 30 May 1999. Gish, Paz & Associates trained interviewers and supervised the administration of the sample design and interviewing, with direction from Greenberg Research. Percentages reported here are subject to a sampling error of +/- 4.9 percentage points (at a 95 in 100 confidence level). Results in smaller segments, such as the 201 interviews for the Occidental area, are subject to an error of +/- 9.9 percentage points.<sup>4</sup>

The results of the survey, focus groups and in-depth interviews form the basis for this report. Respondents seemed genuinely interested in participating in the survey. The interviewers described the majority of respondents (64 per cent) as “cooperative” and 16 per cent as “extremely interested”. The focus group sessions were remarkably open, with participants enthusiastically and passionately voicing their opinions. For some participants, the experience was cathartic — a chance to tell their stories for the first time. Many left feeling that the discussion had helped to lift the psychological burden of their memories.

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<sup>4</sup> These estimates are based on population values of 50 per cent. Obviously, many reported percentages are lower or higher than that; higher percentages would have a smaller sampling error. For example, a reported percentage of 90 per cent for the total population would have a sampling error of +/- 2.9 percentage points.

## Executive summary

The ICRC consultation in El Salvador paints a picture of a brutal war that shook the foundations of society and devastated the nation physically and psychologically. Seven years have passed since the Peace Accords were signed, but memories of the war and its massacres, mutilations and widespread violence are today as vivid as if the conflict ended yesterday. In El Salvador, civilians were swept up in the war, becoming unwilling participants, often under the threat of death. They were intentionally targeted, sometimes used as human shields thrust into the line of fire, sometimes slaughtered as a warning to others. Women suffered terribly as targets of rape, abuse and harassment. Children witnessed horrific acts that left deep emotional scars across a generation. Families were ripped apart. Terror dominated the countryside.

Under pressure from their superiors and unfamiliar with the rules of war, forces on both sides participated in violent attacks on civilians. Despite widespread belief that non-combatants should be protected in wartime, the wall between civilians and combatants crumbled.<sup>5</sup> A cycle of destruction followed, leaving civilians powerless to protect themselves, and those who carried arms questioning their missions. Thirteen years of war left the people of El Salvador divided and exhausted – certain only that they wanted no more war, ready to rebuild their nation, but uncertain about the future.

The impact of El Salvador's war was felt far beyond the 75,000 who lost their lives and the hundreds of thousands who were injured.<sup>6</sup>

- Roughly a third (33 per cent) of Salvadorans report that a family member was killed during the war and 29 per cent say they lost contact with a close relative.
- Fifty-three per cent of people lived within areas of conflict and many had their lives turned upside down. One in five were forced to move (21 per cent) or suffered property damage (20 per cent).

Salvadorans' experiences reflect a strong belief in the rights of civilians to be protected during wartime.

- Nearly all Salvadorans – 84 per cent – believe war should be fought between combatants and that civilians should be left alone.
- Very few believe it is acceptable to put civilians in jeopardy. Many reject the notion that civilians voluntarily assisted combatants during the war.
- Weapons that can indiscriminately injure and kill civilians – particularly landmines, large bombs and weapons of mass destruction – are unacceptable to most Salvadorans.

A near majority of Salvadorans (49 per cent) base their belief that civilians must be protected in societal norms; they characterize actions that threaten civilian lives and property as "wrong". Nearly as many (46 per cent) stress the practical consequences, saying they believe civilians should be protected because the alternative just "causes too many problems".

- The normative justification is based largely on human rights (52 per cent) and religion (39 per cent).
- For those who have a more pragmatic view of civilian protection, the direct damage war causes people is by far the dominant concern. Most cite too much psychological damage

<sup>5</sup> In this report, the word "combatants" is used when referring to soldiers and/or fighters.

<sup>6</sup> Brogan, P., *World Conflicts*, Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 1998, p. 473.

(48 per cent) and too much physical suffering (37 per cent) as the main problems caused by the breakdown of limits.

The limits on behaviour in war began to break down when combatants with little or no training in international humanitarian law were pressured by their superiors to use attacks on civilians when trying to gain a strategic advantage. Combatants in the focus groups described being unaware of the “rules of war” and of facing tremendous pressure from their superiors to take whatever action was necessary to weaken the enemy.

The majority of respondents do not directly blame combatants for their wartime behaviour. Indeed, 59 per cent of those surveyed – and the same percentage of combatants – cite following orders as one of the reasons combatants attack or hurt civilians, more than double the number opting for any other reason. Salvadorans express particular dismay at those who recruited impressionable children and teenagers to become combatants, and the vast majority (83 per cent) believe children should be at least 18 years of age before they are mature enough to fight. The war is over, but its aftermath is still felt in the violence that threatens people’s well-being every day.

The belief in protection of civilians is not as firmly held for captured combatants. While Salvadorans resoundingly reject killing captured combatants if the other side were doing it (89 per cent), they are more likely to sanction torture, and they accept that captured combatants can be isolated from relatives and refused contact with independent organizations.

- Nearly one-quarter (23 per cent) of respondents believe a captured combatant can be subjected to torture (versus 34 per cent of those who were combatants). Nearly as many (19 per cent) think isolating captured combatants from outside visitors is allowable (versus 23 per cent of those who were combatants).
- Passion appears to overtake reason or morality when civilians and combatants consider whether to help a wounded enemy combatant who had killed someone close to them. Although two-thirds of those surveyed (67 per cent) say they would help such a combatant, many of the focus group respondents drew a finer distinction. While they might not necessarily kill the wounded combatant, they would not help him or her either. They would do nothing.

Despite the length of this war and the subsequent exposure of the atrocities committed before its conclusion seven years ago, the Geneva Conventions and rules governing armed conflict are not well known in El Salvador. Generally, only about one-third (33 per cent) have heard of the Geneva Conventions or believe that laws exist that set limits in war.

Yet receptivity to the limits embodied in the Geneva Conventions is quite high and, once made aware of their purpose, many Salvadorans believe they can make a difference.

- Once informed of the mission of the Geneva Conventions, 71 per cent believe they prevent wars from getting worse.

Familiarity with the Geneva Conventions helps determine attitudes towards treatment of combatants.

- Seventy-nine per cent of those who have heard of the Geneva Conventions would not allow captured combatants to be tortured (versus 68 per cent of those who are unfamiliar with the

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Geneva Conventions). When asked if captured combatants should have access to outside representatives, an even larger gap occurs (90 per cent compared with 66 per cent).

Salvadorans believe action should be taken against war criminals, particularly combatants who had charge of troops – according to focus group respondents. But the survey also found a strong desire among many to move on from the war, rebuild their lives and focus on developing their country. A plurality, 43 per cent, believe people who break the rules of war should be put on trial, but more prefer to put the war behind them by either forgiving them (19 per cent), granting amnesty (18 per cent), forgetting them (6 per cent) or exposing them to the public without a trial (8 per cent).

Salvadorans would welcome greater involvement from the international community; indeed, focus group respondents generally believe an earlier engagement of the international community would have spared many lives and much anguish. People look to both national institutions and the international community to deal with the lingering results of this war.

- More than a third (38 per cent) believe international law is the basis for the rules that govern war, more than do national laws (27 per cent), values that people hold (19 per cent) or religious principles (6 per cent).
- The overwhelming majority, 80 per cent, desire more intervention from the international community when civilian areas are cut off from food, water, medical supplies and electricity.
- Almost half (49 per cent) of Salvadorans expect more war in the future; only 29 per cent say they are hopeful that there will be a lasting peace.

The ICRC is a well-respected international humanitarian organization. The red cross emblem is widely recognized and its function – to help people, particularly the wounded, sick and needy – is well understood.

- By a wide margin, the ICRC/Red Cross is seen as having the largest role in helping civilians when they are cut off from food, water, medical supplies and electricity. Sixty per cent cite the ICRC/Red Cross as playing the biggest role in protecting civilians, followed by the UN (34 per cent), international humanitarian organizations (28 per cent) and religious leaders (25 per cent).
  - A majority (57 per cent) would turn to the ICRC/Red Cross for help when populated villages or towns are attacked, and 71 per cent believe ICRC representatives should be allowed to visit captured combatants – far more than other organizations on both measures.
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## The war experience

### Brutal and widespread violence

Thirteen years of warfare in El Salvador shook the foundations of society and inflicted physical and psychological damage on much of the population. Throughout the country Salvadorans experienced the effects of the war firsthand. A majority, 53 per cent, lived in an area of conflict at some time and nearly one-fifth of the population (21 per cent) were forced to move during the war. Two-thirds, 68 per cent, describe themselves as suffering one negative consequence of the war and nearly half, 47 per cent, cite at least two negative consequences.<sup>7</sup>

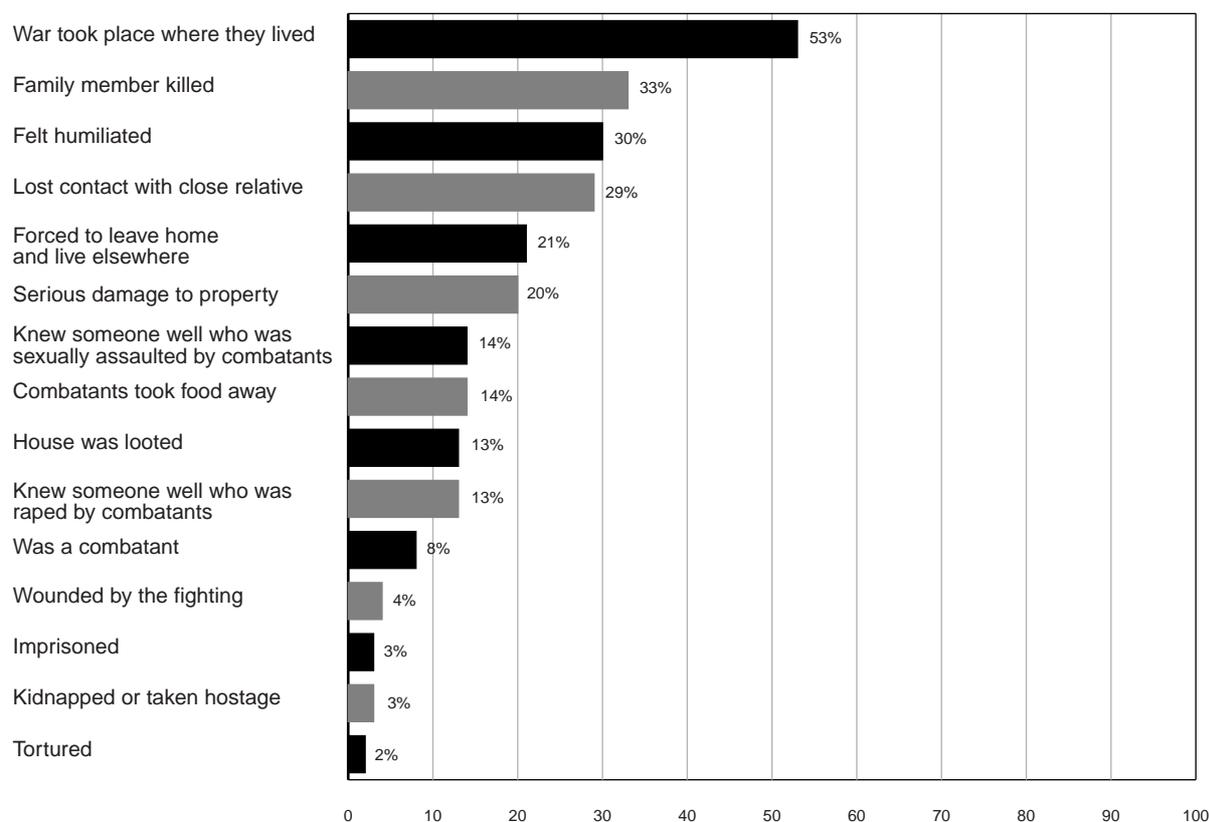
This was an extremely brutal war, waged between the poor and pitting brother against brother for reasons not known to many of those directly affected. One of the war's most defining characteristics is that of senseless violence against people.

The human toll was dramatic and widespread; one-third (33 per cent) report having a family member killed, 29 per cent lost contact with a family member and 30 per cent report feeling humiliated during the war.<sup>8</sup> While this violence was felt throughout the society, women bore a particular burden as the victims of sexual abuse: 14 per cent say they knew someone well who was sexually assaulted and 13 per cent say they knew someone well who was raped.

FIGURE 1

### The war experience

(per cent of total population responding)



<sup>7</sup> Respondents were given a series of 13 possible wartime experiences and asked to identify any that had happened to them as a consequence of the conflict. For example, respondents were asked whether they were forced to leave their homes and live elsewhere, and whether they had been imprisoned or tortured. Figure 1 also indicates the percentages of respondents who say the war took place where they lived and those who say they were combatants.

<sup>8</sup> Combatants experienced the war more intensely and were more directly affected by the violence: 52 per cent lost a family member, 41 per cent were forced to leave home and 11 per cent were imprisoned. Nearly one-quarter (24 per cent) of combatants say someone they knew well was raped.

Dislocation and property damage were also widespread: 21 per cent were forced to leave their homes, 20 per cent experienced serious damage to their property, 14 per cent had food taken and 13 per cent had their homes looted.

The loss of family members is a dominant memory of the war for much of the population. Civilians and combatants alike spoke movingly of the trauma of losing loved ones, often breaking down in the retelling of the experience.<sup>9</sup>

[Moderator: For you personally, what was the worst thing about this war?]

This, for me, was the hardest part. Losing a loved one to war. There were hundreds of us who lost loved ones. It would be hard to find a single family who did not lose loved ones in this war. (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

Because for some it was the bombs and mortars, for others, we lost our entire families, friends, people close to us, this is irreparable... it is something lost forever. And everything, everything that one had, material things can be replaced, although it is very expensive, but human lives no, that's why I feel that... everyone has been left with a footprint of this war. (IDI, woman in conflict zone, Perquin)

Because it would be rare to find the person who did not lose a family member. For me, it's hard to remember mothers watching them kill their children and children watching them kill their parents because all of this actually happened in the war. (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

The same, for us as a family, losing Hector was the most painful, the most significant experience... now we're in post-war, and much is the same but in another way. (FG, NGO personnel, San Salvador)

Perhaps, since it is personal. What I really feel about this war and what hurt me the most was the complete disintegration of my family. It's a point that really makes me suffer and the other part is to have remained lame – to have lost part of my physical body and to never be the same as before. Because, I really mean it, I do not wish for another war, because with my family disintegrated, I lost so much. (FG, young men, San Salvador)

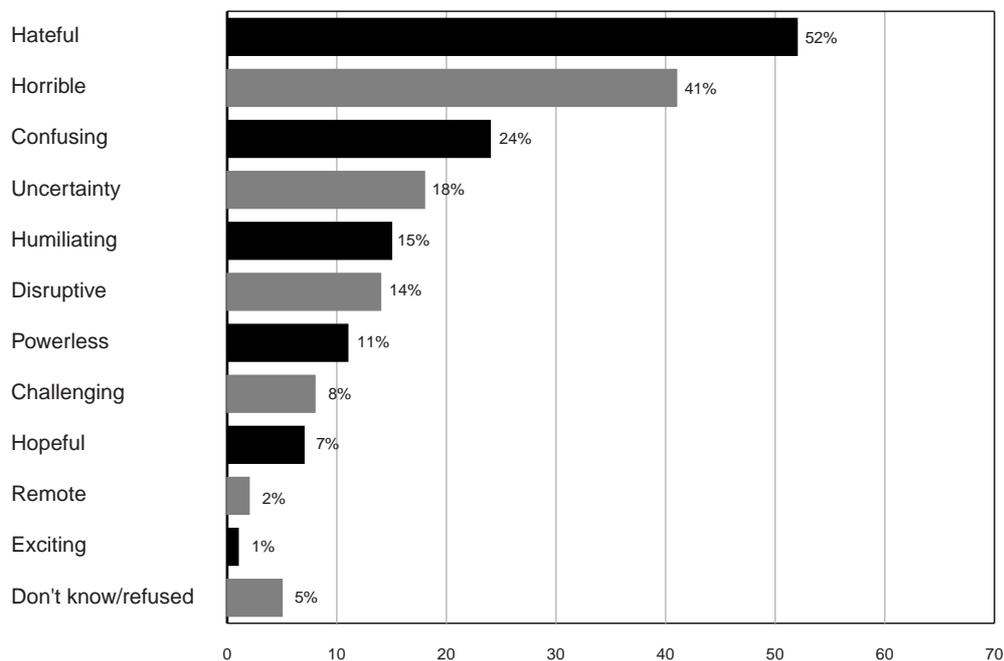
Given the experiences described so vividly in the focus groups, it is no wonder that “hateful” and “horrible” are the terms Salvadorans most often use to describe the war in El Salvador. (See Figure 2.)

Not only did the war cause massive loss of life, but it also produced a tremendous upheaval and uprooting of people, as many were forced to leave their homes at short notice — a fact echoed by survey respondents who characterized the war as “confusing” (24 per cent), “disruptive” (14 per cent) or causing “uncertainty” (18 per cent). This was a war that threw people into its violent currents with little warning and without any clearly defined purpose. Women in areas of conflict spoke of how the armed conflict suddenly seemed to erupt in their communities, sweeping them into a war whose root causes were little understood.

When the troops arrived, we left. We had been making tortillas and when we left, we fled, leaving everything we owned in the house. When we returned, everything had been destroyed, we were dying of hunger... (IDI, woman living in conflict zone, Perquin)

<sup>9</sup> In this report, the word “combatants” is used when referring to soldiers and/or fighters.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Personal description of the war**  
 (per cent of total population responding)



Question: Which *two* of these words best describe the war for you personally?

I had to leave El Salvador. We left one day at six in the evening, and we arrived at four in the morning. We crossed over those mountains right there in the dark, we couldn't make noise, not move or make noise because the reinforcement troops were out there waiting and they wounded the people they captured. (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

The war's unprecedented violence has had lasting repercussions for the people of El Salvador. Salvadorans in every focus group expressed concern over the spread of random violence and delinquency among uneducated youths since the war, and attributed it directly to a decade of conflict. They spoke of young men who learned to act brutally and were taught nothing else while fighting against their brothers.

Psychologists have proven that violence generates violence and definitely people that got used to it [violence] for 14 years continue with the violence. Suddenly the war is over, but they continue still behaving as if they are in war and we have, at least in the hospital, great amounts of patients who are products of this violence. (FG, medical personnel, San Salvador)

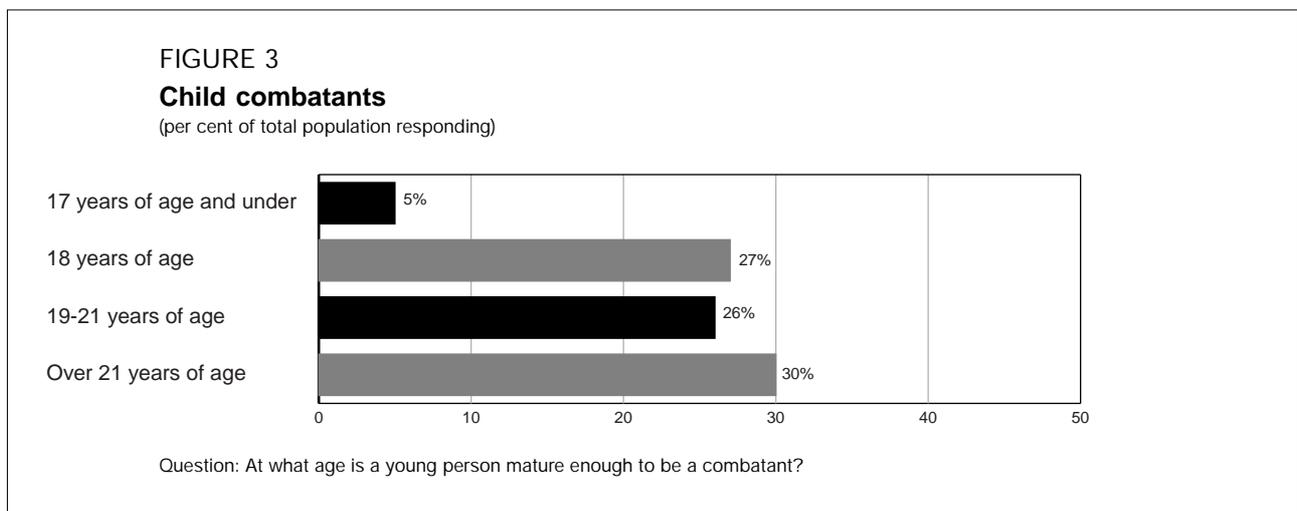
But the other big problem is the wave of delinquency that has risen since the signing of the Peace Accords. It has resulted from both sides of the war, first the soldiers of the armed forces had not studied, and the guerrilla fighters hadn't studied either. So, when the war ended they had no study or training so there is no work for them now. (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

I'd like to refer to the worst thing for me is the delinquency. After the peace process that we had, society has experienced much delinquency. Life is different now and very difficult. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

One more thing, and something that is very noteworthy because it has been published, that during the war there was no delinquency, and now a horrible delinquency has emerged. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

Starting there, from the war, we now have many problems with delinquency. All this, you see, comes from the war, more poverty for the country, and as combatants, well they are not okay with the little bit of support that they received. Many of them are now hanging out with the street gangs. (IDI, woman living in conflict zone, Perquin)

Not surprisingly, Salvadorans resist the notion of children serving as combatants and repeatedly expressed dismay that both sides actively recruited young people to join the war in El Salvador. Countrywide only 5 per cent support the idea of children 17 years old or younger being combatants. Eighteen years of age is a dividing line, as is 21: 27 per cent say 18 year-olds are mature enough to become soldiers or fighters and 30 per cent say anyone over 21 is old enough to bear arms.<sup>10</sup>



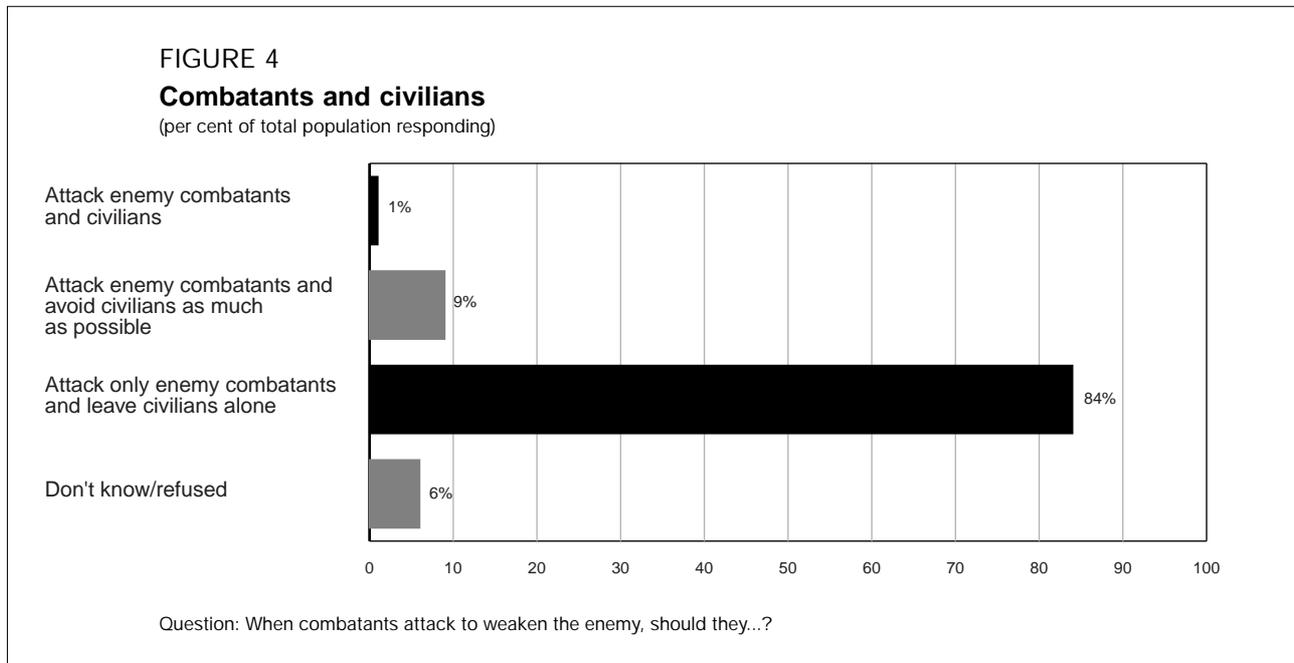
The negative effects of the war linger even today as Salvadorans continue to live daily with violence. This has produced quite a pessimistic outlook on the future. Almost half (49 per cent) of the Salvadorans expect more war in the future; only 29 per cent say they are hopeful that the peace will last.

<sup>10</sup> Combatants regard the involvement of children more leniently; 11 per cent believe children under the age of 18 are ready to take up arms and half (50 per cent) find 18 years an acceptable age to become a combatant.

## Civilians in the war

### Deep respect for civilians

Nearly all Salvadorans are against involving civilians in armed conflict. After experiencing a war in which civilians were used by both sides or intentionally targeted, the overwhelming majority — 84 per cent — believe that combatants should fight only combatants and leave civilians alone. This sentiment is shared equally by combatants and civilians.



When asked to volunteer what combatants should not be allowed to do, most people say they should not attack civilians (23 per cent). Others talk of not killing or killing without a reason (17 per cent). Respondents also mention not killing children and the elderly (2 per cent) and killing or torturing wounded combatants (2 per cent). They believe combatants should avoid fighting in civilian areas or simply fighting at all (5 per cent combined), taking hostages (3 per cent) or recruiting children (3 per cent). (See Figure 5.)

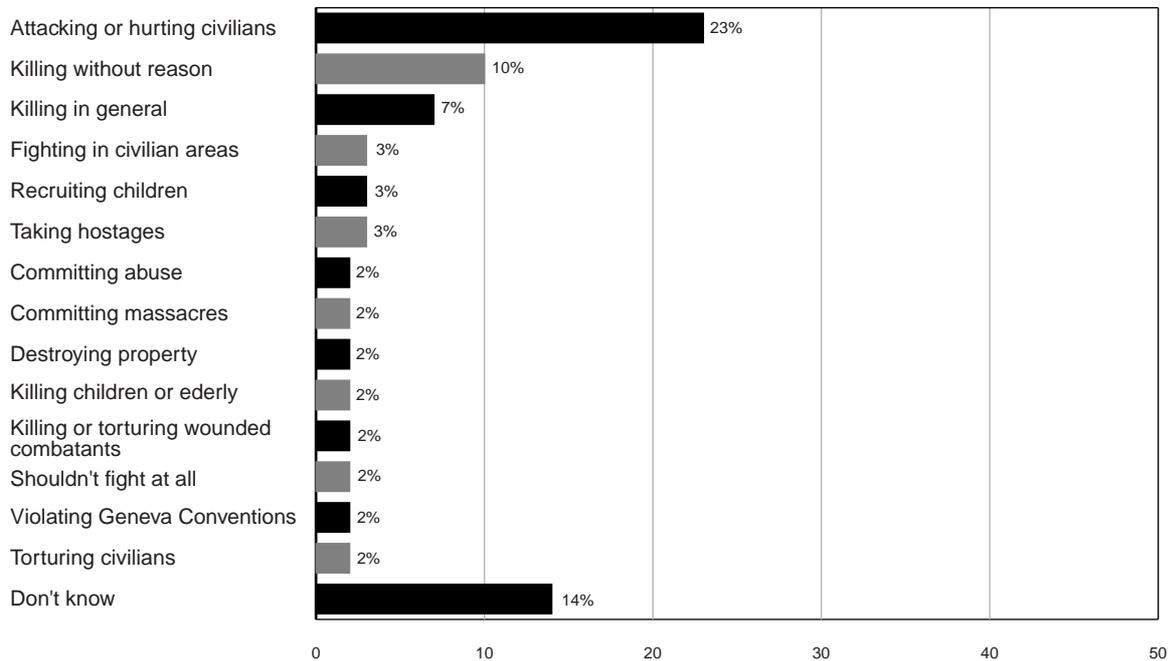
These findings were richly amplified in the focus group discussions. Participants consider attacking civilians to be inappropriate and regret that it was allowed to happen in El Salvador.

At no time would it be okay to attack the civilian population because they cannot defend themselves. (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

So, for me this shouldn't have happened because the civilian population did not get involved with one side or the other. They just lived there and were living their lives and their only crime was that the guerrillas were near by. (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

But, it's the same here; the ones who suffered the consequences were the women, the children and the elderly. The man who went about in the mountain with his weapon, knew what it was about, and knew how to defend himself but these people no, they waited inside their homes, waiting for someone to defend them. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

**FIGURE 5**  
**What combatants should not do**  
 (per cent of total population responding)



Question: Is there anything that combatants should not be allowed to do in fighting the enemy? (open-ended question)

The bad thing they did was to assassinate children... pregnant women... this thing of... assassinating children and other people is wrong. But, I say that one with a weapon has the right to confront another with a weapon, but these children who didn't know why they died, pregnant women with their children inside their uterus... they shouldn't do this. (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

While they feel all civilians warrant protection, Salvadorans were clear on the need for special protection for the most vulnerable members of society — women and children — who paid a particularly high price in the war. Female focus group respondents described rampant sexual abuse of women and told stories of rape and pregnancies aborted under pressure. They described a generation of children who grew up in fear and suffered lasting psychological damage as a result of the war.

This is what the war left us with, also the violence against women by macho men who now beat us and our children daily... we are now all mistreated and abused due to the effects of this war. (IDI, woman living in conflict zone, Perquin)

Yes, I would say yes, they should receive special protection, because the children, for example this massacre that they did, the children, they didn't know anything, and the women who were pregnant suffered so much, yes, they should receive special protection. (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

Other things that both sides did were to recruit people to their forces. I remember that the soldiers fell all over the youth and the youth joined up to kill each other. I would have preferred for them to be run over and killed by a car than to kill each other. If the guerrillas, if the mothers didn't let their sons sign up, they'd kill them

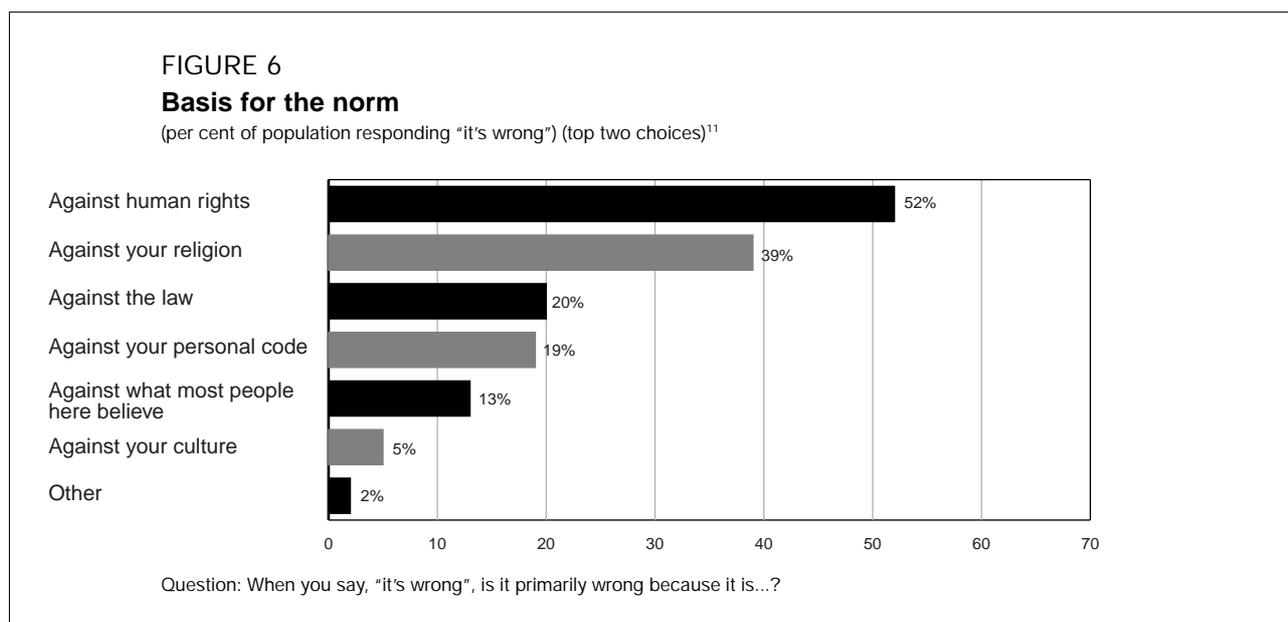
at 10-12 years old. They didn't consider the young age of the recruits. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

Okay, the hardest part was for the mothers to wander about in the mountains for months with their children, without eating, without drinking and the children suffered from the great epidemic of hunger. So many people that died in order to see change in our country, for that reason mostly it's important to tell the whole history of the war, right? (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

There should be special protection, for example, like the pregnant women. It is sad, they should be helped because she is the one worried about the family, the children, her baby, she especially should receive protection. (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

### Foundation for protecting civilians

Salvadorans base their respect for civilians equally on societal norms and practical considerations. Just under half believe combatants should not be able to take actions that harm civilians because "it is wrong" (49 per cent). Asked why these actions are wrong, most say that they violate human rights (52 per cent) or religious beliefs (39 per cent) – answers that reflect harsh memories of inhumanity during the war and the marked influence of the Catholic Church in El Salvador.



In areas of conflict, civilians and combatants alike spoke of the need to respect human life.

One is to respect the lives of the civilians. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

Well, for me, we all have the right to life and to survive however we can. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

So this was the worst for me because they didn't respect anybody, even if they captured someone, they killed them instantly because they didn't respect the dignity or rights of the people. (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

<sup>11</sup> Respondents were allowed to provide multiple responses. As a result, the aggregate responses add up to more than 100 per cent.

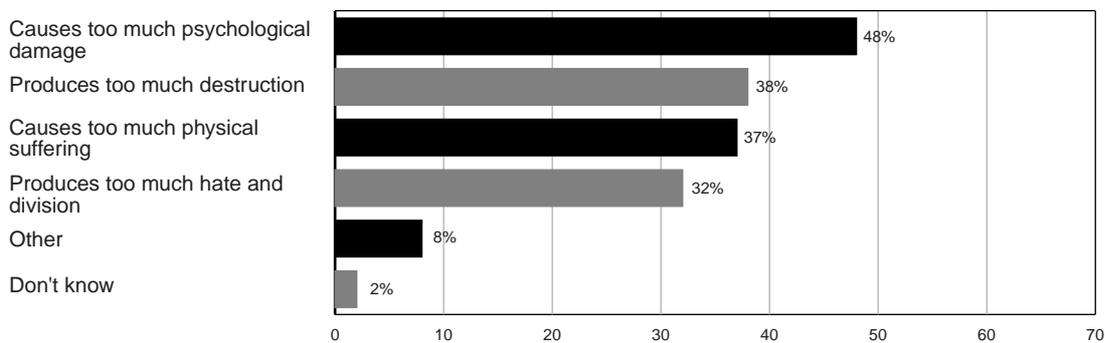
I think my comrade already said it, the tortures which were things that went directly against humanity. I think that's what the majority of us feel, that we all suffered. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

A nearly equal percentage view actions by combatants against civilians more pragmatically, although the human dimension clearly dominates these impressions as well. Of the 46 per cent who believe these actions should not happen because they "cause too many problems", more than half cite the psychological damage that can result (48 per cent), followed by destruction and physical suffering (38 and 37 per cent, respectively). Almost one-third cite the "hatred and division" produced as the main problems these actions cause.

FIGURE 7

**Too many problems**

(per cent of population responding "causes too many problems")<sup>12</sup>



Question: When you say, "it just causes too many problems", are you thinking it...?

In focus groups, combatants shared the commitment to civilian protection, but in contrast to those who did not take up arms, they also cited legal restrictions designed to protect civilians, including international law and agreements. As one combatant said, "If he is not armed, you can't attack him. Because there is a law: if you see him with a weapon, yes you can, without a weapon, no, you can't." (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

**Limits on weapons of war**

People have very clear ideas about what type of weapons they consider acceptable in wartime. They strongly wish to prohibit weapons such as the 500-pound bombs that indiscriminately harm civilians or cause mass destruction.

Participants in the focus groups expressed these feelings strongly, particularly those women who had lived in areas of heavy fighting and experienced aerial bombardment.

Once a plane came to bomb the village where we were meeting, where there were 14 tin roof houses amidst a civilian population. They destroyed the 14 homes, everyone dead, children, women, and a 90-year-old woman hanging from a tree in pieces. (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

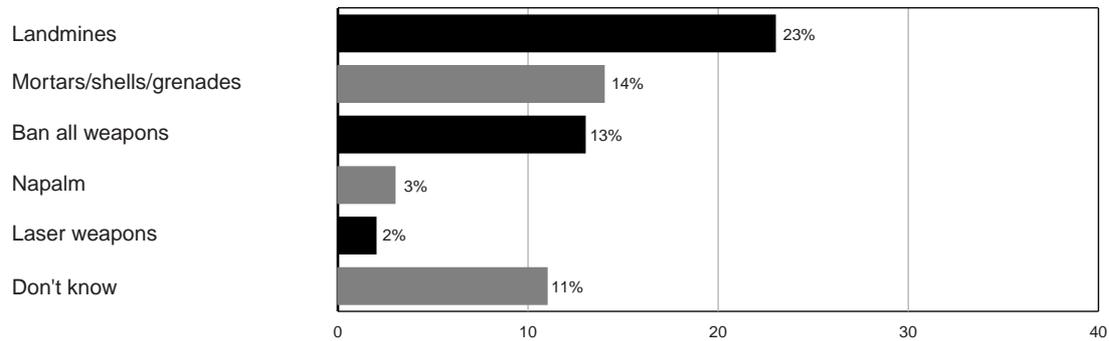
The bombs... they are the ones... of 500 pounds... They threw some of these 500 pound bombs that didn't explode, thank God. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

<sup>12</sup> Each respondent was allowed to provide two responses.

FIGURE 8

**Weapons that should not be used**

(top five responses of those who believe there are weapons that should not be used during war)



Question: What types of weapons are you thinking of?

Yes, for example, the arms those were too, the bombs that they called 500 pounds. Look, these were too much because they demolished too much and also the tear bombs. This was not correct... it's sufficient with their rifle that they could assassinate, but they didn't need these big bombs that they threw. (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

All the way from Gotera, they were throwing mortars and that's when they killed a lot of people from a distance. (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

Most Salvadorans find weapons that can indiscriminately injure and kill civilians, such as landmines, large bombs and weapons of mass destruction, unacceptable. Landmines in particular are singled out: 94 per cent would not support the use of landmines by combatants where civilians may step on them accidentally.

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## Civilians in actual conflict

### Unwilling participants

Salvadorans firmly believe that limits should be put on combatants in order to protect civilians. They reject opportunities to relax this standard and maintain their strongly held beliefs that civilians are to be kept out of armed conflict.

There is a near-absolute belief that attacking civilians who help enemy combatants, willingly or unwillingly, is unacceptable. Almost everyone surveyed (94 per cent) believe civilians who give food and shelter to enemy combatants should not be attacked, regardless of whether they are forced to help or volunteer. This monolithic support for protecting civilians declines slightly when respondents are asked about civilians who are transporting ammunition, but the vast majority still believe they should be left alone. Eighty-seven per cent believe it is not acceptable to attack civilians who transport ammunition under duress and more than three-quarters, 77 per cent, hold firmly to this belief even when the transport is voluntary.

These beliefs are most likely rooted in war experiences, when civilians were used as human shields or slaughtered to gain ground or a psychological advantage. Civilians became pawns in the struggle, the victims of massacres and mutilation meant to weaken the resolve of the other side.

With the principle of psychological warfare, which we can say, they [army] in the beginning had an intelligence organization, which the [foreigners] were involved in, which one of their primary tactics for executing a psychological war was to attack the civilian population, and not only attacking, but also doing very macabre things, like torturing them. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

Then, cutting them into little pieces, and they knew that they weren't guerrillas, they knew they were part of the civilian population, but the objective was to carry out psychological warfare, and leave behind the flow of all these people motivated in questions of war, that was their objective. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

...The army had their tactics, let's say, to devastate, they sent their operatives to demolish the land that was inhabited by the civilian population and the guerrillas. For them, the civilians were the same as guerrillas, but no, they were civilians, and that was part of their operative. Another tactic was to create panic and terror, psychological terror among the population, and other acts were to kill someone in the night and leave them hanging there. These were part of their terror tactics. They left and really nobody knew who had killed them. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

For the most part, it was for personal hatred that the two sides fought so violently. Even more, they used psychological warfare to get to people. He who thought differently, was told that he was your enemy. They said to others destroy the whole family. If they had cows, kill the cows. The transportation routes were destroyed to win the war. Then if one came and destroyed something, the other [side] came to do the same. They would do things to psychologically wear the other side down. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

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The army was prepared to kill, and to kill in this way, because in this way they were going to terrorize the population. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

...she hid underneath the dead bodies that were already there. She dug in like an ant into its ant hill and just when she had buried herself, she heard a soldier say, "here she is... she's already dead". She saw... everything, how they assassinated the children, how they threw the pregnant women in the oven with a raging fire. This woman was an example, because she tells how it was... and she is the only one who saved herself... (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

I'd say for me that the hardest part of war was seeing the massacres of children and the elderly. I witnessed a massacre during this war when they killed 60 children under the age of five. Sixty children. For me, this was the worst thing, because these children were defenceless, minors, all under age five. How barbaric! And, they massacred another 60 innocent civilians who were only elderly and pregnant women. (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

I think that the death squads were prepared by the same military, and they killed them with an objective of cleansing the entire country of people who were manifesting the want for changes in living conditions, you could say, because the people held manifestations, they demanded things from them. So, the people up there became aware and began utilizing the death squads to clandestinely kill and assassinate these people. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

Civilians were caught in the middle – coerced by both sides to help – and thousands gave their lives. Combatants knew well the pressures that civilians faced but did not hesitate to force them to provide food and shelter. Ultimately, as women in the town of Perquin related, civilians had no choice but to help both sides at different times during the war just to survive.

This happened two different ways. In certain areas, the FMLN poisoned the water so that when the armed forces arrived, they would die from drinking the water. The people gave food both to the armed forces and to the FMLN. They were helping out of their own self-defence. They were mostly neutral. They didn't want to get involved with one side or the other. But, they helped them in self-defence by giving up their food. They gave food both to the armed forces and to the FMLN. They helped both sides, in order to remain neutral. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

I'd say, sometimes the soldiers and the guerrillas thought the people... collaborated with the guerrillas and the soldiers realized... that some family perhaps gave them some food or had joined them, so they killed the whole family for collaborating with the enemy. (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

Because, they forced them, obligated them, if the army came you had to give them something to eat. If the guerrillas came, you had to give them something to eat or they would kill you. And sometimes, for example, if the guerrilla was here in Perquin, you had to do whatever they said. If not, you had to leave if one was the owner of a place which they occupied. It was terrible, because if you didn't sell tortillas to the guerrillas, they got mad and if you didn't sell to the soldiers, they

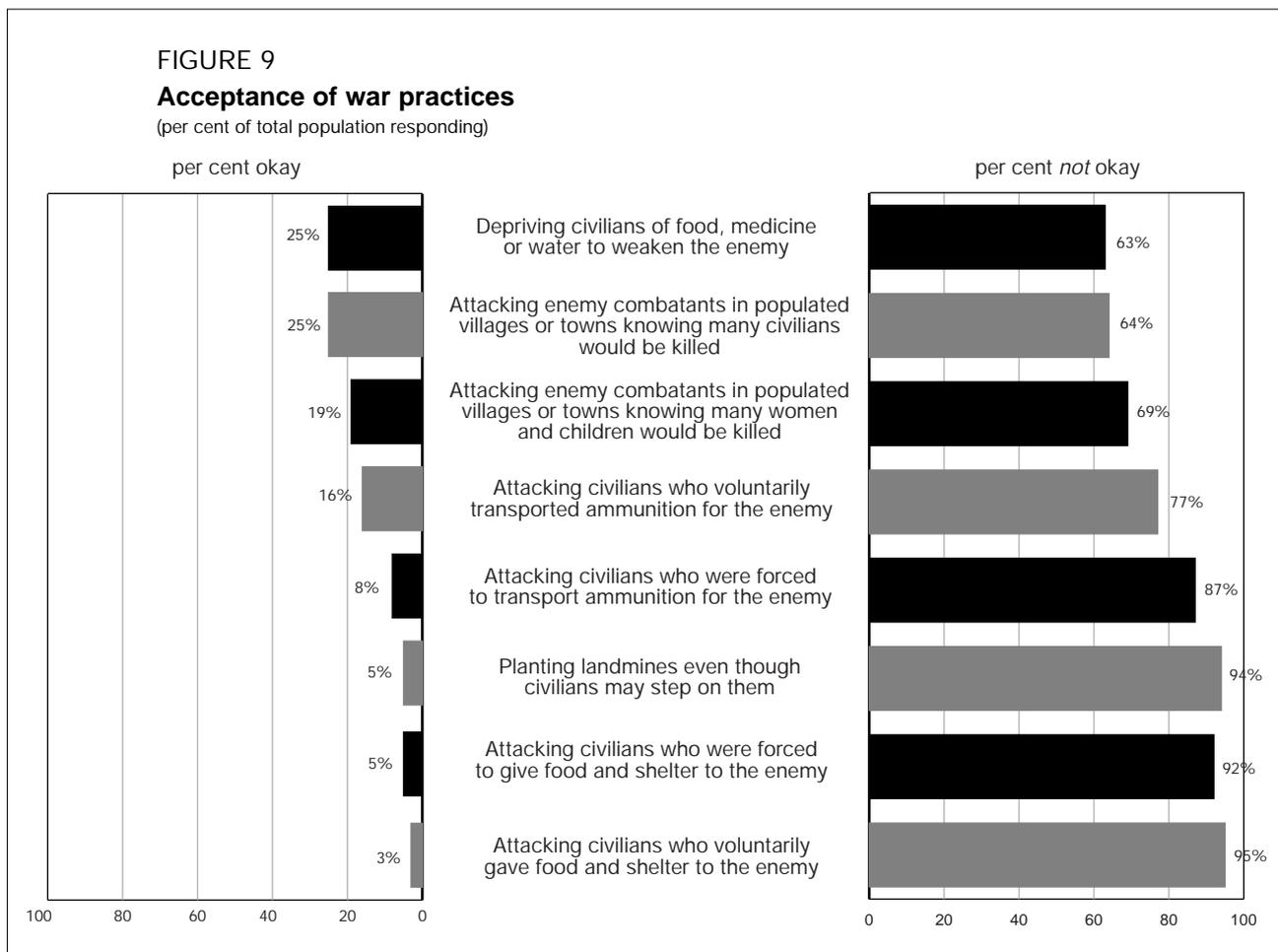
got mad, so you had to collaborate with both sides. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

Because, like I say, you had to take part or sides. Nobody could say, I wasn't involved in the war. Yes, we were involved, but I do not know that it's okay to attack us, because you are asking if they had the right to attack us sometimes just because we were there. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

Because they did it out of fear. My godfather, when the army arrived, was told, "Look Sebastian, we're going to need food for the army" and my godfather would go to bring food. Then the FMLN arrives by night, "You're going to help us get some corn and some meat, go." The military would stop him as he brought food for the other side and vice versa. So, I think if someone is giving me food to help me, out of their fear or my machismo, it would be unjust to kill them. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

### Civilian protections in wartime

A large majority of Salvadorans, as has been noted, voice a belief in a blanket protection for civilians caught up in war. This holds true on a general level and also when respondents are presented with specific scenarios: whether it is acceptable for combatants to deprive civilians of food, water or medicine or to attack a populated village or town knowing many civilians would be killed. Asked whether these actions are "wrong" or "part of war", the overwhelming majority express the belief that they are wrong. Yet a significant minority of Salvadorans believe these actions are part of war, as Figure 9 demonstrates.



While this finding appears to infer acceptance of such actions by a significant minority, there was a clear sense in the focus group discussions that these actions are not acceptable, but a reality of war. When describing their experiences, some participants did so with a sense of resignation, not acceptance. They want civilians to be protected, but their experience with war has effectively taken this option off the table.

For example, when there are bombings, the damage and harm to the civilian population is accidental. They know that the bomb is going to fall... there could be an army there... and civilians. Another thing is when they go towards a barricade... they know that they are going to kill civilians also... one side or the other. (IDI, religious leader, San Salvador)

I think they shouldn't because we all have rights to food and water. I think it must be part of war. (IDI, teacher, San Salvador)

I think it's incorrect also, although that's what war is for, right? To attack one another and unfortunately the civilians get caught in the middle. I think that [in] one form or another we'll always be affected by these situations. Because supposedly, this band is defending the others, and us too. We are always part of the conflict, although we don't want to be and it's incorrect for them to attack us. (IDI, young man, San Salvador)

A large divide between civilians and combatants emerges on this question. Those who fought in the war are much more likely to view these actions as part of war. Just 53 per cent of combatants view depriving civilians of food, medicine or water as unacceptable; one-third, 34 per cent, believe it is part of war. An even lower number reject attacking villages with large civilian populations as wrong (49 per cent) and 33 per cent see it as part of war. These views stand in marked contrast to those of non-combatants: 64 per cent of those who did not take up arms in the war find depriving civilians of food, medicine or water as unacceptable and only 24 per cent accept these actions as part of war. A full two-thirds (68 per cent) do not believe attacking populated villages or towns is acceptable; only one in five believe it's part of war.

### **The impact of taking sides**

Understanding the divergence between norms and practice is easier when the effect of a person's allegiance to a cause or a side is examined. Respondents who took sides during the war in El Salvador are much more likely to have been directly affected by the war and to sanction attacks on civilians.

Combatants are much more likely to have supported a side during the war in El Salvador (58 per cent supported a side compared with 9 per cent of non-combatants). They are also much more likely to cite negative experiences as a result of the war (45 per cent of combatants with four or more negative experiences compared with 18 per cent of non-combatants).

While taking sides in general does not seem to affect their belief in the right to civilian protection on a general level, when presented with specific scenarios involving civilians, their level of tolerance for attacks rises. In particular, they are more likely to sanction attacks on civilians who are seen to voluntarily transport ammunition for the enemy (23 per cent of those who took sides versus 15 per cent who did not). They are also more willing to say attacking populated villages or towns is just part of war (33 per cent versus 20 per cent).<sup>13</sup> And they are more likely to sanction the use of landmines (13 per cent versus only 4 per cent).

<sup>13</sup> They are also more likely to know that there are rules or laws that prevent this kind of behaviour (43 per cent of those who took sides compared with 36 per cent who did not).

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Lastly, this allegiance affects their views of the future. Those who supported a side are more likely to want punishment for rule-breakers (68 per cent versus 59 per cent); they desire more international intervention in the future (87 per cent versus 79 per cent), and they are more pessimistic about peace: the majority of those who supported a side (55 per cent) believe there will be more war in the future instead of peace, compared with 49 per cent of those who did not support a side.

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## Breakdown of limits

### Relaxing the rules of war

Salvadorans' firm belief in according civilians special protection was directly challenged by the reality of a war that targeted civilians. The long list of atrocities is well documented, as innocent civilians were often sacrificed to put additional pressure on the enemy to surrender. Of those who were either imprisoned or lived under enemy control, 15 per cent were personally mistreated, 8 per cent were physically injured and 25 per cent were not treated correctly. The killing, mutilation and abuse of civilians were psychological tools used both to weaken the enemy and discourage support by civilians for the other side.

### Combatants unprepared and untrained in rules of war

Leaders who forced combatants to carry out these atrocities or pay a price themselves applied tremendous pressure to those actively engaged in the fighting. Many Salvadorans fought without a real understanding of the mission; in focus groups, government soldiers talked openly of how they were pressured to fight without a clear justification. Most believed that the elite and other powerful people established the goals of the war, and that they were used to carry out these goals.

It was... a business planned by the highest command... They gave us the weapons. The poor Salvadorans were then forced to fight between two sides like I said. We never knew why we were fighting; we were fighting for the high officials. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

Politics threw us into a conflict and that's why we fought. Without knowing who we were fighting against. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

That's how I have seen it in my mind. Go ask a general who was leading the war at that time, today he's a businessman, today he's a millionaire and the combatants, where are they? Ask the same question to the people of the Frente and they'll tell you the same thing. Why? They swayed people who really lived in the hills, to fight against one another like my companion said. The same race. Only their ideas were different. This was the only difference between us. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

Fighters among the anti-government forces were naturally much clearer about their motivations and goals. They believed the war was necessary to improve the lives of the poor and working classes, and justified it as a necessary price to pay for change.

But also we must say that the war was a necessary bad route, because look, if the war had not happened, we still wouldn't have the few small changes that we do have at the top, so it was worth it to some degree... of those who have benefited, well, we wouldn't be meeting with you here today. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

Because it was worth more to die fighting than to die of hunger, and in this situation we are clear that the war we don't wish upon anyone. Nor perhaps would we continue working this way... but if we defend our reasons, the causes for which we got involved in the effort. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

Well, I would tell him that war carries a lot of suffering, of course. It is hard, and perhaps we didn't even achieve our objectives but, since there was no other way out, we had to do it. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

But the confusion and lack of understanding that marked the attitudes of government soldiers could also be found among anti-government forces. Coming face-to-face with government soldiers – many of whom were drawn from the rural poor, the very people they were fighting for – challenged the clarity of their goal. As one former FMLN combatant put it: “Look, the soldiers were or are from poor families. The guerrillas also are from poor families. How could the soldiers make them fight against us knowing that they were poor just like us?”

Both soldiers and fighters described entering the war with little training and little understanding of the “rules” of war.

Because, here in central San Salvador, to mobilize yourself to the maximum where the war was, in the rural villages, in the rural area where they were killing the indigenous [people], where the people were not prepared. This war took place there, they didn't instruct us in human rights, they just said here's what you're going to do and here's how you're going to do it. You are going to defend our country. It was your same village opposing you. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

#### **Pressured to follow orders**

Lacking knowledge of the rules of war, combatants were put under tremendous pressure from their superiors to attack, kill and massacre civilians. The roots of this breakdown are found in a culture of pressure to use the most extreme tactics against the enemy and civilians in order to weaken the resolve of the other side. Civilians and combatants both cite following orders from superiors as the reason why civilians were attacked (59 per cent of each group), far more so than any other reason, including winning at any cost, hatred for the other side, lack of concern for laws or the influence of alcohol or drugs.<sup>14</sup>

Civilians and combatants agreed that untrained and poor combatants were forced by their superiors to carry out these acts or face extreme penalties, sometimes the loss of their own lives.

I was drugged. My mind worked only as I wanted it to. Or, you could say under the orders of others or it could be my own turbulence that I was lost. Yes, I killed on a whim with a machete... I did it. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

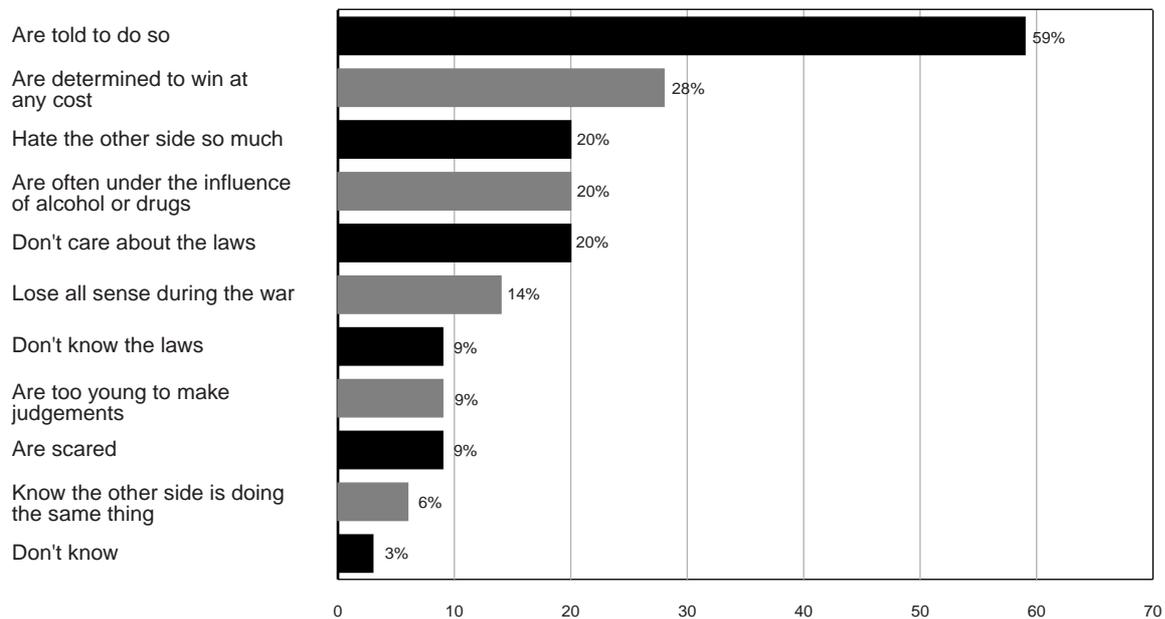
Among themselves... for example, if a guerrilla committed a small error, he had to go kill his comrade for this error, including his same guerrilla comrades. Yes, and the soldiers were the same way, that's why I say that their commanding officers should be punished. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

They had someone who gave them orders... someone who sent them to, as they say some were drugged, some killed their own mothers and fathers and felt no remorse. (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

Yes, they were orders. They were orders, and if they didn't comply... well, they made a lot of money to do this and so if they didn't comply with the orders, like I say... A cousin of mine because he didn't want to kill some family members, they killed him. They'd say, “You don't want to be a soldier, you can't be in the army,

<sup>14</sup> A tendency to hold superiors responsible is also reflected in attitudes to punishment, as discussed on p. 24.

**FIGURE 10**  
**Why combatants attack civilians**  
 (per cent of total population responding) (top two responses)



Question: Which *two* of the following reasons best explain why combatants attack or hurt civilians, even though many people say it is not okay or maybe against the law. Is it because...?

because you feel pity. He who enters the army, cannot feel pity, not for your mother, or your father, nobody..." that's what they told them, to assassinate and he didn't do it so they removed him from the post and killed him, a nephew of mine. (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

Yes, following orders. Everything, I will manifest if you don't do it to them, I'll do it to you. That's what they'd say to us. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

Combatants were not ready to admit that they deliberately committed atrocities, but were quick to point out the possibility of civilians being harmed mistakenly as part of the war. They spoke of making these mistakes, and regretting these acts, but view them from within a broader framework of what was necessary in this particular war.

And we, I am telling you with the strictest confidence, that because I was operating in the area, that they said, look "if there are eight soldiers and two civilians, let them pass." This is what I saw; we never directly attacked the civilian population... using them as a way to move from one point to the next, right, and lamentably, eight or ten soldiers and one civilian would die, right. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

There was unjust treatment of civilians by both sides. That is war. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

Sometimes, yes, civilians were wounded, but it's because they got caught in the crossfire. In the same crossfire, the army brought the civilian population into it,

they brought them into it to help them with their security, and they took them to other places to defend them. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

Every one of us carries our archives, good or bad, but we do it. So, I can tell you, step by step, my military history, my story. So, what I want you to understand, what my brother is trying to tell you, is that everyone of us carries this and we haven't even told our own families. It is ours, it is our personal diary, my crucifix that I carry and that I will bear, forever. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

### Prisoner protections less certain

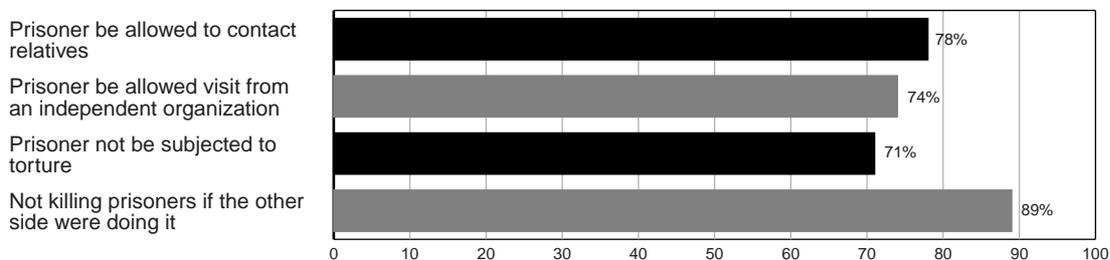
A large majority of Salvadorans extend the protections accorded to civilians to captured combatants and remain firmly committed to preventing abuses against them. The vast majority, 89 per cent, reject the killing of captured combatants, even if the other side is doing so, and 86 per cent believe captured enemy combatants never deserve to die. Perhaps because of the inhumanity and violence they have endured, Salvadorans are resolutely opposed to killing – even taking the life of an enemy – and actively committed to protecting life.

While a large majority believe captured combatants should be protected and accorded all their rights, a significant minority is more tolerant of certain abuses. Almost one-quarter of Salvadorans (23 per cent) sanction torture and slightly smaller minorities accept restrictions on visits from independent organizations and even from family members. (See Figure 11.) Combatants are even more likely to accept these abuses, particularly subjecting a prisoner to torture (34 per cent).

FIGURE 11

### Captured enemy combatants

(per cent of total population responding)



Question: Now let me ask you how captured combatants should be treated.

Combatants perhaps view the treatment of captured enemy combatants differently because they have found themselves in similar situations during the war. They were not monolithic in their views. Some told of facing this situation and saving the enemy combatant in spite of strong feelings about what that combatant had done.

Yes, I've done it, I had to do it because as I described that in the beginning, my work was as a brigade officer in health and although we didn't have medicine, we reached an agreement with the international Red Cross that we would attend to our wounded, our wounded soldiers. They would replace the medications that we needed. This was not always possible for the levels of isolation and contact with the ICRC that we had. (IDI, war-injured person, San Salvador)

For example, if yesterday a soldier killed my brother, and tomorrow I have the possibility of charging him for it, honestly, I can't answer what I would do. I would like to say that I would, that I would respect his life; of course, there were many who reacted that way. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

For example, the direction of the Frente in this sense was very clear, respect for life was first. Including extreme cases, if some combatants, for example, thought they could act in this manner, they were removed and sent elsewhere and they put someone else in their place who would treat the situation with more indifference. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

Yes, for us there is an experience with, they took the community of San Marcos, they wounded a soldier in the face and he couldn't walk, so we asked the Red Cross to take him out of there. It could have been us. But as human beings, we can't let someone else suffer, so we made sure the man was cured. (FG, NGO personnel, San Salvador)

No, I only want to say that it is a complicated experience, because I could have lived one of these experiences. To begin with, these guys who killed my father and captured my mother were only a few blocks away. I had the opportunity out in Amaya, right... look, I saw it and I had a brash reaction and said, today I am going to kill that devil, because I could have done it very easily, arrive and hit him with a couple of shots. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

The widely held belief that combatants were following orders when carrying out the many atrocities does not temper the vivid memories that atrocities provoke. Instead, Salvadorans struggle with what they know is morally correct and the intensity of their emotions. As noted earlier in this report, hatred is a defining characteristic of the war and that emotion can dissolve a clearly stated moral commitment to protect captured combatants.

The moral commitment to protect captured combatants begins to break down when respondents were confronted with the hypothetical situation of choosing to save a surrendering enemy combatant who had killed a close relative or friend. The survey findings indicate a majority would save the life of a surrendering enemy combatant (67 per cent) and a slightly smaller majority would help one who was wounded (63 per cent).

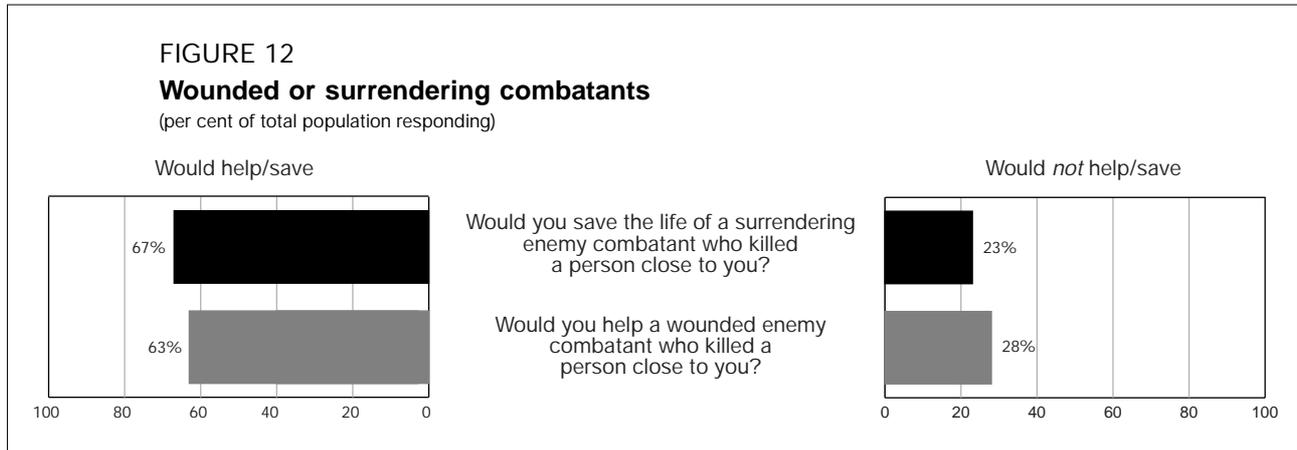
In the focus groups, some participants expressed the belief that they would in fact save or help a surrendering or wounded enemy combatant as part of their moral code. Their belief that every human being has the right to live outweighed other considerations in what is perhaps the most difficult test of that code.

I believe that I would... because this happened to me; I know I would because this already happened to me. I didn't have this in my head that, I am going to seek revenge but, the young man who killed my brother and when I saw him I felt something very ugly and if I had wanted to do something, I could have done it but I didn't. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

So yes, I believe that I could do it. But, if you go around thinking about it... it's hard to say what you would do. So, I believe that it depends on what one thinks and what one thought during the war and to kill was the only thing because that was in his head. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

Yes, I would. I would save him and everything, but in my conscience, I'm not going to want to but at the base, maybe, like my companions say, I would ask for my God to give me patience in this situation. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

However, among a significant number of Salvadorans, passions take over and they are ready to ignore their moral code in either situation. Almost one-quarter (23 per cent) would not save the life of a surrendering combatant and 28 per cent would not help one who was wounded.



Participants in the focus groups described the struggle that would likely take place in this situation. Many believe their emotions would take over and they would not make the effort to save the enemy combatant. They recognize that their actions would go against their moral code, their religion, or both, but balance that against the knowledge of what they have lost at the hands of this enemy combatant.

Perhaps most revealing is the manner in which they avoid responsibility for this person's life by not taking action either way. Most focus group participants would not help a wounded combatant, but they would not kill him or her either. Rather, they would leave the combatant alone to live or die without them. This is perhaps their way of acknowledging their emotions, but maintaining their internal code.

Perhaps I would not save him, nor would I touch him, better yet... (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

No, because if he is wounded and ready to die, it's better not to touch him, it's better that he dies... (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

This is difficult, very difficult because if I saw a wounded soldier and I knew that he had killed my mother... I wouldn't do anything to him but I wouldn't help him either. (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

In the end, the emotions this situation provokes within people would likely be overwhelming and would dominate their actions in a way that makes it difficult for them to predict.

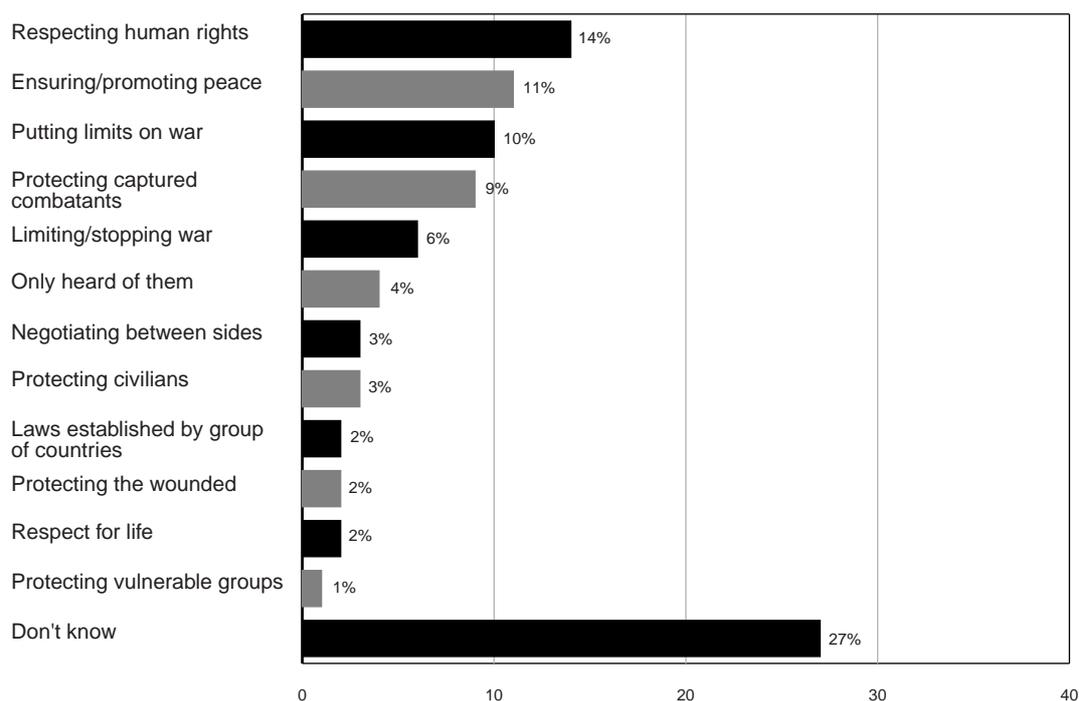
## Geneva Conventions

The long war and the attention focused on abuses since the war's end have not produced a high level of awareness of the Geneva Conventions in El Salvador. Just 33 per cent of those surveyed have heard of the Geneva Conventions, and of those only 48 per cent could describe them accurately. Those who were familiar with the Geneva Conventions mainly describe their mission as setting limits in war and promoting peace (27 per cent); protecting civilians, captured combatants, the wounded and vulnerable groups (15 per cent); and respecting human rights (14 per cent).

FIGURE 13

### What the Geneva Conventions are about

(per cent of population who have heard of the Geneva Conventions)



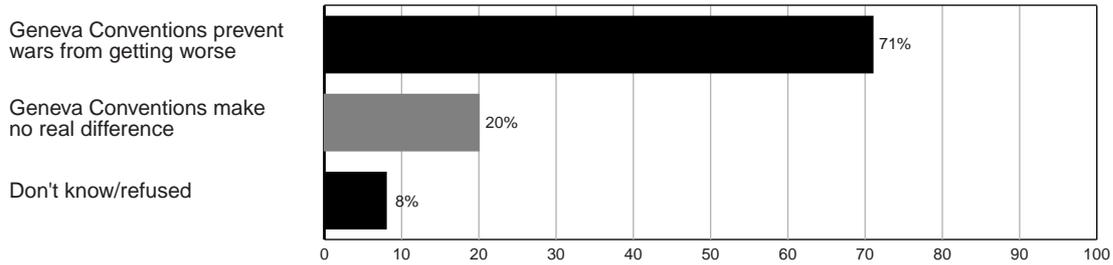
Question: Could you tell me what the Geneva Conventions are about?

More combatants have heard of the Geneva Conventions than civilians (44 per cent to 33 per cent). Education clearly correlates with awareness of the Conventions. Salvadorans with a higher education are more likely to have heard of the Geneva Conventions: college graduates (51 per cent), high school diploma (35 per cent), some primary education (22 per cent) and no education (8 per cent).

This low level of awareness of the Geneva Conventions is consistent with a general lack of knowledge about laws meant to limit the actions of combatants in wartime. Fewer than half of Salvadorans believe there are laws against attacking populated villages or towns (37 per cent) or depriving the civilian population of food, medicine or water to weaken the enemy (27 per cent). Again, there is greater awareness among combatants – 43 per cent know of laws against attacks on towns with civilians and 34 per cent believe there are laws that prevent depriving civilians of food, medicine or water.

Once the Geneva Conventions and their mission are explained, a large majority of Salvadorans believe they will make a difference in armed conflict. By an overwhelming margin (71 per cent to 20 per cent), they believe the Geneva Conventions prevent wars from getting worse.

**FIGURE 14**  
**Impact of Geneva Conventions**  
(per cent of total population responding)

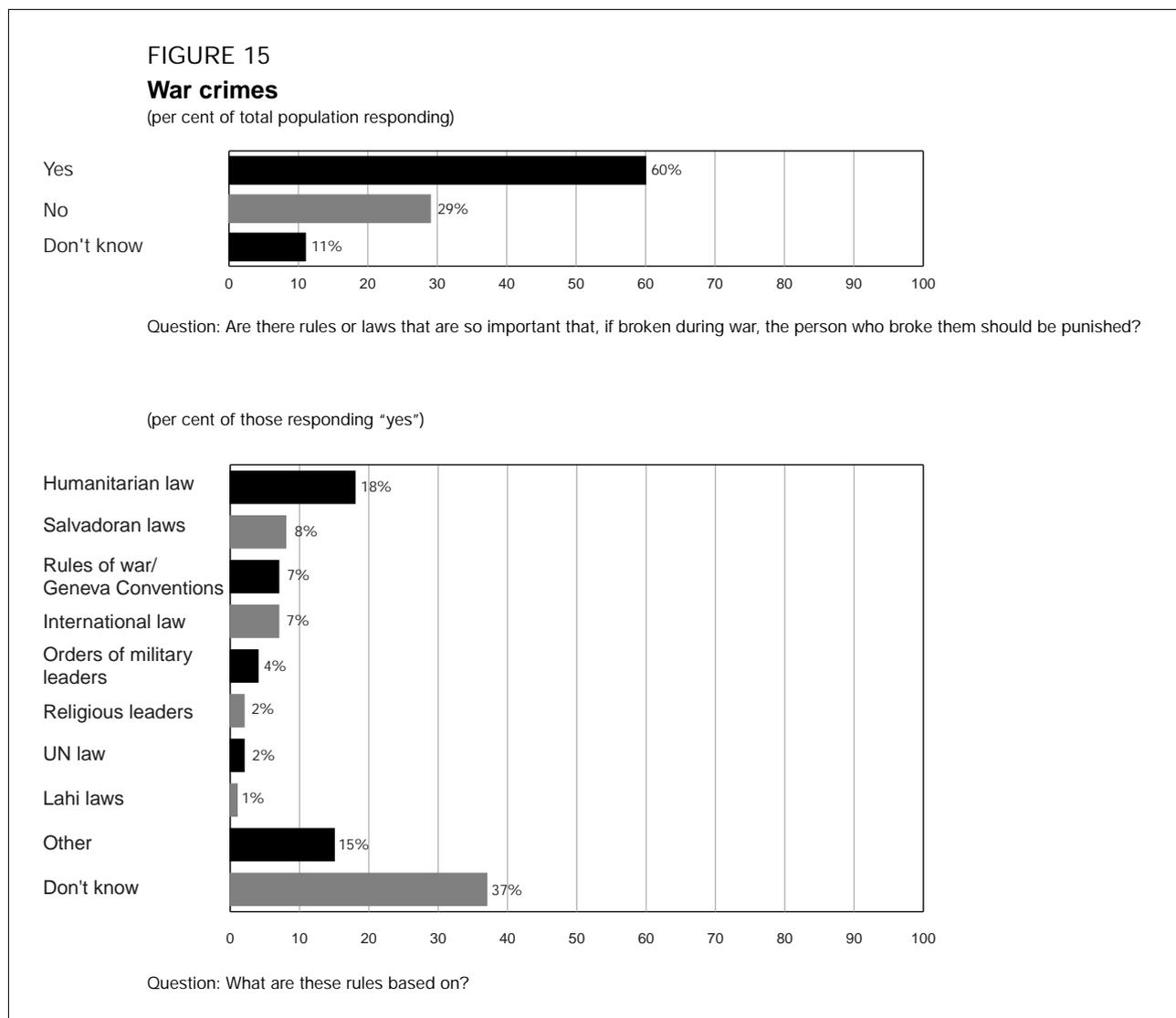


Question: Do you think the existence of the Geneva Conventions prevents wars from getting worse or does it make no real difference?

Awareness of the Geneva Conventions clearly makes a difference in perspectives on wartime behaviour. Those who are familiar with them are more likely to believe that depriving the civilian population of food, medicine or water is wrong (68 per cent versus 61 per cent); that captured combatants should not be subjected to torture (79 per cent versus 68 per cent); and that captured combatants should be allowed visits from independent organizations (90 per cent versus 66 per cent).

## War crimes and the international community

Salvadorans approach the question of war crimes with somewhat contradictory views that reflect competing beliefs. They believe there are rules or laws so important that those who break them should be punished (60 per cent). They also believe someone must pay a price for the vicious acts committed during the war.



Yet there are mixed feelings about putting these war criminals on trial. Just 43 per cent support that option, compared with 51 per cent who would prefer to move on and either forgive them, grant them amnesty, forget about them or expose them to the public. Exhaustion with the memories of a brutal war makes them hesitant to reopen the book, revive old hatreds or relive their experiences.<sup>15</sup> (See Figure 16.)

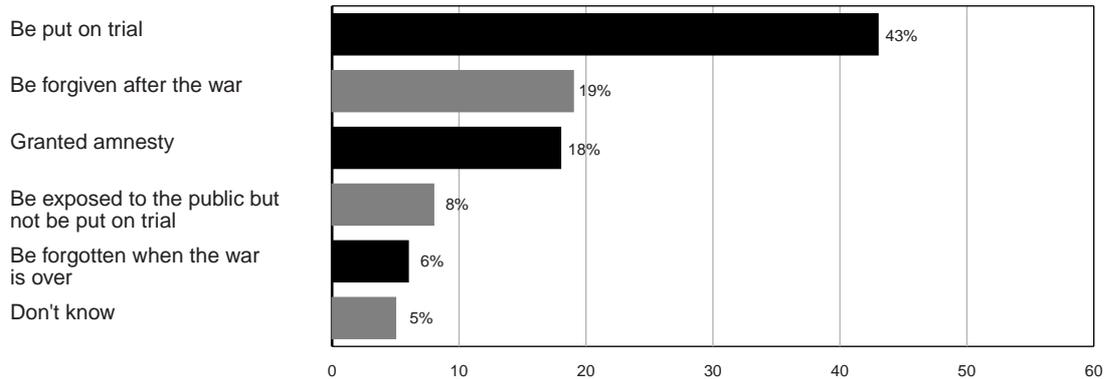
Their experiences also colour their impressions of the Truth Commission. As one focus group participant said, "I'm not really in agreement that they bring judgment... because we're going to fall into a very difficult vortex that could cause fatal consequences for the future of our country." (FG, medical personnel, San Salvador) While Salvadorans are somewhat hesitant to bring judgment on wrongdoers, they believe that all people should know what happened during the conflict and that the Truth Commission played a central role in that process.

<sup>15</sup> Fewer combatants want to see war criminals put on trial (28 per cent) and the vast majority believe in forgiveness (32 per cent) or amnesty (30 per cent).

FIGURE 16

**Punishment**

(per cent of total population responding)



Question: When the war is over, should people who have broken these rules...?

It is a moral debt that the Salvadoran community and the Salvadoran society and all those who were affected by the conflict should know the truth about what happened. (FG, medical personnel, San Salvador)

I heard that it was a group of investigators who wanted to discover the truth, where the truth was behind these acts, these massacres, the assassinations. So they could find out about the horrible things that happened during the war, horrible things that left our villages suffering in general. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

The Truth Commission investigated the worst cases, those that really merited investigation. They wrote reports about who was involved, the intellectual authors. (FG, young men, San Salvador)

There is a broadly held belief that the blame for many of the atrocities lies with the military leaders, who put incredible pressures on combatants to commit heinous acts to gain an advantage. Focus group participants called for punishing those who were in charge more than the combatants who carried out the orders.

So they, too, were repressed to be able to carry out orders, so I think that those who should be punished are those... who were giving orders to kill. (FG, female ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

For me, they shouldn't punish those who did the act but the heads of the acts, the ones who brainwashed and put these ideas into the heads of the people who acted. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

Why don't they [Truth Commission] investigate the higher-ups who gave the orders in the first place? (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

### International role

Salvadorans are ambivalent about their government's ability to protect civilians successfully. Although 45 per cent would look to the Salvadoran government or its courts to punish wrongdoers, slightly more than a third (34 per cent) would look instead to the international community to play a major role in dealing with war crimes and the issues of war in general. An overwhelming majority, 80 per cent, want more intervention by the international community to help civilians in the future.

Many believe earlier international involvement would have reduced the negative impact of the war. They believe that, if only the international community had paid more attention, if only the spotlight had focused on El Salvador, the war may not have gone on for as long or been as brutal.

Well, what they could have done and maybe sometimes they did, in other countries the international community helped, because they sent groups of people here to El Salvador, for example, the ONUSAL,<sup>16</sup> was here helping and they left when the country was, you could say, peaceful again, and I think that the international [groups] could have at times, also could have helped the people or our country, so that the war would cease. I think they tried to help. (FG, women with missing family members, Perquin)

The international organizations should have come, they should not have let this [war] happen. It should not have been implemented. Since it had been coming on little by little, it could have been stopped. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

Because if the international organizations had seen what was going on here, they could have found a way to get involved and negotiate sooner than later. (FG, male ex-FMLN combatants, Chalatenango)

I feel that they should have done it much earlier than they did, because it's the same if they had done it at the beginning of the war, perhaps. I think they could have... like they eventually did. Too much time went by before they got involved. (FG, women living in conflict zone, Perquin)

If the international community had pressured more during or after the massacre... perhaps the[y] would have taken more precautions in their future fighting against the guerrillas. They [international community] never even threatened or reprimanded them for what they did so they kept it up and did it more and more. (FG, ex-soldiers, armed forces, San Salvador)

Salvadorans look to both the international community and their own national institutions to resolve these issues. In focus group discussions, participants stressed that the international spotlight is critical, and expressed the belief that the international community could bring an impartial perspective.

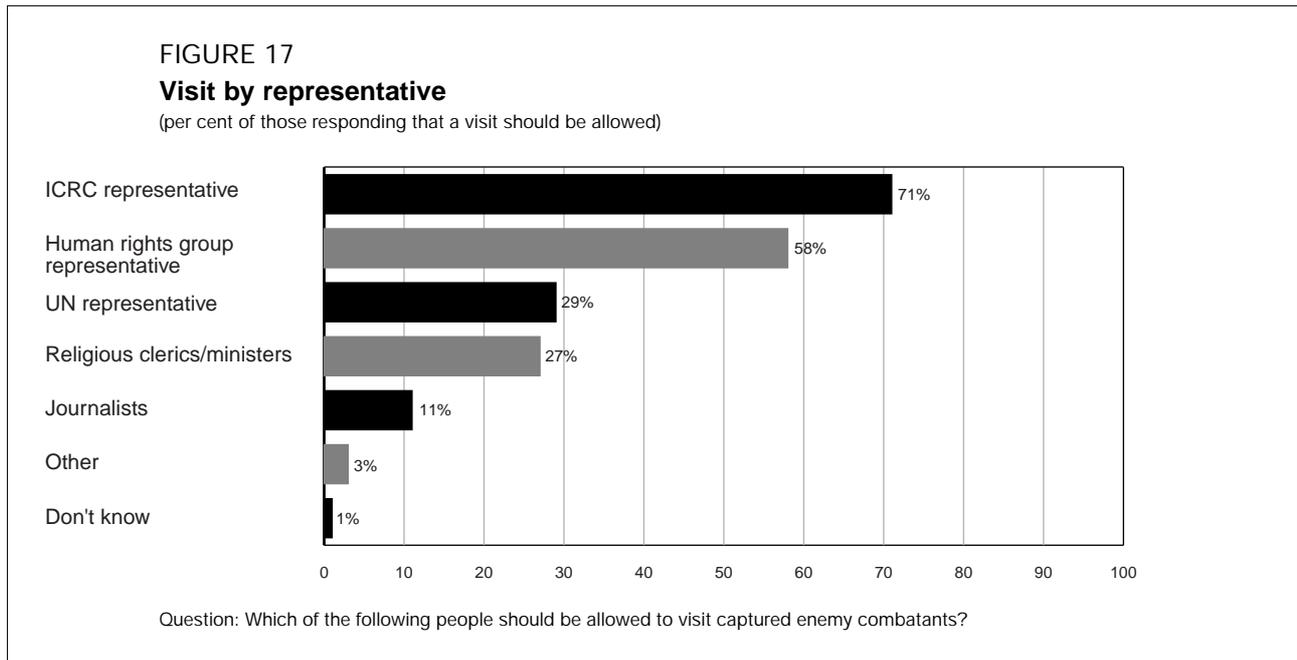
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<sup>16</sup> United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador.

## The role of the ICRC/Red Cross

The ICRC/Red Cross emerges as one of the most credible institutions in El Salvador. Its emblem is recognized by virtually everyone surveyed (92 per cent). The red cross emblem is seen as protecting everybody (42 per cent), including the wounded and sick (20 per cent) and anyone needing help (12 per cent).

People believe the ICRC/Red Cross has a clear role to play in the war, for civilians and combatants alike. When considering which independent representatives should visit captured combatants, people cite the ICRC, 71 per cent, by a wide margin over human rights representatives (58 per cent), UN representatives (29 per cent) and clergy or religious representatives (27 per cent).



Salvadorans also look to the ICRC/Red Cross in times of trouble during war (58 per cent), again to a much higher degree than any other organization or representative. When asked to whom they would turn for help during a war, people overwhelmingly picked the ICRC/Red Cross. (See Figure 18.)

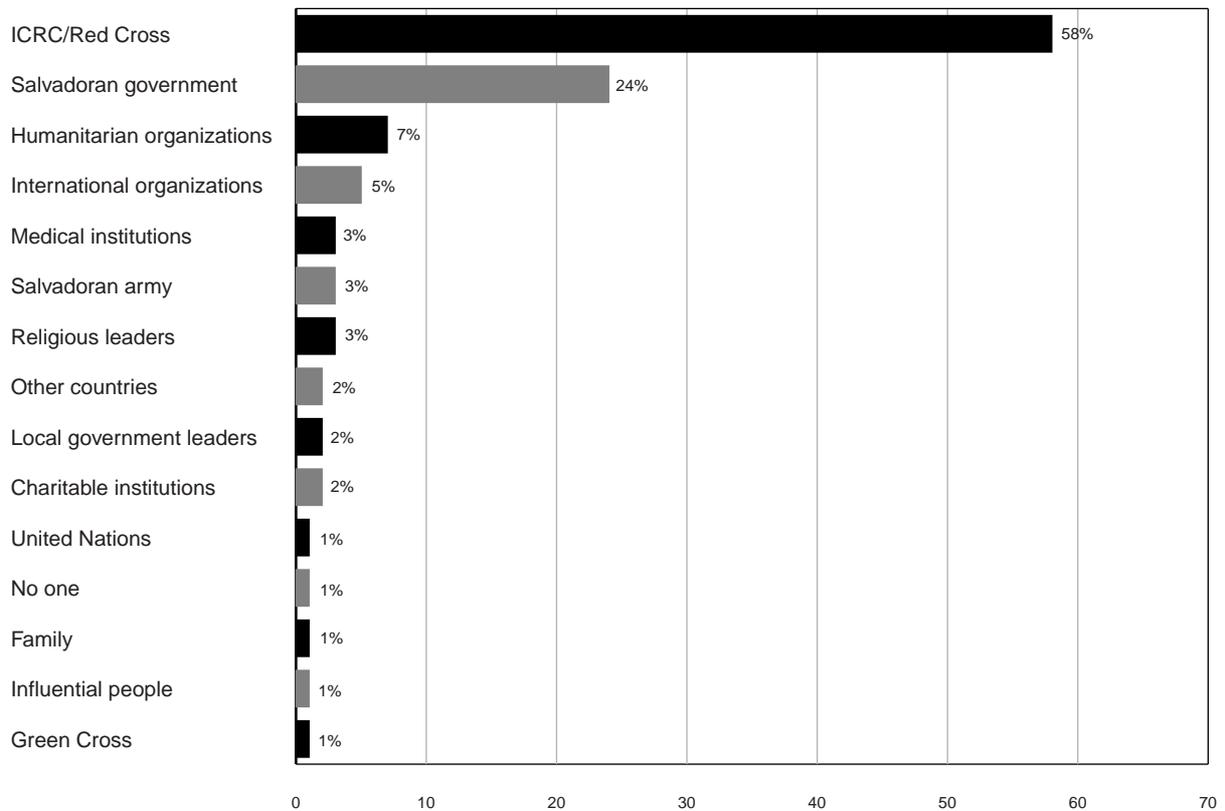
The ICRC/Red Cross also maintains a strong standing as an active force in helping civilians whose villages have been cut off from food, water, medical supplies and electricity. More than half (60 per cent) cite it as one of two organizations or individuals who played the biggest role in helping civilians during the war, nearly twice the number for the next most frequent mention, the UN (34 per cent). (See Figure 19.)

The ICRC/Red Cross is the very symbol of independence and embodies very important qualities that give it a higher standing in an armed conflict than other humanitarian organizations, the government and even religious leaders.

FIGURE 18

**Turn to for help**

(per cent of total population responding)

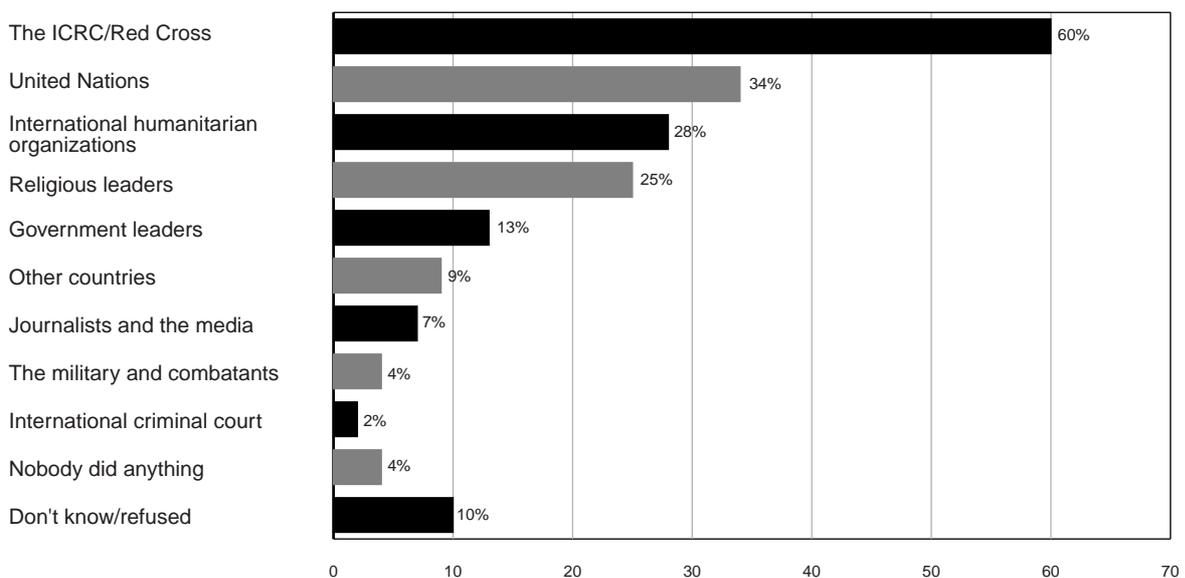


Question: Let me ask what can be done if during the war civilian areas are attacked, towns or villages are cut off from food, water, medical supplies and electricity? To whom would you turn to get help or to be protected?

FIGURE 19

**Biggest role**

(per cent of total population responding) (top two responses)



Question: I'm now going to describe different kinds of people and organizations. Please tell me which *two* of these have played the biggest role during the war to stop civilian areas from being attacked or cut off from food, water, medical supplies and electricity.

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## Annex 1: General methodology

The ICRC's worldwide consultation on the rules of war, which is the cornerstone of the People on War project, was carried out in 12 countries that have been ravaged by war over the past decades. In each case, the ICRC conducted a public opinion survey with a representative sample of the country's population and organized in-depth interviews and focus groups with those involved in or directly affected by the conflict.

For comparative purposes, the views of people were also sought in France, Russian Federation, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States on the basis of the opinion survey only.

The consultation was based on three principal research methods:

- A survey of 1,000 (in some cases 1,500) respondents representative of the country's general population;
- Focus groups (between 8 and 12 depending on the country) allowing a professionally moderated and intensive discussion in small groups;
- In-depth, face-to-face interviews (about 20 in each country) with individuals with specific war experiences.

In almost every case, the ICRC and local Red Cross or Red Crescent staff conducted the interviews, organized the focus groups, including recruitment of participants, and helped with translation/interpreting. Greenberg Research, with a local partner company, developed the sample design for the survey, processed data in electronic form, provided moderators and prepared transcripts.

### **Opinion survey**

*Questionnaire.* The opinion survey questioned people on their war experiences and views on international humanitarian law. The survey was mainly standardized for all countries, though the wording was modified to reflect each context and to achieve consistent meaning. About 10 per cent of the questions were contextual and in many cases unique to the country. In an additional five countries, the questionnaire was designed to elicit people's perceptions on war and humanitarian law.

The questionnaires were developed by Greenberg Research, in consultation with the ICRC, on the basis of interviews with humanitarian law experts in the United States and Europe. The survey and questions were pre-tested in Mozambique and Colombia.

*Sample design.* In each country, interviews were held with 1,000 to 1,500 respondents, selected by a stratified, multistage cluster sampling method. The sample was stratified to ensure representation (500 interviews) from each of the principal conflict-affected geographic areas or ethnic/religious groups. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, this meant some 1,500 interviews (500 from Republika Srpska and 500 each from the Bosniac and Croat areas of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina); in Israel, the occupied territories and the autonomous territories, this meant 1,000 interviews (500 in Israel and 500 in the occupied territories and the autonomous territories). These areas were divided into urban and rural geographic units (strata), to ensure representation of urban and rural populations.

The local partner randomly selected small geographic units within these strata. These units – 100 to 200 in each country – constituted the sampling points for the survey. In each geographic unit, 10 households (though fewer in some countries) were selected using a random route method appropriate to

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the country. In some cases, interviewers were provided with a map and a route; in others, interviewers were simply given a route and selection instructions.

Within households, respondents were selected using a Kish grid (a respondent selection key that employs a combination of random numbers, alphabet codes and the number of available members in a household to identify the appropriate respondent) or the birthday criterion (a respondent selection process that employs dates of birth to determine the appropriate respondent). Interviewers were to make three attempts to achieve a completed interview, including locating the respondent elsewhere. In nearly every country, non-response was below 10 per cent.

The demographic distribution of the surveyed respondents was compared with the best available census data on education, age, household type and occupation. Where the sample survey was sharply skewed (e.g., too many college-educated or too many young respondents), statistical weights were applied to eliminate the bias.

Interviews carried out by phone reached 755 adults in France, 1,000 in Switzerland, 750 in the United Kingdom and 1,000 in the United States, and 1,000 face-to-face interviews were carried out in the Russian Federation.

*Survey administration.* In nearly all the countries, the survey was administered by the ICRC, with the assistance of Greenberg Research and a local research partner. Interviews were conducted by Red Cross or Red Crescent staff. Greenberg Research provided training, which typically took two days.

*Parallel research.* In three of the countries – Colombia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Philippines – Greenberg Research commissioned a parallel quantitative survey, administered by a local research company using professional interviewers, in order to identify patterns of bias. The results of the parallel studies were then compared with the results of the ICRC-administered surveys. The exercise found only a few areas of systematic bias. Those interviewed by the ICRC and Red Cross or Red Crescent staff, for example, were consistently more supportive of the ICRC's role and more aware of the Geneva Conventions and the rules of war. However, the parallel research found few systematic differences in opinions on international humanitarian law. The ICRC results closely resemble the parallel survey results on most other questions. (A technical report assessing the parallel research and Red Cross bias is available separately.)

### **In-depth research**

*Focus groups.* The focus groups provided a relatively unstructured environment for people to discuss their war experiences freely, express their views on the appropriate limits to war and consider possible actions against those who exceed them. To be effective, the groups had to be as homogeneous as possible, that is, the participants all had to have similar characteristics. Thus, in general, the participants in a group came from the same area, were all male or all female and shared an important experience (e.g., families of missing persons, ex-soldiers, ex-fighters, prisoners, teachers or journalists). The discussions were frequently intense and emotional and provide a rich commentary on how the public approaches these issues.

In each country, 8 to 12 focus groups were organized – four in each of the principal conflict areas. The participants were recruited by Red Cross or Red Crescent staff, based on guidelines provided by Greenberg Research. The local research company provided a professional moderator, who facilitated the discussions using guidelines prepared by Greenberg Research.

The discussions were held in focus-group facilities, school classrooms, hotel rooms and even in the open air, if, for example, they involved guerrilla fighters. ICRC, Red Cross/Red Crescent and

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Greenberg Research staff observed and listened to the discussions from an adjoining location, with simultaneous translation in English. The focus group discussions were recorded and later transcribed in English.

*In-depth interviews.* To help interpret the full meaning of the survey responses, about 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals who had had specific war experiences. The in-depth interview guidelines repeated questions from the public opinion survey, although they allowed for open-ended, rather than categorized responses. Interviewers were encouraged to probe and follow up on responses.

The in-depth interviews involved a broad range of people – officers, medical personnel, students (secondary school and university), journalists, former combatants, refugees, displaced persons, family members of missing persons, war invalids and others.

The interviews were recorded on tape, transcribed and translated into English by the local partner.

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## Annex 2: Questionnaire\*

### Introduction

We are doing a series of interviews on **[NAME OF COUNTRY]** and would like your help with that. Would it be possible to ask a few questions to the person who is 18 years or older and whose birthday is **[FIRST AFTER TODAY]**? **[IF NECESSARY:** The interview will take about 30 minutes.] The questions are about your experiences and opinions on the [war/armed conflict] in **[NAME OF COUNTRY OR REGION]**. Your identity will remain absolutely confidential.

Let me begin by asking you some questions about yourself to make sure we are talking to all kinds of people. If you don't want to answer, feel free to tell me so and we will move on to the next question.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

[Don't know/refused]

2. How many years of school have you had? \_\_\_\_\_ years

[Don't know/refused]

3. What is your current family situation?

Married (have a husband or wife)

Single

Live together with someone (in a permanent relationship)

Divorced (or separated)

Spouse of missing person

Widow(er)

[Don't know/refused]

4. Do you have children? **[FOLLOW UP IF "YES"]** How many?

No children

Yes \_\_\_ children

5. What is your job now or are you not working?

Farmer

Manual worker

Skilled worker

Self-employed

Housewife/home care

Soldier (combatant)

Government employee

Private sector employee

Teacher/professor/intellectual

Pensioner/retired

Unemployed (but looking for work)

Unemployed (not looking for work)

Student

Other **[SPECIFY]**

[Don't know/refused]

\* This questionnaire is the standard one used in the 12 countries affected by conflict in the last decades. Some contextual questions were added for specific countries. These do not figure here, but are reflected in the findings presented in each Country Report.

6. Let me ask about the war in [COUNTRY NAME]. Did the war take place in the area where you were living or did the war take place mainly somewhere else?

- Area where you were living → GO TO Q7  
 Somewhere else? → GO TO Q8  
 Both [Volunteered response] → GO TO Q8  
 [Don't know/refused]? → GO TO Q8

7. [IF "AREA WHERE YOU WERE LIVING" IN PREVIOUS QUESTION] Did you live in that area before the [war/armed conflict], move voluntarily, or were you forced to move? [PROBE IF RESPONDENT SAYS "THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN ARMED CONFLICT"]

- Live in same area  
 Moved voluntarily  
 Forced to move  
 [Don't know/refused]

8. [ASK OF ALL RESPONDENTS] During the [war/armed conflict], did you ever find yourself in a situation of being a combatant and carrying a weapon?

- Yes — combatant, carried weapon  
 No — not a combatant  
 [Don't know/refused]

9. [ASK OF ALL RESPONDENTS] Is there anything that combatants should not be allowed to do in fighting their enemy? [PROBE AND WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]

[IF NO RESPONSE, GO TO Q11]

10. [IF RESPONDENT GIVES ANY RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS QUESTION] Could you tell me the main reason why they should not do that? Is that because...? [READ AND ROTATE]

- It's wrong → GO TO Q10a  
 It just causes too many problems → GO TO Q10b  
 [Don't know/refused] → GO TO Q11

[FOLLOW UP IF MORE THAN ONE REASON SELECTED] Which would be the main reason?

- 10a. [IF "IT'S WRONG"] When you say, it's wrong, is it primarily wrong because it is...? [READ AND ROTATE] [TWO RESPONSES ALLOWED]

- Against your religion  
 Against your personal code  
 Against the law  
 Against what most people here believe  
 Against your culture  
 Against human rights  
 Other [SPECIFY]  
 [Don't know/refused]

10b. **[IF "IT JUST CAUSES TOO MANY PROBLEMS"]** When you say, it just causes too many problems, are you thinking it...? **[READ AND ROTATE] [TWO RESPONSES ALLOWED]**

- Produces too much hate and division
- Causes too much psychological damage
- Produces too much destruction
- Causes too much physical suffering
- Other **[SPECIFY]**
- [Don't know/refused]

11. Which two of these words best describe the war for you personally? **[READ AND ROTATE]**

- Horrible
- Disruptive
- Humiliating
- Exciting
- Hateful
- Challenging
- Hopeful
- Confusing
- Uncertainty
- Powerless
- Remote
- [Don't know/refused]

**Note: Version used in countries where there are no clear sides for most of the population; for countries where there are sides, half the surveys will be asked Version A (without sided wording) and half Version B (with sided wording).**

12. Now I would like to ask you some *general* questions about how, in your view, combatants should behave in times of war.

**Version A:** When combatants attack to weaken the enemy, should they...? **[READ AND ROTATE]**

**Version B:** When combatants from your side attack to weaken the enemy, should they... ? **[READ AND ROTATE]**

- Attack enemy combatants and civilians
  - Attack enemy combatants and avoid civilians as much as possible
- OR**
- Attack only enemy combatants and leave the civilians alone
  - [Don't know/refused]

**[FOLLOW-UP IF CONFUSION ABOUT YOUR/OTHER SIDE]** Just imagine that there is a side in the conflict that you support more than any other side.

**Note: in the next set of questions we will be randomly splitting the sample in two. Version 1 will be asked of one half and version 2 will be asked of the other half. If there are clear sides to the war, Version 1 coincides with Version A and Version 2 coincides with Version B. (This means there will always be two and exactly two versions of the questionnaire.)**

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Let me ask you about some things that combatants may do to weaken the enemy they are fighting against. Please tell me for each of these things whether it is okay or not okay to do it, to weaken the enemy.

13. **Version 1:** Attacking civilians who voluntarily gave food and shelter to enemy combatants. Would it be okay or not okay to attack them in order to weaken the enemy?

**Version 2:** Attacking civilians who were forced to give food and shelter to enemy combatants. Would it be okay or not okay to attack them in order to weaken the enemy?

- Okay  
 Not okay  
 [Don't know/refused]

14. **Version 1:** Attacking civilians who voluntarily transported ammunition for enemy combatants defending their town. Would it be okay or not okay to attack them to weaken the enemy?

**Version 2:** Attacking civilians who were forced to transport ammunition for enemy combatants defending their town. Would it be okay or not okay to attack them to weaken the enemy?

- Okay  
 Not okay  
 [Don't know/refused]

15. I will now describe some situations that may happen during a [war/armed conflict]. For each situation, I would like you to imagine that you are part of that situation. Tell me how you think you would behave if the decisions were completely up to you. Here comes the first imaginary situation.

**Version 1:** Would you save the life of a surrendering enemy combatant who killed a person close to you?

- Would save  
 Would not save  
 [Don't know/refused]

**Version 2:** Would you help a wounded enemy combatant who killed a person close to you?

- Would help  
 Would not help  
 [Don't know/refused]

Now I'm going to ask your opinion on some of the things combatants might do in times of [war/armed conflict].

- 16a. **Version A:** What about depriving the civilian population of food, medicine or water in order to weaken the enemy?

**Version B:** What about depriving the civilian population on the other side of food, medicine or water in order to weaken the enemy?

Is that wrong or just part of war?

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- Wrong
- Part of war
- Both [Volunteered response]
- [Don't know/refused]

16b. **Version A:** Are there any laws or rules that say you can't do that, even if it would help weaken the enemy, or are there no laws or rules to stop that?

**Version B:** Are there any laws or rules that say you can't do that, even if it would help your side weaken the enemy, or are there no laws or rules to stop that?

- Laws — can't do that
- No laws
- [Don't know/refused]

17a. **Version 1:** What about attacking enemy combatants in populated villages or towns in order to weaken the enemy, knowing that many civilians would be killed?

**Version 2:** What about attacking enemy combatants in populated villages or towns in order to weaken the enemy, knowing that many women and children would be killed?

Is that wrong or just part of war?

- Wrong
- Part of war
- Both [Volunteered response]
- [Don't know/refused]

17b. **Version A:** Are there any laws or rules that say you can't do that, even if it would help weaken the enemy, or are there no laws or rules to stop that?

**Version B:** Are there any laws or rules that say you can't do that, even if it would help your side weaken the enemy, or are there no laws or rules to stop that?

- Laws — can't do that
- No laws
- [Don't know/refused]

18. **[ASK ONLY IN WAR ZONES WHERE APPROPRIATE]** What about attacking religious and historical monuments, in order to weaken the enemy. Is that wrong or just part of war?

- Wrong
  - Part of war
  - Both [Volunteered response]
  - [Don't know/refused]
-

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19. **[ASK ONLY IN WAR ZONES WHERE APPROPRIATE]** What about taking civilian hostages in order to get something in exchange? Is that wrong or just part of war?

- Wrong
- Part of war
- Both [Volunteered response]
- [Don't know/refused]

20. **[ASK ONLY IN WAR ZONES WHERE APPROPRIATE]** Now a question about the "protected areas". Do you think that these "protected areas" are a good or a bad idea?

- Good idea
- Bad idea
- [Don't know/refused]

21. **[ASK ONLY IN WAR ZONES WHERE APPROPRIATE]** Did the "protected areas" make it better or worse for civilians during the war, or did they make no difference?

- Better
- Worse
- No difference
- [Don't know/refused]

22. **[ASK ONLY IN WAR ZONES WHERE APPROPRIATE] Version 1:** Did the "Peace support operation" make it better or worse for civilians during the war, or didn't it make any difference?

**Version 2:** Did the "Peace support operation" make it better or worse for you personally during the war, or didn't it make any difference?

- Better
- Worse
- No difference
- [Don't know/refused]

**Version A:** Let me ask you about some other things that might happen during war to weaken the enemy. Please tell me for each of these things whether it is okay or not okay to do it in order to weaken the enemy.

**Version B:** Let me ask you about some other things that your side might do to weaken the enemy during war. Please tell me for each of these things whether it is okay or not okay to do it in order to weaken the enemy.

23. First, are there types of weapons that should just never be used during war? **[FOLLOW UP IF YES]** What types of weapons would you think of? **[CHECK RESPONSE BELOW] [DO NOT READ CHOICES] [MULTIPLE ANSWERS ALLOWED]**

- Landmines
  - Laser weapons
  - Napalm
  - Nuclear weapons
  - Chemical weapons
  - Cluster bombs
-

- Other [SPECIFY]
- No types of weapons allowed
- [Don't know/refused]

24. **Version A:** Combatants planting landmines to stop the movement of enemy combatants, even though civilians may step on them accidentally. Is it okay or not okay to do that if it would weaken the enemy?

**Version B:** Combatants on your side planting landmines to stop the movement of enemy combatants, even though civilians may step on them accidentally. Is it okay or not okay to do that if it would weaken the enemy?

- Okay, if necessary
- Not okay
- [Don't know/refused]

25. In war, combatants sometimes attack or hurt civilians, even though many people say it is not okay and maybe against the law. So please tell me why you think combatants attack civilians anyway.

**[PROBE AND WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]**

26. Which *two* of the following reasons best explain why combatants attack or hurt civilians, even though many people say it is not okay or maybe against the law. Is it because they...? **[READ AND ROTATE RESPONSES]** **[FOLLOW-UP IF MORE THAN TWO REASONS SELECTED]** Which would be the two main reasons?

- Don't care about the laws
- Hate the other side so much
- Are determined to win at any cost
- Lose all sense during war
- Are too young to make judgements
- Don't know the laws
- Are often under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Are scared
- Are told to do so
- Know the other side is doing the same thing
- [Don't know/refused]

27a. Now let me ask you how *captured combatants* should be treated.

**Version A:** Must a captured enemy combatant be allowed to contact relatives, or doesn't that have to be allowed?

**Version B:** Must your side allow a captured enemy combatant to contact relatives, or don't you have to allow that?

- Must allow
- Don't have to allow
- [Don't know/refused]

27b. **Version A:** Is it true that a captured enemy combatant cannot be subjected to torture to obtain important military information, or can captured combatants be subjected to torture?

**Version B:** Is it true that your side cannot subject a captured enemy combatant to torture to obtain important military information, or can you subject captured combatants to torture?

- Cannot subject  
 Can subject  
 [Don't know/refused]

27c. **Version A:** Must a captured enemy combatant be allowed a visit by a representative from an independent organization outside the prison or camp, or doesn't that have to be allowed?

**Version B:** Must your side allow a captured enemy combatant to be visited by a representative from an independent organization from outside the prison or camp, or don't you have to allow that?

- Must allow                      → GO TO Q27d  
 Don't have to allow            → GO TO Q28  
 [Don't know/refused]        → GO TO Q28

27d. **[IF "MUST ALLOW"]** Which of the following people should be allowed to visit captured enemy combatants...? **[READ AND ROTATE RESPONSES] [ALLOW MULTIPLE RESPONSES]**

- International Committee of the Red Cross representatives  
 UN representatives  
 Human rights group representatives  
 Journalists  
 Religious clerics/ministers  
 Other **[SPECIFY]**  
 [Don't know/refused]

Once again, I want you to *imagine* yourself in the following situations and tell me what you think you would do if the decisions were completely up to you.

28. **Version A:** If one side in the war is killing prisoners, would you approve the killing of prisoners by the other side or would you not approve it?

**Version B:** If the other side in the war is killing prisoners, would you approve the killing of prisoners by your side or would you not approve it?

- Would approve  
 Would not approve  
 [Don't know/refused]

**[FOLLOW UP IF RESPONDENT PROTESTS]** Just imagine you happen to find yourself in this situation.

29. In general, do you ever think that captured enemy combatants deserve to die?

- Think deserve to die  
 No  
 [Don't know/refused]

30. Now I'm going to ask you about your actual experiences during the war. Please tell me whether any of the following things happened to you personally or did not happen as a consequence of the [war/armed conflict] in [COUNTRY NAME]. **[READ AND ROTATE ORDER]**

	Happened	Did not happen	Don't know/ refused
Forced to leave your home and live elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Imprisoned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kidnapped or taken hostage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tortured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt humiliated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lost contact with a close relative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A member of your immediate family killed during the armed conflict (son, daughter, father, mother, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather, grandchild)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Serious damage to your property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded by the fighting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Combatants took food away	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Had your house looted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Somebody you knew well was sexually assaulted by combatants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>[READ LAST]</b> Somebody you knew well was raped by combatants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

31. **[ASK ALL RESPONDENTS]** Were you imprisoned by enemy combatants or were you living in an area that came under enemy control?

Imprisoned by enemy combatants	<b>→ GO TO Q32</b>
Living in area under enemy control	<b>→ GO TO Q32</b>
Both [Volunteered response]	<b>→ GO TO Q32</b>
[Don't know/refused]	<b>→ GO TO Q34</b>
No response	<b>→ GO TO Q34</b>

32. **[ASK IF "IMPRISONED", "LIVED UNDER ENEMY CONTROL", OR BOTH]** Please tell me whether any of the following happened while you were under enemy control. **[READ AND ROTATE]** Did that happen or not?

	Happened	Did not happen	Don't know/ refused
You were personally mistreated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
You were physically injured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
You were treated correctly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>[READ LAST]</b> You had a contact with a representative from an independent organization to check on your well-being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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33. **[ASK ONLY IF CONTACT HAPPENED, OTHERWISE GO TO Q33]** Which of the following people did you have contact with to check on your well-being? **[READ AND ROTATE RESPONSES]** **[ALLOW MULTIPLE RESPONSES]**

- ICRC representatives
- UN representatives
- Human rights group representatives
- Journalists
- Religious clerics/ministers
- Other **[SPECIFY]**
- [Don't know/refused]

34. Now let me ask you for your opinion about something else, about young people being combatants. At what age is a young person mature enough to be a combatant? **[READ LIST UNTIL RESPONDENT CHOOSES AN ANSWER]**

- 14 or under
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- Above 21
- [Don't know/refused]

35. During the war, did you support [have you supported] one of the sides or did you not support any side?

- Supported a side
- Did not support a side
- [Don't know/refused]

36. Let me ask you something very different. Have you ever heard of the Geneva Conventions?

- Yes — heard
- No — not heard      **→ GO TO Q38**
- [Don't know/refused]      **→ GO TO Q38**

37. **[IF HEARD OF GENEVA CONVENTIONS]** Could you tell me what the Geneva Conventions are about? **[WRITE DOWN ANSWER AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]** **[MARK APPROPRIATE RESPONSE]**

- Accurate **[ANY REFERENCE TO LIMITS IN WAR]**
  - Not accurate **[NO REFERENCE TO LIMITS IN WAR]**
-

38. Let me read you a statement about the Geneva Conventions:

*The Geneva Conventions is a series of international treaties that impose limits in war by describing some rules of war. Most countries in the world have signed these treaties.*

Do you think the existence of the Geneva Conventions prevents wars from getting worse or does it make no real difference?

- Prevents wars from getting worse
- No real difference
- [Don't know/refused]

39. Are you familiar with this? **[SHOW RED CROSS OR RED CRESCENT]** What does it stand for? **[DO NOT READ RESPONSES]**

- Red Cross
- Red Crescent
- Red Cross and Red Crescent
- Medical/Hospital
- United Nations
- Army
- Other **[SPECIFY]**
- [Don't know/refused]

40. What kind of people or things does this symbol protect? **[WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]**

41. Are there rules or laws that are so important that, if broken during war, the person who broke them should be punished?

- Yes
- No → **GO TO Q46**
- [Don't know/Refused] → **GO TO Q46**

42. **[IF YES]** So what kind of rules or laws are you thinking about? **[PROBE AND WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]**

43. **[IF RESPONDS TO PRIOR QUESTION, OTHERWISE GO TO Q46]** What are these rules based on? **[READ AND ROTATE] [ONE RESPONSE ONLY]**

- [Country name]'s laws
  - International law
  - Religious principles
  - The values people hold
  - Other **[SPECIFY]**
  - [Don't know/refused]
-

44. If these rules are broken in war, who should be responsible for punishing the wrongdoers? **[READ AND ROTATE] [ONE RESPONSE ONLY]**

- The government of [country name]
- The [country name]'s courts
- International criminal court
- The military itself
- The civilian population
- Your own political leaders
- Other **[SPECIFY]**
- [Does not apply, rules are not broken]
- [Don't know/refused]

45. When the war is over, should people who have broken these rules...? **[READ AND ROTATE] [ONE RESPONSE ONLY]**

- Be put on trial
- Be exposed to the public but not be put on trial
- Be forgotten when the war is over
- Be forgiven after the war
- Granted amnesty
- [Don't know/refused]

46. **[ASK ALL RESPONDENTS]** Let me ask what can be done *if* during the war civilian areas are attacked, towns or villages are cut off from food, water, medical supplies and electricity. To whom would you turn to get help or to be protected? **[PROBE AND WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]**

- [Can't turn to anybody]
- [Don't know/refused]

47. I'm now going to describe different kinds of people and organizations. Please tell me which *two* of these have played the biggest role *during* the war to stop this. Here are the people and organizations: **[READ AND ROTATE] [RECORD THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT RESPONSES] [FOLLOW UP WITH: Which two have played the biggest role?]**

- The military and combatants on your side **[Version B]**
- The military and combatants of the other side **[Version B]**
- The military and combatants **[Version A]**
- Religious leaders
- International humanitarian organizations
- Journalists and the news media
- The United Nations
- The ICRC or Red Cross (or Red Crescent)
- Government leaders
- International criminal court
- Other countries
- [Nobody did anything]
- [Don't know/refused]

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48. In the future, would you like to see more or less intervention from the international community to deal with these kinds of issues?

- More intervention
- Less intervention
- [No intervention]
- [Don't know/refused]

49. Do you think the peace will last or do you think there will be more war in the future?

- Peace will last
- More war in future
- [Both]
- [Don't know/refused]

50. One last question, what did you learn from the war that you think others should know? **[PROBE AND WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]**

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## **The ICRC's 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 war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It 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 International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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