

PEOPLE ON WAR

Country report Somalia

ICRC worldwide consultation on the rules of war

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

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.

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.

Table of contents

Country context	ii
Country methodology	iii
Executive summary	iv
The war experience	1
Widespread conflict	1
<i>Figure 1: The war experience</i>	1
Rape and brutality	2
<i>Figure 2: Personal description of the war</i>	3
Protection of civilians	4
Limits on wartime behaviour	4
<i>Figure 3: What combatants should not do</i>	4
Norms, tradition and religion	5
<i>Figure 4: Basis for the norm</i>	5
Weapons of war	7
Civilians and captured combatants at risk	8
Blurring the line between combatants and civilians	8
<i>Figure 5: Combatants and civilians</i>	8
<i>Figure 6: Acceptance of war practices</i>	9
Captured combatants at risk	9
<i>Figure 7: Wounded or surrendering combatants</i>	10
<i>Figure 8: Captured enemy combatants</i>	10
<i>Figure 9: While under enemy control</i>	11
Breakdown of limits	13
The cycle of violence	13
<i>Figure 10: Why combatants attack civilians</i>	13
Length of the war	14
The nature of clan warfare	14
<i>Figure 11: Impact of sidedness</i>	16
<i>Figure 12: Consequence of attitudes</i>	16
<i>Figure 13: Impact of war experience</i>	17
Youth, militias and brutality	18
<i>Figure 14: Child combatants</i>	18
Collapse of authority: declining influence of tribal elders	19
A national vacuum	19
Turning to faith	20
Geneva Conventions	21
Knowledge and efficacy of the Geneva Conventions	21
<i>Figure 15: Knowledge of laws</i>	21
<i>Figure 16: Geneva Conventions</i>	22
Punishment of war crimes	22
<i>Figure 17: War crimes</i>	
International institutions	24
United Nations	24
ICRC/Red Crescent	24
<i>Figure 18: Red Crescent and protection</i>	25
<i>Figure 19: Biggest role</i>	25
<i>Figure 20: Turn to for help</i>	26
Annex 1: General methodology	27
Annex 2: Questionnaire	31

Country context

The past decade of war in Somalia is perhaps best defined as a succession of four conflicts, all of which have been rooted in traditional rivalries among Somali clans. These conflicts are estimated to have killed more than 50,000 of Somalia's 10 million people.¹ They have literally torn the nation apart: for seven years Somalia has lacked a central government, army, legislature or judiciary. A measure of stability has been established in the country's north – which seceded and proclaimed its independence in 1991 – but armed conflicts among clan militias continue to dominate more than half of the nation's territory.

The first of the four conflicts began in 1989 and pitted the forces of long-time President Mohammed Siad Barre against a group of powerful clans who claimed their interests were being ignored by the central government. That conflict ended in 1991 with the ouster of Siad Barre and the collapse of the military. Siad Barre's departure triggered a second period of war, which was marked by a struggle between two of the nation's most powerful clans for the right to assume central control of the country. The conflict was never resolved.

In 1992, a devastating famine that ultimately claimed 500,000 lives led the United Nations (UN) to dispatch a multinational military force to Somalia. The intervention was estimated to have saved more than one million lives.² However, when the UN tried to plan elections and restore civil society, attacks by clan militias on multinational troops triggered a brief armed conflict. The UN force suffered casualties, and nations that had committed troops rapidly withdrew their soldiers.

The fourth conflict is an ongoing series of battles for territorial control among some 30 warlord-backed militias, whose fighters routinely extort and attack civilians. International efforts to negotiate peace agreements, led by regional neighbours, have produced a number of cease-fire agreements in the past four years, but each has almost immediately collapsed. Both Somali observers and outside experts believe that the population's sheer exhaustion with war has improved prospects for a settlement, but the future remains very difficult to predict.

¹ Brogan, P. *World Conflicts*, Lanham Maryland: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1998, p. 97.

² More than 5 per cent of Somalia's population died during the 1992 famine. The famine also produced more than 2 million internally displaced persons and drove another 800,000 people to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

Country methodology

The findings in this report are based on a consultation conducted in Somalia by local ICRC staff and volunteers from the Somali Red Crescent Society. The consultation was particularly challenging given that no ICRC expatriates or research personnel entered Somalia for security reasons. Therefore, the Somali research was conducted solely among Somali people – the only context in the People on War project where this occurred. All project coordination was staged through the ICRC regional delegation in Nairobi, Kenya. In Nairobi, Greenberg Research, Inc. worked with Research International East Africa, Limited (RI), a locally based research company, to develop the sample design, put the data in electronic form and to transcribe and translate the audio tapes of the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. ICRC local staff and volunteers from the Somali Red Crescent Society conducted all survey and in-depth interviews and led all the focus group discussions.

- Eight **focus group (FG)** discussions were held throughout Somalia, beginning on 3 March and ending the first week in April 1999. Focus group participants included: elders and religious leaders in Hargeisa and Belet Huen; nomads from Dusamareb; displaced women in Bardera; women farmers in Jilib; women in Bosaso; and militiamen in Kismayo and Mogadishu. The groups were moderated by local ICRC staff who had participated in a training session on focus group facilitation conducted by Greenberg Research in Nairobi. The discussion guidelines used were developed by Greenberg Research and modified for context with the assistance of the ICRC regional delegation in Nairobi.
- Local ICRC staff conducted 20 **in-depth interviews (IDI)** in Somalia after being trained in in-depth interviewing techniques by RI in Nairobi. Respondents included artists, nomads and farmers, professionals such as doctors, merchants and businessmen, clan elders and displaced persons. Greenberg Research developed the discussion guidelines used for the in-depth interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and all interviews were completed during the month of March 1999. All focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted in Somali, recorded on audio tape and transcribed and translated into English by RI.
- After attending a training seminar held by RI in Djibouti on 9-10 March 1999, approximately 40 volunteers from the Somali Red Crescent Society completed a **nationwide survey** with a representative sampling of the adult general population of Somalia (15 years of age and older), using a stratified, multistage cluster sampling method. In total, 1,005 interviews were completed. The quantitative survey was conducted during the month of April 1999. The data were weighted by gender, region, clan and education and split to ensure that the data accurately reflected the population. Percentages reported here are subject to a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points (at a 95 in 100 confidence level). Results in smaller segments, such as the 402 interviews conducted with respondents who had less than a primary education, are subject to an error of +/- 7.1 percentage points.³

³These 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 +/-2.6 percentage points.

Executive summary

Somalia is no stranger to war. Clan warfare – and the strong traditional code that governs its conduct – has been an accepted part of life for centuries. Indeed, outside of the forces of nature, these conflicts have done more than anything else to shape the history of the nation and the identity of its peoples.

But, in the last decade Somalis have come face to face with a new, unfamiliar kind of war – a war without limits and rules that has devastated their families and dismembered their nation. Unprecedented levels of violence and destruction have undermined the power and relevance of strongly held religious beliefs and cultural values and rendered impotent the traditional wartime code of conduct. A seemingly endless series of conflicts has forced Somalis to redefine their fundamental understanding of war – its contestants, its victims, its tactics and its goals.

Reconciling reality with “what is supposed to be” has proved a wrenching, if not impossible, challenge. Confronted with this challenge, Somalis continue to hold tight to the traditional rules meant to separate civilians from combatants. Their faith in Islam remains the primary force that guides their thoughts, helps to justify contradictory actions and sustains their hope that the war will end.

Somalis have not abandoned their traditional rules of warfare out of ignorance. Nor have they repudiated them. The limits have been violated and suspended, rather, because the cycle of conflicts has spun out of control. Clan warfare as practised by the warlord-backed militias has created a virtual dragnet that has swept up civilians alongside combatants, leaving a trail of broken lives and shattered families. Once-taboo tactics – rape, massacres and extortion – have become routine. Hatred, revenge and the need to survive amidst the chaos have added fuel to the fire.

Four outstanding characteristics of the war in Somalia have conspired to eliminate the traditional rules that separate civilian from combatant – and guarantee a level of brutality and destruction that far exceeds any previous conflict on Somali soil.

First, the sheer length and breadth of the fighting in Somalia has left few untouched by conflict. Only 12 per cent of those surveyed report that they escaped the direct physical or psychological impact of ten years of war.⁴ In a similar vein, 88 per cent of those surveyed say that they lived in an area where conflict had occurred.⁵

Second, clan warfare by its very nature offers few avenues of escape for civilians. Denying that one belongs to a clan – or that one shares that clan’s ambitions – is not possible. Civilians have had no choice but to become involved. Violence among combatants has reached far beyond the 23 per cent of Somalis who say they carried a weapon into war.

A third element that has made the past decade of Somali war different from others in recent memory is the absence of professional soldiers. These conflicts have been the province of militias whose warlord patrons exercise little control over the day-to-day behaviour of amateur militiamen. The young fighters – many 15 or 16 years old – have roamed the countryside, introducing and expanding new and violent tactics such as rape and extortion. The result has been chaos and brutality.

Fourth and finally, Somalia has lacked the kind of strong authority – on the local or national level – that in previous eras has helped limit war’s impact on civilians. Tribal elders and religious leaders continue to command respect, but their power to rein in the violence has declined precipitously as the traditional rules governing conflict have been thrown aside and the wars have gone on. On the national level, Somalia has for seven years lacked a central government or military and legal system that might have interceded among warring clans or attempted to bring about peace negotiations. Meanwhile, the

⁴ Respondents were asked to identify which of 12 experiences “happened to you personally” as a consequence of the war. These experiences covered a range of physical and psychological effects, from imprisonment to property damage to feeling humiliated.

⁵ This includes the 63 per cent of respondents who say the war occurred in the area in which they lived and the 25 per cent who report that the war took place in their region and elsewhere.

international community – the UN and Somalia's neighbours – has proved unable to help slow the fighting; its continued attempts and failures have only made them seem less relevant.

Taken together, these elements have helped produce a war that would have been both unrecognizable and unthinkable ten years ago – a conflict in which, in the words of a tribal elder, “everyone has his own rules”. In the face of this new reality, Somalis continue to find solace and hope in their traditional beliefs and religious convictions. Armed with their faith in Allah – supplemented by the hope that “battle fatigue” will eventually lead people to stop fighting – a remarkable 69 per cent of Somalis believe that their nation will eventually be at peace.

The main findings of the consultation include:

The war's toll. Ten years of conflict have had widespread and brutal effects on the Somali population.

- Presented with a list of 12 negative physical and psychological effects of the war – ranging from imprisonment and property damage to feelings of humiliation – 53 per cent of those surveyed say they had personally been subject to six or more.
- A remarkable 65 per cent say that a member of their immediate family was killed – almost double the number reported in any other nation surveyed by the ICRC.⁶
- Rape became a routine weapon of the conflicts and defined the war experience for many. Thirty-nine per cent report that someone they knew well was raped. In focus group discussions, graphic images of specific incidents of rape dominated women's recollections.
- Dislocation and property loss were also common. Nearly two-thirds of Somalis (63 per cent) were forced to leave their homes and live elsewhere, and a majority suffered serious property damage or had their homes looted.
- The war has left Somalis embittered and angry. Sixty-one per cent describe the war as “horrible”, 35 per cent say it has been “humiliating” and 15 per cent use the word “hateful”. No matter how they describe the war, virtually all focus group and in-depth interview participants arrive at the same conclusion: war should be avoided at all costs.

Protection of civilians. The vast majority of Somalis, echoing the tribal code of conduct, strongly believe that civilians should not be drawn into war and should be protected at all times. They base this judgement primarily on cultural and religious norms.

- Sixty-six per cent of respondents say combatants should attack enemy combatants only and leave civilians alone.
- Almost four in five Somalis surveyed (79 per cent) believe there are actions combatants should not take when fighting the enemy. Only 1 per cent of respondents say “everything is allowed in war”.
- Asked why combatants should not take actions that threaten civilians, 61 per cent cite personal and cultural norms (“it's wrong”) compared to 31 per cent who give a more pragmatic reason (“it just causes too many problems”). Of those who say such actions are wrong, more than half (53 per cent) base their judgement on a “personal code”. Human rights, religious and cultural traditions and the law are also prominently mentioned.

⁶ See p. 1 in the report for a full explanation of this finding.

- Combatants are clearly aware of the customs and religious tenets that underlie the unwritten code of conduct that governs clan warfare. In focus groups and interviews, tribal elders and others lament the loss of traditional rules that protect civilians.
- Somalis in large measure reject the use of modern weapons of war that can indiscriminately kill or injure civilians. For example, 69 per cent reject the use of landmines. In the survey and focus groups, respondents also rebuke the militias for setting up roadblocks in order to extort civilians.

Attacks on non-combatants. A decade of unrelieved violence and destruction has left a significant minority of Somalis willing to accept ground rules for war that leave civilians open to attack.

- One in five Somalis (21 per cent) accept the proposition that combatants should avoid civilians as “much as possible”.
- About 70 per cent of Somalis reject as “wrong” military actions that put civilians at risk – depriving civilians of food, medicine or water or kidnapping them. But, almost one in five respondents (17 per cent) accept such actions as “part of war”.
- Somalis draw a distinction between treatment of civilians who voluntarily help the enemy and those who are forced to do so. Thirty-seven per cent of respondents agree that civilians who voluntarily give food and shelter to enemy combatants are fair targets, compared with only 10 per cent who are open to attacks on civilians who are coerced into supporting combatants.

Prisoners at risk. While most Somalis voice support for the protection of prisoners, the cycle of violence and feelings of revenge have left a significant minority willing to break with traditional rules. In focus group discussions, ruthlessness, mercy and generosity were all on display.

- About one in five respondents say they believe captured enemy combatants deserve to die and that prisoners can be subjected to torture in order to obtain important military information.
- Faced with hypothetical life-or-death scenarios, 25 per cent of respondents say they would not save the life of a surrendering enemy combatant who had killed someone close to them. Nineteen per cent of respondents say they would not help a wounded enemy combatant.
- The experiences of those who were imprisoned or lived under enemy control contradict people’s stated beliefs that they should be protected. Fifty per cent of those who were imprisoned or lived under enemy control say they were personally mistreated by their captors and 22 per cent say they suffered physical injury.
- Combatants are fully aware of the customs that prohibit the killing of prisoners. In focus group discussions, however, they justify this behaviour in the name of bringing the war to an end and preventing their prisoners from killing again.

The fate of civilians. The character of the war and its combatants conspired to eliminate the rules that separate civilian from combatant and guaranteed a level of brutality far in excess of previous clan warfare.

- As clan warfare made it difficult to distinguish civilians from combatants, it became easy to justify actions that were sure to threaten civilian lives and property. In focus groups, a range of people blame civilians themselves for what happened to them.

- Those who say they supported a side in the conflict are more likely to be open to actions that could harm civilians. Twice as many of those who support a side, compared with those who did not, would allow attacks on the enemy in populated villages and towns.
- The threat to civilians was made worse by warlords who recruited young teenagers to join their militias. While close to one-third of respondents approve of people 17 years and younger taking up arms, the overwhelming majority (73 per cent) of those surveyed agree that too many children who were “too young and irresponsible” became combatants.
- As the violence continued, the power of tribal elders and religious leaders declined. In their absence, fighting raged without limits or rules. That vacuum, combined with a lack of a central government, stripped clans and citizens alike of a potential protector and peacemaker. Citizens of all stripes long for a reunified nation.
- The absence of tribal authorities and a central government reinforced the power of Islam. Its teachings and a high degree of fatalism has helped Somalis come to grips with the contradictions of this war and the violence visited on one another.

International institutions. The 1992 famine briefly internationalized the war but left many sceptical of the power of international institutions. Somalis are relatively unfamiliar with the international law of war but remain open to agencies that offer aid in a time of chaos.

- The Geneva Conventions are not well known in Somalia. Only 42 per cent say they have heard of them and just half of those describe them accurately. There is some evidence that increased knowledge of the Geneva Conventions could reduce acceptance of actions that threaten civilians and captured combatants.
- There is broad support for punishment of war crimes, and four in five respondents (79 per cent) believe that people who break the rules of war should be put on trial. A majority of respondents say that Somali institutions should take responsibility for punishing war criminals.
- About half of the respondents say they have positive feelings towards international institutions. Forty-six per cent say that UN forces in Somalia have made the situation better for civilians, while 24 per cent say they have made it worse.
- Fifty-one per cent of those surveyed are in favour of increased intervention by international institutions on behalf of civilians caught up in war. But, many remain distrustful of Western institutions; 38 per cent say they want intervention by these groups to decline or stop altogether.
- The younger generation – Somalis under 30 – are more open to investing power in international institutions, including an international court and the UN.
- The people of Somalia are familiar with and supportive of the ICRC/Red Crescent. Nearly four in five respondents correctly identify the organization’s emblem. Asked to describe who the red crescent emblem protects, 44 per cent of those surveyed say it protects civilians, the weak and the vulnerable.
- Somalis give equal credit to their religious leaders and the ICRC/Red Crescent for doing the most during the war to protect civilians and those in need. Thirty-three per cent of respondents say that when civilians are threatened, they would turn to the ICRC/Red Crescent for help, a larger percentage than those who mention religious leaders or the UN.

The war experience

Widespread conflict

Somalia's ongoing wars have left few of its 10 million citizens unaffected and little of its territory untouched. Clan warfare as practised by the warlord-backed militias has created a virtual dragnet that swept up even those who tried their best to avoid or outrun the fighting. No fewer than 88 per cent of Somalis surveyed report that the war took place in the area where they lived. As one militia member said with only slight exaggeration, ten years of constant fighting created a situation in which "every person has participated in war be it practically or intentionally". (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

Escaping the war was simply not an option for all but a lucky handful. Only 12 per cent of Somalis, when presented with a list of 12 negative consequences of the war – which cover a range of physical and psychological effects, from imprisonment to property damage to feeling humiliated – say they have experienced none of them. Of those who report they had experienced some of the effects listed, more than half (53 per cent) say they have been personally subjected to six or more.

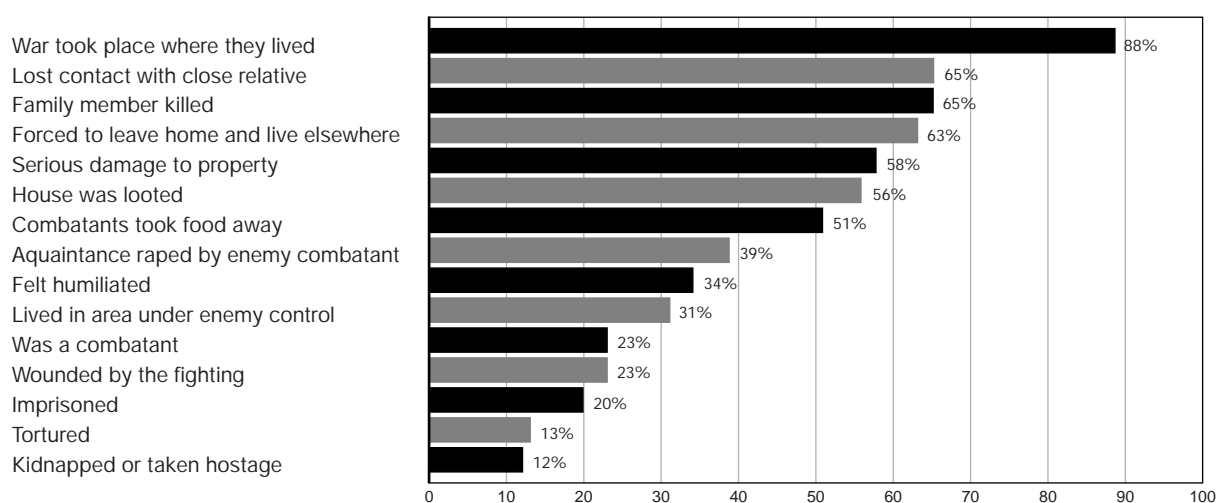
In one remarkable finding, 65 per cent of those surveyed report that a member of their immediate family was killed during the conflicts. This number is less striking if one considers that polygamy is legal and commonly practised in Somalia – each man is allowed as many as four wives – and that one would expect to find a broader definition of the term "immediate family" in a clan-based society. The result is impressive nonetheless – almost double the number reported by those in any other country surveyed (33 per cent of El Salvadorans made a similar claim). It would be hard to overstate the impact on the Somali psyche; nearly two in every three people *believe* that a member of their immediate family was killed.

Brutal attacks, physical suffering, dislocation and property loss were also common: 39 per cent report that someone they knew well was raped (see below); 23 per cent were wounded in the fighting; 20 per cent were imprisoned; nearly one in three (31 per cent) lived in an area under enemy control; 63 per cent were forced to leave their homes; 65 per cent say they lost contact with a close relative; and more than half report that they suffered serious property damage (58 per cent), had their homes looted (56 per cent) or had combatants take their food (51 per cent). These experiences cut across lines of age, gender and region.

FIGURE 1

The war experience

(per cent of total population responding)



The war's impact was, of course, harshest on the 23 per cent of Somalis who say they have been armed fighters, most of whom were younger men.⁷ But civilians were by no means spared from violence. While 45 per cent of combatants report being wounded in the fighting, 16 per cent of civilians say they have been wounded. Similarly, a relatively high proportion of civilians – 20 per cent versus 25 per cent of combatants – say they have been imprisoned by the enemy. Thirteen per cent of civilians (compared with 23 per cent of combatants) say they have been tortured and 12 per cent say they have been kidnapped or held hostage (compared with 22 per cent of combatants).

The predicament of civilians in Somalia's conflicts is well illustrated by comparing the experiences of the majority of Somalis (53 per cent) who say they supported a side in the war with the 41 per cent who say they did not. Those who did not take sides were, of course, less likely to experience the negative consequences of the war, but they were not immune even to its harshest experiences. Twenty-two per cent of those who supported a side in the conflicts were imprisoned, but the same holds true for 20 per cent of those who did not support a side.

Rape and brutality

The consultation has revealed that the extent and severity of suffering among Somalis – both direct and indirect – has been nothing short of extraordinary. This is particularly clear in the case of rape and its impact on women.

As has been mentioned, 39 per cent of Somalis – five times the level reported in other countries surveyed – report that somebody they knew well was raped by combatants. In-depth discussions reveal the tremendous psychological impact and brutal power of this new weapon of war in Somalia, and the ongoing fear it has engendered among women. In contrast to men – who were unlikely to discuss specific experiences when asked to recall their worst memories of war – the women's answers were dominated by graphic images of specific cases of rape.

In three discussions among groups of displaced women and women farmers, participants volunteered a battery of horrifying incidents: the rape of a nine-year-old girl; a woman raped alongside her daughters; a woman eight months pregnant gang-raped by 17 men, who then killed the unborn male child; another woman raped until she miscarried; an old woman raped by 70 men, and a woman who was shot in the head when she resisted gang rape. (FG, women, Bosaso; FG, displaced women, Bardera; FG, women farmers, Jilib)

Rape, loss and trauma left women isolated emotionally and with tremendous economic burdens – and feeling that they had suffered as much, if not more, than men.

Women are very soft. They cannot tolerate problems like the men. They suffer more psychologically as they see their children or themselves raped. They lose their own men folk. Hence it is very difficult. (FG, women, Bosaso)

Men were created for war but women weren't. You find that in the end, women are the ones who suffer most. They are widowed, they lose their husbands and children, they are shot while pregnant, so they are much more affected. (FG, militiamen, Mogadishu)

Everyone suffers but women suffer most because they lose their husbands, sons, property and, in addition, they have to earn a living for the remaining children and relatives... Most men die in the war, but women shoulder the overbearing economic burden imposed on them. (FG, displaced women, Bardera)

They also suffer more psychologically as they remain behind and wait anxiously to get news of the conditions on the battlefield... (FG, nomads, Dusamareb)

⁷Thirty-seven per cent of men under 40 report that they have participated as armed combatants, compared with 24 per cent of men over 40. Eight per cent of women say they were combatants.

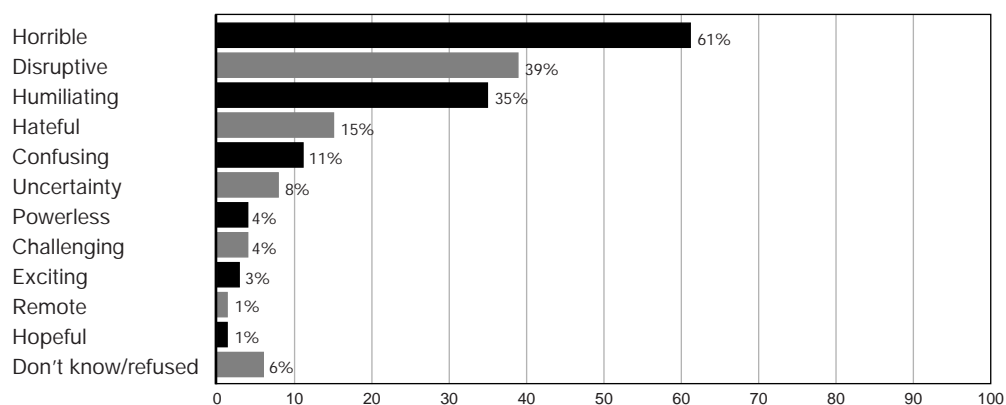
Tales of violence and destruction echo in virtually all the focus group discussions and interviews. There are rare stories of combatants who spared the lives of those they captured or of villagers who helped neighbours in danger. A handful of survey respondents (8 per cent) report that the war has been personally “challenging” or “exciting” or has made them “hopeful”.

Far more common, however, are stories of terrible brutality: a father who lost all ten of his sons in the war (FG, displaced women, Bardera); a man who saw “30 dead children on their mothers’ breasts” (FG, nomads, Dusamareb); a woman who saw a man dismembered with scissors while a number of people watched (FG, women, Bosaso); and a once respected tribal elder who was held prisoner and watched as his captors cut off the heads of his fellow prisoners. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

Little wonder, then, that 61 per cent of those surveyed say the word “horrible” best describes the war for them, while 35 per cent choose the word “humiliating” and 15 per cent the word “hateful”. Others focus on the war’s direct impact on their lives; 39 per cent of those choose the word “disruptive” to describe the war, “confusing” (11 per cent), “uncertainty” (8 per cent) and “powerless” (4 per cent). (See Figure 2.) No matter how they describe the war, virtually all Somalis arrive at the same conclusion: war should be avoided at all costs.

FIGURE 2
Personal description of the war

(per cent of total population responding)

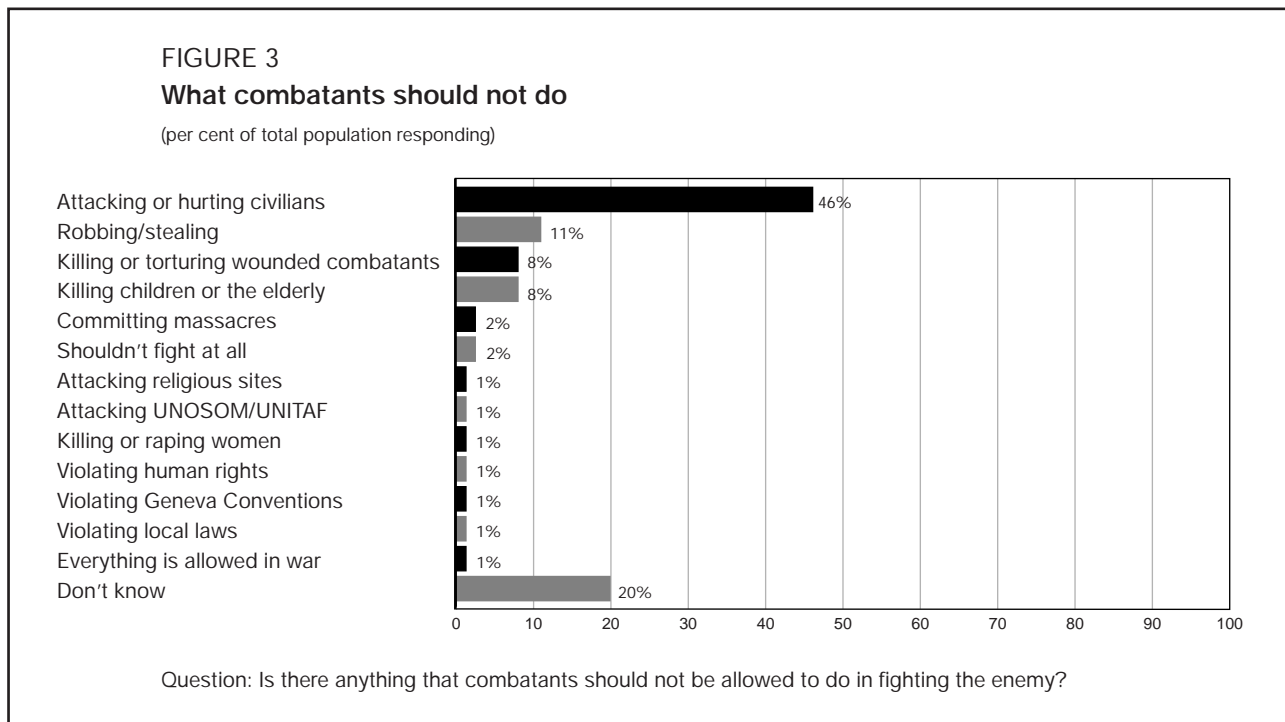


Question: Which *two* of these words best describes the war for you personally?

Protection of civilians

Limits on wartime behaviour

The reality of Somalia's war – its brutality and its impact on civilians – stands in sharp contrast to its peoples' strongly held attitudes on wartime behaviour. Sixty-six per cent of respondents say that combatants – no matter whose side they are on – should attack enemy combatants and leave civilians alone.⁸ Seventy-nine per cent of those surveyed name actions that should be off-limits to combatants. The list includes attacking or hurting civilians (46 per cent), robbing or stealing (11 per cent), killing or torturing wounded combatants (8 per cent) and killing children or the elderly (8 per cent). Only 1 per cent of respondents say that "everything is allowed in war". (See Figure 3.)



The findings were echoed in discussion groups and interviews, where people across a broad spectrum reject attacks on civilians. This includes a number of militiamen, who voice blanket opinions that belie the reality of the war in Somalia.

...the civilians should not be involved in war. They shouldn't be attacked or killed.
(FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

You should not attack in order to harm the innocent civilians. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

Because they are non-combatants of war and they are not the fighters against you.
They haven't killed your people, they are poor civilians. And they should be left alone.
(FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

Not surprisingly, women, children, the elderly and disabled and religious leaders were most frequently singled out for special protection. But a range of participants in focus groups and in-depth interviews – fighters, farmers, tribal elders – say that students, teachers, and highly educated professionals such as doctors and scientists should be included in this group. (IDI, fighter, Boroma/Berbera; FG, women farmers, Jilib; FG, militiamen, Mogadishu; FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa) Somalis, it seems, put a special value on the scarce few of their countrymen and women who have more than a primary education.

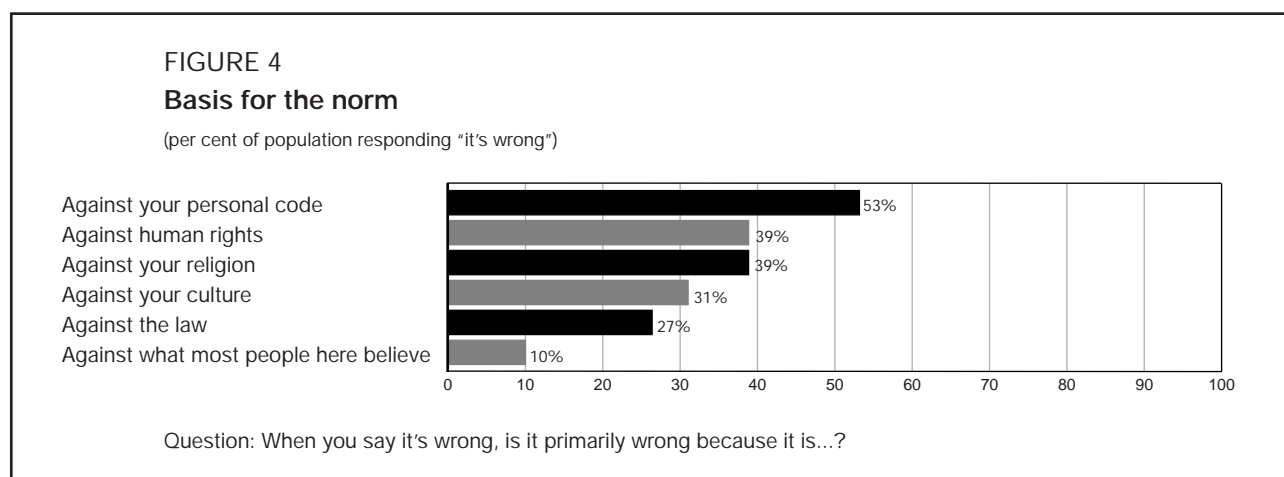
⁸See "Civilians and combatants" on page 8 for a more detailed examination of this question.

Norms, tradition and religion

The widespread influence of religious and cultural norms in Somalia is revealed when respondents are asked why combatants should not take actions that threaten civilian lives and property. Sixty-one per cent of those surveyed base their beliefs on respect for these norms, saying that violating limits on wartime behaviour is “wrong”. Only half that many (31 per cent) justify their beliefs on more practical grounds (“it just causes too many problems”).⁹ The percentage of those who believe “it’s wrong” rises with age – from 55 per cent among 18-29 year-olds to 74 per cent among 40-49 year-olds.

Among those who say “it’s wrong”, the majority (53 per cent) say attacks on civilians and other prohibited acts violate their “personal code”, with another 10 per cent saying they are “against what most people here believe”. Significant numbers also justify their position by saying such actions are against human rights (39 per cent); against their religion (39 per cent) or culture (31 per cent); or against the law (27 per cent). (See Figure 4.) One doctor’s explanation offers a succinct summary of why civilians should be protected:

It is against humanity. Islam forbids it. It results in psychological problems that continue long after the war is over. It is against our culture and tradition to abuse helpless people.
(IDI, doctor, Boroma)



In focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, combatants demonstrate a clear understanding of the cultural norms and religious teachings that underlie Somalia’s traditional wartime code of conduct – and the shame associated with violating it.

To attack civilians is unlawful according to traditions and religion. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

It’s traditionally and religiously unlawful to attack and kill civilians, but it’s allowed according to the traditions of today. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

It is incorrect to do what the laws prohibit. They shouldn’t kill since they are Muslims.
(FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

Somalis are a hundred per cent Muslim. They also have traditions. It is very shameful to do something that is forbidden as taught by our forefathers. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

The focus group discussions and the in-depth interviews provide a much clearer picture of the traditional Somali wartime code of conduct and the unprecedented nature of the past decade of conflict. Tribal elders and religious leaders offer detailed explanations of the rules of war and lament their demise. The in-depth interviews reveal a strong historical understanding and appreciation of the rules of war among a wide range of people.

⁹ Seventy-five per cent of these respondents say the primary problem is that such actions generate “too much hate and division”, while 45 per cent say “it produces too much destruction” and 29 per cent cite “psychological damage”.

This is not the only war that has taken place in Somalia. In the previous war fighters used to fight but never harm the children, old people, innocent people and even prisoners. Today everyone is killed. The old are killed, the young who have not even matured. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Belet Huen)

According to Somali tradition, combatants should not kill the religious elders... They should not kill the captured heroes who are well known – and protect the people in the future – because if they are killed war increases. They are not allowed to kill civilians, women and children, to break into personal houses, loot property, kill captured prisoners. This is how our traditional wars used to be... During our ancient times people used to make appointments and agreements on time or days when they would fight. There was nothing like tricking or hunting of one another. Although it is a part of war, it is something I have never known since I was born. (IDI, elderly male, Mogadishu South)

Nowadays people write down laws but previously during our time those ancient days, people used to pay 100 camels for the life of one man in compensation. Then they pay for other abuse and mistreatments. If a person is tortured, you cut the ears and nose in the payment of compensation. (IDI, elderly male, Mogadishu South)

Somalis had a tradition which prohibited all bad things. If the war became too long, there was an exchange of girls and horses so the long-lasting enmity would finish there. (FG, displaced women, Bardera)

For example the northern Somalis never used to kill women and children when they went for animal raids, but during the last civil war it was done. (IDI, nomad, Boroma)

[Moderator question: Previously was it easy and simple to shoot a person?] To compensate a person was 1.2 million shillings. I witnessed a man who was shot with ten bullets. The man who killed him took his gun and sold it. Hence he got the money to pay for compensation of the life of that person he had killed. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

As you know, Allah gave man a sensible mind and understanding other than animals, and from time immemorial, the Somalis used to fight against each other from generation to generation, but they were safeguarding the human rights according to our culture. (IDI, journalist, Mogadishu)

When discussion turns to protection afforded by human rights and international law, respondents define these largely in terms of Somali cultural norms and the tenets of Islam. Where participants cite international law, for example, their language unconsciously creates a hierarchy of justification that places their traditional customs and religious beliefs above international norms. Several tribal elders and religious leaders explicitly reject a Western definition of these rights, saying that the powerful nations violated human rights while the “Third World countries care about humanity”.

The impact of a decade of war becomes clear when respondents are asked to define and explain the role of human rights. While a handful of those questioned cite freedom and property rights, most focus on their role in conflict and define human rights as a protective shield.¹⁰ Islam and tradition dominate definitions.

...Human rights are how Islamic religion states. But not how the powerful countries assume. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

¹⁰ “I have heard of it on the radio, and I think it is meant to protect people’s lives.” (IDI, nomad, Boroma) “It protects people from harm.” (IDI, displaced woman, Bardera) “...for the protection of the weaker people” (IDI, woman artist, Bardera) “Mistreating the poor” (FG, militiamen, Mogadishu).

One should be given peace. One should not claim that one is more powerful than another. All people should be equal. None should undermine the other. Everything should be shared equally. As stated in the Islamic religion, that is the meaning of human rights. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

It is the right to refuse to do what is bad, just as our religious leaders and elders tell us. (FG, women, Bosaso)

The "human rights" that I know of are governed by the Holy Quran [Koran] and they are better than the ones you are talking about. (IDI, doctor, Boroma)

The Somalis know what human rights are. Our culture instructs us to be mindful of the weak people and this is what human rights are all about. (IDI, journalist, Mogadishu)

Weapons of war

As strongly as Somalis voice their belief in traditional protections for civilians during wartime, they reject modern weapons of war that indiscriminately target civilians. More than half of those surveyed volunteer that landmines should never be used in war – a far greater proportion than those who mention nuclear or chemical weapons. Seventeen per cent mention cluster bombs, which have been used to deadly effect in Mogadishu and elsewhere.

Sixty-nine per cent reject the use of landmines to weaken the enemy in situations where civilians might accidentally be injured or killed, while 21 per cent approve their use.¹¹ Combatants and civilians alike condemn them and warn of their effects long after the war ends. "It is wrong to plant landmines," one militiaman said. "It's inhuman." (FG, militiamen, Kismayo) "They protect no one and kill everyone." (IDI, displaced woman, Galkayo)

Somalis are equally strong in their repudiation of the scores of roadblocks established by militias to extort civilians, often regardless of clan affiliation. These roadblocks affected combatants and civilians alike and left them feeling humiliated (44 per cent), intimidated (25 per cent), angry (18 per cent) and irritated (17 per cent). Only 7 per cent say the roadblocks made them feel more secure. One in four civilians (27 per cent) have come to accept roadblocks as part of the new kind of warfare – random weapons that endanger and disrupt civilian lives.

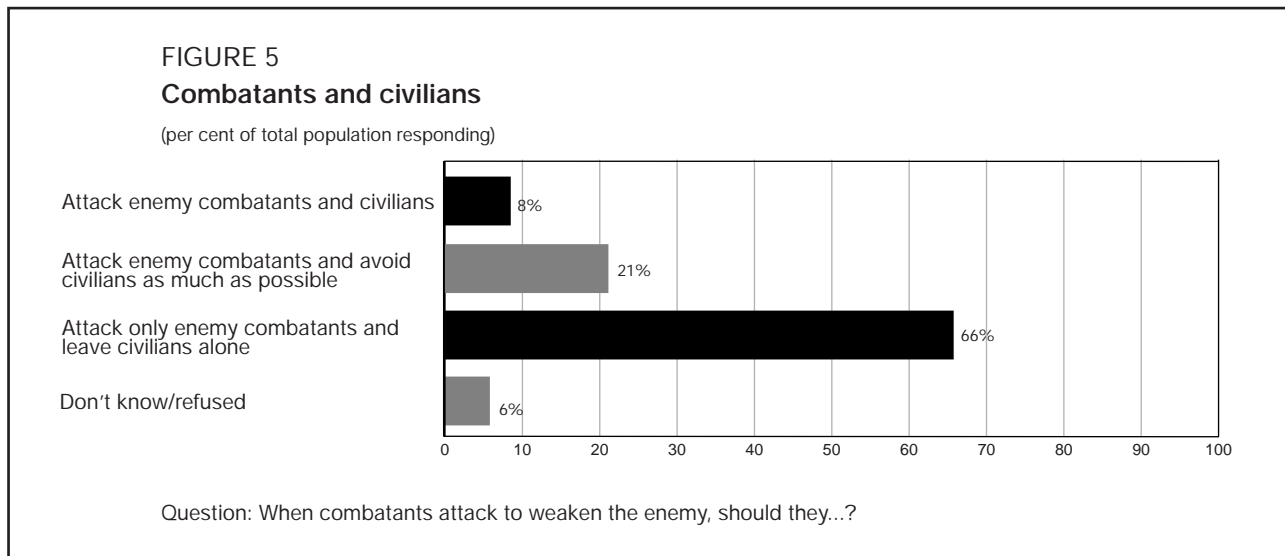
¹¹See Figures 11, 12 and 13 for a breakdown of views on the use of landmines.

Civilians and captured combatants at risk

Blurring the line between combatants and civilians

The people of Somalia strongly believe in the traditional customs and religious tenets that are meant to protect civilians in times of war. They are well aware of the wartime code of conduct that has long governed disputes among clans. After the pressure of ten years of unrelieved violence and destruction, however, a significant minority of Somalis are willing to accept ground rules for war that leave civilians open to attack.

Sixty-six per cent of those surveyed say that combatants should only fight among themselves and leave civilians alone. One in five Somalis (21 per cent), however, are willing to accept the proposition that civilians should be avoided "as much as possible". (See Figure 5.)



Faced with the kind of situations they have encountered in wartime, a plurality of respondents prove willing to give combatants leeway to attack civilians, especially if they are seen to be aiding the enemy: 37 per cent of respondents say it is acceptable to attack civilians who voluntarily give food and shelter to enemy combatants and 39 per cent sanction attacks on civilians who voluntarily transport ammunition to combatants who are defending their town.¹² This finding was strongly amplified in the focus group discussions.

I believe that those civilians and the fighters belong to one family group once the civilians are going with the fighters, doing things like cooking, treating them and any other necessary thing... Whatever happens to the civilians is up to them. If they collaborate with the fighters, then what happens is up to them. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

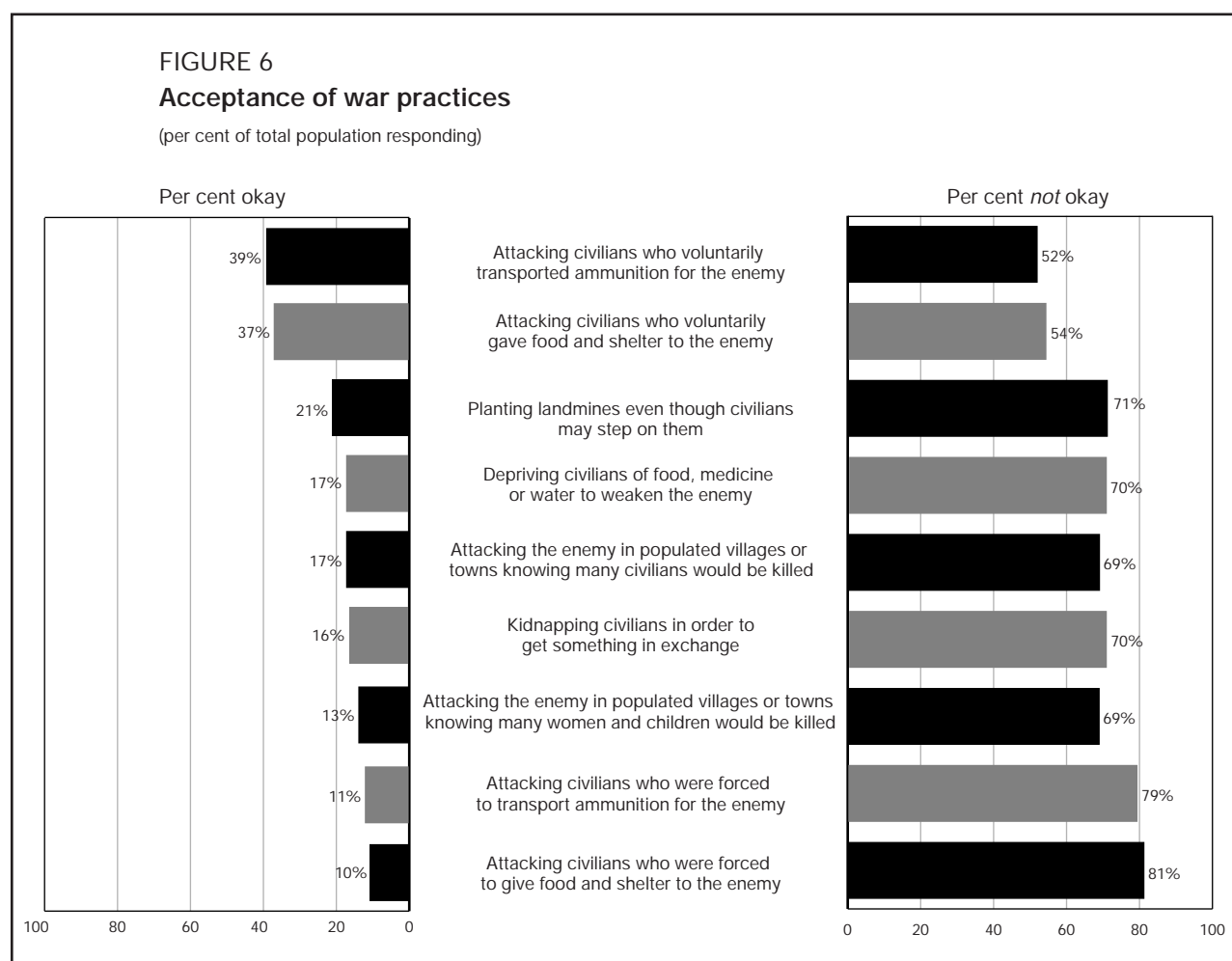
I think it is the responsibility of the civilians to chase away the enemy, but if they accommodate the enemy, then they will face the music because there is no other solution. (FG, nomads, Dusamareb)

I will follow the law and rescue those who are captured. Otherwise I won't bother about a civilian running behind the soldiers fighting [who] is injured. Because to me a civilian is a person who doesn't come in the line of war. They don't come to the fields of war. They normally stay at home. But the person who is carrying water, cooking food for my enemies, is included in the fight against me, so I have to kill even him if I meet him. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

¹² More educated respondents and young women are less likely to sanction such actions. Seventy-eight per cent of those with some secondary education reject attacks on civilians who are providing food to combatants (versus 62 per cent with no education). Only 24 per cent of women under 40 say it's acceptable to attack civilians who voluntarily provide ammunition to combatants compared with 45 per cent of young men, older men and older women.

...when they support your enemy they became your enemy. (FG, women farmers, Jilib)

Acceptance of these practices drops dramatically when civilians are described as being forced to assist enemy combatants. In this case, only one in ten respondents accept such attacks. (See Figure 6.)



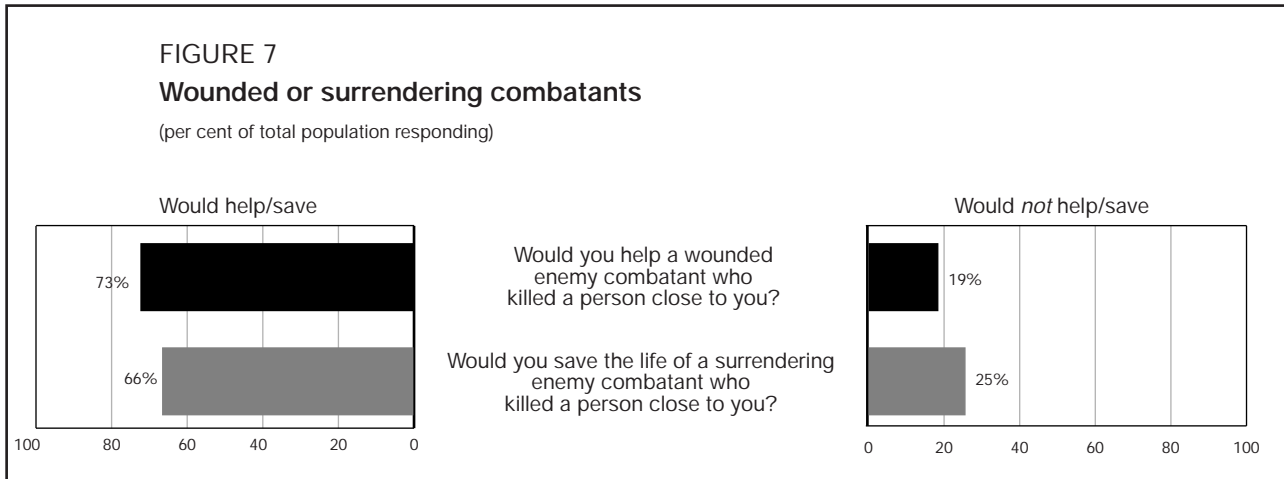
About 70 per cent of Somalis reject as “wrong” military actions that put civilians at risk: depriving civilians of food, medicine or water; attacking villages knowing that women and children would be killed; or kidnapping civilians in order to get something in exchange. But nearly one in five respondents accept these as “part of war”. As one further explores wartime behaviours, the willingness to put civilians at risk grows.

Captured combatants at risk

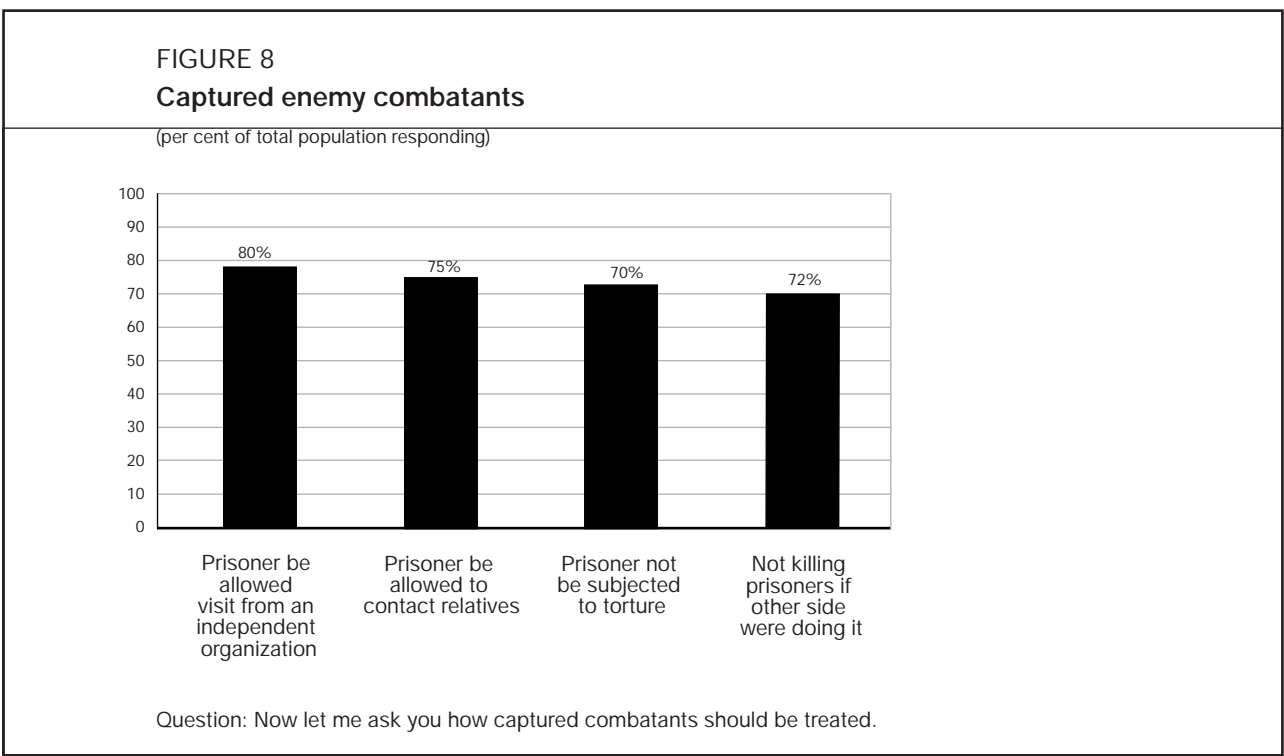
A similar, significant minority of respondents prove willing to break with the Somali wartime code of conduct when it comes to the treatment of captured combatants. Seventeen per cent of respondents – nearly one in five – say they think “captured enemy combatants deserve to die”. Approximately 20 per cent approve the idea of one side killing prisoners if the other side is doing the same and 21 per cent would approve of captured combatants being subjected to torture.

¹³In general, those respondents who personally experienced violent and disruptive aspects of the war show little difference when asked if they would protect enemy combatants. Those who had been wounded in battle, however, were significantly more likely to approve of killing prisoners if the other side were doing it (31 per cent compared with 19 per cent of those who were not wounded); more likely not to spare the lives of enemy fighters who surrender (44 per cent compared with 20 per cent) or help a wounded combatant (30 per cent compared with 16 per cent); and more likely to approve of torturing prisoners (31 per cent compared with 19 per cent). These differences are not evident among those who were imprisoned or tortured; in fact, they prove slightly more likely to protect the enemy.

When respondents are confronted with hypothetical scenarios and asked how they would react in life-or-death situations involving enemy combatants, the vast majority demonstrate generosity. Sixty-six per cent say they would “save the life of a surrendering enemy combatant who killed a person close to them”, compared with 25 per cent who say they would not save his life. Seventy-three per cent say they would help a wounded enemy combatant who had killed someone close to them; 19 per cent disagree. (See Figure 7.) Combatants are far more severe: more than one-third approve of killing prisoners if the other side were doing it (36 per cent versus 16 per cent of non-combatants); say prisoners can be tortured (38 per cent versus 16 per cent); and say they would not help a wounded enemy (36 per cent versus 15 per cent).¹³



Recollections of those who actually fell under enemy control or were imprisoned (575 respondents) help demonstrate the gap between what people say they believe and what happens in war. Only one in three report being treated correctly, 50 per cent say their captors mistreated them and 22 per cent say they suffered physical injury. Only 18 per cent say they had contact with a representative of an independent organization while detained, a figure wildly at odds with the 80 per cent of those surveyed who say captured combatants should be allowed such visits. (See Figures 8 and 9.)¹⁴

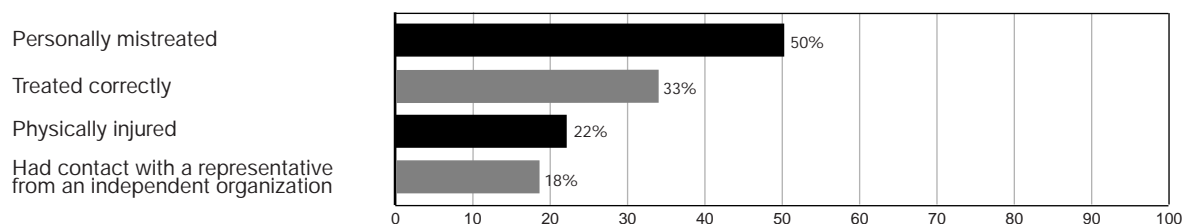


¹⁴Of those who say they had contact with an independent organization, 86 per cent cite the ICRC. Forty per cent cite the UN, 20 per cent human rights representatives, 16 per cent religious leaders and 15 per cent journalists.

FIGURE 9

While under enemy control

(per cent of those imprisoned or under enemy control)



Question: Please tell me whether any of the following happened while you were under enemy control.

Many participants are unequivocal in their views on the importance of protecting prisoners and treating them with respect. "It is good to take care of him. You should give him life protection." (FG, militiamen, Kismayo); "When one is injured he is quite helpless and should be protected at all costs." (FG, women, Bosaso); "The enemy should not be killed... Today he is my enemy but he will be my friend tomorrow." (IDI, displaced woman, Galkayo) "Forget about your relative he killed. This man himself is injured, and he needs to be helped. [Question: Even if he killed your brother, he should be rescued?] Yes." (IDI, militia colonel, North Mogadishu)

Many respondents cite traditional norms and Islamic teachings to justify their opinions, stating that killing wounded or imprisoned combatants is "wrong". Others link their reasons to an implicit understanding of the traditional code of conduct.

Personally I believe in rescuing prisoners... I will not kill a prisoner even if [he kills] mine. What I will do is to release him so that he goes to join his fellow group. Then he will inform them that I captured and released him. This way they will understand that I captured and released him. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

If I see anyone who killed my relatives, I wouldn't forgive him even if he were my relative. I couldn't forgive him even if he was injured or not. Whether he has a gun or not... But if I was given wealth in revenge for my relative's killing, I could not harm [the prisoner] even if he is healthy. But if I am not compensated, I will kill him even if he is critically injured. (IDI, farmer, Bur-Hakaba)

For all those who reject out of hand the killing or mistreatment of captured combatants, there were others who deny their responsibility or display an honesty and ruthlessness born of the cycle of revenge and uncontrolled violence. "God is the only protector," says one tribal leader. "They can request protection from Allah only." (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa) When women farmers were asked if they would kill an enemy combatant who had killed somebody close to them, it prompted this exchange:

I will release him even if he killed my brother.

I will take him to the Islamic law court.

I will not do it. Revenge is bad.

Personally if I get a person who killed my brother I will kill him.

If I meet the person who killed my brother I will slaughter him.

I will take him to the Islamic court of law. Once you kill a person for revenge your relationship with God is cut off because he forbids it.

(FG, women, Bosaso)

Combatants, as has been noted, are fully aware of the customs and religious teachings that prohibit the killing of prisoners. They spoke honestly about releasing prisoners because they feared that if they mistreated them, they would receive the same treatment if captured. Yet the militiamen and fighters interviewed had little trouble finding reasons to justify killing an enemy captive.

It depends on the knowledge and sensitivity of the fighter who caught the prisoner. The killers are always blamed over such issues... In most cases when the war is in action, the prisoner is killed because there is anger and the fighter feels it's his right to avenge his friend or brother.
(FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

I will kill any prisoner who is captured twice or repeatedly, but not one who has been captured for the first time. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

Actually, there are no cells to keep the prisoners in Somalia, nowhere to feed them... The prisoner knows the fighters and therefore, if set free, he might kill more people. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

I can simply boil them [prisoners] in tarmac, since they killed my brother. I can never forgive them... Definitely they should be killed. Personally I can cut his flesh to pieces, because I know this is what will happen to me when I'm caught. (IDI, militiaman, Bur-Hakaba)

Breakdown of limits

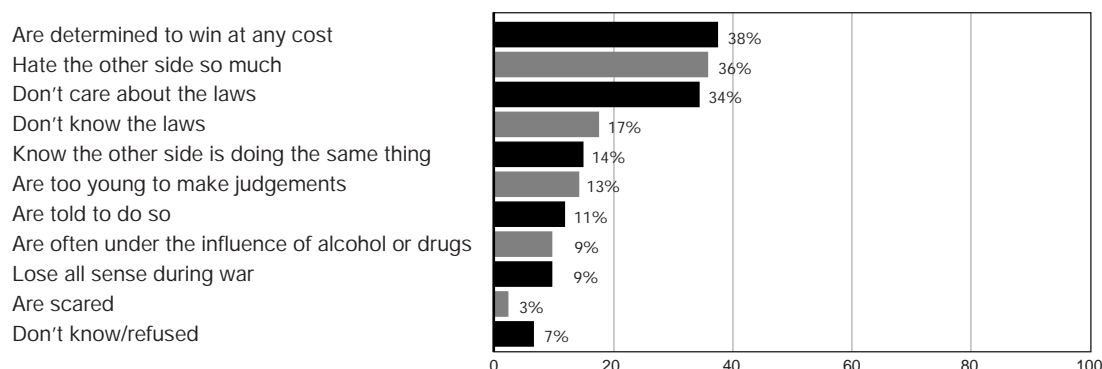
The cycle of violence

The ICRC consultation in Somalia demonstrates that the vast majority of people hold strong opinions on the limits of war, particularly on the need to protect civilians. It also reveals a keen awareness of – and belief in – the centuries-old wartime code of conduct and its roots in cultural norms and Islamic teachings. Ten years of warfare, however, and unprecedented levels of violence have undermined the power and relevance of the code and the values that stand behind it. Accepted limits on warfare have fallen by the wayside and the line between combatants and civilians has all but disappeared. A significant minority of Somalis today approve of – or are willing to accept as “part of war” – a range of previously unacceptable actions: killing and torturing prisoners; kidnapping civilians for leverage in battle; attacking villages knowing full well that women and children may be killed; and depriving civilians of food and water.

When asked to explain why combatants attack civilians, respondents stress the effects of the cycle of violence. Thirty-eight per cent say the combatants want to win “at any cost”, 36 per cent blame it on hatred of the enemy, 14 per cent say the combatants “know the other side is doing the same thing” and 9 per cent say fighters lose all sense during war. A third (34 per cent) believe combatants wilfully disregard the law and half as many (17 per cent) say it’s because they are unaware that the laws exist.¹⁵ (See Figure 10.)

FIGURE 10
Why combatants attack civilians

(per cent of total population responding)



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 they...?

Hatred, revenge and disregard for the law are mentioned time and again when focus group participants and in-depth interviewees try to explain how civilians became part and parcel of the war in Somalia. More than anything else, however, Somalis paint a picture of a war that spun out of control – a series of conflicts that took on a life of its own and trampled their nation’s most revered traditions and sacred beliefs. In contrast to most other armed conflicts surveyed as part of the ICRC project, the conflicts in Somalia lacked an ideological goal or any sense of direction. For civilians they became little more than a struggle for survival and sanity amidst anarchy.

Making sense of the “new” rules of war and the belief/behaviour dilemma is not an easy or comfortable task for Somalis. In the focus groups and in-depth interviews not one of those questioned claim ignorance of the traditional standards of conduct. Only a handful justify their behaviour in the name of a cause or the greater good. Almost all invoke Allah in searching for an explanation. Many bemoan a senseless war in which people have forgotten why they started fighting.

¹⁵ Respondents were allowed to select two reasons.

When we talk about war in Somalia we cannot call it a fight. It's a war of disaster. They are brothers, they belong to same religion so no one can be termed as a fighter. People are not struggling for independence, they are just killing each other. (FG, militiamen, Mogadishu)

I think the whole war was a mistake. The people who are fighting don't even know why they are fighting. (IDI, woman farmer, Jilib)

There used to be peace and enmity at the same time. The ongoing war has no objective. People believe in killing anyone who confronts them without thinking twice about it. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Belet Huen)

We are fighting for no apparent reason or aim. (IDI, elder male, Mogadishu South)

Our religion teaches us to protect our things and ourselves when we are being attacked but never to attack each other and destroy ourselves. (IDI, poet, Boroma/Berbera)

Length of the war

The ICRC consultation reveals four outstanding characteristics of the war in Somalia that conspired to eliminate the traditional rules that separate civilian from combatant and guaranteed a level of brutality and destruction far in excess of previous conflicts.

First, as has been noted, the sheer length and breadth of the fighting left few Somalis untouched by the conflict. Put simply, long wars are bound to embrace more people. As territory is overrun and stripped of resources, combatants move on. Civilians become a natural feature of this battlescape. Questioning their involvement becomes moot. At this point, Somalis are left hoping that "battle fatigue" may help bring an end to the sufferings of civilians.

The nature of clan warfare

Second, clan warfare by its very nature leads inexorably to the participation of civilians, even if the civilians don't take ownership of the fighters or the cause. Denying that one belongs to a clan – or that one shares the ambitions of one's clan – is not an option. The line between civilians and combatants becomes virtually indistinguishable.

It is difficult to define the term civilian because some are also looting or fighting alongside the militia in the name of defending themselves. So sometimes it is quite hard. (IDI, merchant, Boroma/Berbera)

Because the war is a tribal war the civilians themselves are the fighters and most of them do not know what they are fighting for. They don't know the objectives of the fight. The fighters are the looters and killers, people who don't want development, unity and peace. Other people fight in the war yet they don't know the reason as to why they are fighting. (FG, militiamen, Mogadishu)

The problem in Somalia is tribalism. Civilians fight against civilians and they support the two fighting groups. In the process so many non-combatants are killed. (FG, militiamen, Mogadishu)

...if a tribe attacks another tribe they don't differentiate between a civilian and a combatant and they will end up killing anyone they meet. (IDI, farmer, Bur Akaba)

In focus groups and interviews, respondents are quick to refer to Somali traditions and reject military actions that threaten civilian lives or property. Unprompted, they even make suggestions on how civilians could be spared from harm when, for example, combatants threaten a village; in separate discussions several people echo the suggestion of a tribal elder who recommended

that fighters “surround the town, get all the civilians out and then attack the enemy”.
(FG, militiamen, Mogadishu)

Many lament the impossible situation Somalis face. When civilians and combatants are living side by side, as one tribal elder says, “it becomes so difficult to separate the bullets.” (FG, elders and religious leaders, Belet Huen)

Good intentions and ideal solutions quickly give way to more pragmatic, severe judgements that reflect the reality of ten years of warfare. Militiamen and tribal elders – groups on opposite ends of the Somali social spectrum – give strikingly similar answers when asked about depriving civilians of food and water:

Depriving the civilian part of the population food and water to weaken the enemy is just part of the war, and it is very effective as it will weaken the enemy, making them shift from one place to another... If this is not done then the war will not end. (IDI, militiaman, Bur-Akaba)

They should be harassed as they are just the same as the fighters. Cutting off the water and food is part of the war. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

...there is no making it easier on them. I will deal with any supporters of my enemies. I have to finish their water. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

I have to do anything to intercept the war against them. I should cause water and food crisis. At least they can't overpower me if they are economically insufficient. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

These rules only apply when a country is peaceful. But during the war they are not valid. People are fighting for their tribes or clans. (IDI, businesswoman, Galkayo)

Others place the blame for attacks on civilians squarely on the victims and seem to eliminate any traditional line separating them from combatants.

If the civilians are warned about it and they refuse to budge they only have themselves to blame (FG, women farmers, Jilib)

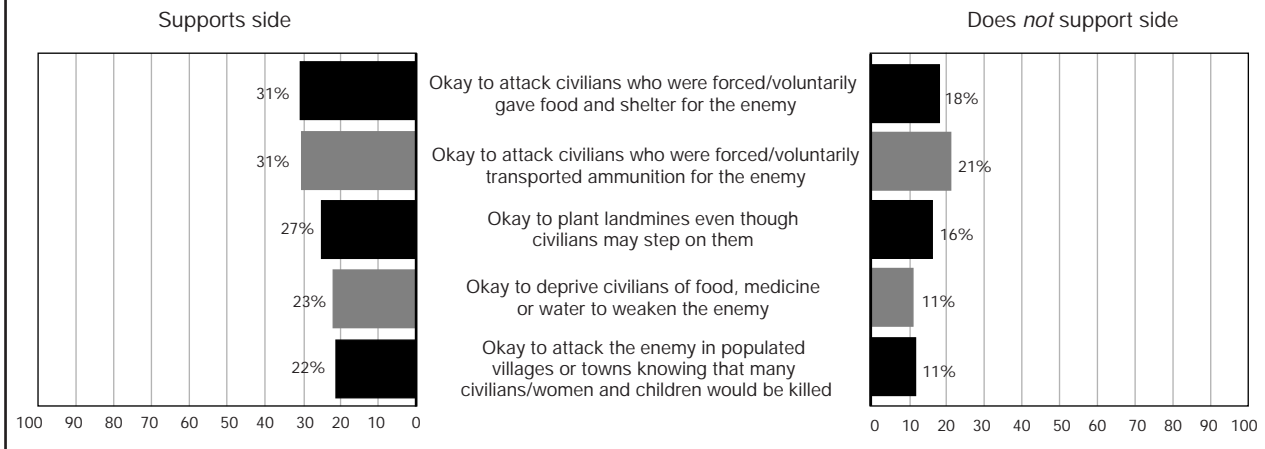
I think the civilians should be warned of any impending attack, and if they decide to surround the area where the enemy is, they only have themselves to blame. (FG, women farmers, Jilib)

Given the inherent nature of clan warfare, it is perhaps surprising that only 53 per cent of Somalis say they have taken sides in the conflict, while 41 per cent say they have not. The length, violence and senseless nature of the conflicts may go a long way in explaining why so many Somalis seem to have disconnected from their own clans' actions and goals. The survey also indicates that those who “take sides” are more tolerant of activities that threaten civilians. When a split sample of respondents were asked how combatants on their side should behave, 54 per cent said that they should attack only enemy combatants and leave civilians alone (compared with 66 per cent of those sampled). Twenty-nine per cent accept the looser standard that combatants should “avoid civilians as much as possible” (compared with 21 per cent of the total).

Similar differences can be found between those who say they support a side and those who say they do not when respondents are presented with specific scenarios. Thirty-one per cent of those who support a side, for example, sanction attacks on civilians who give food and shelter to the enemy, compared with 18 per cent of those who do not take a side. Twice as many of those who support a side would allow attacks on the enemy in populated villages and towns. (See Figure 11.) This kind of tolerance for attacks on civilians provides much potential for harm.

FIGURE 11
Impact of sidedness

(per cent of total population responding)

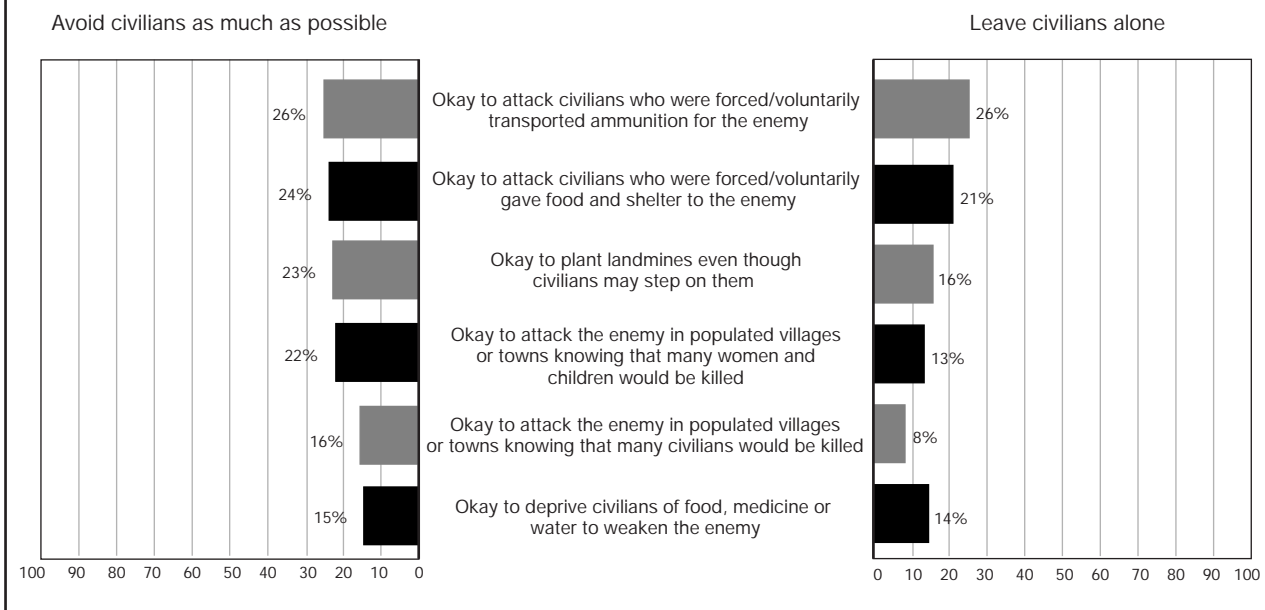


Only small differences are seen between those respondents who say that combatants should leave civilians alone and those who say civilians should be avoided as much as possible.¹⁶ (See Figure 12.)

In general, those respondents who personally experienced some of the most violent and disruptive aspects of the war show negligible differences when asked if they would sanction attacks on civilians and protect enemy combatants. Those who have been wounded in battle or were combatants, however, prove slightly more open to attacks on civilians. About 23 per cent of those who were wounded say attacks on the enemy in populated villages are “part of war” (compared with 15 per cent among all respondents). More than a quarter of those who have been combatants (28 per cent) sanction attacks that would deprive civilians of food, medicine or water (compared with 17 per cent of all respondents). (See Figure 13.)

FIGURE 12
Consequence of attitudes¹⁷

(per cent of total population responding)

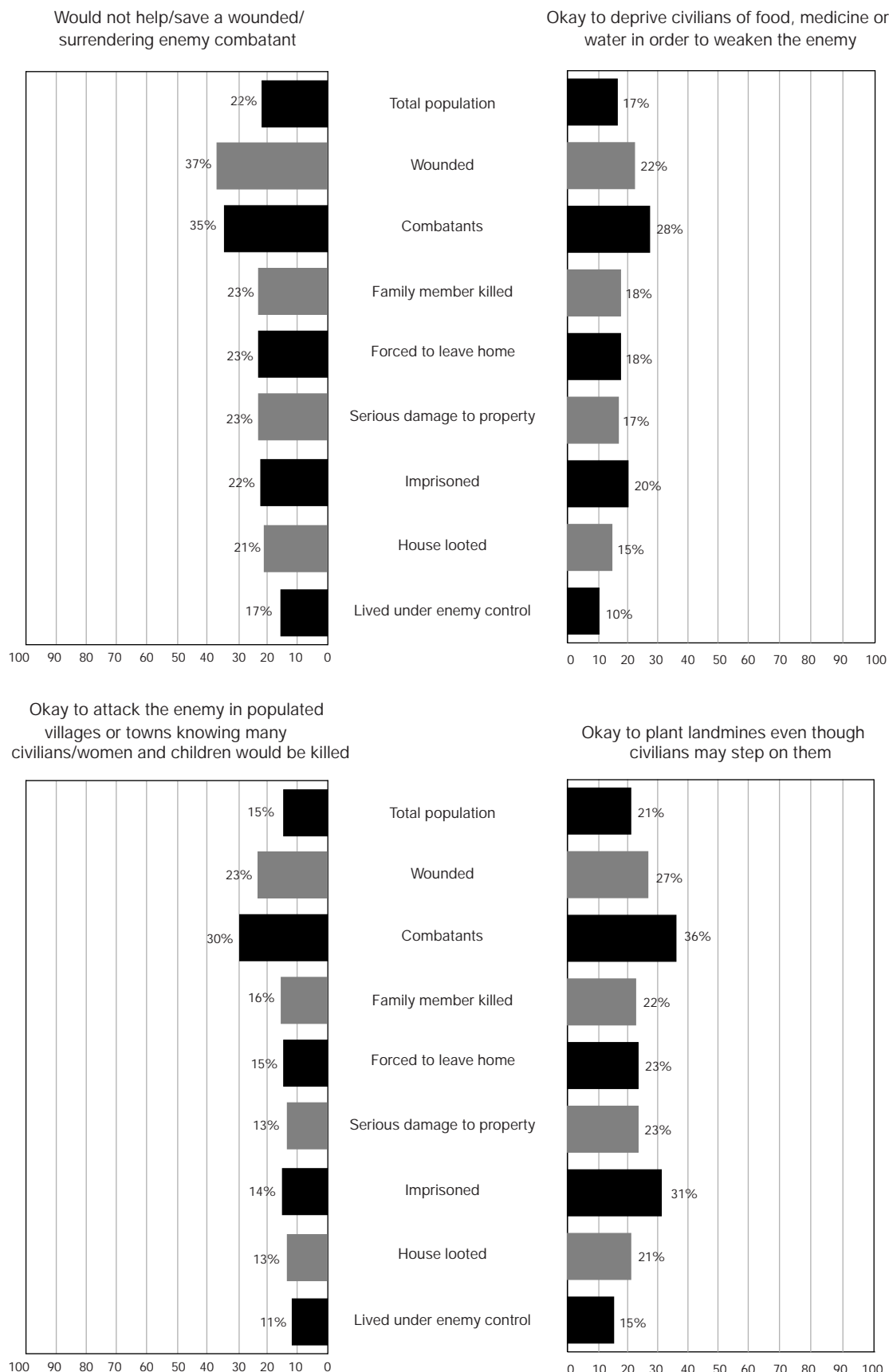


¹⁶ This may partially be explained by the war-weariness of Somalis. Actual experience among respondents with scenarios in which civilians come into the line of fire may temper even those who take the more pragmatic stance of avoiding civilians “as much as possible”.

¹⁷ Respondents were asked how combatants should behave in times of war. “This figure represents respondent attitudes towards attacks on civilians among those who say “attack enemy combatants and *avoid civilians as much as possible* (left side) or attack enemy combatants and *leave civilians alone* (right side). For example, 16 per cent of those who say combatants should *avoid civilians as much as possible* believe it is acceptable for enemy combatants to attack the enemy in populated villages or towns, while only 8 per cent of those who say *leave civilians alone* find this practice acceptable.

FIGURE 13
Impact of war experience

(per cent of population with specific war experiences)¹⁸

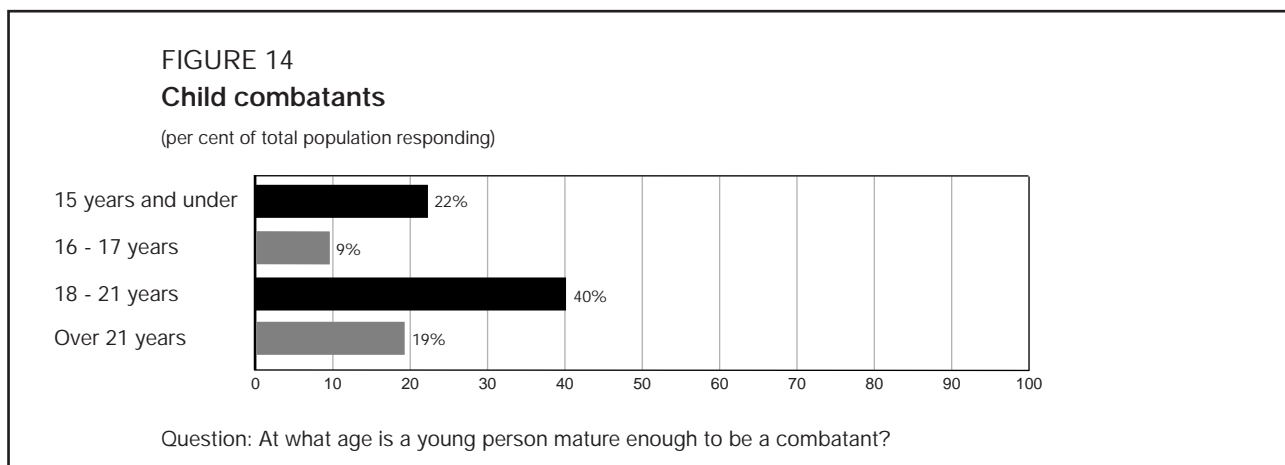


¹⁸This figure demonstrates how people's experiences during the war affect their views on the treatment of civilians and combatants no longer taking part in the fighting. For example, 36 per cent of combatants believe that it is acceptable to plant landmines, even though civilians may step on them.

Youth, militias and brutality

A third element that has drawn civilians into war and made the past decade of Somali war so different from others in recent memory is the absence of professional soldiers. These conflicts have been the province of militias, whose warlord patrons exercise little control over the day-to-day behaviour of amateur militiamen. The fighters – some as young as seven years old – have roamed the countryside, helping to make routine new tactics such as rape and extortion in Somalia. Though they were not the first to abuse civilians, they have created new victims of violence every day.

While the majority (59 per cent) believe only people 18 and over are mature enough to be combatants, significant minorities support the long-accepted tradition in Somalia that teenage men are expected to fight in clan wars. Almost one-third say that people 17 and under are mature enough to be combatants, and fully 22 per cent approve of those 15 and under going to war. (See Figure 14.)



In this case, tradition helped create a situation that generated disorder and violence beyond anyone's control. Young fighters made up the rules as they went along. Seventy-three per cent of respondents agree that many children "who were too young and irresponsible" became combatants. Only 14 per cent disagree, even though, as one militiaman volunteered, "14 and 15 year-olds made up the majority of the fighters." (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

In focus groups and interviews, participants repeatedly describe the youths as illiterate and ignorant, lacking in even the barest understanding of the traditional wartime code of conduct. Tribal elders and others interviewed condemn the warlords for manipulating the youth: "They use the youths for destruction." (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa) "They have no respect for religion, culture or tradition." (IDI, journalist, Mogadishu) Most respondents refuse to blame the young men. The emergence of these new, deadly fighters prompt deep pessimism and pleas for a return to the old ways.

The only language they have learnt is blood. They are armed. They have no wisdom."
(IDI, elderly male, Mogadishu South)

When a person has had an experience of the pain of being shot, he will not hurriedly attempt to kill. But when you are new, you don't have any experience of the pain, the agony of being shot. You will go around killing and shooting aimlessly. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

The fighters of today are the ignorant, illiterate youth or the others who are not intelligent. These are the people who don't know the advantages and disadvantages of the war.
(FG, elders and religious leaders, Belet Huen)

Modern and traditional laws are very different. Before the young men could listen to their parents or elders but now they want to make their own decisions, which lead them to problems. It is sad that before one had to work hard to earn a living but today one just walks into a town with the aim of looting somebody's property to make oneself rich. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Belet Huen)

These young generations are normally mistaken. They turn out to be great fighters, merciless, and they kill, they loot. They are ignorant, uneducated and blind. They are fearless and they cause fear. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

All of these elements – the war's length, the nature of clan warfare, uncontrolled youth – helped to sweep civilians up in Somalia's war. But it is the lack of any strong, accepted authority – on the local or national level – that let the war spin out of control and left the Somali people to wander unprotected in a lawless land.

Collapse of authority: declining influence of tribal elders

The strongest traditions – and the strictest codes of honour – mean little without powerful enforcers. In Somalia, simply put, there has been a vacuum of authority.

For centuries, tribal elders and religious leaders have governed Somali society. They have been the interpreters and enforcers of traditional customs and the meaning of Islam. They have been the authorities that people turn to first in peace and war, and the negotiators who bring peace among clans.

In the past decade, the cycle of conflict has sapped the elders of their influence. Though they continue to command respect among their clans and villagers, they have been powerless to defend those who choose not to fight. Civilians have been the victims of the decline. In focus group discussions, participants mourn this loss.

The elders who were the peacemakers and the teachers of the law are nowadays lower than any other person... [Fighters] never used to kill children and mothers, and now they are even bombing holy places. This wasn't a written law, but a traditional law... At the present time there is nobody or no rule rejecting the killing of civilians and therefore they are killed whenever one feels like it and wherever they are met. All the former laws have been destroyed... People are now making their own laws. (IDI, artist, Mogadishu South)

[Nomads] used to fight over farms, and their problems were solved by elders who were highly respected. No one could disobey their orders. Now people have abandoned the culture and tradition of the nomads. The bushmen fighting today were never trained about war so they do not have any idea of how to go about it. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Belet Huen)

In the old days there was a leader highly respected and obeyed and it was he who decided the course of action in the war zone. But today everyone is his own leader. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Belet Huen)

A national vacuum

Alongside the collapse of traditional authority has come the collapse of the nation itself. While people in many countries around the world have come to fear strong central control, in Somalia the vacuum in the capital has been keenly felt. Participants in focus group discussions consistently bemoan the lack of law and order that has led to an open season on civilians. Only a handful goes so far as to call for rebuilding a professional army. When asked about their hopes for the future, however, virtually everyone voices support for national unity, a new central government and the stability it would bring.

I would urge the other Somalis to unite under one flag. [Then] the displaced persons will be reunited. Nationalism will be promoted. Destruction will cease. And Somali dignity will be [restored]. (FG, displaced women, Bardera)

Interestingly, tribal elders are the strongest, most explicit supporters of the return of central control, an implicit admission that they have lost control.

During the functioning of the government the civilians and fighters were separated out but in this civil war every group is attacking their people. They don't consider the civilians. Civilians are lucky only if the fighters are in separate places. (FG, militiamen, Mogadishu)

Since there is no government in Somalia, no one punishes the evil doers and they therefore continue killing. Formerly people were punished accordingly but nowadays people do what they feel like. (FG, militiamen, Mogadishu)

When the government is in power the civilians are watched by the military. They defend them from anybody trying to interfere with them. They look after their humanity, unity and their existence. If this is not there, something like what happened in Somalia comes about. (FG, militiamen, Mogadishu)

In Somalia, civilians are fighting against civilians. Since there is no government in Somalia, people are freely armed and civilians are attacked. (FG, militiamen, Mogadishu)

Turning to faith

In the absence of tribal authorities or a national government that can protect them, Somalis cling ever more tightly to their faith. Islam encompasses 99 per cent of the Somali people. Muslim teachings are the dominant force in people's daily lives and the backbone of their values. Deep faith in Allah is almost palpably audible in every discussion about the war. Allah also dominates all discussions about the future and hopes for peace.

Islamic teachings have also shaped people's attitudes towards the fate of civilians in the war. They justify fighting to defend one's life, family and property and have no doubt given solace to Somalis who find themselves acting in ways that violate the traditional norms.

Allah has brought us this far. He is the one who has helped us to cope with the war. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

God is the only protector. They [civilians] can request protection from Allah only. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

...it is the will of Allah that will save us. Guessing and predicting won't help. (FG, militiamen, Kismayo)

The first hope is to pray that Allah should [relieve] this disaster. To give us an honest country and an honest government that will form the existence of this people. We are hoping for a good future from Allah. (FG, militiamen, Mogadishu)

Never in your life, never lose hope, never forget Allah and his mercies. Don't lose hope of God revealing his mercy on you. (FG, elders and religious leaders, Hargeisa)

No doubt it is this faith – combined with acute "battle fatigue" – that lies behind the remarkable fact that 69 per cent of the Somali people believe that there will be lasting peace in their country.

Geneva Conventions

Knowledge and efficacy of the Geneva Conventions

The Geneva Conventions are not well known in Somalia, where the power of tribal tradition and religious rules is foremost in people's minds. Forty-two per cent say they have heard of the Geneva Conventions, whereas 36 per cent say they have not. Those who directly experienced the negative effects of the war are more likely to be aware of them. Twenty-seven per cent of those who report no negative personal experiences of the war are aware of them, compared with 44 per cent of those who report one or more ways in which they suffered the physical or psychological impact of the war. Men are much more likely than women to be aware of the Geneva Conventions (50 per cent versus 32 per cent), a finding that reflects their increased access to, and attainment of, higher levels of education. Indeed, knowledge of the Geneva Conventions rises sharply with education levels: 32 per cent of those with no formal education; 57 per cent of those with a primary education; 73 per cent of those who have gone past secondary school.

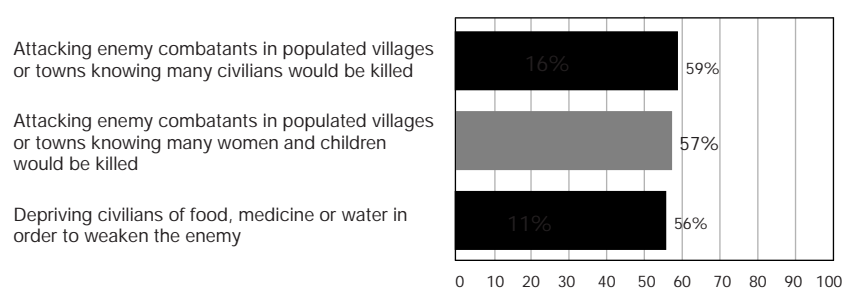
A little more than half (54 per cent) of those who say they are aware of the Geneva Conventions describe them accurately, mentioning some limits in war. That leaves only one in five Somalis who display a real understanding of them. When asked to describe the Geneva Conventions, most people focus on their role in protecting prisoners (38 per cent); civilians and vulnerable groups such as women and children (28 per cent); and the wounded (15 per cent). Respondents also mention the role of the Geneva Conventions in protecting human rights (10 per cent) and forbidding specific weapons and acts of war such as massacres.

While Somalis might not be aware of the Geneva Conventions per se, the majority believe that specific laws exist to protect civilians during times of armed conflict. Fifty-six per cent say that laws exist which bar combatants from depriving civilians of food and water and 59 per cent say that there are laws that aim to stop attacks on populated villages. These findings most likely reflect traditional Somali tribal laws that prohibit these kinds of actions, rather than detailed knowledge of the Geneva Conventions.¹⁹(See Figure 15.)

FIGURE 15

Knowledge of laws

(per cent of total population responding "yes")



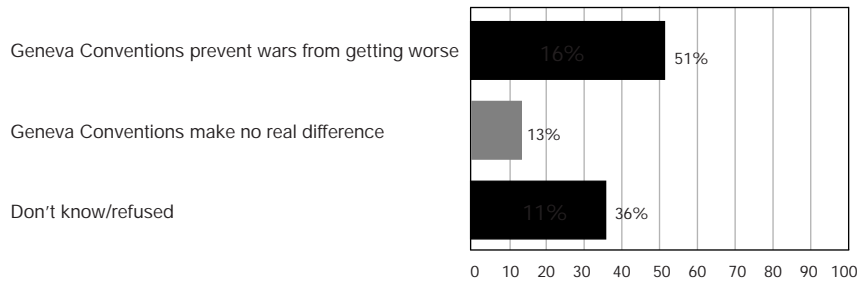
Question: Are there laws that say you can't do that, even if it would help the enemy?

A bare majority of Somalis – 51 per cent – give the Geneva Conventions credit for preventing wars from getting worse. (See Figure 16.) There is some evidence that increased knowledge of the Geneva Conventions could reduce tolerance of attacks on civilians and prisoners. Eighty-one per cent of those who are aware of the Geneva Conventions say that they would help a wounded enemy or save the life of one who surrenders, compared with 69 per cent of those who have never heard of the Geneva Conventions. Thirty-two per cent of those who say that combatants should attack both the enemy and civilians are aware of the Geneva Conventions, compared with 47 per cent of those who say combatants should leave civilians alone.

¹⁹ The questions about the specific laws do not refer to the Geneva Conventions. It is nonetheless worth noting that 60 per cent of those who have heard of the Geneva Conventions say that depriving civilians of food and water is both wrong and unlawful, compared with 45 per cent of those who are not aware of them. On attacking populated villages, the numbers are 59 and 49 per cent, respectively.

FIGURE 16
Geneva Conventions

(per cent of total population responding)



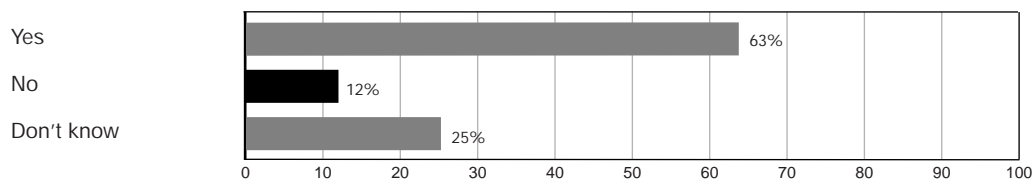
Question: Do you think the existence of the Geneva Conventions prevents wars from getting worse or does it make no real difference?

Punishment of war crimes

There is broad support in Somalia for punishment of war crimes. Almost two-thirds of Somalis – 63 per cent – say that there are rules so important that those who violate them deserve punishment. Only 12 per cent disagree. Half of those surveyed say that the rules governing punishment are based on religious principles and Somali law, while 35 per cent cite international law as the basis for these rules. (See Figure 17.) Once again, Somalis are more apt to look inwards for guidance on their wartime conduct.

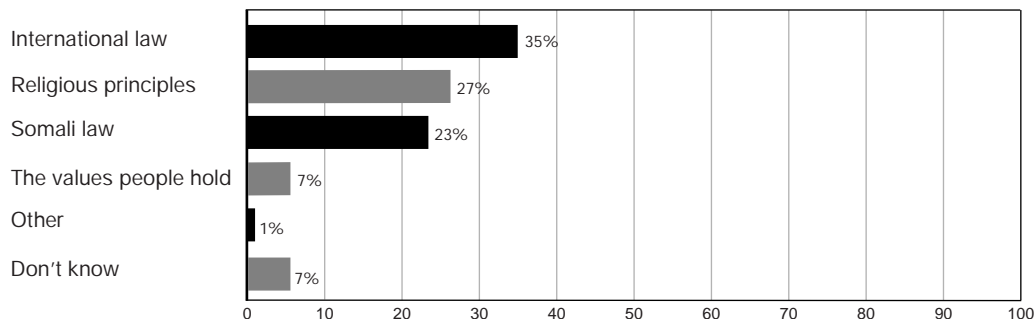
FIGURE 17
War crimes

(per cent of total population responding)



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

(per cent of those who responded "yes")



Question: What are these rules based on?

Of the 63 per cent who believe wrongdoers should be punished, four in five (79 per cent) say that these people should be put on trial. Only 8 per cent say they should be forgiven or granted amnesty. Somalis believe that their own people and institutions should take responsibility for punishing war criminals. True, the largest single group of respondents – 37 per cent – say that an international court should be given the cases to hear. But a total of 51 per cent say that Somalis – be it the courts, government, military, political leaders or civilians – should take charge of such cases. The lack of a central government appears to have depressed the number of Somalis who choose this option.

At the moment, as the focus groups suggest, Somalis are more interested in ending their war than in what ought to be done to those who have broken the law. If and when they shift their focus, however, the data suggest that future generations of Somalis may be more willing to look outside their nation to bring justice to bear on war criminals. Fifty per cent of those under 30 say they would refer cases to an international court, compared with 35 per cent of those over 40; only 17 per cent of young people choose the Somali courts, about half the proportion of those over 40 years old.

International institutions

United Nations

Since its intervention in the famine of 1992 – and the withdrawal of the UN multinational force – Somalis view the international community's presence in Somalia with some ambivalence. Harsh memories of the 1992 UN mission inspire little confidence in its ability to bring order. International relief agencies have met with mixed success in helping victims of later famines and droughts.²⁰ The cease-fires negotiated by Somalia's neighbours have collapsed, while generating anger among some clans and scepticism of future efforts.

Nonetheless, most Somalis harbour generally positive feelings towards international institutions and remain favourably disposed to future interventions. Almost half of those surveyed (46 per cent) report that UN forces in Somalia have made things better. Thirty per cent say UN forces have made things worse for them personally. Again, the data suggest new openness among Somalia's younger generation. Fifty-two per cent of those under 30 years old say the UN has made things better, compared with 43 per cent of those over 30. As education levels improve, moreover, the UN is more likely to find a favourable audience.²¹

ICRC/Red Crescent

Next to their own religious leaders, the people of Somalia trust the ICRC/Red Crescent to protect them and help them in time of need. These organizations are not only widely recognized but also genuinely appreciated for the active role they have played in shielding Somalis from the ravages of the past decade. They are also seen as "a symbol of hope" and "a sign of humanity". (IDI, doctor, Boroma; IDI businesswoman, Galkayo)

The people of Somalia are very familiar with the Red Crescent. Nearly four in five respondents (78 per cent) correctly identify the emblem and only 8 per cent think of it as a generic sign for medical help.

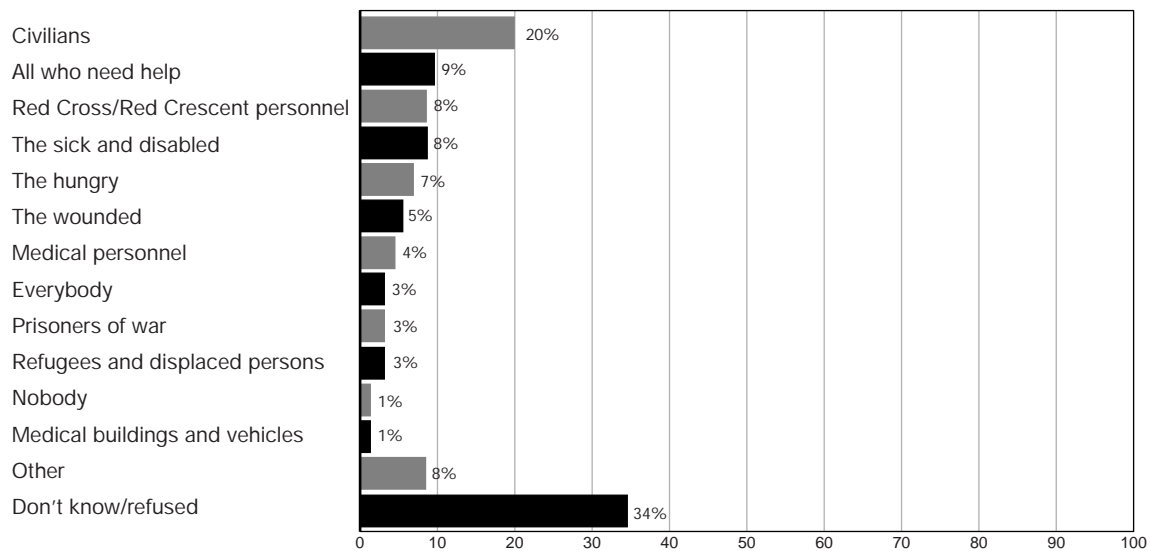
The red crescent emblem is seen as the protector of civilians, the weak and the vulnerable. Forty-four per cent say these are the kind of people the Red Crescent serves, with almost half that total (20 per cent) saying the group protects civilians in the broadest sense. Nine per cent say the Red Crescent exists to help all those in need, while a number also identified Red Cross/Red Crescent personnel, medical workers and prisoners of war as its constituencies. (See Figure 18.)

²⁰ Fifty-four per cent of those surveyed indicate that food and supplies sent by international organizations have reached the people who needed them. Thirty-six per cent disagree.

²¹ Forty-three per cent of those with less than a primary education say the UN has made things better, compared with 55 per cent of those who have gone beyond primary school.

FIGURE 18
Red Crescent and protection

(per cent of total population responding)

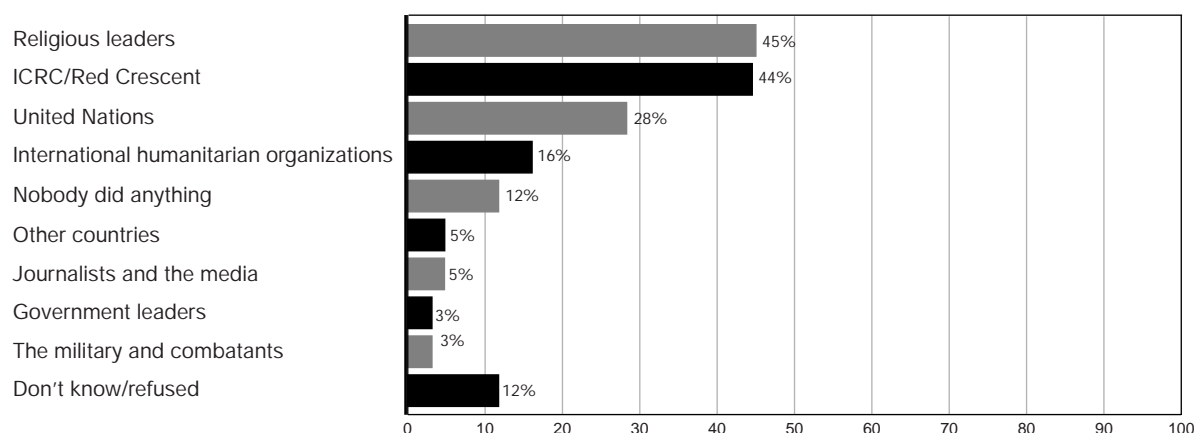


Question: What kind of people or things does this symbol (red crescent emblem) protect?

Somalis give equal credit to their religious leaders and the ICRC/Red Crescent for doing the most during the war to protect civilians and help those in trouble. (Forty-five and 44 per cent of respondents mention each, respectively. See Figure 19.) The UN (28 per cent) and international humanitarian organizations (16 per cent) are also cited, although less prominently. Asked whom they would turn to for help when civilian areas are attacked or their food, water and medical supplies are cut off, more respondents (33 per cent) choose the ICRC/Red Crescent than any other organization. (See Figure 20.) Religious leaders were cited by 22 per cent and international organizations and the UN by 16 per cent.²²

FIGURE 19
Biggest role

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

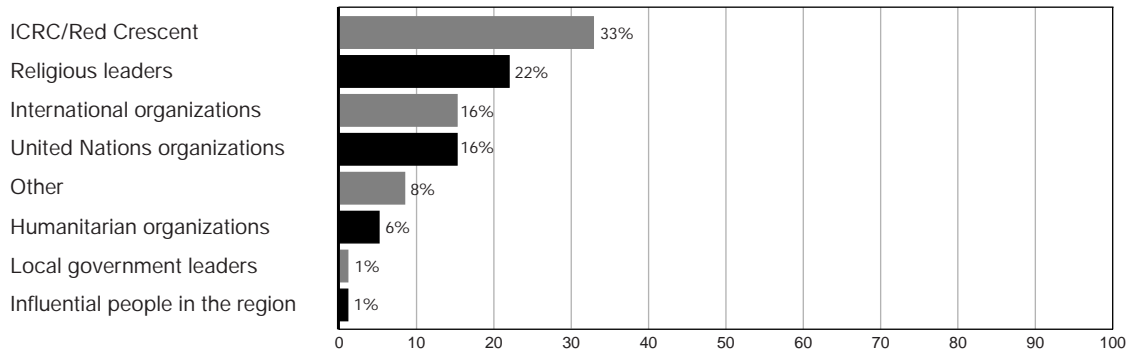


Question: I'm now going to describe different kinds of people and organizations. Please tell me which two of these have played the biggest role during the war to stop civilian areas from being cut off from food, water, medical supplies and electricity.

²² In focus groups and in-depth interviews, respondents invariably add one name to the top of the list of those they would appeal to for protection and help. "Allah and relief agencies and the Red Cross", as one woman put it succinctly. (FG, displaced women, Bardera)

FIGURE 20
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?

The goodwill that the ICRC/Red Crescent has earned is evident in people's attitudes towards such organizations. With the exception of militia members, participants in focus groups and interviews unanimously reject the idea of attacking an enemy vehicle that carries the red crescent emblem. Fifty-one per cent of respondents say they would like to see increased activity on behalf of civilians caught up in war by international organizations like the UN, the ICRC and humanitarian groups. "It's essential for the organizations [like the Red Crescent] to keep helping," one militiaman said. "There are a lot of people who are weak and we don't have a government."

This is not to say that all Somalis are ready to open the door further or let international humanitarian organizations become involved in their internal conflicts. More than a quarter of respondents (27 per cent) say they want all intervention by these groups to end completely; 11 per cent want them to decrease their level of activity in Somalia. The last decade has left many Somalis acutely suspicious of Western involvement in their country. Said one tribal elder: "Each Somali had a tradition and ties that governed his life, but with the Western civilization they have lost their culture. They no longer respect life. The traditional law has been destroyed." (FG, elders and religious leaders, Belet Huen)

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 international 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 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 askew (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 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.

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.

1. 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.

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.)

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?

- 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]
-

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"/>
[READ LAST] 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 → GO TO Q32
- Living in area under enemy control → GO TO Q32
- Both [Volunteered response] → GO TO Q32
- [Don't know/refused] → GO TO Q34
- No response → GO TO Q34

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"/>
[READ LAST] 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"/>

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]

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]**

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.
