

Roots of Behaviour in War

Study update

Terms of reference

Background

The 2004 *Roots of Behaviour in War* study

[\[https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p0853.htm\]](https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p0853.htm) strongly influenced the development of new ICRC policies and practices aimed at strengthening compliance with IHL among arms bearers (i.e. State armed forces and non-State armed groups). A survey of the literature available at the time was also carried out.

[\[https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p0854.htm\]](https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p0854.htm)

Ten years on, this update study will revisit the conclusions of the study to determine if they, and the policies they inspired, remain pertinent to the wide array of arms bearers the ICRC interacts with today. The new study aims to deepen the analysis by better understanding why some groups of arms bearers comply with “norms of restraint” (patterns of behaviour in armed conflict that respect non-combatant immunity) while others do not.

Research question & methodology

The new study aims to better understand factors that influence the development of norms of restraint across different categories of arms bearers.

Given the enormous differences in the types of arms bearer with which the ICRC interacts – from groups with sophisticated hierarchies to very loose alliances of small-scale fighting units – the project will study four categories (or types) of arms bearer.

Two distinct groups are to be researched in each of the following four categories:

- **State armed forces**, which possess a clear command structure, code of conduct, training, education and sanction systems.
- **Groups with a political ideology**, which tend to have formal codes of conduct, political teaching sessions and lengthy induction training. Types of doctrine may be Maoist, communist, religious (non-Islamist, see category below) or ethnic nationalist.
- **Community-linked armed groups** such as militias or self-defence groups, which might or might not operate with support from a State. They typically have strong links to communities and/or local notables but are decentralized, with an informal organizational structure.
- **Non-State armed groups and movements** that subscribe to different trends of Islamist thought and practice, that are parties to conflicts in Africa, the Middle East or Asia, and that refer for their conduct in armed conflict to specific interpretations of Islamic law.

Data collection is expected to be predominantly qualitative in nature, but this does not preclude research designs with both qualitative and quantitative methods. Researchers are expected to have well-established contact with, and access to, the arms bearers they propose to study.

In order to ensure comparability across the different groups studied, the study's analytical framework will be finalized in April 2016 at a meeting with all selected researchers.

Audience and use of findings

The objective of the study is to explore the factors that influence the behaviour of arms bearers, shedding light on why some develop norms of restraint when engaged in armed conflict while others do not, and what influences this process. The study aims to inform the policies and practices of the ICRC and other humanitarian organizations when they seek to improve compliance with the norms underpinning IHL.

The study's findings and their implications will be put into a report that will be published by the ICRC.