

Public Opinion and Crisis Behavior in a Nuclearized South Asia[^]

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Abstract

Research on public opinion and crisis behavior has focused on pressures felt by leaders that have initiated a crisis, not on leaders in target states responding to adversary provocation. Our survey experiment involving 1,823 respondents in Pakistan's Punjab province, finds public support for escalating rather than de-escalating such a crisis. It shows how public pressures can encourage conflict even in instances where a leader has engaged in no prior effort to generate audience costs following crisis onset. Survey respondents were also more likely to support escalatory decisions if they were made by a military, rather than civilian, leader, although we do not find that military leaders receive more support in de-escalatory decisions. Finally, while we demonstrate that leaders can mitigate the costs of de-escalating by highlighting the dangers of conflict, they still incur substantial opportunity costs in foregone public support when they opt to de-escalate rather than escalate a crisis.

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I. Introduction

Does public opinion restrain or inflame interstate conflict? Will publics rally behind leaders that choose to escalate, punish leaders that de-escalate, or listen to leaders who offer justifications for less dangerous paths? Do the answers to these questions vary depending on the type of leader and the political institutions that channel public opinion? These questions sit at the heart of an active and vibrant research agenda that seeks to assess the nature and severity of popular pressures for conflict. Using data from a survey experiment of 1,823 respondents fielded in Pakistan's Punjab province from January to February 2018, this paper offers sobering results that suggest clear public support for escalating rather than de-escalating an unfolding crisis. While we demonstrate that leaders can mitigate the costs of de-escalation by pointing to the dangers of conflict, they still incur a substantial opportunity cost in public support when they opt to de-escalate rather than escalate. This observation helps to illuminate the public opinion consequences of adversary provocation, which can generate incentives for conflict typically ignored in traditional crisis bargaining models (see Cho 2017; Dafoe, Hatz, and Zhang 2017; Hall 2017; Cho 2018; Dafoe and Weiss 2018).

Our paper advances an emerging research agenda, which offers survey and experimental evidence of public opinions toward crisis behavior outside of the U.S. context (Berinsky, Quek, and Sances 2012; Davies and Johns 2013; Driscoll and Maliniak 2016; Quek and Johnston 2017; Dafoe and Weiss 2018; Bell and Quek 2018) and is the first attempt to do so in Pakistan, a weakly institutionalized democracy of considerable theoretical and substantive importance.¹ Pakistan is formally coded as a democracy under most classification schemes whenever it has had a popularly elected civilian prime minister (Marshall, Gurr, and Jagers 2017; Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland

¹ On why transitional or weakly institutionalized democracies may engage in different international behavior, see Van Evera 1994; Snyder and Ballentine 1996; Mansfield and Snyder 2007, chaps 3–4.

2010; Boix, Miller, and Rosato 2013; Ulfelder and Lustik 2007). Yet, it nonetheless exhibits many characteristics of a “hybrid regime” (Karl 1995; Collier and Levitsky 1997) given the large role the Pakistan Army plays in politics (Fair 2014; Shah 2014) even during periods of civilian-led governance (Adeney 2017), and especially in “reserved domains” (Valenzuela 1992) of Army influence over national security policy. Such hybrid or transitional regimes may be especially dangerous given weak political institutions (Mansfield and Snyder 2007). Pakistan’s substantive importance—as the world’s fifth-most populous country and likely possessing over one hundred nuclear weapons—interacts with its democratic status. Pakistan’s war with India in 1999 is one of the only wars with over 1,000 battle deaths between two formally democratic states, while also being one of the only direct conflicts of such scale between nuclear-armed adversaries, posing important challenges to theories of democratic and nuclear peace.

India-Pakistan relations are characterized by a high-level of background violence. The Indian government claims—with considerable supporting evidence—that much terrorist activity in India, especially in the disputed territory of Kashmir, is conducted by groups or individuals aided and abetted by the Pakistani state. The degree to which the Pakistani state has “cognizance, influence, or control” of a specific terrorist attack varies across groups and over time (Coll 2018, 290). Pakistan’s choice to support proxy violence means that crises can occur as a result of actions taken with little-to-no deliberation by Pakistani decisionmakers. Once a crisis unfolds, public opinion has the potential to take on its own dynamic. If the public punishes leaders for not standing up in a crisis, then any precipitating event is especially dangerous because leaders may proceed down a path which they believe to be militarily unwise. On the other hand, if the public is willing to accept de-escalation when appropriate, then leaders have greater space to avoid unnecessary conflict.

Our experiment sought to answer three questions, and finds clear answers to all three. First, does the public prefer escalation or de-escalation following adversary provocation? We find that

respondents are less likely to support a political leader when that leader de-escalates a crisis compared to when the leader chooses to escalate. Second, does the public weigh decisions on escalation taken by military or civilian leaders differently? We find that respondents are significantly more likely to support escalatory decisions if they are made by a military, rather than civilian, leader, although we find little evidence that military leaders receive more support in de-escalatory decisions than their civilian counterparts. And, third, can the public be swayed toward greater support for de-escalation by references to the potential costs of conflict? We find that respondents base their support in part on the potential justifications that leaders make. In particular, we find that explaining de-escalation by referencing either nuclear dangers or potential economic consequences decreases the opportunity costs faced by de-escalating leaders, though we find no evidence that either message is more compelling than the other. Furthermore, neither de-escalatory justification garners more support than escalation. These findings are important because they demonstrate that backing down is punished even in democratic and nuclear dyadic contexts, offering an important domestic political incentive for conflict that goes beyond the substantive issues at stake or the intentional generation of audience costs by leaders during crisis (Fearon 1994).

Our study contributes to a nascent literature on the public opinion consequences of adversary provocation. Provocations have been characterized variously as “actions or incidents that state actors perceive as intentionally and wrongfully challenging or violating their values and goals, thereby eliciting outraged reactions” (Hall 2017) or more broadly as “anger-inducing foreign action” (Cho 2017) with a consequence of increasing resolve in the targeted state (Dafoe, Hatz, and Zhang 2017). This research agenda has been pursued along multiple lines, including qualitative historical work (Hall 2017; Cho 2017), survey experimental and natural experiment findings from the country of Georgia (Driscoll and Maliniak 2016), and survey experiments in the United States (Gottfried and Trager 2016; Dafoe, Hatz, and Zhang 2017; Cho 2018) and China (Dafoe and Weiss 2017). Our

experiment advances this empirical agenda by offering one of the first survey experiments examining public responses to provocation in a hybrid or transitional regime.²

This paper proceeds first by spelling out the channels through which public opinion can affect foreign policy, before turning to a brief review of the contextual circumstances of the seven-decade-long India-Pakistan dispute. It then introduces the research design in greater detail, before describing the empirical results that the survey experiment produced. Finally, it turns to the implications of those findings for our understanding of the broader literature on public opinion and conflict, as well as possible directions for future research.

II. Theoretical Framework and Expectations

Our research builds on three overlapping literatures associated with the domestic sources of foreign policy that have special relevance to the Pakistani case, and those three topics in turn motivate our research design. First, we seek to better understand the potential public opinion pressures faced by leaders of a target state in a coercive bargaining situation. Most existing literature has tended to focus on the costs associated with the state that initiates the crisis. Specifically, we want to better understand potential “rally around the flag” effects that might incentivize escalation. Leaders face public sanction from inaction, but in part that sanction is from the loss of potential rally around the flag effects. Second, we seek to identify whether the military—given its specialization in armed conflict—is uniquely able to argue for de-escalatory action. Third and finally, we attempt to assess whether escalatory pressures can be mitigated or eliminated through the

² Georgia in 2008, which was the focus of Driscoll and Maliniak 2016, was partly “free” according to Freedom House, and is, to the best of our knowledge, the only other foreign policy survey experiment that has occurred in a hybrid regime.

provision of more detailed justifications, and test whether well-known rationales associated with peaceful international conduct are persuasive to respondents.

Target States, Public Audiences, and Rallies around the Flag

In recent years, the literature on public opinion and crisis behavior has focused on understanding audience costs, a key mechanism for understanding how a state can generate credible threats to escalate a dispute despite the inefficiency of armed conflict (Fearon 1994). By making public threats or engaging in a public campaign to justify armed conflict, an escalating state undertakes a process that “cannot be reversed without political costs,” and those costs in turn provide credibility to the underlying escalatory threat (Martin 1993), increasing the probability of compellence success. Thus, there has been considerable work done—historical and experimental—in determining the existence and magnitude of so-called “audience costs” in the initiating (or challenging) state (Tomz 2017; Snyder and Borghard 2011), and whether the targeted state perceived the existence of those audience costs in determining its own behavior (Trachtenberg 2012), as well as identifying the strategic selection effects that bedeviled empirical assessments of the phenomenon (Schultz 2001; Fearon 2002; Kurizaki and Whang 2015).

Less work has gone into examining the popular pressures associated with target states backing down or conceding in a crisis. In Schultz’s stylized account, for instance, a target state that concedes to a challenge at the outset only suffers the substantive loss on the issue that generated the crisis in the first place—such as the value of disputed territory (Schultz 2001). Only if the target state “resists” and the escalating state “stands firm” does the target state leader risk audience costs for backing down. But such an account only makes sense for crises where conceding at the outset is unobserved or uninteresting to the public. As Kurizaki (2007, 544) has observed, however, “making a threat in crises often has domestic political consequences for a defender as well as for a

challenger.” While covert threats and concessions exist (Kurizaki 2007; Carson 2016), there is no reason to suspect they make up the majority of crisis bargaining behavior. Since the danger of public sanctions varies from target to target, different types of states likely experience substantially different incentives when faced with the initial choice of concession or resistance, retaliation or inaction. In fact, much of the modeling of crisis bargaining assumes implicitly some tangible good being bargained over—such as territory—that is either held or conceded. This modeling neglects empirical evidence that explicit coercive threats appear to be uncommon in both crises and militarized disputes (Downes and Sechser 2012, 459).

The literature on audience costs has focused on the potential costs of backing down following crisis initiation, but has not emphasized the public benefits that might flow from escalation for either the initiating or target state, even as some scholars in that tradition have acknowledged the possible importance of such effects (see, e.g., Fearon 1994, 580). Such an escalatory preference may emerge through two pathways: (1) if publics have hawkish preferences (Snyder and Borghard 2011, 438) and/or (2) if there are rally around the flag effects (Mueller 1970; Mueller 1973; Baker and O’Neal 2001; Lai and Reiter 2005). In either instance, leaders may conclude that there are public opinion benefits from escalatory choices that they would have to forego by de-escalating a crisis—an opportunity cost in the event of de-escalation which we label a “lost rally.” The precise mechanisms behind rally effects more generally are still debated, with some evidence in favor of “opinion leadership,” namely that opposition elite criticism decreases during an international crisis, and the resultant loss of oppositional elite cuing increases mass support for national leaders (Baker and O’Neal 2001, 668). Alternative “patriotism” or “anger-based” models for the rally effect instead suggest that threats help build in-group identity (Tajfel and Turner 1986) or, at a minimum, posit that leaders will gain additional support in order to permit retaliation and retribution (Lerner et al. 2003; Lambert et al. 2010; Lambert, Schott, and Scherer 2011). While in

most audience cost models these foregone rally effects are not assessed, they may be quite important in real life. By emphasizing them for the target state, we are inspired by recent efforts to decompose audience costs in initiating states. Kertzer and Brutger, for instance, argue that traditional audience costs involve both an inconsistency cost (associated with starting a crisis and then subsequently backing down) as well as belligerence cost (a penalty for starting a crisis in the first place) (Kertzer and Brutger 2016). To these, our experiment suggests that there may be a “lost rally” cost, since a targeted leader that de-escalates a crisis will not capture the public support they could have if they had escalated.

H1: Individuals will be more supportive of escalatory decisions taken by leaders of target states following provocation than de-escalatory decisions.

Civil-Military Relations and Public Opinion

If publics put pressures on their leaders, they need not treat all leaders equally, and they may be inclined to give some types of leaders greater latitude to pursue certain policy courses. For example—and particularly in hybrid contexts—military leaders may be accorded greater scope for action by public observers than civilian leaders, since the military has unique “policy credibility” (Cukierman and Tommasi 1998; Cowen and Sutter 1998; Mattes and Weeks 2018) on decisions relating to armed conflict given the status of military officers as “professionals” in the “management of violence” (Huntington 1957). Just like doctors making medical decisions, military leaders should therefore have unique policy credibility about matters of war and peace. If they opt to de-escalate, voters should have some confidence that the decision was taken with a full assessment of the military consequences of the alternative. In many countries, including Pakistan, the military is more

popular and accorded greater trust than other public institutions, potentially generating greater support for its decisions.

Given Pakistan's tumultuous civil-military relations, understanding whether civilian and military national leaders face asymmetric popular pressures to escalate or de-escalate conflict is important for understanding the link between Pakistan's regime type and its persistent international revisionism. If the military is accorded special deference to escalate or de-escalate, then conflictual behavior can be understood, especially during periods of military rule, as primarily a function of military preferences, flowing perhaps from the military's parochial interest in conflict (Darnton 2014) or its strategic culture (Fair 2014). If the military is not accorded special deference by the public, though, this merits placing added weight on popular opinion (Milam and Nelson 2013) in understanding Pakistani revisionism.⁴

H2: Individuals will be more likely to support military leaders for their decisions—whether escalatory or de-escalatory—than civilian leaders.

Justifications and Theories of Peace

National leaders are not forced to merely read the script provided to them by international events. If they back down in a crisis, they do not need to do so without explanation. Rather, they have the ability to explain their choices, providing information and rhetoric to voters to frame their

⁴ Public preference for conflict could itself be a function of past decisions to influence education and media to inculcate more nationalist and hawkish messages (see Van Evera 1984, chaps 7–8), but the degree to which the contemporary military is constrained by those past decisions is still worthy of empirical analysis.

decision in the best light. Voters know that in some cases backing down may be strategically optimal (Gowa 1999). Levendusky and Horowitz (2012, 329) show that when respondents are given a scenario where a leader offers new information to justify the strategic wisdom of backing down in a crisis, approval for that course of action dramatically increases, so much so that “the president can substantially reduce or even eliminate any audience costs when backing down appears to be the right move.”

H3: Individuals that receive justifications for the leader's decision to de-escalate will be more supportive of the decision than those that do not receive any justification.

In our experiment, we test whether justifications associated with two well-known theories of peace mitigate public sanction (or increase approval) for de-escalation in the context of a hypothetical India-Pakistan crisis. First, we test whether the public will respond to leaders explaining the choice as a way to preserve economic growth and prosperity. Such appeals may be persuasive given the strong empirical relationship of economic concerns with political support, a relationship that is arguably stronger than leader performance in international affairs (Wilkin, Haller, and Norpoth 1997; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). By manipulating the salience of this rationale, we can help distinguish if there is an additional mechanism of public support that might buttress findings of a capitalist peace undergirded by economic interdependence (Angell 1910; Brooks 2005; Gartzke 2007). Such economic logic and appeals have been employed by Indian and Pakistani leaders to justify restraint (in the face of provocations), dialogue, and efforts at peace (Menon 2016, 64, 73; Musharraf 2004).

Secondly, our hypothetical civilian leaders explain their de-escalatory decision in terms of fears of nuclear escalation. If leaders are extraordinarily cautious in the presence of nuclear weapons, as so-called nuclear deterrence optimists have argued (Waltz 1981; Jervis 1989; Sagan and Waltz

2013) or if nuclear use is associated with a moral taboo (Tannenwald 2007), it is reasonable to suspect that mass public opinion should be especially sensitive to concerns about nuclear escalation. After all, publics are likely to suffer in the event of nuclear escalation, and while war is costly for the public overall, nuclear war between India and Pakistan would be far more costly, even if it were to remain limited (Sankaran 2014).

Since these theories are associated with conditions present in South Asia—namely the need for an impoverished Pakistan to develop economically and the danger of nuclear escalation in an India-Pakistan conflict—we seek to test whether rationales readily available to national leaders can be easily employed to diminish the costs associated with de-escalation. If such justifications eliminate or substantially diminish the public sanction of de-escalation, they help demonstrate how major theories offered for international peace can operate through the mechanism of public opinion. If such justifications are not persuasive, or only minimally so, it demonstrates important limits for those theories, with implications for national leaders attempting to adjudicate between immediate risks associated with public opinion and uncertain risks associated with conflict.

H4a: Individuals who receive a justification highlighting nuclear risk will be more supportive of the leader's decision than those that receive a justification emphasizing economic risk.

H4b: Individuals who receive a justification highlighting economic risk will be more supportive of the decision than those that received the nuclear risk justification.

III. Context: India-Pakistan Conflict

The India-Pakistan rivalry dates back to the countries' violent partition out of colonial India and their first war over the disputed Kashmir territory in 1947, making it one of the longest ongoing interstate rivalries. During the Cold War, they fought three major conventional wars—two over Kashmir and the third resulting in the separation of East Pakistan—interspersed with dozens of

militarized disputes and crises. Both states' acquisition of nuclear weapons during the course of the rivalry increased the danger that any renewed hostilities might generate catastrophe. India first tested nuclear weapons in 1974 and then again in 1998, while Pakistan likely acquired the ability to produce a nuclear bomb in the mid-1980s and overtly tested nuclear weapons in 1998. After the 1998 tests, President Bill Clinton described the region as “the most dangerous place in the world” (*The Hindu*, 11 March 2000). Within a year of their nuclear tests, India and Pakistan defied deterrence optimists' confidence in nuclear stability (Joeck 2013) and fought the 1999 Kargil War (Lavoy 2009). The conventional conflict lasted two months, claimed roughly 1,000 battle deaths, and some believe involved nuclear signaling (Riedel 2009).

Despite the absence of wars since Kargil, the past two decades have been punctuated by several major and minor crises. All the while, cross-border exchanges of small-arms fire, mortars, artillery, and even raids have been a regular feature on the heavily fortified Line of Control (LoC) that separates the disputed territory of Kashmir. Despite a 2003 ceasefire agreement, the region has hosted one of the world's most active combat zones with nearly 10,000 killed.⁵ The frequency of such interstate violence has made most observers numb to what analysts term a “pink flamingo” risk—“fully visible” but “almost completely ignored” (Barno and Bensahel 2015). Perhaps unsurprisingly then, public opinion in Pakistan is consistently and staunchly anti-Indian. Pew data from approximately the last 10 years has found that a plurality of Pakistani respondents hold a “very unfavorable” view of India, and that a majority perceive India to be a “very serious threat” to their country—in fact, a greater threat than Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

The 2016 Uri episode provides a useful illustration of how domestic pressures might escalate crises. In September 2016, an attack attributed to a Pakistan-sponsored terrorist group against an

⁵ Based on South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) data.

Indian Army base in Uri, Kashmir killed 19 Indian soldiers and injured dozens more. Owing to “intense public pressure” (Joshi 2016), Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly authorized limited punitive raids across the LoC, dubbed “surgical strikes”, killing Pakistani soldiers and suspected terrorists (Gokhale 2017, 38–52). Narang explains that “[g]iven the public outrage, expressed most vehemently online and on television, the notion that attacks by Pakistani-supported militants can be suffered with no response may be increasingly unsustainable” (Narang 2016). This pressure may have stemmed from Modi’s electoral promises, his incendiary rhetoric after the attack (*Indian Express*, 19 September 2016), past failures to retaliate (*Hindustan Times*, 18 September 2016), and media pressure (*The Caravan*, 26 September 2016).

Following their completion, India announced that operations had “ceased” and that it did “not have any plans for further continuation,” shifting the decision of escalatory retaliation to Pakistan (“Surgical Strikes: Full Text of Indian Army DGMO Lt Gen Ranbir Singh’s Press Conference,” 2016). Most observers believe Pakistan’s government faced similar public pressures to counter-attack. As Pakistan took steps consistent with having been attacked—by convening high-level national security meetings, raising alert levels, and mobilizing troops along the border—India braced for a response (Gokhale 2017, 29; *Indian Express*, 27 September 2017). Instead, Pakistan was able to sidestep pressure to retaliate by categorically denying that any strike took place: a position sustainable due to inconsistencies in the exaggerated Indian media claims.¹ Although the crisis de-escalated, this incident highlights the real dangers of public pressure in contemporary India-Pakistan crises. In Uri’s aftermath, a senior Pakistani official assured retaliation for any future Indian strikes (*Times of India*, 13 October 2016). One prominent Pakistani analyst warned of both countries tying

¹ *Dawn*, 29 September 2016; *Firstpost*, 1 October 2016. This is similar to the argument by Carson 2016 about the utility of secrecy in escalation control.

leaders' hands through domestic audiences, arguing "both states are being too casual about weaponising society and public opinion against the other country" (*Dawn*, 2 October 2016). The longstanding India-Pakistan dispute therefore provides fertile ground for examining escalation pressures, while recent crises, such as Uri, provide realism to the crisis vignette that we utilize, bolstering the external validity of our survey findings.

Pakistan has a hybrid regime, in which the military and elected civilian leadership compete for, and share, political power. Despite the increasing abundance of hybrid or transitional regimes in the international system (see Gunitsky 2017, 42), survey experimental work has largely focused on established democracies (mostly the United States) and, to a considerably lesser extent, autocracies (mostly China). While Pakistan is not representative of hybrid regimes writ large given the considerable institutional diversity contained within that label (Collier and Levitsky 1997), no attempt to understand the characteristics of hybrid regimes can be complete without discrete empirical probes into the nature of public opinion and policy in specific cases. In other words, this survey experimental work in Pakistan should be viewed as an early attempt to build specific case knowledge that contributes both to understanding a substantively important case as well as to advance what will by necessity be a cross-national endeavor.

IV. Research Design

We conducted a door-to-door household survey among 1,823 individuals in Punjab province, with an embedded experimental module. The survey was conducted in Urdu by the Pakistan Institute of Public Opinion (an affiliate of Gallup International in Pakistan), a public opinion and research firm. In keeping with cultural norms, all-female teams of enumerators interviewed women and all-male teams interviewed men. Primary sampling units (villages in rural areas, and census circles in urban areas) were randomly selected on the basis of census data. Within

each of these units, twelve households were randomly selected. Within each household, the Kish grid method² was used to identify individuals above the age of 18 to interview.³

The survey was restricted to a representative sample of Punjab, which is the country's most populous and politically important province. Punjab's population of 110 million is more than twice that of the next most populous province. Because Punjab is also the traditional heartland of the Army (Fair and Nawaz 2011; Staniland, Naseemullah, and Butt 2018) and, by some accounts, the most nationalistic of the provinces (Afzal 2018, 92), we caution against extrapolating the results to the rest of the country without further research. Nonetheless, because Punjab contains 54% of the seats in the National Assembly, it determines which political party secures a national legislative majority. Punjab's "military, administrative, economic and demographic predominance" (Talbot 2002, 59) therefore means that it is an important region to study in its own right, and also that voting behavior there shapes political party behavior at the national level. Table I provides some descriptive statistics of the sample to provide demographic detail of the respondents.

² The Kish grid method uses a pre-assigned table of random numbers to select members within a household to be interviewed or surveyed.

³ The survey was carried out on a tablet. Randomization was carried out by providing enumerators with a preselected list of random numbers that corresponded with survey versions to utilize at each survey site. Randomization succeeded in achieving balance on demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal covariates (see Appendix 2).

Table I: Descriptive Statistics	
Ethnicity	Punjabi: 74.6% Saraiki: 16.1% Urdu-speaking: 6.3%
Gender	Female: 49.7% Male: 50.3%
Locality	Urban: 32.3% Rural: 67.7%
Which party did you vote for in 2013? (among self-reported voters)	PML-N: 66% PTI: 17.9% PPP: 10.36%
Attitudes toward India	Treat India as a friend: 30.6% Treat India as an enemy: 50.5% Treat India as neither a friend nor enemy: 17.4%
Satisfied with democracy	Very satisfied: 31.8% Fairly satisfied: 39.7% Not very satisfied: 16.7% Not at all satisfied: 10.6%

Six versions of the survey were administered (see Table II). The experimental treatments sought to estimate support for different de-escalation and escalation approaches pursued by varying state leaders. In our experiment, we exploit a characteristic of Pakistan’s hybrid regime: that political leaders and army leaders routinely engage in their own messaging about national policy. Thus, a prime minister might make a statement about a decision without that statement necessarily implying agreement by military leaders, while military leaders might make public statements contrary to the beliefs or preferences of their nominal civilian superiors.

In total, the experiment aimed to test three things: 1) the difference in levels of support for escalatory actions compared to de-escalatory actions in response to instigation from India; 2) whether the support for this policy was affected by the identity of the leader making the decision—

in particular, whether the civilian prime minister or the chief of army staff made the decision;⁴ and 3) the extent to which different justifications provided by the civilian leader to explain the de-escalation affected support for the decision. Due to constraints related to sample size, we opted against including treatments in which the COAS also provided explanations for de-escalation.

Table II: Treatment Assignment		
	Prime Minister (PM)	Chief of Army Staff (COAS)
De-escalate with no explanation	Treatment 1 (T1)	T2
De-escalate with economic explanation	T3	--
De-escalate with nuclear explanation	T4	--
Escalate	T5	T6

To test these, a short vignette was read to all respondents. The vignette, meant to evoke the 2016 Uri attack detailed earlier, described a hypothetical scenario in which fighting breaks out between India and Pakistan, leading the Indian army to kill 10 Pakistani soldiers across the Line of Contro in response to alleged attacks by cross-border militants. In the de-escalatory conditions, the leader—alternatively the Pakistani prime minister or army chief—is described as denouncing the raid and asking the international community to condemn it, but choosing not to retaliate. In two of these de-escalation conditions, the prime minister provides an explanation for his decision. The first explanation highlights the economic cost of a potential war with India, while the second emphasizes how fighting could lead to nuclear war and resultantly, a large number of deaths. In the escalation treatment, the leader—either the prime minister or army chief—orders an attack on Indian positions in Kashmir, which results in the death of 10 Indian soldiers but also the loss of five Pakistani soldiers. The text of all treatments is included in Appendix 1.

⁴ Given the size, budget, and influence of the Army relative to other military services, the Army Chief is the effective head of the Pakistan military.

Although the scenarios described in these vignettes are hypothetical, they are based on widely reported recent events. As such, we expect that respondents would not have had difficulty understanding the scenarios, nor in perceiving them as plausible. We made the decision to exclude the names of the current prime minister and army chief, referring to them instead by their titles because at the time the survey was undertaken, then-prime minister Nawaz Sharif had recently, and unexpectedly, been dismissed and replaced by a lesser-known politician. In addition, our experiment was not concerned with the identities of individual leaders but rather with the difference between support for military and civilian foreign policy decision generally, and thus, we do not anticipate that this had any impact on the way in which the treatment was received.

The dependent variable was measured on a Likert scale of 1-7 with 1 indicating “completely oppose”, 7 “completely support,” and 4 “neither support nor oppose.” Consistent with other recent experimental work on public opinion and conflict, we report results based on a dichotomous measure of support for ease of interpretation, in this case, all respondents offering support (scores of 5, 6, or 7).⁵ Demographic details were collected at the end of the survey.

V. Experimental Results

The survey experimental results present evidence in favor of three findings. First, Pakistani citizens support escalatory over de-escalatory policies, even when those policies would result in the deaths of Pakistani soldiers. Second, the military or civilian identity of the leader making foreign policy decisions affects support for that decision, but asymmetrically in garnering greater support for

⁵ See Appendix 3 for robustness checks, including using a 1-7 ordinal measure instead of the dichotomous measure reported.

military leaders in favor of escalation. Third, providing a reason for de-escalation can increase support for such a policy relative to no explanation. Each of these findings is discussed in turn.

First, we find that Pakistani respondents are significantly more likely—statistically and substantively—to prefer that their leaders take action against India in response to any instigation. This is the case regardless of whether the leader is military or civilian, or whether any reason is provided for de-escalation. On the one hand, this may not seem surprising given that a large percentage of respondents in our survey believed that Pakistan should treat India like an enemy rather than a friend (51%) and the vast majority considered India either a very serious or somewhat serious threat (83%). However, because retaliation in our vignette resulted in the death of five Pakistani soldiers, we may have nonetheless expected that respondents would have tempered their support for action against India. After all, there are more dead Pakistanis in the escalatory conditions than in the de-escalatory conditions, only in the escalatory conditions their deaths are offset by the deaths of 10 Indians.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses across all treatment conditions. As evident, escalatory decisions taken by either the prime minister or army chief received the most support followed by those in which the prime minister offered a justification for de-escalating. Decisions by either the army chief or prime minister to de-escalate received the least support of any conditions presented in the experiment.

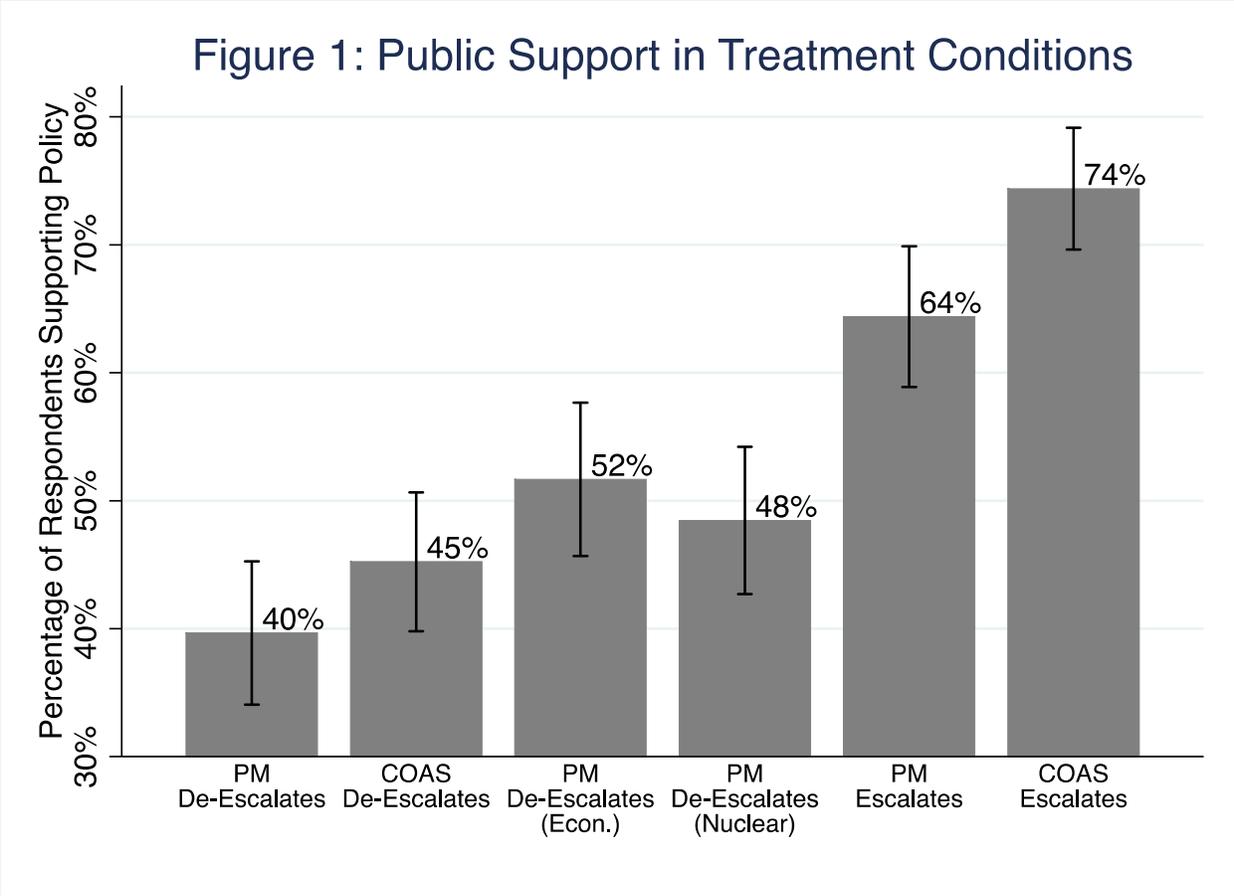
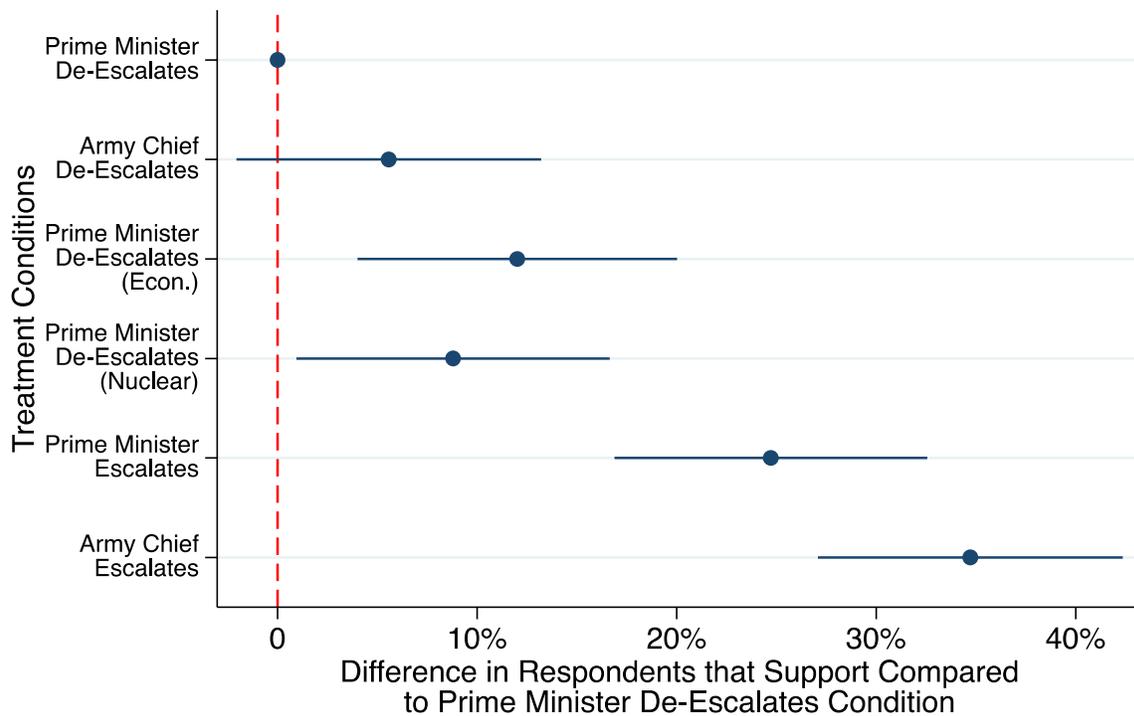


Figure 2 shows the difference in means between the condition in which the prime minister opted to de-escalate without justification (the reference case) and all other conditions. As Figure 2 demonstrates, decisions to escalate are substantially more popular than those to de-escalate, no matter what justification is offered for de-escalation or whether the prime minister or army chief explained de-escalation.

Figure 2:
Difference in Means Across Treatment Conditions



Second, we found that respondents were no more likely to support military leaders that de-escalated than they were civilian leaders that did so. Failure to accord the military deference on de-escalation appears contrary to theories that posit the military will have policy credibility in their area of professional competence. While slightly more respondents supported a decision by the army chief to de-escalate (45%) than a similar decision by the prime minister (40%) that difference was substantively small and statistically indistinguishable from zero ($p=0.15$). In contrast, a greater percentage of respondents supported a decision by the army chief to escalate (74%) than supported the same decision by the Prime Minister (64%), a substantively meaningful and statistically significant ($p<.001$) difference. This suggests that any additional public support the Army may garner as a result of its major decisions may be conditional on whether such decisions accord with

hawkish voter preferences, indicating that the Pakistan military may be somewhat captive to public desires.

Third, we find that the inclusion of a justification—whether nuclear or economic—for de-escalation *does* increase support for such a decision. This finding is consistent with past research that finds that when leaders, who have more information than their publics, explain their decision in the context of that information, publics generate fewer audience costs (Levendusky and Horowitz 2012). We found no difference between the *type* of justification provided. That is, respondents were equally likely to support the de-escalation decision regardless of whether it emphasized economic cost or referenced the possibility of nuclear war. We had theoretical bases to support both directions of this effect. While the harm war can inflict on economies is easily understood and is typically perceived as dampening the likelihood of war (Angell 1910; Brooks 2005), there is a perception that the danger of nuclear war acts as a stronger deterrent to initiating serious conflict (Waltz 1981; Jervis 1989). However, studies have also shown that constituents in democracies prioritize economic performance over other issues, including international crises and war, when making electoral decisions (Wilkin, Haller, and Norpoth 1997; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). Despite the potential consequences of war on Pakistani economic well-being and—given the involvement of nuclear weapons—national survival, it is notable that these justifications still generated support for de-escalation at levels substantially lower than either escalatory condition. Only half of respondents supported de-escalation when a justification was provided by the prime minister compared to the over 60 percent of respondents that support an escalatory decision by the prime minister.

It is an open question as to how enduring this escalatory preference would be if Pakistan's tit-for-tat raid led to greater escalation and prolonged active hostilities. Yet in making an escalatory decision, it is still meaningful to know what benefit politicians or military leaders would accrue from tit-for-tat violence if they could “get away with it.” The fact that there are public opinion benefits to

a Pakistani retaliatory strike helps us assess one payoff amidst a broader probability distribution of possible Indian responses. At a minimum, our results show that the Pakistani public is willing to support the further escalation of conflict even at the cost of additional Pakistani lives as long as costs are also imposed on India in the process.

VI. Conclusion

This paper offers evidence of public constraints on the leaders of target states that face provocation in crises. While leaders possess some ability to attenuate public pressure through specific messaging, that ability appears to be limited. While military leaders receive greater public support to escalate than their civilian peers, they do not have a similar public opinion advantage in de-escalating. As a consequence, leaders face clear popular incentives for escalation in a crisis. Despite well-understood risks and potential long-term costs, such pressures could motivate an escalatory, tit-for-tat cycle of violence that would be especially dangerous between two nuclear-armed adversaries.

India and Pakistan remain engaged in one of the longest enduring interstate rivalries. This rivalry is especially dangerous given the repeated crises, continuation of cross-border violence, and nuclear-armed status of contemporary South Asia. Much of that danger has been attributed to Pakistan's persistent revisionism (Kapur 2007), which in turn has been attributed by many scholars to the preferences of the Pakistan Army (Fair 2014; Shah 2014). The causal logic tying the Pakistan Army to the perpetuation of conflict in South Asia may be correct, but this survey experiment suggests that the Pakistan Army does not garner unfettered support for any possible action. Instead, while respondents are more supportive of the Pakistan Army than they are civilian leaders in taking escalatory steps, they give no greater latitude to army leaders in de-escalating than they do civilian leaders. This result suggests that the relationship between the military, public opinion, and foreign

policy in Pakistan is more complicated than merely one of the military dictating opinion and policy, and indicates that the military may itself be partially trapped by hawkish preferences of the public.

Political survival in Pakistan is a difficult feat. No civilian prime minister has completed a constitutionally permissible five-year term in office. This heightens the importance of our findings, which point towards public sanction for de-escalating conflict. These “lost rally” opportunity costs must be considered in a bargaining model just as audience costs have been incorporated. Crises can appear by accident or at unpredictable times as a result of risk-producing foreign policies that are poorly understood by national leaders. Thus not all crises are carefully selected into by their participant states, leaving open the possibility of inadvertent and uncontrollable escalation. The public opinion pressures felt by target states that perceive adversary provocation then are especially worthy of study.

Our findings suggest several avenues for future research. First, our survey shows that Pakistanis exhibit a strong preference for responding to provocative Indian violence with retaliatory violence. Whether this preference derives solely from Pakistani attitudes toward India or concerns about national honor and sovereignty following provocation was not tested, and future research should attempt to distinguish between these possibilities.

Second, our testing of justifications for de-escalation suggests that respondents are somewhat persuaded by arguments associated with an “economic” or “nuclear” peace. However, while these messages partially mitigated the preference for escalation, they did not eliminate it. Future research should look to the comparative effect of such justifications in different contexts. Additionally, we did not test whether such justifications were more or less persuasive if made by military leaders due to sample size concerns, but future research should explore the relationship between different messengers as well as the messages they send to justify these types of decisions.

Finally, it may be the case that respondents prefer escalation to de-escalation under certain conditions. In our escalatory scenario, Pakistan suffered a small number of casualties in the process of inflicting a small, but somewhat larger, number of casualties on India. Future work may seek to disentangle how public support for escalation varies as absolute and relative costs change. National honor may be something that is worth 5 soldiers, but not 500 or 5,000.

India and Pakistan continue to engage in routine violence along their disputed border in Kashmir while Pakistan-supported groups persist in terrorist violence against the Indian state and its civilians. Any of these incidents has the potential to become a crisis. Once public attention is aware of a provocation, our results suggest there are clear pressures for escalation—pressures that may work to weaken deterrence at a future critical juncture. Understanding such pressures—in the initiating *and* target state as well as when leaders intentionally try to heighten audience costs *and* when they try to minimize them—continues to merit intense scrutiny.

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Appendix

A1. Text of Experiment

Treatments 1 & 2 (De-Escalate PM/COAS)

Imagine fighting breaks out between India and Pakistan. India claims it was attacked by cross-border militants and in retaliation, attacks Pakistani forces across the Line of Control in Azad Kashmir, and kills 10 Pakistani soldiers. The Pakistani **Prime Minister/Chief of Army Staff** denounces India's irresponsible action and asks for the international community to condemn the raid, but chooses not to retaliate.

On a scale of 1-7, how supportive are you of the **Prime Minister/Chief of Army Staff's** decision (to denounce but not take retaliatory action), where 1 means completely opposed and 7 means completely supportive?

Treatments 3 & 4 (De-escalate with justification/PM)

Imagine fighting breaks out between India and Pakistan. India claims it was attacked by cross-border militants and in retaliation, attacks Pakistani forces across the Line of Control in Azad Kashmir, and kills 10 Pakistani soldiers. The Pakistani **Prime Minister** denounces India's irresponsible action and asks for the international community to condemn the raid, but chooses not to retaliate.

He explains, 'Despite India's action, if we were to start a war, **it would devastate Pakistan's economy and could halt our development for a generation/ it could lead to the use of nuclear weapons which could kill millions of people.**'

On a scale of 1-7, how supportive are you of the **Prime Minister's** decision (to denounce but not take retaliatory action because that would harm the economy), where 1 means completely opposed and 7 means completely supportive?

Treatments 5 & 6 (Escalate PM/COAS)

Imagine fighting breaks out between India and Pakistan. India claims it was attacked by cross-border militants and in retaliation, attacks Pakistani forces across the Line of Control in Azad Kashmir, and kills 10 Pakistani soldiers. The Pakistani **Prime Minister/Chief of Army Staff announces that in response, he ordered the army to attack Indian positions in Kashmir. The Pakistani army kills 10 Indian soldiers in this attack, but 5 more Pakistani soldiers also die during the battle.**

On a scale of 1-7, how supportive are you of the **Prime Minister/Chief of Army Staff's** decision (to attack India in response), where 1 means completely opposed and 7 means completely supportive?

A2. Balance Tests

**Difference in Means (with T-test P-values) between
Covariate Mean for Respondents in Survey Version 1 and _____.**

Covariates	Min,Max	Version 2	Version 3	Version 4	Version 5	Version 6
<i>Female</i>	(0, 1)	-0.009	-0.004	0.021	0.002	0.020
<i>Age</i>	(18, 98)	-0.313	-0.715	-0.415	-0.271	-1.181
<i>Rural</i>	(0, 1)	-0.040	-0.017	-0.074*	-0.027	-0.085**
<i>Vote</i>	(0, 1)	0.009	-0.002	-0.024	0.007	-0.011
<i>High income</i>	(0, 1)	0.031	0.021	0.028	-0.019	-0.028
<i>High education</i>	(0, 1)	0.012	0.023	-0.036	0.027	0.017
<i>PML-N</i>	(0, 1)	0.002	-0.081*	-0.010	-0.043	-0.015
<i>Daily prayer</i>	(0, 1)	0.018	-0.015	-0.013	-0.035	-0.065*
<i>Punjabi speaker</i>	(0, 1)	0.012	0.015	0.007	-0.001	0.066*
<i>India peace</i>	(0, 1)	0.009	0.001	-0.018	-0.004	-0.013
<i>Prefer democracy</i>	(0, 1)	-0.003	-0.033	0.050	0.034	-0.006
* p<0.1, ** p<0.05						

In 55 t-tests, we find 4 variables where the difference in means exceeds the p<0.10 level and 1 variable where the difference in means exceeds the p<0.05 level, which is consistent with expectations. Given that this is what we would expect by chance, we can be confident that the randomization succeeded in achieving balance on demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal covariates.

Given the presence of multiple treatment conditions, we fit a multinomial logistic regression model to the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Version} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Female} + \beta_2 \text{Age} + \beta_3 \text{Rural} + \beta_4 \text{Vote} + \beta_5 \text{High income} \\ & + \beta_6 \text{High education} + \beta_7 \text{PMLN} + \beta_8 \text{Daily prayer} + \beta_9 \text{Punjabi speaker} \\ & + \beta_{10} \text{India peace} + \beta_{11} \text{Prefer democracy} + \varepsilon \end{aligned}$$

The test for joint orthogonality for the model as a whole fails to reject the null (p=0.78) and Wald tests for each individual covariate fails to reject the null at conventional levels of significance for all covariates.⁶ This further contributes to our confidence that randomization succeeded in achieving balance on covariates.

⁶ David McKenzie, “Tools of the Trade: A Joint Test of Orthogonality when Testing for Balance,” February 4, 2015, recommends this approach. Separately, Matthew S. Levendusky and Michael C. Horowitz, “When Backing Down Is the Right Decision: Partisanship, New Information, and Audience Costs. *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (2012):323–338, use this approach when testing random assignment in a similar survey experimental design.

A3. Robustness Checks and Coefficient Comparisons

Table 1: Coefficient Estimates for Treatment Effects with Different Estimators and/or Dependent Variables

VARIABLES	(1) Dummy Support DV (LPM)	(2) Dummy Support DV (Logit)	(3) Dummy Support DV (Probit)	(4) 7-Point Likert DV (LPM)
Treatment 2 (COAS De-esc.)	0.0557 (0.0389)	0.228 (0.163)	0.142 (0.102)	0.253 (0.157)
Treatment 3 (PM De-escalate [Econ.])	0.120*** (0.0408)	0.487*** (0.170)	0.304*** (0.106)	0.440*** (0.165)
Treatment 4 (PM De-escalate [Nuclear])	0.0879** (0.0400)	0.358** (0.167)	0.223** (0.104)	0.332** (0.161)
Treatment 5 (PM Escalates)	0.247*** (0.0400)	1.012*** (0.171)	0.631*** (0.105)	1.263*** (0.161)
Treatment 6 (COAS Escalates)	0.347*** (0.0390)	1.486*** (0.174)	0.917*** (0.106)	1.766*** (0.157)
Constant (PM De-esc.)	0.397*** (0.0282)	-0.420*** (0.119)	-0.262*** (0.0739)	3.895*** (0.114)

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 2: Tests for Equality of Coefficient Estimates from Model 1

Comparison	F-statistic (1, 1790)	P-value
Treatment 3 [PM de-escalates with economic justification] = Treatment 4 [PM de-escalates with nuclear justification]	0.62	p<0.43
Treatment 2 [COAS de-escalates] = Treatment 6 [COAS escalates]	58.81	p<0.001
Treatment 5 [PM escalates] = Treatment 6 [COAS escalates]	6.55	p<0.011