Original Article

Examining the effects of political information and intervention stages on public support for military interventions: A panel experiment

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Abstract This study examines the formation and continuity of public support for military interventions as a function of political information levels and intervention stages using a panel experiment. The results demonstrate that politically informed individuals express less support for a military intervention at the beginning of that intervention compared to uninformed ones. However, as the intervention proceeds and casualties are incurred, the support of politically uninformed people decreases at a higher rate than does the support of the politically informed. As such, politically informed individuals demonstrate more stable levels of support across intervention stages. In addition, success or failure of an intervention at a certain stage interacts with the level of political information. Most notably, a decrease in support is significantly more pronounced among politically uninformed individuals compared to informed ones under deteriorating intervention conditions. Nevertheless, as the duration of the intervention gets longer, the level of support drops even with improving prospects while the impact of political information disappears. I also find that policy-specific information has a greater effect on public support for military interventions compared to general political information.
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Introduction

Scholars widely acknowledge that democratic political leaders need public support for their policy endeavors, particularly when conducting costly military interventions. As such, a comprehensive examination of the dynamics

of public opinion regarding military interventions is crucial to explaining more definitively the determinants of foreign policy decisions for engaging in, and carrying out, such military actions. In examining public opinion on military interventions, scholars have investigated numerous factors, including the effects of casualties, intervention objectives, mass media, the likelihood of success, as well as perceived justness of war. Still, to better understand the dynamics of public support for military interventions, two other major factors – political information and intervention stages – require further investigation.

To begin with, regarding political information, most studies in this area of research examine the public as an undifferentiated mass that reacts uniformly to changes in the course of an intervention. In reality, however, the public is divided across different levels of political information, which in turn leads to differences in perceptions of and attitudes about foreign policy events. Although there are a few studies that do consider how varying information levels affect public support for military interventions (for example, Berinsky, 2007), they overlook the dynamics of public opinion across different stages of a military intervention, thus foregoing the possibility that the nature of public support may change throughout a given intervention. On a parallel basis, although there exist a few studies that examine public support for the use of force across different intervention stages (see Gelpi *et al*, 2005/06) or across different time points during the course of a military intervention (see Gartner, 2008), they do so without accounting for variations regarding political information levels. Thus, amid the paucity of research addressing the main effects of political information and intervention stages, no work, to my knowledge, has yet systematically explored these two key factors in tandem.

Building on and extending previous scholarship, this study examines the formation and continuity of public support for military interventions as an interactive function of political information levels and intervention stages within an experimental setting in the US context. In doing so, I offer a more nuanced rational approach to exploring the micro foundations of public support for military interventions by taking into account how support among individuals possessing different levels of political information varies in response to structural changes occurring throughout an intervention. By disaggregating military interventions into different stages and the public into different information segments, I also tackle the dynamics of belief-updating during the course of an intervention.

This study also offers an original methodological approach with respect to the operationalization and measurement of political information. Specifically, the study introduces political information as an experimental treatment rather than relying on conventional measures that focus on existing variations in political information among the mass public. Most standard measures of political information (for example, factual test items and proxy indicators such

as education) are susceptible to numerous threats concerning their validity and reliability. This is mainly because conventional information measures may reflect a host of intervening factors and individual differences – such as intelligence, motivation and personal interest – that may contaminate the results concerning the direct impact of political information. In comparison, applying an experimental manipulation of political information along with the random assignment of participants to experimental conditions allows one to more effectively control for such extraneous factors and individual differences.

In addition to introducing political information as an experimental treatment, this study also includes a common measure of general political information – a factual information scale – as a covariate in the analyses to examine the potential differences between *ad hoc* policy-specific information and general political information. By comparing the effects of general and domain-specific measures of political information, this study thus confronts and advances the debate over whether general or domain-specific political information matters more for influencing public opinion (see Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987; Zaller, 1992; Gilens, 2001).

Public Opinion on Military Interventions

For scholars who examine public support for military interventions, the role of military casualties has often been a primary focus of interest (for example, Mueller, 1973; Gartner, 2008). Early on, Mueller's (1973) seminal study showed that the US public support for the Vietnam War eroded mainly as a function of mounting casualties. More recent cross-national research on public opinion regarding the use of military force has further demonstrated that sensitivity to casualties is universal (see, for example, Eichenberg, 2007).

In addition to the impact of casualties on public support for war, a number of studies investigate the role of other factors to explain variations in public opinion. For example, Russett and Nincic (1976) argue that US public support for military assistance to a country under attack depends on that country's geographic proximity to and level of economic interdependence with the United States. They also posit that people favor providing military assistance to a country subjected to external aggression than to one that is involved in a civil war. In a comparative context, Dixon's (2000) study on Britain's military involvements in Palestine, Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia reaches a similar conclusion that the British public is less supportive of interventions in civil wars than conventional wars.

Building upon and refining earlier work on public opinion regarding the use of force, Jentleson (1992) argues that public support varies as a function of the objective of a military intervention and proposes two 'principal policy

objectives'. The first type of objective is the 'foreign policy restraint', which entails military interventions against an aggressive adversary that threatens one's national interests. A second category, 'internal political change', involves 'force used to engineer internal political change within another country whether in support of an existing government considered an ally or seeking to overthrow a government considered an adversary' (Jentleson, 1992, p. 50). Jentleson and Britton (1998) extend this theory by adding a third category, 'humanitarian intervention'.

Jentleson (1992) argues that the public bases its casualty tolerance on the principal policy objective inherent in a military operation. He contends that the public will accept missions with 'foreign policy restraint' goals as important missions that are worth a substantial cost. In comparison, 'humanitarian intervention' missions enjoy public support only if the costs are relatively low. Finally, 'internal political change' missions experience lower levels of public support. Alternatively, Larson (1996) argues that the public's casualty tolerance is influenced by domestic elite casualty tolerance (see also Berinsky, 2007). Specifically, when elites are divided about a military mission, even a small number of casualties will quickly diminish public support, whereas when elites reach a consensus public support will be robust even in the face of mounting costs. On a parallel basis, Goetze (2008) suggests that political leadership has a particular influence in instigating and shaping public debates over the use of military force. To illustrate her argument, Goetze refers to French public opinion about the Iraq War, which became particularly focused and convergent over the anti-war position once President Chirac clearly stated that France would not follow the United States.

Among the leading factors that shape public opinion on foreign policy issues in general and military interventions in particular, a large number of studies draw attention to the role played by the mass media (see, for example, Hallin, 1986; Bennett and Paletz, 1994; Nacos *et al*, 2000). This is mainly because 'the primary way people obtain information about politics' is through the mass media (Barabas and Jerit, 2009, p. 74; see also Graber, 2002). Scholars suggest that mass media influences public opinion in various ways, as in the priming and framing of information and through agenda setting (for example, Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Bartels, 1993; Shanto, 1993). Specifically, an individual's primary source of news may affect the breadth, substance and valence of political information one acquires, and in turn one's policy preferences (see Baum, 2003). For instance, one's political information and opinion regarding the Iraq War may be different for a person watching Fox News as the primary news source compared to another person watching the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), partly because of variations between these media outlets in terms of their coverage of the war and presentation of differing policy perspectives (see Kull *et al*, 2003/2004).

Apart from the general role mass media plays in shaping people's level of information and their political preferences, scholars also examine more specifically how media influences public support for the use of force, a phenomenon referred to as the 'CNN effect' (see Robinson, 2002, for a review). The basic proposition of the 'CNN effect' thesis is that popular emotional impulses provoked by the commercial television industry largely affect the public's foreign policy choices, particularly regarding public support for initiating military interventions (Kennan, 1993). A major implication is that television news stories may frame international conflicts in a manner that induces emotional reactions and creates a sense of responsibility, thus moving the public to demand certain policy actions from its government. For instance, Seib (2002) argues that the broadcast of heart-wrenching images of suffering children to millions of Americans generated a strong emotional reaction resulting in public pressure on the Bush administration to intervene in Somalia (see also Kennan, 1993). Although some studies suggest that the CNN effect is overrated (see, for example, Jakobsen, 2000; Robinson, 2002; Gilboa, 2005), a vast majority of scholars recognize the potential of news media to influence public opinion on military interventions and other foreign policy issues.

In explaining public support for an intervention, a number of scholars point to people's expectations of success with regard to the fulfillment of the intervention objective. For example, Feaver and Gelpi (2004) posit that when people believe that a mission will succeed, they will continue to support the mission, even as costs mount. However, when the public thinks victory is unlikely, even small costs will cause support to plummet (see also Eichenberg, 2005). Gelpi *et al* (2005/2006) refine this argument by suggesting that public support and casualty tolerance are primarily shaped by the intersection of beliefs concerning (1) the justness of the war and (2) the likelihood of winning.

Finally, several studies suggest that public support for a military mission will be more robust if the public sees that other countries also support such mission (for example, Kull *et al*, 1997). This is because the public may perceive that a multilateral intervention seems somewhat better justified than a unilateral one. People are also more likely to favor multilateral military action as their country is not obliged to bear all of the costs. For instance, a large number of opinion surveys conducted before the United Kingdom joined the United States in the Iraq War found that UK public support for the war hinged on UN approval and whether UN inspectors could find proof of weapons of mass destruction (Baines and Worcester, 2005).

Public Opinion across Different Stages of Military Interventions

Several scholars point out that support for an intervention already in progress may differ significantly from support observed in the pre-intervention period

(for example, Russett and Nincic, 1976; Russett, 1990; Baum, 2002; Lai and Reiter, 2005). For instance, some scholars suggest that many people in Britain who may have opposed the decision to take part in the US-led war against Iraq felt obliged to show support for British troops once the war began, leading to a sudden upward shift in UK public opinion (see Baines and Worcester, 2005; Lewis *et al*, 2005, p. 52). In fact, a vast body of research finds that political leaders enjoy spikes in their approval ratings immediately following a high-profile foreign policy event, as in the case of a military intervention, even when the level of public support has been low just before the event (for example, Mueller, 1973; Brody and Shapiro, 1989; Parker, 1995). Scholars refer to this phenomenon as the 'rally-round-the-flag' effect.

Once the short-term rally effect starts to abate, other dynamics of public opinion come into play during the subsequent courses of an intervention. Sullivan (2008) argues that using time-series data compiled during each military operation allows scholars to test the effects of numerous factors that vary across time (for example, duration, troop numbers and casualties), the impact of different perceptions of costs and benefits, and the likelihood of success of an intervention (for example, Mueller, 1973; Klarevas, 2002; Gelpi *et al*, 2005/2006). However, reliable and comprehensive public opinion data on military operations are limited. Several studies have tried to resolve this 'small-N' problem by pooling all available data from multiple interventions into a single data set (for example, Jentleson, 1992; Jentleson and Britton, 1998; Eichenberg, 2005). Yet, pooling data from polls covering multiple interventions that were conducted at different time points can produce unreliable results and lead to false inferences, primarily because the direction and significance of the factors that influence public support immediately following an intervention may differ for 'stay the course' versus 'withdrawal' options once an intervention is underway (Sullivan, 2008).

Political Information on Foreign Policy Issues

Political information, in a broad sense, denotes an individual's range of factual knowledge about politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996, p. 10; Goren, 2001, p. 161).[1] Regarding political information levels on foreign policy issues, scholars have long depicted the US public as highly ill-informed, guided by irrational impulses and holding extremely volatile preferences (see, for example, Almond, 1960; Converse, 1964). Over time, however, a more optimistic view of the cognitive capabilities of the mass public has emerged, as more research on the US public has shown that people may meaningfully organize their foreign policy opinions via heuristics without necessarily possessing high levels of information (Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987; Neuman

et al, 1992). Nevertheless, even if politically uninformed individuals are able to compensate for their low information levels with the use of cognitive shortcuts, scholars still point to unremitting differences between highly informed and uninformed members of the public regarding their policy preferences, political attitudes and behavior (see, for example, Althaus, 1998; Gilens, 2001).

Although several scholars suggest that US citizens hold foreign policy preferences that are fairly sensible and adjustable to changes in world events (Jentleson, 1992; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Holsti, 1996; but see Bartels, 2003), others indicate that a large number of Americans are still highly uninformed about international politics (see Nincic, 1992; Bennett, 1994). In fact, studies on cross-national differences in political information levels find that Americans considerably lag behind the citizens of many other Western countries in their knowledge of major actors, issues and events in foreign affairs (see Kohut *et al*, 1994; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Curran *et al*, 2009; Iyengar *et al*, 2009). Several scholars attribute this knowledge gap among countries to differences in the quality and supply of international news, and in the public demand for political information (for example, Dimock and Popkin, 1997; Curran *et al*, 2009; Iyengar *et al*, 2009; see also Baum, 2003 regarding hard versus soft news).

General versus Policy-specific Information

A point of disagreement among scholars who study political information is the question of whether general or policy-specific information matters more in shaping public opinion. Whereas some scholars depict individuals as 'information generalists', others suggest that citizens are 'information specialists' who are knowledgeable about only a few issues that are of particular concern to them (see, for example, Iyengar, 1990; Krosnick, 1990; Price and Zaller, 1993; Hutchings, 2003). Scholars who portray individuals as information generalists focus on the role that general political information (rather than policy-specific information) plays in molding public opinion (for example, Zaller, 1992). In contrast, scholars who argue that the acquisition of policy information is domain-specific point out that policy-specific information has a more direct influence on political judgments, opinion change and policy preferences than does general political information (for example, Gilens, 2001). If the latter is the case, typical scales of general political information may not adequately capture such effects. Given this debate, one objective of this study is to explore which type of political information – general or policy-specific – has a greater influence on public support for military interventions.

Theoretical Framework

Recent studies on public support for the use of force have tended towards a rationalist approach. A large number of scholars suggest that individuals decide whether to support (or oppose) initiating and sustaining a military intervention based on a rational expected utility calculation (for example, Jentleson, 1992; Larson, 1996; Jentleson and Britton, 1998; Feaver and Gelpi, 2004; Eichenberg, 2005; Gelpi *et al*, 2005/2006; Gartner, 2008). Therein, one's support for a military engagement is a function of one's (1) evaluation of the utility of an intervention's objective, (2) estimate of the probability of success in attaining that objective, and (3) perception of the costs incurred during the course of such intervention. Regarding costs, many scholars suggest that casualties are the most salient, visible and systematic measure of costs associated with military interventions (for example, Gartner *et al*, 2004). Several scholars also address the notion of belief-updating throughout the course of an intervention via incoming information (see Gartner, 2008, p. 96). Building on and extending this line of research, I offer a more nuanced rational approach in exploring the micro foundations of public support for military interventions by taking into account variations in the level of support among people with different political information levels and across different intervention stages.

To begin with, I expect that an individual's rational decision-making capacity is partly determined by that individual's level of political information, which in turn affects his or her policy preference regarding a military intervention. Past research indicates that politically informed individuals are likely to consider more policy options and a higher number of cost-benefit dimensions in the decision-making process compared to uninformed ones (see, for example, Park and Kosicki, 1995). To illustrate, an individual with a low level of political information may decide whether or not to support an intervention by looking only at the price of gasoline and/or the number of casualties, whereas a politically informed person may prefer to observe additional dimensions, such as diplomatic credibility or sunk costs. Moreover, individuals can be exposed to the same estimates of costs and utilities, but the perceived value of these estimates may differ in accordance with their level of political information and vary across different stages of an intervention. For instance, politically informed and uninformed people may react differently to the same number of casualties because they differ in their perceptions of (and their tolerance for) such casualties.

Along with dissecting the public into different segments of political information, I also disaggregate a military intervention into different stages. Specifically, I categorize intervention stages as follows. The pre-intervention stage (stage 1) is the stage when there are considerations of a possible

intervention, but the military operation has not yet initiated. The starting stage (stage 2) is the very beginning stage of the intervention. At this stage, the intervention has just begun such that it is too soon to receive steady feedback concerning the current progress and costs of the operation. This stage can also be referred as the rally stage of an intervention. The intervention then moves to stage 3 when structural changes occur in the course of the intervention resulting in changes in costs, utilities and the probability of success, thus leading to changes in the public perceptions of the intervention. Thereafter, each time a structural change occurs, the intervention moves into further stages. Last, one can then determine a cutoff point for the final stage *post hoc*.[2] By conceptualizing military interventions across different stages, one can introduce important considerations, such as whether a previous intervention stage was successful, to the investigations of public support for military interventions. Disaggregating interventions into different stages also enables one to more systematically examine the dynamics of belief-updating as reactions to structural changes throughout the course of an intervention.

Hypotheses

Recent research suggests that different constituencies respond to political events in accordance with their particular interests and level of attentiveness (for example, Krause, 1997; Baum and Kernell, 2001; Baum, 2002). Regarding US military operations abroad, Althaus (1998) shows that fully informed opinions concerning foreign policy issues tend to be relatively more dovish than uninformed opinions. More specifically, Jaros *et al* (1982) argue that the most critical aspect about a lack of political information 'is not that it leads directly to a preference for aggressive policies, but rather that it leads to a desire for simple, readily understood solutions'. Therefore, the perceived utility of engaging in a military intervention to deal with an international crisis is likely to be high for the politically uninformed given that such policy option represents a clear-cut foreign policy solution. By comparison, as political information increases awareness of multiple policy options beyond military solutions, the perceived benefits of intervening militarily are not likely to be as high for politically informed individuals.

Politically uninformed individuals are also likely to support a military intervention decision because they are more susceptible to political rhetoric and manipulation employed by a leader seeking to justify his or her decision to intervene by focusing on the benefits of such military intervention and overstating the probability of success while discounting the potential costs. On the other hand, research shows that politically informed individuals are less

prone to be affected by such manipulative discourses (Baum, 2002; Taber and Lodge, 2006). Accordingly, I propose the following:

Hypothesis 1: Politically uninformed individuals are likely to show *higher levels of support* for a military intervention than politically informed ones at the pre-intervention stage and the starting stage of that intervention.

Regarding the change of support from the pre-intervention stage to the starting stage of a military intervention, I expect that politically informed individuals are likely to preserve their initial perceptions of the expected costs, utilities and probability of success of an intervention that they have acquired before the launch of that intervention. Several studies have found that highly informed individuals are less likely to change their opinions because they can successfully counterargue any dissonant new information unlike politically uninformed ones who often display volatile political opinions (see, for example, Taber and Lodge, 2006). In fact, by aggregating the data from the post-World War II period, Baum (2002) finds that the least politically aware individuals demonstrate a higher rate of increase in their presidential approval ratings than the most politically aware individuals in the immediate aftermath of using force abroad. Accordingly, I propose the following:

Hypothesis 2: Moving from the pre-intervention stage to the starting stage of a military intervention, politically uninformed individuals are likely to show *higher rates of increase in support* for that intervention than politically informed individuals.

As a military intervention proceeds from the starting stage into subsequent stages, casualties may occur. As politically informed people are more cognizant of the realities of a military intervention, they are also likely to have more accurate estimates of expected costs to begin with and show less severe reactions to the actual costs incurred as compared to the politically uninformed. Indeed, Gelpi *et al* (2005/2006) find that an individual's level of education has a significant impact on his or her tolerance for casualties. Their results indicate that a college-educated respondent in the United States is about 20 per cent more likely to tolerate at least 1500 casualties in Iraq than a respondent who has not completed high school. In addition, Feaver and Gelpi (2004) find that casualty tolerance is positively correlated with an individual's belief in the importance of a particular military mission and confidence regarding the success of a military effort. Accordingly, if the expected and actual casualty tolerance of politically uninformed individuals is lower than

politically informed ones, then their perceptions of utility and success from an intervention will also be lower. Accordingly, I propose the following:

Hypothesis 3: Once actual casualties are incurred, politically uninformed individuals are likely to show *lower levels of support* for a military intervention than politically informed ones in the subsequent stages of that intervention.

Once actual costs and casualties come into play in a military intervention, the dynamics of expected utility calculations change accordingly. Sullivan (2008, p. 115) asserts that 'as a result of concerns about the losses associated with withdrawing from a military engagement once it is underway, some individuals who would not have supported *initiating* the use of force at a given set of cost and risk parameters may nonetheless support *sustaining* an ongoing operation with those parameters'. That said, one's sensitivity to the costs of withdrawing may vary according to one's level of political information. As Gomez and Wilson (2003) put it, politically informed individuals have a plentiful reserve of knowledge to begin with and have a variety of ways to integrate newly acquired information. They are thus more likely to make global, as well as local attributions. Politically informed individuals also tend to look beyond the most obvious causal factor in a given situation, which is the number of actual casualties in the context of a military intervention. As politically uninformed individuals are less conscious than politically informed individuals of long-term foreign policy objectives, credibility issues and major military concerns, I expect that politically uninformed individuals are likely to react more severely as the number of casualties increases. Accordingly, I propose the following:

Hypothesis 4: As the number of actual casualties increases, politically uninformed individuals are likely to show *higher rates of decrease in support* for a military intervention than politically informed ones when moving from one intervention stage to the next.

Apart from the effect of casualties, another important factor to consider regarding the level of public support for military interventions is the prospect of a successful intervention (for example, Feaver and Gelpi, 2004; Gelpi *et al*, 2005/2006; see also Eichenberg, 2005). The presence of casualties may reflect differently on one's level of support when the state of the intervention is deteriorating versus when it is improving. Similar to the reasons suggested above concerning casualties, as politically uninformed individuals are not as

cognizant of long-term political and military concerns as politically informed ones, they are likely to react more severely if the prospects of a military intervention begin to diminish at a certain intervention stage. Accordingly, I propose the following:

Hypothesis 5: Under deteriorating intervention conditions, politically uninformed individuals are likely to show *higher rates of decrease in support* for a military intervention than politically informed ones when moving from one intervention stage to the next.

Panel Experiment Design

To test my hypotheses concerning public support for military interventions across political information levels and intervention stages, I designed a *panel experiment* that basically 'combines an experiment and a panel study' (see Gartner, 2008, p. 100). Specifically, I used a 2×2×4 split-plot (within and between groups) factorial design. The dependent variable was the level of support for the intervention at each intervention stage. The within-group factor was the intervention stage (composed of four panels: the pre-intervention stage (stage 1), the starting stage (stage 2), stage3 and stage 4). The between-group factors were (1) two levels of policy-specific information (*ad hoc* political information versus no *ad hoc* political information) and (2) two alternative intervention prospect patterns (improving versus deteriorating conditions) introduced at stages 3 and 4. The experiment also included a test of general political information as a covariate, which I measured by a conventional knowledge scale with 26 test items.[3] A total of 369 upper-level undergraduate students of a university in the United States took part in the experiment and were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions. The pre-test of the *ad hoc* information manipulation involved 72 participants.

General structure of the experiment

I conducted the experiment in two sessions. In the first session of the experiment, in order to manipulate *ad hoc* political information, one-half of the participants were exposed to a 45-min lecture on ethnic conflict and military interventions. The other half of the participants were given a lecture on an unrelated topic. In the second session of the experiment, following the lecture session, all participants were exposed to a hypothetical international crisis, which involved the possibility of a US militarily intervention.[4] In order to manipulate intervention stages, the progress of the crisis and the actions of the United States were presented as a sequence of experimental scenarios

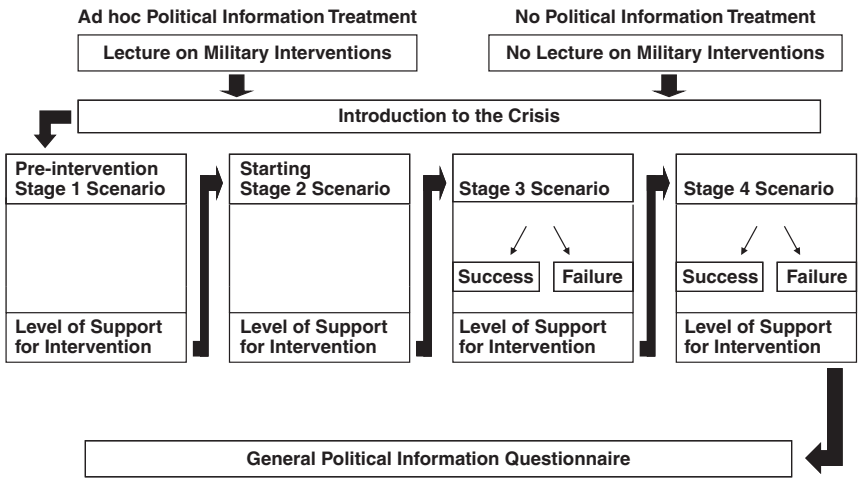

Figure 1: Panel experiment design.

organized into four different intervention stages (the pre-intervention stage (stage 1), the starting stage (stage 2), stage 3 and stage 4). These intervention stages thus constituted the panels of the experiment.

At the end of each intervention stage, participants were asked to indicate their level of support for the military intervention following their exposure to the information (in the form of a newsflash) about the course of the intervention. Immediately after stating their level of support, the participants would move to the next stage where they would be exposed to new information on the state of the intervention. In all four stages, information about the number of expected casualties was provided. The experimental scenarios at stages 3 and 4 also reported the number of actual casualties in addition to the number of expected casualties. Furthermore, at stages 3 and 4, two alternative intervention prospect patterns – depicting the intervention conditions either as improving or deteriorating – were introduced. Figure 1 illustrates the complete design of the experiment.

Experimental Materials and Treatments[5]

Ad hoc political information treatment

I introduced the manipulation of *ad hoc* political information in the first experimental session by exposing half of the participants to a lecture on ethnic

conflict and military interventions. The lecture contained basic information about the definition of ethnic groups and ethnic conflict, major causes and consequences of ethnic conflict, and alternative conflict-resolution options through third-party interventions in ethnic conflict. The lecture further provided information on different types of military interventions with some specific case examples, major reasons and outcomes of military interventions, as well as key international principles that concern decisions to intervene. The tone of the lecture was kept as neutral as possible, promoting neither a pro- nor anti-intervention rhetoric. The other half of the participants received a lecture on an unrelated topic. The lecture session was presented to the participants as an activity unrelated to the second experimental session to prevent any priming effects on the participants' responses to the experimental material.

To test the effectiveness of the manipulation, I administered a knowledge quiz on ethnic conflict and military interventions to 72 participants. Half of the participants were presented with the lecture on ethnic conflict and military interventions, and were given the knowledge quiz following the lecture. The other half of the participants answered the quiz without receiving the lecture on ethnic conflict and military interventions. The participants that received the *ad hoc* information treatment answered more items correctly ($M_{PI} = 5.83$) than the control group ($M_{PU} = 4.16$) out of a maximum score of 8 [$F(1, 70) = 29.16$, $P < 0.0001$].

Intervention stages and the decision task

At all four intervention stages, the participants were exposed to information in the form of a newsflash that detailed the state of the US military intervention in a hypothetical ethnic conflict. At the pre-intervention stage (stage 1), all of the participants read a brief scenario about a severe ethnic conflict on a fictitious island (called Kuzeya) in the Mediterranean Sea. The scenario described the ethnic structure of the island as composed of a majority group (called Sumans) affiliated with autocratic countries in the region, and a minority group (called Amians) strongly affiliated with the United States. The scenario depicted the evolvement of an ethnic struggle between these two groups and the subsequent violence against the minority group and Americans residing on the island. The story described harassments and kidnappings of locals and Americans in roadblocks and bombings, as well as an increase in the number of fatalities. For the decision task, participants were asked to express their level of support (on a scale from 0 to 100) for a US military intervention in this conflict should the United States decide to intervene.

After stating their level of support for a possible US military intervention at the end of the pre-intervention stage (stage 1), participants moved to the

starting stage of the intervention (stage 2). At this stage, participants were given a newsflash informing them that the United States had just initiated a military intervention in the ethnic conflict that they have read about. Starting from stage 2 and for the remaining stages (stages 3 and 4), the participants were asked to indicate their level of support (on a scale from 0 to 100) for sustaining the military intervention.

At all four stages of the intervention, the participants were provided with the number of expected casualties. The experimental scenarios at stages 3 and 4 also reported the number of actual casualties alongside the number of expected casualties. At stages 1 and 2, the number of expected casualties was reported to be between 100 and 300. There were no actual casualties at these first two stages of the intervention. At stage 3, the participants were informed that it had been *3 months* since the United States initiated a military intervention in Kuzeya. The number of expected casualties was set to 300 at stage 3. At this stage, the number of actual casualties was introduced and reported as 124. At stage 4, the time was set to *9 months* since the launch of the military intervention. At this stage, the number of expected casualties was raised to 600. The actual cumulative casualty rate also increased to 437.[6]

At stages 3 and 4, two alternative scenarios were used, one describing the course of the intervention as improving and the other as deteriorating. The participants were exposed to different combinations of these alternative intervention prospect patterns across stages 3 and 4 (improving-improving; improving-deteriorating; deteriorating-improving; deteriorating-deteriorating). The depiction of the intervention as improving was based on military achievements (such as forcing the enemy to retreat) and independent from the number of expected and actual casualties. Below is an excerpt from the scenario given at stage 3, which portrays the prospect of the intervention as improving:

> New reports surfacing on the Suman-Amian conflict in Kuzeya and the US military intervention there – initiated 3 months ago – show signs of improvement in the region. American soldiers collaborating with Amian forces gained significant ground in the Northern provinces and more than a third of the Suman forces have now laid down their weapons and surrendered. Meanwhile, in the all too important southern province, the second-in-command Suman general ordered his fighters to withdraw and release a large number of civilian captives after negotiations with Amian forces resulted in a cease-fire and truce. Only weeks ago, such an agreement was thought by many to be a near impossible task.

On a parallel basis, the depiction of intervention as deteriorating was based on military failures (such as inability to gain control of the enemy territory) and

independent from the number of expected and actual casualties. Below is an excerpt from the scenario given at stage 4, which portrays the prospect of the intervention as deteriorating:

> Now for the news on the Suman-Amian conflict in Kuzeya and the current state of the US military intervention in trying to end the violence there. Reports indicate that the enduring efforts of the US forces to aid Amians have thus far resulted in a steady decline towards resolving the conflict. All provinces of Kuzeya, save for it southern province, remain in control of Suman forces. Reports from the front lines indicate that American forces continue to take the brunt of the responsibility in the fighting, with Amian forces serving mostly as backup support for most military operations. US officials see this as a strong sign that US intervention efforts have faltered and that Amians may not be able to take control over Kuzeya.

General political information

As mentioned, there has been a debate in the political information literature concerning the relative importance of policy-specific information versus general political information regarding political judgments, opinion change and policy preferences. By including general political information as a covariate in my analyses, I tackle an interesting question on whether policy-specific information or general political information has a more direct influence on the level of support for a military intervention across different intervention stages.

To measure general political information, I administered a questionnaire at the end of the experiment. The questionnaire consisted of four segments: domestic political knowledge, recognition of important national and foreign political figures, foreign policy knowledge, and policy-specific knowledge on military interventions. I then aggregated the separate scores of the four sections to obtain a total score of each participant's level of general political information (out of a maximum score of 26).[7]

One may argue that rather than generating *ad hoc* political information as an experimental treatment, using the last segment of the questionnaire – policy-specific knowledge on military interventions – would be sufficient to examine the effects of policy-specific information on the level of support for a military intervention. However, as noted above, such a measure of political information is often contaminated with a host of extraneous factors that are associated with political information such as personal interest in politics, intelligence, motivation and so on. On the other hand, an *ad hoc* generation of

policy-specific information via experimental manipulation enables a true randomization and thus better control over such extraneous variables.

Results

For the statistical analysis of the panel experiment, I employ a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). Repeated measures ANOVA allows for the measurement of the dependent variable (in this case, the participant's level of support for a military intervention) at different times and/or under different levels of a treatment (in this case, across intervention stages).

Level of support across all four intervention stages

Table 1 presents the results of the repeated measures 2×2×4 ANOVA across all four intervention stages. The results, illustrated in Figure 2, demonstrate that the group who received the *ad hoc* political information treatment has a significantly lower level of support for the intervention ($M_{PI} = 54.81$) compared to the group without *ad hoc* political information ($M_{PU} = 59.62$) across four intervention stages [$F\,(1, 361) = 4.74$, $P < 0.05$]. The main effect for

Table 1: Support for military intervention across levels of *ad hoc* political information and intervention stages: Repeated measures analysis of variance

Independent variables	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F-value*	*P-value*
Ad hoc information (*Ad hoc*)	7525.08	1	7525.08	4.74	0.03
Success of stage 3 (Stage 3)	2001.41	1	2001.41	1.26	0.26
Success of stage 4 (Stage 4)	3358.45	1	3358.45	2.11	0.14
Ad hoc × Stage 3	8364.43	1	8364.43	5.27	0.02
Ad hoc × Stage 4	472.33	1	472.33	0.29	0.58
Stage 3 × Stage 4	1710.66	1	1710.66	1.07	0.29
Ad hoc × Stage 3 × Stage 4	1131.12	1	1131.12	0.71	0.39
Subject (Group)	572889.9	361	1586.95	—	—
Intervention stages (Stages)	75137.36	3	25045.7	106.11	<0.0001
Stages × *Ad hoc*	2628.70	3	876.23	3.71	0.01
Stages × Stage 3	5478.61	3	1826.20	7.73	<0.0001
Stages × Stage 4	8715.96	3	2905.32	12.30	<0.0001
Stages × *Ad hoc* × Stage 3	782.97	3	260.99	1.10	0.34
Stages × *Ad hoc* × Stage 4	532.71	3	177.57	0.75	0.52
Stages × Stage 3 × Stage 4	127.84	3	42.61	0.18	0.90
Stages × *Ad hoc* × Stage 3 × Stage 4	681.96	3	227.32	0.96	0.40
Stages × Subject(Group)	255619.2	1083	236.02	—	—

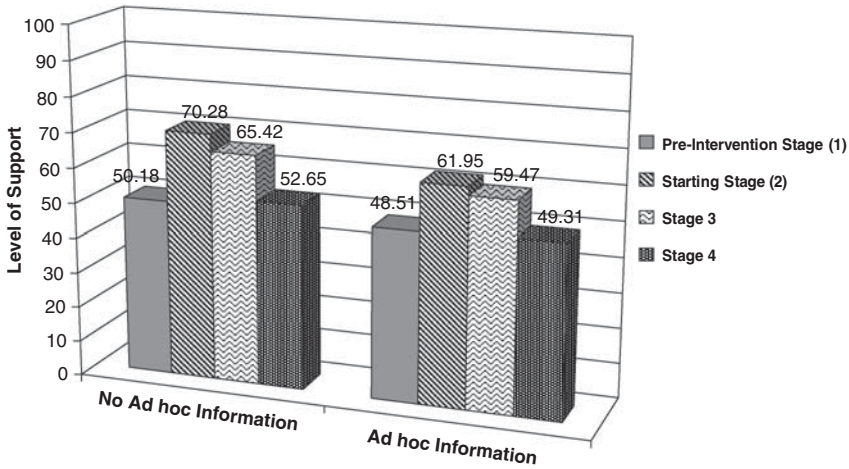

Figure 2: Support for military intervention across all intervention stages.

intervention stages is also significant [$F\ (3, 1083) = 106.11,\ P < 0.0001$]. Specifically, the level of support at the pre-intervention stage/stage 1 ($M_{STAGE\_1} = 49.36$) increases at the starting stage of the intervention ($M_{STAGE\_2} = 66.35$). However, as the intervention proceeds, one observes a gradual decrease in support at stages 3 and 4 ($M_{STAGE\_3} = 62.62$ and $M_{STAGE\_4} = 51.07$).

The interaction of *ad hoc* information with intervention stages is also statistically significant [$F\ (3, 1083) = 3.71,\ P < 0.05$]. Specifically, participants with no *ad hoc* information demonstrate a higher rate of change in their expressed level of support compared to the group with *ad hoc* information when moving from one intervention stage to the next. To elaborate, going from the pre-intervention stage (stage 1) to the starting stage (stage 2), the rate of increase in the level of support among the group with no *ad hoc* information is higher [($M = 70.28$ at stage 2)–($M = 50.12$ at stage 1) = 20.16 per cent] compared to the group with *ad hoc* information [($M = 61.95$ at stage 2)–($M = 48.51$ at stage 1) = 13.44 per cent]. Similarly, the mean level of support that participants with no *ad hoc* information express at stage 2 ($M = 70.28$) decreases by 4.86 per cent at stage 3 ($M = 65.42$), whereas participants with *ad hoc* information show less change (2.48 per cent) in their level of support for the intervention going from stage 2 ($M = 61.95$) to stage 3 ($M = 59.47$). On a parallel basis, the mean level of support at stage 4 for the group with no *ad hoc* information is 52.65 per cent, indicating a 12.77 per cent decrease from the level of support expressed at stage 3 ($M = 65.42$). The *ad hoc* information group, on the other hand, once again expresses less decrease (10.16 per cent) in the mean level of support going from stage 3 ($M = 59.47$) to stage 4 ($M = 49.31$).

Level of support at the pre-intervention and starting stages of an intervention

For Hypothesis 1, I have proposed that politically uninformed individuals are likely to show higher levels of support for a military intervention than politically informed ones at the starting stage of that intervention. Furthermore, going from the pre-intervention stage to the starting stage of a military intervention, Hypothesis 2 predicts that politically uninformed individuals are likely to show a higher rate of increase in their support for that intervention than the politically informed. As these hypotheses refer to the level of support for the first two stages of an intervention, I conducted a 2×2 repeated measures ANOVA of political information (between-group factor) across intervention stages 1 and 2 (within-group factor).

The results regarding the level of support for the first two stages of the intervention are consistent with the larger analysis using all four intervention stages (see Table 2). Regarding the main effect of political information, participants with no *ad hoc* information show significantly higher levels of support for the intervention ($M_{PU} = 60.20$) than those with *ad hoc* information ($M_{PI} = 55.23$), [$F\ (1, 367) = 5.11,\ P < 0.05$]. Concerning the main effect for intervention stages, the level of support expressed at the pre-intervention stage ($M_{STAGE\_1} = 49.36$) significantly increases at the starting stage of the intervention ($M_{STAGE\_2} = 66.35$), [$F\,(1, 367) = 226.62,\ P < 0.0001$]. This finding is in line with the literature on the rally-around-the-flag effect observed right after the initiation of a military intervention.

In addition to the main effects, the interaction of *ad hoc* information with intervention stages is statistically significant [$F\ (1, 367) = 9.07,\ P < 0.01$] (see

Table 2: Support for military intervention across levels of *ad hoc* political information and intervention stages 1 and 2: Repeated measures analysis of variance

Independent variables	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F-value*	*P-value*
Ad hoc information	4546.32	1	4546.32	5.11	0.02
Subject (Group)	325980.3	367	888.23	—	—
Intervention stages (Stages 1 and 2)	51891.51	1	51891.51	226.62	<0.0001
Intervention stages × *Ad hoc* information	2077.54	1	2077.54	9.07	0.002
Intervention stages × Subject (Group)	84032.43	367	228.97	—	—
Main effects			*Mean*	*St. dev.*	*N*
Ad hoc information	—	—	55.23	25.32	390
No *ad hoc* information	—	—	60.20	24.97	348
Intervention stage 1	—	—	49.36	24.82	369
Intervention stage 2	—	—	66.35	22.71	369

Figure 2). Specifically, participants in the *ad hoc* information treatment group show lower levels of support for the military intervention at the starting stage of the intervention ($M = 61.95$) compared to the group that did not receive the *ad hoc* information treatment ($M = 70.28$). This finding is in line with Hypothesis 1. Regarding the change in the level of support going from the pre-intervention stage to the starting stage, the level of support among participants without *ad hoc* information increases at a higher rate [($M = 70.28$)–($M = 50.12$) = 20.16 per cent] compared to the participants who received the *ad hoc* information treatment [($M = 61.95$) – ($M = 48.51$) = 13.44 per cent]. The results thus corroborate Hypothesis 2.

Level of support at stages 3 and 4

Hypothesis 3 proposes that once actual casualties are incurred (that is, stages 3 and 4 in the experimental design), support of politically uninformed individuals for an intervention is likely to be lower than that of the politically informed. However, the results of the repeated measures ANOVA (see Table 1 and Figure 2) show that the level of support among participants with no *ad hoc* information treatment is in fact higher ($M = 65.42$ at stage 3 and $M = 52.65$ at stage 4) than that of the participants with *ad hoc* information ($M = 59.47$ at stage 3 and $M = 49.31$ at stage 4).

One of the reasons behind this finding may be related to the duration of the intervention set in the experimental scenarios. As mentioned, the time since the initiation of the intervention was set to 3 months at stage 3 and 9 months at stage 4 in the scenarios. Nevertheless, the presence of actual casualties may in fact take longer to instigate a significant decrease in the level of support for the intervention among the politically uninformed. In addition to the duration of the intervention, there may be a certain threshold for the number of actual casualties to have a significant effect on an individual's level of support given his or her level of political information. To investigate these possibilities, alternative experimental scenarios with more variation in the duration of the intervention and the number of actual casualties is necessary.

Hypothesis 4 proposes that the level of support for a military intervention among politically uninformed people is likely to decrease at a higher rate than that of the politically informed once actual casualties occur. The results of the repeated measures ANOVA show that, given actual casualties reported at stages 3 and 4, the level of support among the participants that did not receive the *ad hoc* information treatment drops at a significantly higher rate compared to the participants with *ad hoc* information (see Table 1 and Figure 2). Specifically, the mean level of support that participants with no *ad hoc* information expressed at stage 2 ($M = 70.28$) decreases by 4.86 per cent at stage

3 ($M = 65.42$), whereas participants with *ad hoc* information show less change (2.48 per cent) in their level of support for the intervention going from stage 2 ($M = 61.95$) to stage 3 ($M = 59.47$). On a parallel basis, the mean level of support at stage 4 for the group with no *ad hoc* information is 52.65 per cent indicating a 12.77 per cent decrease from the level of support previously expressed at stage 3 ($M = 65.42$). On the other hand, the level of support among participants with *ad hoc* information decreases at a lower rate (10.16 per cent) going from stage 3 ($M = 59.47$) to stage 4 ($M = 49.31$) compared to the group with no *ad hoc* information.

The results, therefore, are in line with the prediction of Hypothesis 4. These findings also suggest a hint of support for Hypothesis 3 in light of the projected level of support among the politically informed and uninformed. Specifically, if the duration of the intervention gets longer and the number of actual casualties keeps rising, the higher rate of decrease among individuals with no *ad hoc* political information may eventually lead to a lower level of support among these individuals compared to the ones with *ad hoc* information.

Intervention prospect patterns (improving versus deteriorating)

In considering how the success of an intervention at a certain stage may interact with political information (that is, in terms of change in one's level of support), Hypothesis 5 proposes that politically uninformed individuals are likely to express a greater rate of decrease in support under deteriorating intervention conditions than politically informed ones when moving to the next stage. To test this hypothesis, I conducted a 2×2×2 repeated measures ANOVA to analyze change in levels of support moving from stage 3 to 4.

The results indicate an interesting three-way interaction between *ad hoc* political information, success of stage 3, and intervention stages 2 and 3 [$F\ (1, 365) = 4.46,\ P < 0.05$], as illustrated in Figure 4. When the state of the intervention is portrayed as improving at stage 3, similar effects are observed for both the *ad hoc* information and no *ad hoc* information treatment groups. Specifically, the level of support expressed at stage 2 is maintained around the same level at stage 3 by both groups ($M_{PU} = 69.71$ at stage 2 and $M_{PU} = 70.81$ at stage 3; $M_{PI} = 58.48$ at stage 2 and $M_{PI} = 58.16$ at stage 3). On the other hand, when the state of the intervention is portrayed as deteriorating, the level of support significantly drops going from stage 2 to 3. That said, such decrease in the level of support is significantly more pronounced for the group that did not receive the *ad hoc* information treatment [($M = 70.89$ at stage 2)–($M = 59.75$ at stage 3) = 11.14 per cent] compared to the *ad hoc* information group [($M = 65.66$ at stage 2)–($M = 60.88$ at stage 3) = 4.78 per cent]. The findings thus corroborate Hypothesis 5 (Table 3 and Figure 3).

Table 3: Support for military intervention across levels of *ad hoc* political information and intervention stages 2 and 3: Repeated measures analysis of variance

Independent variables	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F-value*	*P-value*
Ad hoc information (*Ad hoc*)	8983.13	1	8983.13	10.32	0.001
Success of stage 3 (Stage 3)	0.007	1	0.007	8.05	0.99
Ad hoc × Stage 3	4483.41	1	4483.41	5.15	0.023
Subject(Group)	317447.8	365	869.72	—	—
Intervention stages (Stages 2 and 3)	2633.81	1	2633.81	16.94	<.0001
Stages × *Ad hoc*	278.97	1	278.97	1.79	0.18
Stages × Stage 3	3202.65	1	3202.65	20.59	<.0001
Stages × *Ad hoc* × Stage 3	693.86	1	693.86	4.46	0.03
Stages × Subject (Group)	56749.01	365	155.47	—	—

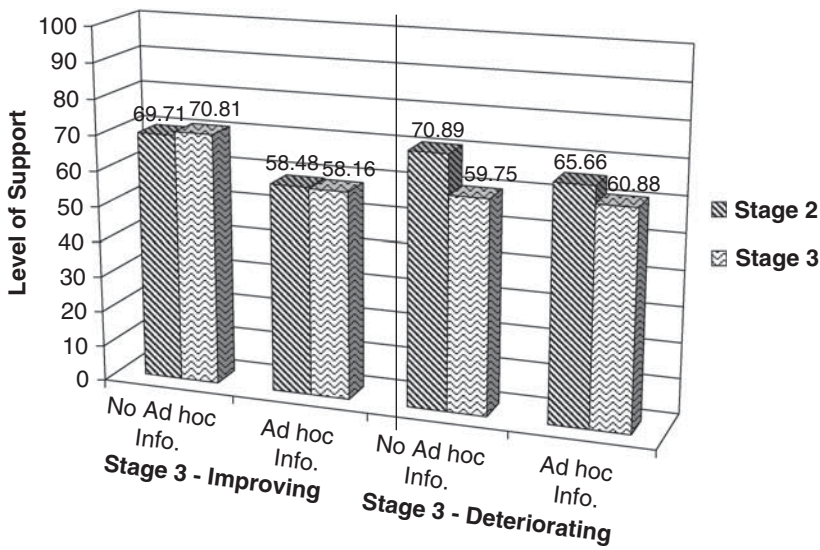

Figure 3: Support for military intervention: Three-way interaction between 'success of stage 3', 'intervention stages 2 and 3' and '*ad hoc* political information'.

In contrast to the previous analysis, the results of the 2×2×2 ANOVA to examine change in support moving from stage 3 to 4 show no significant three-way interaction between *ad hoc* information, success of stage 4, and intervention stages 3 and 4 [$F\ (1, 365) = 1.62,\ P > 0.1$]. Therefore, the results do not corroborate Hypotheses 5 at this stage. That said, the two-way interaction of the success of stage 4 with intervention stages 3 and 4 is statistically significant [$F\ (1, 365) = 31.88,\ P < 0.0001$]. As Figure 4 illustrates, when the state of the intervention is portrayed as deteriorating, the level of

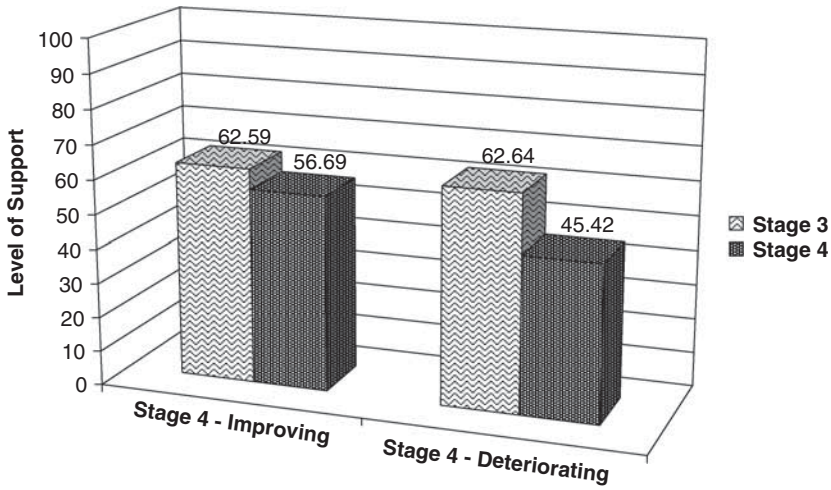

Figure 4: Support for military intervention: Two-way interaction between 'success of stage 4', 'intervention stages 3 and 4'.

Table 4: Support for military intervention across levels of *ad hoc* political information and intervention stages 3 and 4: Repeated measures analysis of variance

Independent variables	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F-value*	*P-value*
Ad hoc information (*Ad hoc*)	3537.47	1	3537.47	3.47	0.06
Success of stage 4 (Stage 4)	5469.63	1	5469.63	5.36	0.02
Ad hoc × Stage 4	160.56	1	160.56	0.15	0.69
Subject(Group)	371992.7	365	1019.15	—	—
Intervention stages (Stages 3 and 4)	24383.69	1	24383.69	132.27	<0.0001
Stages × *Ad hoc*	450.92	1	450.92	2.44	0.11
Stages × Stage 4	5877.75	1	5877.75	31.88	<0.0001
Stages × *Ad hoc* × Stage 4	299.85	1	299.85	1.62	0.20
Stages × Subject(Group)	67285.53	365	184.34	—	—

support significantly drops going from stage 3 to 4 ($M_{STAGE\_3} = 62.64$ and $M_{STAGE\_4} = 45.42$). Even when the state of the intervention is portrayed as improving at stage 4, the level of support continues to decrease from the level of support expressed at the end of stage 3, although at a lower rate ($M_{STAGE\_3} = 62.59$ and $M_{STAGE\_4} = 56.59$). In short, as the duration of intervention gets longer (for example, in the case of experimental scenario for stage 4, the intervention had been going on for 9 months) the level of support drops even with improving prospects while the impact of *ad hoc* information disappears (Table 4).

The effect of general political information

Apart from my main analyses, I also included a conventional measure of political information – one's general knowledge of domestic politics and international facts – as a covariate across alternative models. Interestingly, I did not obtain statistical significance for this factor in any of the analyses. Moreover, controlling for general political information does not change the statistical significance or coefficient signs of the experimental factors.[8] These findings are in line with previous scholarship that conceptualizes individuals as information specialists rather than generalists, suggesting that policy-specific information has a more direct influence on political judgments, opinion change and policy preferences than does general political information (see, for example, Iyengar, 1990; Krosnick *et al*, 1993; Gilens, 2001). The results thus corroborate the proposition that, if available, domain- or policy-specific measures are preferable to general knowledge scales for analyzing information effects on public opinion (Zaller, 1992, pp. 336–337; see also Jerit *et al*, 2006). Indeed, contrary to the policy-specific information measure, the measure of general political information does not seem to adequately capture the impact of political information on public support for military interventions.

Given the use of experimental data in this study, it is important – as a robustness check – to determine whether there is a sufficient amount of variation in the levels of general political information among student participants. This is to ensure that the nature of the data does not suffer from a statistical validity problem owing to limited variation where the statistical inference regarding the existence or absence of the causal relationship (here, between general political information and support for the intervention) may be incorrect (see Maxwell and Delaney, 2004). Accordingly, I checked the diagnostic statistics of the experimental data concerning the distribution of general political information levels among the participants. As mentioned above, I measured the participants' level of general political information by administering a questionnaire that comprised a total of 26 questions. The summary statistics of the general political information variable show that the values range from 6 to 26 with a mean of 16.55 and a 4.71 standard deviation above and below that mean, indicating that the data are spread out over a fairly large range of values. Further diagnostic checks, including the examination of the frequency distribution for the variable using a histogram with an overlay of the normal curve, show that such variation approximates a normal distribution (see Figure 5). As such, these data diagnostics demonstrate that there is sufficient variation among participants regarding their level of general political information, thereby substantiating the robustness of the findings.

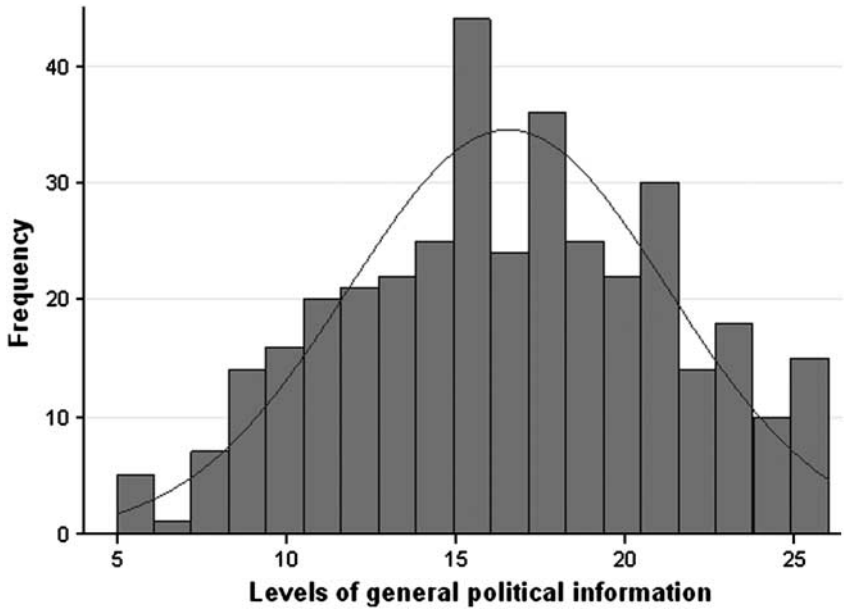

Figure 5: Histogram of general political information levels among experimental participants.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined public support for military interventions as a function of political information and intervention stages using a panel experiment conducted in the United States. The experimental findings generally fall in line with my theoretical expectations. Specifically, the results demonstrate that politically informed individuals express less support for a military intervention at the beginning of that intervention compared to the uninformed. However, as the intervention proceeds and casualties are incurred, the support of politically uninformed individuals decreases at higher rates than that of politically informed ones. As such, politically informed individuals demonstrate more stable levels of support across intervention stages. I also find that success or failure of an intervention at a certain stage interacts with the level of political information. The results suggest that a decrease in support is significantly more pronounced among politically uninformed individuals compared to informed ones under deteriorating intervention conditions. That said, as the duration of the intervention gets longer, the level of support drops even with improving prospects while the impact of political information disappears. In addition, I find that policy-specific information has a greater effect on support for military interventions compared to general political information.

As the subject pool of the experiment was drawn from the United States, the context of this study centers on US public reactions to military interventions. Nevertheless, I believe that the arguments and findings of this study also pertain to the dynamics of public opinion in most countries, particularly in other Western democracies. As Stimson (1999, p. xxi) argues, because the cognitive processes of people around the world are similar, a model of public opinion that works for the American case may transfer across national boundaries without much difficulty and modification (see also Zaller, 1992, p. 301). Although there are certainly context-specific factors and national characteristics, such as wealth, military power and demographic composition of a society, that may condition the support of a country's citizens for a military intervention (Eichenberg, 2007), there also exist universal logics that are not confined to any particular society or culture. Indeed, based on the results of his cross-national analyses across 81 countries in six historical episodes (ranging from the Gulf War in 1991 to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan), Eichenberg (2007) suggests that (a) the objective for which military force is used, (b) the extent to which it is perceived as legitimate, and (c) the degree of risks and costs associated with using force are all part of the universal determinants of public support for the use of force. By the same token, I expect that the theoretical logic offered in this study is applicable to any country for which there is variation among its citizens regarding political information levels and where public opinion may form and fluctuate in response to structural changes during the course of a military intervention.

Although many cross-national studies draw attention to a knowledge chasm between the US public and people living in other democracies, they also point to the prevalence of *within-nation* variation regarding political information levels among individuals and among certain social groups in almost every country (for example, Curran *et al*, 2009). For instance, Iyengar *et al* (2009) find that even in Switzerland with its considerably well-informed public, intra-nation knowledge gap approximates that of the United States. In another comparative study, Howe (2006) refers to the political knowledge gap between younger and older cohorts in Canada, as well as in the Netherlands – a high-civic-literacy society (see Milner, 2002). Therefore, even if a country's public generally possesses a high amount of political information at the aggregate level, the arguments of this study regarding the differences between politically informed and uninformed members of the public should still apply to that country at the individual level.

A few comments are also warranted regarding the use of the experimental method. Whereas political scientists in general acknowledge the high internal validity of experimentation as a means of testing hypotheses, debate continues over the external validity of this method. Therein, most criticism is directed at

the use of college students and the artificiality of laboratory settings with regard to the representativeness of the experimental samples and the generalizability of results (for example, Sears, 1986; Kinder and Palfrey, 1993; McDermott, 2002).

In addressing this debate about experimentation, I echo the sentiments expressed by Mook (1983, p. 386) that, 'what makes research findings of interest is that they help us understand everyday life. That understanding, however, comes from theory or the analysis of mechanism; it is not a matter of "generalizing" the findings themselves'. In other words, the research objective and the conclusions drawn from an experiment relate solely to the logic of one's theory and hypotheses. As such, the main purpose of most experimental studies is neither to estimate the characteristics of a given population from sample characteristics nor to draw inductive conclusions about that population, but to investigate whether the theorized relationships exist between the variables of interest.

I emphasize that the experiment used in this study was designed for examining the determinants of public support for military interventions rather than that of elite decision makers. Otherwise, using students in an experiment that aims to study elite behavior would be problematic because the information acquisition and processing patterns, associative memory structures, levels of experiential knowledge, and decision strategies are different for the public and elite decision makers. A number of scholars suggest that experimentation is an appropriate method when the real-world equivalent of a student sample in an experiment is the public – not the political elite (see Mintz *et al*, 2006; Morton and Williams, 2010). In fact, comparing the results of his national-level experiment on public support for war with those he conducted in laboratory conditions with students, Gartner (2008) does not find a significant difference between the reactions of students and older adults. Even if the actual link among levels of political information, intervention stages and support for military intervention might differ in strength and degree in the general population, I believe that the basic cognitive and psychological processes that lead to the proposed outcomes should essentially be similar among all types of people (see Willnat *et al*, 2006).

In conducting my experimental analyses, I provide a useful yet preliminary exploration of how political information affects public support for military interventions across different intervention stages. One future avenue of research is to replicate the experiments in different cultural settings, and thus expand the context of the study beyond US public reactions to military interventions. Further investigations may also involve the use of alternative experimental scenarios designed around interventions with different foreign policy objectives and with variations in the casualty rates and duration of intervention stages. Another future step in this line of research may involve

developing a cross-national time-series data set on public support for military interventions that provides data on political information levels and identifies different stages of a given set of interventions, which would allow for a more comprehensive empirical investigation.

Lastly, a brief discussion is warranted on the policy implications of this study. A commonly accepted argument made by scholars who focus on casualty aversion is that public opposition to casualties may force political leaders to avoid military involvement in an international crisis all together or, in the case that an intervention is already in progress, prematurely terminate the mission. Although more recent research has demonstrated that the public is not entirely casualty-phobic, there is still strong evidence that the number of casualties may significantly diminish public support for a military intervention and, in turn, influence foreign policy decisions. This was the case with the US withdrawal from the intervention in Somalia following the deaths of 19 US soldiers in October 1993. Thereafter, the Clinton administration's refusal to respond to the genocide in Rwanda in April 1994 is also attributed in part to the outcome of the Somalian intervention and public opposition to the use of military force. Another historical case is Britain's decision to pull out from Palestine in 1948 in the presence of a growing sense of dissent among the British public in reaction to casualties the British army had suffered (Dixon, 2000).

This study suggests that politically informed segments of the public are likely to be more cognizant of long-term foreign policy objectives, credibility issues, sunk costs, and major political and military concerns than the politically uninformed. When leaders view the public as a single mass that is likely to withdraw its support for an intervention owing to casualties, this may result in poor foreign policy decisions and outcomes that not only misinterpret the level of costs that a political constituency is willing to bear, but also undervalue the long-range goals of foreign policy, jeopardize mission accomplishments, and underestimate the logistical difficulties or political costs of rapid withdrawal (Burk, 1999; Sullivan, 2008; see also Goemans, 2000; Filson and Werner, 2002; Slantchev, 2004). Thus, given the role of public opinion in foreign policy decision making, more nuanced investigations in this line of research are warranted for better understanding the dynamics of public support for military interventions.

About the Author

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Notes

1 As alternatives to political information, some scholars use terms such as political sophistication, political expertise, political knowledge or political awareness.
2 One should note that the cutoff points for intervention stages will differ from one intervention to another. Hence, there is no one-size-fits-all recipe, and the course of the intervention stages is certainly not path dependent. That said, the use of a general rubric is helpful for disaggregating military interventions into basic stages in order to observe various dynamics of the intervention process such as opinion updating and changes in the level of support.
3 The questionnaire is based on items from the American National Election Studies data archive, Prior's (2002) study, and Taber and Lodge's (2006) study.
4 As Gartner (2008, p. 100) suggests, experiments using hypothetical scenarios provide scholars a way to get a handle on the broader range of processes concerning public opinion on military interventions by enabling one to manipulate and vary the factors of interest in accordance with one's research objectives. Employing hypothetical scenarios also allows a researcher to prevent any bias or confusion that might arise by referring to present or past time real-world actors or events, which would contaminate the validity and reliability of the findings. Nevertheless, the experimenter should avoid developing hypothetical scenarios that are unrealistic or artificial. With these considerations in mind, I used the Cyprus ethnic conflict case as my guiding framework for the hypothetical ethnic conflict scenario, with certain modifications introduced to make the context more relevant to the experimental participants. Therein, I did not make any explicit references to that conflict to avoid any preexisting opinions about the conflict, which would confound the experimental results.
5 The experimental materials are available upon request.
6 The casualty patterns provided in the experimental scenarios are similar to the US casualty patterns incurred in the military operations in Iraq during corresponding time periods (see www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm).
7 I estimated Cronbach's α to check whether each constitutive section of the questionnaire measured the same underlying construct (here, general political information) so that the sections could be combined to generate an additive measure. The Cronbach's α reliability coefficient for this additive measure is 0.66. I also conducted a simple correlation test along with Fisher's r to z transformation. The results indicate significantly high levels of correlation among four sections of the questionnnaire ($P<0.0001$), and thus justify the formation of an index variable.
8 The results of these additional analyses are available upon request.

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