Strategies of Contestation: International Law, Domestic Audiences, and Image Management*

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Abstract

International relations scholars frequently argue that violations of international law generate political costs for governments. Yet we know little about whether governments can evade responsibility for non-compliance, which may be a low-salience issue for domestic audiences. We propose a theory of image management whereby leaders strategically contest international law violations to influence citizen perceptions of the government. Drawing on communications scholarship, we disaggregate government image into four underlying dimensions: morality, performance, lawfulness, and allegiance. A government's response to violations is designed to influence the dimensions of image valued by their political coalition. We develop a typology of response strategies and test their effects in a survey experiment examining violations of the torture, trade, and chemical weapons regimes. Our results offer fresh insights for compliance scholarship. Governments can mitigate backlash and leverage allegations of non-compliance for political ends, but their strategies are constrained by the foreign policy preferences of supporters.

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1   Introduction

In November 2017, a prosecutor for the International Criminal Court (ICC) requested a formal investigation into allegations of US war crimes in Afghanistan. As the ICC Pre-Trial Chamber considered the request, the Trump administration launched an aggressive campaign to denounce the court. Speaking to the Federalist Society in Washington, DC, National Security Advisor John Bolton vowed to "use any means necessary to protect our citizens...from unjust prosecution by this illegitimate court."[1] When the ICC moved forward with the investigation, the Trump administration responded even more forcefully, decrying the ICC's actions and authorizing sanctions against ICC officials. Secretary of State Pompeo pledged that "we will not stand by as our people are threatened by a kangaroo court."[2]

The Trump administration's response to the ICC shows that even a populist government with a clear aversion to international cooperation can feel compelled to respond to an alleged violation of international law. The United States has a history of fraught engagement with the ICC, and the Trump administration could have chosen to downplay the investigation. Yet it elevated the issue, publicly attacking the ICC and issuing unprecedented sanctions.

The form and content of the Trump administration's response is also noteworthy. US officials not only challenged the court's legitimacy, they used the ICC investigation to bolster the Trump administration's image as a protector of American citizens. This strategy contrasts with the approaches of previous administrations that confronted similar allegations.

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[1] Owen Bowcott, Oliver Holmes, and Erin Durkin, "John Bolton threatens war crimes court with sanctions in virulent attack," *The Guardian*, 10 September 2018.

[2] Karen DeYoung and Carol Morello, "Trump authorizes sanctions targeting International Criminal Court," *The Washington Post*, 11 June 2020, retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/trump-authorizes-sanctions-targeting-international-criminal-court/2020/06/11/6130d78c-abf4-11ea-9063-e69bd6520940_story.html.

In the early 2000s, the Bush administration defended abusive interrogation methods against suspected terrorists with a strategy of "legal evasion": reinterpreting international torture rules to argue that its actions were consistent with international law (Sanders, 2011). Years later, the Obama administration justified its decision to decline prosecution of Bush-era interrogators by arguing that a lack of criminal prosecution is not a moral exoneration.[3]

US officials' varied responses to torture allegations is part of a larger story about the link between international law and domestic politics. International relations scholars often posit that domestic and international backlash can encourage compliance with international rules. In the domestic arena, much of this work focuses on how interest groups and civil society organizations mobilize to support compliance or discipline governments that fail to meet their obligations (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Dai, 2007; Simmons, 2009). Others argue that that international law has a direct effect on public opinion (Wallace, 2013; Chaudoin, 2014; Kreps & Wallace, 2016), leading constituents to punish their government for non-compliance (Lupu & Wallace, 2019; Kim, 2019b).

Yet both international rules and government responsibility are subject to significant interpretational ambiguity. Governments do not simply passively accept allegations of non-compliance; rather, they offer public defenses designed to shape the public's interpretation and mitigate political costs. Recent work demonstrates that how governments frame their behavior and justify violations can impact public opinion (Zvobgo, 2019; Chu, 2019; Strezhnev *et al.* , 2019; Brutger & Kertzer, 2018).

We argue that governmental responses to alleged international law violations are best understood as part of a broader strategy of image management. A government's public image is multidimensional, reflecting citizens' beliefs about different values and abilities.

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[3]Scott Shane. 30 August 2012. "No Charges Filed on Harsh Tactics Used by the CIA." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: `https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/31/us/holder-rules-out-prosecutions-in-cia-interrogations.html`.

And while high-stakes foreign policy crises may require governments to emphasize specific characteristics like credibility or resolve, less-publicized events provide opportunities to craft more varied narratives about behavior. A government's rhetorical defense may be designed to mitigate anticipated backlash against noncompliance, or it might be designed to leverage publicity for other political goals. Just as a cosmopolitan government may want to signal its intention to follow international law in the future, a populist government might use an alleged violation to remind supporters that it looks out for its own citizens first. By conceptualizing a government's response through the lens of image management, we offer an explanation for why governments "pick fights" over international law violations even when the allegation might have otherwise gone unnoticed by many citizens.

Our theory integrates international relations scholarship with insights from public relations and corporate communications. The latter traditions examine how organizations and individuals manage their public image with relevant audiences. Building on existing typologies of image management for organizations (Carpenter, 2010), we conceptualize a government's image as comprised of four primary traits: moral authority, performance, lawfulness, and allegiance to citizen interests. Transposing these four dimensions to the realm of foreign policy and public opinion provides a more comprehensive account of the political stakes for a government facing a foreign policy crisis. It is rarely possible for a government to shift public opinion on all four dimensions; instead, policymakers face tradeoffs that depend on the situation and the underlying values of their supporters.

We apply the concept of image management to the study of international law and public opinion. We offer a typology of persuasive strategies that governments use to justify violating international legal commitments. We distinguish strategies by the degree of antagonism that they exhibit toward the relevant international regime. *Atonement* strategies acknowledge the authority of the international regime and underscore the state's commitment to its international obligations. *Disassociation* strategies shift blame by distancing the government

from the violation. *Attack* strategies challenge the legitimacy of international law or portray it as incompatible with national interests.

These strategies shift citizens' beliefs about distinct aspects of the government's image. Atonement strategies, for example, signal a commitment to international law; we therefore expect them to improve the government's image for lawfulness. Attack strategies disparage the regime and reduce the government's lawfulness image, but may help bolster perceptions of allegiance to citizens. Finally, disassociation strategies should enhance expectations of future compliance but diminish perceptions of the government's performance. Each strategy's overall effect on public support depends on citizens' underlying values.

We test our argument in a survey experiment examining international law violations across the torture, trade, and chemical weapons regimes. These issue areas vary with respect to normative power and domestic political significance, and thus contribute to the generalizability of our findings. In a nationally representative survey of American respondents, we show how allegations of international law violations provide opportunities for governments to engage in image management. Across issue areas, rhetorical defenses shift respondent beliefs about different aspects of a government's image. While all strategies translate into higher levels of support for the government, they appeal to distinct audiences with varying foreign policy values.

Our findings have important implications for governmental incentives for compliance, as well as the link between foreign policy rhetoric and public support. We show that many different types of defenses can mitigate—though not completely eliminate—damage to the government's image. Crucially, these overall effects mask meaningful variation among the dimensions of government image and across the citizenry. Scholarship on the domestic mechanisms supporting compliance must grapple with this variation to understand when and how leaders can shirk non-compliance costs

Our argument also has implications for constructivist work on rhetoric and legitimation.

The consequences of non-compliance depend in part on a violation's stigma, which is socially constructed. But in an age where citizens maintain not just different values, but separate understandings of basic facts, violations may have polarized impacts. This suggests leaders with anti-globalist supporters will often have domestic political incentives to ignore treaties and even highlight violations, while leaders with cosmopolitan supporters will be more constrained. Global populism may thus pose a prolonged threat to international cooperation, even absent populist leaders.

2   International Law and Domestic Audiences

International legal commitments can shape domestic politics through many channels. Domestic interest groups and civil society organizations may mobilize to support compliance on issues like the environment (Raustiala, 1997; Von Stein, 2008; Dai, 2007) and human rights (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Simmons, 2009; Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui, 2005; Risse & Sikkink, 1999).[4] Opposition parties can capitalize on public disapproval of foreign policy actions, using unpopular policy choices to critique a leader's broader executive agenda (Kertzer, 2016). International commitments thus shape internal political debate, and in turn, influence how a government translates its policy agenda into law.

International law also affects domestic policy preferences. Kim (2019a) finds that international legal commitments are associated with greater support for compliance among political elites. Others find similar results among domestic constituents, with studies showing international law can shape public support for trade policies (Chaudoin, 2014; Powers, 2022), refugee admissions (Strezhnev *et al.* , 2019), drone strikes (Kreps & Wallace, 2016), treatment of POWs (Chu, 2019), solitary confinement (Chilton, 2014), government repression

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[4]Interest groups may also mobilize against international rules (Downs & Rocke, 1995; Rosendorff & Milner, 2001) or push in both directions (Chaudoin, 2016).

(Lupu & Wallace, 2019), and the use of torture (Wallace, 2013).[5]

Proponents of international cooperation view these findings as promising evidence that violations generate domestic political costs, encouraging governments to comply with their commitments.[6] Existing work varies in the hypothesized mechanisms. International legal commitments may influence citizen value structures (Simmons, 2009), while violations may signal a leader is irresponsible (Fang, 2008) or shift beliefs about future compliance in other issue areas (Kim, 2019b).

Related research on audience costs features similar debates. Audience cost theory argues that citizens punish leaders who renege on public foreign policy commitments (Fearon, 1994; Smith, 1998; Trager & Vavreck, 2011). But there is substantial disagreement regarding the specific inferences that citizens draw when governments "back down." Scholars point to individual views about the importance of the country's national honor or its international reputation, or general preferences for consistency between word and deed (Tomz, 2007a; Levy *et al.*, 2015). Others suggest citizens are drawing judgments about more specific leader traits such as competence (Levendusky & Horowitz, 2012) or belligerence (Kertzer & Brutger, 2016). While each of these mechanisms could reduce political support for governments, existing work lacks a unified framework connecting foreign policy commitments to citizens' underlying values and policy preferences.

Theorizing about the effect of international agreements on domestic attitudes is complicated by rule ambiguity and uncertainty. Consider the chain of events that must occur for violations to reduce domestic political support. First, international organizations or other actors must identify and publicly reveal a violation of international rules. Second,

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[5]Though Chilton & Versteeg (2016) find that violations of torture law does not shift public support.

[6]This domestic channel complements international reputational effects as a force for sustaining compliance (Keohane, 1984; Tomz, 2007b; Morrow, 2007).

constituents must interpret this information in a way that attributes responsibility to the violating state (Mercer, 1996). Third, domestic audiences must adjust their beliefs about one or more dispositional characteristics of the non-compliant government. This updating process takes place in a noisy environment with large volumes of potentially competing information.[7] Finally, once beliefs are updated, citizens must adjust their behavior in ways that generate costs for the non-compliant government.

While individual links in this chain have received significant scholarly attention,[8] the process of interpreting violations deserves further scrutiny. Both rationalist and constructivist accounts of belief formation justify a focus on the interpretation stage. Formal models of "cheap talk" communication suggest that citizens' inferences depend on the perceived bias of the actor sending the signal (Crawford & Sobel, 1982). Governments can contest violations by challenging the impartiality of the international regime, or by issuing their own "jamming" messages that contradict the allegation (Minozzi, 2011; Minozzi & Woon, 2016).

Constructivist accounts highlight how contested social processes give meaning to violations. Scholarship on narrative, legitimation, and norm evasion describes how states use language and ideas to shape reactions to their behavior. Political rhetoric can build support for foreign policy initiatives (Goddard & Krebs, 2015; Krebs, 2015), and legitimation strategies can reduce backlash against flagrant transgressions. Goddard (2015), for example, describes how Hitler justified German territorial expansion with appeals to shared norms such as self-determination. In other cases, leaders exploit the ambiguity of international

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[7]Downs & Jones (2002) argue that shifts in beliefs following violations are smaller than commonly believed.

[8]Carnegie & Carson (2018) and Terman & Voeten (2018) examine the political incentives associated with revealing violations. Others focus on the mode of information transmission, arguing that ratings and indices increase political effects (Kelley & Simmons, 2015; Cooley & Snyder, 2015; Kelley, 2017; Morse, 2019, 2022).

law to claim technical compliance even while violating the underlying norm (Búzás, 2018). Such theories suggest that the consequences of rule violations depend on how violators respond to the stigma of non-compliance (Adler-Nissen, 2014) and how others interpret the non-compliant behavior (Bull, 1977; Kratochwil & Ruggie, 1986). We build on these and other recent studies that investigate how governments frame their behavior to shape public opinion (Zvobgo, 2019; Chu, 2019; Strezhnev *et al.*, 2019; Brutger & Kertzer, 2018).

3 A Theory of Image Management

The domestic politics of international law violations can be usefully analyzed through the broader lens of governmental image management. Individual attitudes toward a government depend on a citizen's underlying values and beliefs. While allegations of bad behavior can pose a threat to a government's image, they also offer an opportunity for governments to shape individual beliefs about a government's characteristics. A government may refute a violation directly or attempt to shift blame for its behavior. Conversely, it may attack the international rules themselves, using the violation to highlight how the government prioritizes the welfare of its own citizens over international commitments.

We focus our analysis on the period after a state has been accused of non-compliant behavior. We assume that an alleged violation has the potential to affect how citizens view their government; however, the specific direction and nature of this effect will depend on the context of the violation and on citizen preferences. Notably, we do not argue that international law violations are inherently politically salient for domestic audiences. Instead, our theory describes how violations create opportunities for governments to shift perceptions of their underlying strengths and vulnerabilities. Contestation over international law thus becomes a strategy for shaping constituent beliefs about the government.

Allegations of non-compliance trigger a process of image management, visualized in Fig-
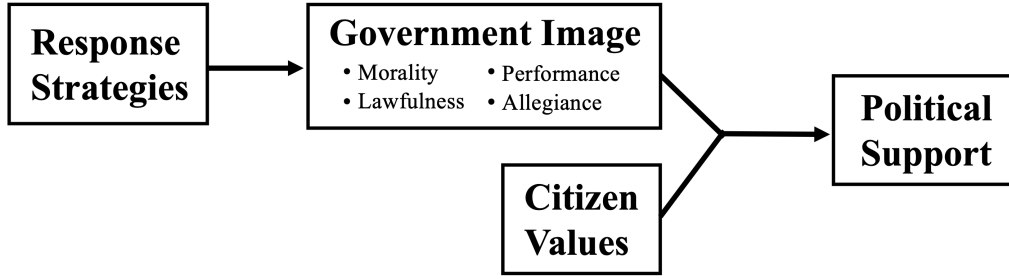
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Figure 1: *The Process of Image Management following International Law Violations.*

ure 1. First, the government selects among several possible response strategies. A government may apologize for an instance of non-compliance or shift blame to other actors. It can also opt for a strategy of strategic silence, in which the government ignores the allegation in the hopes of minimizing political backlash.

Second, domestic constituents update their assessments of the government. This changes the government's *image*, which we define as perceptions of a government's conduct, motives, and disposition.[9] A key aspect of our conceptualization is that a government's image is multidimensional, reflecting the varied and potentially independent judgments a citizen can reach about different government traits.

Third, citizens have heterogeneous underlying values regarding the "ideal" traits a government should exhibit. Some constituents prioritize competence in carrying out governmental functions, while others place a high weight on honesty or allegiance to citizen interests. These values are likely to be correlated with citizens' political ideology and approach to foreign policy. Fourth, the government's image and citizen values jointly determine the level of domestic political support among constituents. Put simply, citizens vote for political leaders who successfully project an image that they find attractive.

Image management is the process of shaping citizen attitudes to optimize political sup-

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[9]Benoit (2020, p.305) writes that an image is "a perception that develops out of what the organization says or does as well as by what others say about the organization and how others behave toward it."

port. Governments anticipate the chain of events in Figure 1, subject to some uncertainty over citizen beliefs and values, and select response strategies accordingly. Governments seek to manage their public image rather than citizen values because the latter are fixed in the short term. Governments can strategically shape the interpretation of key events but will have difficulty manipulating underlying values. Instead, a government focuses on shaping estimates of its own responsibility, the perceived offensiveness of the violation, or other judgments about its behavior (Benoit, 2015).

The theoretical process we describe is both parsimonious and adaptable. It unifies two important findings from the literature on international law and domestic politics: the susceptibility of citizens to strategic framing effects and the multidimensional nature of public attitudes regarding foreign policy behavior. As we explain below, the concept of image management also opens up significantly more space for political contestation than the traditional constituency-driven domestic compliance mechanism.

3.1 Response Strategies and Framing Effects

Governments have political incentives to respond to allegations of international law violations. An allegation may represent a direct threat to a government's image, or it may serve as an opportunity for a government to reinforce select characteristics among key supporters. Regardless of their motivation, governments are not idle observers who passively accept accusations of non-compliance. Instead, they contextualize violations to maximize political support. Policymakers recognize that non-response may appear as incompetence, or that political opponents may exploit an alleged violation to criticize a leader or the government. Personal factors may also push leaders to respond – individuals usually feel compelled to

justify, explain, or defend their behavior (Benoit, 2015).[10]

Specific responses will vary across governments; however, even officials with little concern for a country's international reputation often seize the opportunity to craft a compelling narrative. The Trump administration, for example, could have ignored World Trade Organization (WTO) rulings against the United States, but instead used them to reinforce its "America First" approach to international policy. When the WTO ruled in favor of China in September 2020, both Trump administration officials and Republican members of Congress publicly criticized the WTO and leveraged the violation to highlight their support for American workers and business.[11]

Political leaders shape their image by framing violations in ways that appeal to their supporters. Image management is intersubjective; a "smart" rhetorical defense depends on how the speaker perceives the audience's beliefs and underlying values (Benoit, 2015, 5). Existing research documents how framing effects — i.e., the selective presentation of information to promote "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, 52) — can significantly impact public opinion. Media or elite discourse generates framing effects by emphasizing a subset of relevant considerations, leading individuals to focus on these factors when constructing opinions (Druckman, 2001). Foreign policy issues may be particularly subject to framing effects, since political knowledge is often low (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Elite messages, however, may

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[10]If the initial allegation gets little coverage, a leader may find it strategically advantageous to ignore the event. If a leader expects ongoing news coverage, however, or sees an opportunity to use the crisis as a political tool, we contend that the government will craft some kind of response.

[11]Mo Yu, "US Officials, Lawmakers Blast WTO Ruling on US Tariffs on China," *Voice of America*, 16 September 2020, retrieved from: `https://www.voanews.com/economy-business/us-officials-lawmakers-blast-wto-ruling-us-tariffs-china`.

have differential effects on public opinion across issue areas (Guisinger & Saunders, 2017) and the effect of these messages may depend on individual-level moral values (Rathbun & Stein, 2020; Brutger, 2021; Rathbun, 2012; Rathbun *et al.* , 2016).

A wide range of framing strategies may shift citizen inferences about non-compliance. We classify response strategies into three categories, according to their stance toward the violated international regime. *Atonement* strategies accept the regime's fundamental legitimacy and underscore the state's commitment to its international obligations.[12] A government may apologize for its actions (Lind, 2011) and/or specify concrete actions to promote future compliance with the violated rules. For example, when the Swedish government confronted domestic backlash following a 2001 violation of international torture law, leaders adopted an atonement strategy. The government acknowledged responsibility for the violation, apologized, and compensated victims.[13]

Disassociation strategies distance the government from the violation in order to reduce perceived responsibility. These strategies are not openly hostile to the regime and may explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the harm caused by non-compliance. However, they seek to narrow a government's liability by arguing that actors without direct responsibility should not be held accountable. A government might protest that the violation was accidental, compelled by extenuating circumstances beyond its control, or caused by the unauthorized actions of low-level actors. An example is the Bush Administration's response to prisoner

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[12]This strategy is closely associated with the process of "stigma recognition" (Goffman, 1963; Adler-Nissen, 2014) in which deviant actors apologize for transgressions and internalize the value judgment of the audience.

[13]"Sweden pays 502,000 in compensation to exonerated terror suspect," *The Jerusalem Post*, 4 July 2008, retrieved from: `https://www.jpost.com/International/Sweden-pays-502000-in-compensation-to-exonerated-terror-suspect`, accessed on 22 June 2020.

abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Political leaders absolved themselves of responsibility, shifting blame to "disgraceful conduct by a few American troops who dishonored our country and disregarded our values."[14] Dissassociation is a particularly attractive strategy when a previous government has committed the alleged violation, as it allows a leader to enhance their image through an advantageous comparison to a previous government.

Finally, *attack* strategies seek to undermine an international regime's authority and legitimacy. They may involve denying the alleged violation while highlighting bias in institutional decision-making procedures or acknowledging the violation while arguing that the regime is unfair. These strategies frequently employ explicit appeals to national interests. Former US President Trump frequently used *attack* strategies to criticize the WTO (Carnegie & Carson, 2019). Attack strategies are the most confrontational since they challenge the principles upon which the regime is built.[15]

Each response strategy is modified to account for the context of a violation. Governments are more constrained when details of the violation cannot be kept secret from the public. This is illustrated by the Iranian government's response to allegations that it shot down a passenger plane in January 2020. The government first denied its involvement in the incident, but as new evidence surfaced, Iranian officials eventually acknowledged responsibility for the

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[14]Suzanee Goldenberg, "US to demolish Abu Ghraib jail and punish its general," *The Guardian*, 25 May 2004, `https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/may/25/usa.iraq2`, accessed 22 June 2020.

[15]By including attack strategies, we extend existing work on legitimation and norm evasion that generally assumes states do not refute the principle of complying (for an exception, see Adler-Nissen (2014) on stigma rejection and counter-stigmatization).

incident and apologized, while also blaming "human error."[16]

3.2   Dimensions of Government Image

Atonement, disassociation, and attack strategies are designed to change how individuals view the government. A government's image, like that of an organization or an individual, is composed of multiple attributes. Citizens form beliefs about political leaders and governments across a range of dimensions, such as whether a leader acts in the best interests of citizens or is competent in executing policy. In countries where significant political power is concentrated in a single executive, beliefs about the leader are often intertwined with general perceptions of the government's performance and competencies.

Adopting a multifaceted view of image sheds light on government incentives and constraints when responding to an allegation of non-compliance. While international relations scholars have long argued that governments accrue a reputation for compliance among other states (Keohane, 1984; Guzman, 2008; Simmons, 2010), domestic audiences are likely to consider this trait as only one aspect of a government's overall performance. The result is a much more complex information environment. International law violations can send multiple signals about a government's underlying traits, and the battle to frame the public's interpretation can magnify, reduce, or completely offset the political costs of non-compliance.

While a government's image could include many aspects of behavior, we draw on work from public administration to highlight four critical dimensions of public image:[17]

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[16]Farnaz Fassihi, "Anatomy of a Lie: How Iran Covered Up the Downing of an Airliner," *The New York Times*, 26 January 2020, retrieved from: `https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/26/world/middleeast/iran-plane-crash-coverup.html`, accessed on 19 June 2020.

[17]Our framework is adapted from Carpenter (2010), who cites four elements of a public agency's image: performative, moral, procedural, and technical reputation. See also Carpenter & Krause (2012).

- **Performance**. Is the government competent and efficient in its execution of policy?

- **Morality**. Does the government's conduct meet basic ethical standards?

- **Lawfulness**. Does the government abide by legal commitments, rules, and norms?

- **Allegiance to Citizens**. Does the government protect the interests of constituents?

While these dimensions are not exhaustive, they capture key priorities of domestic constituents as they weigh whether to support a political leader. They also consolidate specific government traits like competence (Levendusky & Horowitz, 2012; Levy *et al.* , 2015), belligerence (Kertzer & Brutger, 2016), and responsibility (Fang, 2008) into a single framework.[18] For example, a substantial body of literature has examined how a leader's perceived resolve can affect crisis bargaining (Weeks, 2008; Trachtenberg, 2012; Kertzer, 2016). Kertzer *et al.* (2021) find that citizens use capabilities, stakes, signals, and past actions to judge resolve. Combining these insights with our framework suggests that individuals will vary in how much they value resolve and that these underlying differences may affect views of a government's performance and allegiance to citizens. The key insight of this multidimensional approach is that governments can choose which areas to emphasize during a crisis response.

3.3 Citizen Values and Political Support

After hearing the government's justification and updating beliefs about its characteristics, citizens decide whether to support or oppose the non-compliant government. To make this decision, they assess the government's image in light of their underlying political values. While the government's image is subject to manipulation, values are fixed in the short term and thus constrain governments as they respond to public relations crises.

Individual values can vary considerably across the public: citizens may disagree about what constitutes honesty (a component of the government's moral image) or competence (a

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[18]For example, we would categorize competence and responsibility as aspects of a government's performative image, while belligerence is related to a government's moral image.

component of performative image). They may also differ in how they prioritize the relative importance of each dimension. This variation means that a shift in a government's image is likely to produce heterogeneous effects on constituent political support.

In portraying political support as jointly determined by a government's image and citizen values, we draw on communications scholarship on image repair. In this tradition, individual attitudes have two components: *beliefs* and *values* (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; Benoit, 2015). Beliefs (image) reflect an individual's understanding of facts. Values determine how individuals evaluate beliefs, which they may view as favorable or unfavorable. The two variables interact to form attitudes. The image repair framework translates readily to electoral politics, where constituents may have the same beliefs about a government but differ in values. For example, two citizens may have identical beliefs about US President Biden's underlying motives on immigration policy, but disagree in their evaluation of those motives.

In our theory, individuals evaluate multiple dimensions of a government's image in accordance with their values. Relevant considerations vary by the type of image management threat. For international law violations, we consider an individual's general foreign policy orientation to be a reasonable proxy for relevant underlying values. More specifically, we follow previous research in assuming that individuals have underlying preferences about the importance, effectiveness, and desirability of using military force, and that this "hawks/doves" divide will shape citizen assessments of the government's image.[19]

We acknowledge that government rhetoric is sometimes countered by competing narratives from activist groups, opposition parties, or international organizations. These countermessages may mute the impact of the government's image management strategies. However, political leaders maintain a powerful ability to shape narratives on foreign policy issues

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[19]For research on foreign policy orientation, see Wittkopf (1990); Holsti & Rosenau (1990); Kertzer *et al.* (2014) among others. We also examine other measures of citizen values in the supplementary appendix.

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where they enjoy an informational advantage (Levendusky & Horowitz, 2012), particularly when secrecy facilitates the construction of favorable narratives (Carson, 2018). We expect the effect of image management to be the largest among the general public and considerably smaller among activists and political elites with hardened views over foreign policy outcomes, although we only probe the former process in our empirical tests.

In summary, image management occurs when governments craft framing strategies to shape their image in the hopes of bolstering political support. Potential government responses to alleged violations (*atonement*, *disassociation*, and *attack*) target different dimensions of the government's image and often entail tradeoffs among them. Individual citizens weigh the government's image against their own values and shift support accordingly.

4   Testing Image Management

We test how the three response strategies affect a government's image and overall support in an original survey experiment. Our approach builds on recent work leveraging experimental methods to test the effect of international law on public approval (e.g., Chaudoin (2014); Chilton (2014); Zvobgo (2019); Powers (2022)). The advantage of a survey experiment is the ability to randomly assign the government's image management technique. If political leaders select response strategies that appeal to their supporters, we will only observe a subset of possible responses in observational data. An experimental setting also allows us to probe how a government's strategy choice interacts with individuals' foreign policy values.

The survey examines how image management shapes public opinion about political leaders. As discussed above, direct electoral pressure is one of two major mechanisms that encourage compliance within international rules. The second mechanism, in which domestic interest groups and civil society organizations mobilize in favor of compliance (Simmons, 2009; Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui, 2005; Risse & Sikkink, 1999), is not tested in the survey experiment. While we assume that domestic public opinion will affect the probability of

successful civil society activism, we do not test this empirically and encourage future work
to investigate such effects.

4.1 Hypotheses

Our theory predicts that non-compliant governments can shape their public image by framing
violations in favorable ways. We now specify expectations of how *atonement*, *disassociation*,
and *attack* response strategies will affect core dimensions of government image. In each case,
the counterfactual is a scenario in which the government is accused of non-compliance but
does not respond, forgoing the opportunity to engage in image management.

We expect *atonement* strategies to improve a government's image for lawfulness. These
responses acknowledge the legitimacy of international rules and underscore the government's
commitment to future compliance. Since they often include an admission of responsibility,
we also expect them to enhance a government's moral image (specifically its image for hon-
esty). On the other hand, an *atonement* response should diminish a government's image for
allegiance to citizen interests, since it explicitly emphasizes the government's commitment
to international obligations. We do not have strong *ex ante* expectations regarding effects
on the government's performative image. While admission of fault could lead citizens to
infer that leaders are incompetent, others may view *atonement* as a prudent, instrumental
response to protect the country's international reputation.[20]

> *H1*: *Atonement* responses enhance a non-compliant government's image for lawful-
>   ness and morality, but diminish its image for allegiance to citizen interests.

Disassociation strategies shift responsibility to other parties. By persuading citizens
that the government had no intention to violate international law, these responses should

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[20]Levendusky & Horowitz (2012) find that citizens often forgive a political leader's breach
of commitments if they see the action as a prudent response to changed circumstances.

enhance the government's image for lawfulness. When *disassociation* invokes an accident or unauthorized behavior by government agents, it may have a negative impact on perceptions of government competence — a key element of performance. Effects on morality and allegiance to citizens are unclear, but governments employing a *disassociation* response may experience a generalized image improvement if citizens attribute the violation to other actors.

> *H2*: *Disassociation* responses enhance a non-compliant government's image for
> lawfulness, but diminish its image for performance.

We expect *attack* strategies to bolster a government's image for allegiance to citizen interests. These responses are often explicitly crafted to elevate the national interest over international commitments, but with possible negative implications for perceived lawfulness. As with *atonement* strategies, citizen perceptions of the government's performance and morality could be subject to competing and potentially offsetting pressures.

> *H3*: *Attack* responses enhance a non-compliant government's image for allegiance
> to citizen interests, but diminish its image for lawfulness.

Finally, we investigate how changes in the government's image affect political support. In general, we expect positive perceptions to translate into greater support from citizens. However, these effects will be conditioned on citizens' foreign policy values. More hawkish individuals are likely to place a higher weight on allegiance to citizen interests compared to their dovish counterparts, making them more responsive to changes in this dimension of government image. On the other hand, we expect hawkish citizens to respond less favorably to the government's image for lawfulness.

> *H4*: Citizens with hawkish foreign policy values will experience a larger increase
> in political support when governments improve their image for allegiance, and
> a smaller increase when governments improve their image for lawfulness.

4.2   Survey Methodology

We test these hypotheses in a survey fielded in May 2020 to a sample of 2,529 US-based respondents.[21] Respondents are randomly assigned one of three issue areas—torture, trade, or chemical weapons—and provided with background information on the country's international legal commitments. The text below is for the issue area of torture.

> The United States is a member of the Convention Against Torture, an international treaty that seeks to promote human rights around the world. Under this agreement, governments pledge that they will abide by a set of rules prohibiting all forms of torture against people residing in their countries. They also agree not to transfer individuals to the custody of other countries where they are likely to be tortured. An international body of experts assesses compliance with the Convention Against Torture's rules.

Respondents then read a hypothetical scenario in which a future US government (in 2025) violates the treaty.[22] In the scenario, an expert review body associated with the treaty determines that the United States has violated international rules. We describe a plausible violation based on the specific obligations within each treaty. In the torture issue area, the government violates non-refoulement obligations by transferring an individual to a country where they are subsequently tortured. The trade violation involves the imposition of tariffs on foreign goods. The chemical weapons violation consists of failing to destroy a stockpile of chemical weapons. Respondents are told that the expert body's findings were summarized in a public report, generating a debate about the government's actions.

Respondents are then randomly assigned to a control condition, a comply condition, or to one of the three types of image management strategies. We include two versions of the *atonement* and *attack* response strategies to examine whether differences within types

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[21]Respondents were recruited via Lucid Theorem. See the appendix for sample statistics and survey text.

[22]We randomized the political party of the US president in the scenario.

generate different results. In the main text, we combine these estimates according to the 3-category typology presented above (disaggregated estimates are reported in Appendix Figure A1). The image management conditions feature an additional US government defense. In the *disassociation* treatment, for example, respondents learn that the government blames a low-level bureaucrat who was subsequently fired. Text for each treatment is below.

- **Atonement Response**

    - *Apology*: "the US government accepts full responsibility for the violation and apologizes to victimized parties"
    - *Recommitment*: "the US government reiterates its support for the agreement and commits to following the rules more closely in the future"

- **Disassociation Response**

    - *Unauthorized Bureaucrat*: "the US government announces the firing of a low-level bureaucrat who failed to follow US policy when committing the violation"

- **Attack Response**

    - *National Interest Appeal*: "the US government argues that its first obligation is to protect US interests, even when it contradicts international law"
    - *Legitimacy Challenge*: "the US government argues that the international body has no authority to pass judgment on the United States"

In the control condition, respondents learn about the violation but do not view a response from the US government. We compare control respondents with those in the image management conditions to assess the causal effect of each response strategy. Finally, we further include a *Comply* condition, where the expert review subsequently determines that the US government was in compliance with the agreement. This condition allows us to assess whether compliance always generates the highest level of government support, or if image management strategies can completely eliminate domestic political costs.

After the scenario, we measure respondent beliefs about the four core dimensions of government image. For example, we measure the government's image for allegiance to citizens by having respondents indicate their level of agreement that "the government looks out for

the best interests of its citizens."[23] To estimate the government's image for performance, we ask respondents whether it "has the skills to achieve its foreign policy objectives." Moral and lawful image are measured as respondent ratings of the government's honesty and likelihood of repeating violations in the future, respectively.

We measure political support by asking whether respondents would vote for the government in an upcoming election. Respondents select among "definitely vote for", "probably vote for", "probably vote against", and "definitely vote against" the government. For ease of interpretation, we transform the 4-point scale of government support to a binary measure that classifies those who will "definitely" and "probably" vote for the government as supporters. Following the first scenario, each respondent is randomly assigned to a second scenario from a different issue area and the process repeats.[24]

We measure respondents' foreign policy values with a pre-treatment questionnaire that estimates their degree of militant internationalism (MI), a common measure of hawkish foreign policy attitudes. We ask the standard battery of questions employed in recent work on citizens' foreign policy orientation (Kertzer *et al.* , 2014; Brutger & Kertzer, 2018). Respondents rate their agreement with a series of statements designed to solicit their underlying policy values (e.g., "the US should take all steps including the use of force to prevent aggression by any expansionist power"). We transform responses via principal components analysis and assign respondents a normalized "MI" score in $[0, 1]$.[25]

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[23]Respondents rate their agreement with on a 5-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

[24]The order of the scenarios does not affect the size or nature of the treatment effect.

[25]Militant Internationalism is one of several plausible measures of citizen foreign policy values. The appendix reports results using two alternative measures: "Cooperative Internationalism" (CI) and partisan identification; additional untested measures like nationalism may also be relevant.

5 Results

5.1 Response Strategies and Government Image

We begin by testing how the image management strategies affect the core dimensions of government image. Figure 3 summarizes the effect of each response strategy on perceptions of the government's morality, lawfulness, allegiance to citizens, and performance. Estimates reflect the difference in respondent ratings between the control group (no government response) and the three treatment categories (*atonement*, *disassociation*, and *attack* responses).

The top panel displays the treatment effect of the *atonement* response strategy. Consistent with theoretical expectations, governments that employ this strategy significantly increase their image for lawfulness. Respondent expectations of the government's likelihood of future compliance – our measure for lawfulness in the context of international law – increase by nearly half a point on the five-point scale, compared to the control condition. Notably, the atonement treatment reduces the likelihood that respondents assess the government as "extremely" or "somewhat" likely to violate international law in the future from over 60% to 45%. This response strategy also substantially enhances the government's moral image, consistent with H1. However, we do not observe the anticipated decline in the government's image for allegiance to citizens. In fact, perceptions of both government allegiance and performance increase in comparison to the control group.[26]

The middle panel shows estimates for the *disassociation* response strategy. We hypothesized that *disassociation* should enhance the government's image for lawfulness and diminish its image for performance. Our results provide partial support for *H2*. Disassociation generates a statistically significant increase in respondent perceptions of government lawfulness,

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[26]Appendix Figure A1 reports separate estimates for the two versions of atonement strategy; while most effects are very similar, the addition of an apology creates a substantially larger increase in the government's moral image.
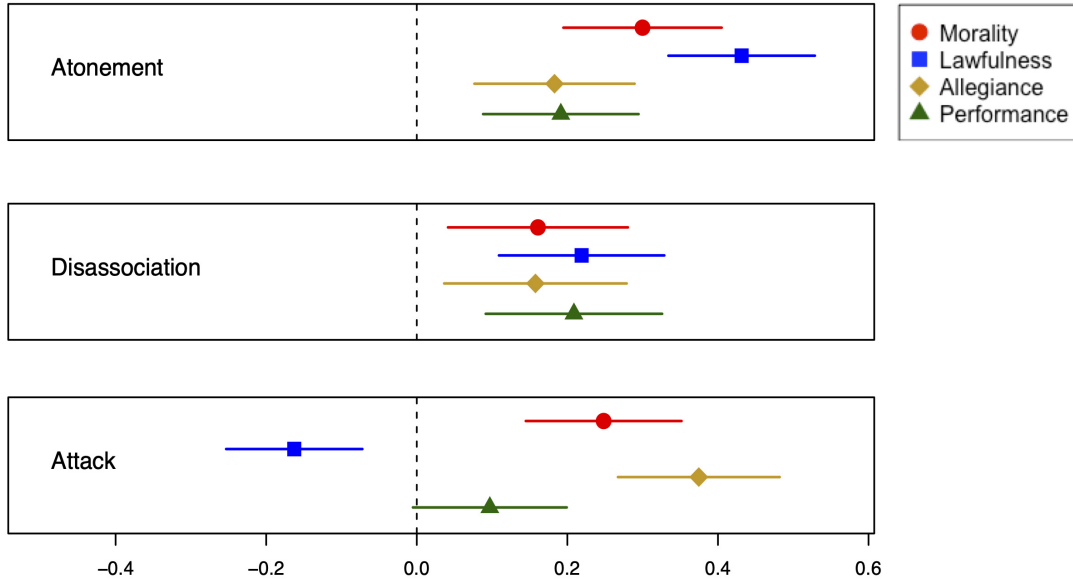
Figure 2: *Effect of Response Strategies on Government Image*: The figure shows the treatment effect of each image management strategy on the four dimensions of government image, compared to the control condition (international law violation with no government response). Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals are displayed for each treatment

though the strategy is substantively less effective than *atonement* in this regard. It also bolsters the government's image across the other three dimensions. It appears that the *disassociation* response is successful in diffusing blame in a general matter, reducing a range of negative inferences that citizens would otherwise associate with non-compliance.

Finally, the bottom panel presents effects of the *attack* response strategy. Results differ dramatically from the previous two strategies in two ways. *Attack* is uniquely effective at enhancing the government's image for allegiance to citizens, increasing respondent perceptions on this dimension by approximately 0.4 points. However, the strategy comes with a stark tradeoff: the government's image for lawfulness declines compared to the control condition. These results are consistent with *H3*. *Attack* responses also increase perceptions of government honesty compared to the control condition. The estimated effect on perceived government performance is positive but insignificant at the .05 level ($p = 0.063$). Disaggregating results by the two versions of attack strategies reveals that appeals to the national

interest outperform legitimacy challenges in enhancing the government's image for morality and allegiance to citizen interests (see Appendix Figure A1).

The differences in effects across strategies underscore that governments face tradeoffs when minimizing political fallout from international law violations. Image management clearly shifts beliefs among respondents, but strategies vary in how they impact different beliefs. *Atonement* responses are the most effective at persuading citizens that the government will fulfill its legal obligations in the future, while *attack* responses optimize beliefs that the government has citizens' best interests at heart. *Disassociation* has a moderate, generalized effect across all four dimensions of government image.

To gauge whether treatment effects differ across the issue areas of torture, trade, and chemical weapons, we report separate estimates for the three issue areas in Appendix Figure A2. The effects of image management strategies are highly consistent across these diverse policy domains. Only *atonement* exhibits some weak evidence of heterogeneous effects: it is marginally more effective at increasing perceptions of government honesty in the wake of chemical weapons violations, compared to trade violations ($p = 0.10$).

While each response strategy enhances at least one dimension of government image, the best case scenario for a government is the *Comply* condition, in which respondents are told that a subsequent expert review determines the government did not violate the international rule (see Figure A3 in the appendix). This result suggests that even if governments can use image management strategies to mitigate the costs of violations, they still have political incentives to comply with international commitments. Governments weigh many factors, however, when calculating compliance decisions, and once a violation has occurred, this option is no longer available to them.[27]

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[27]We also note that the design of the *Comply* condition may inflate its effect, since the exoneration of the government after an initial accusation of non-compliance may constitute a distinct "vindication" effect.

5.2 Foreign Policy Values and Political Support

Our theory suggests that citizens' foreign policy values will condition the effect of the government's image on domestic political support. We now examine this second causal arrow in Figure 1. Because citizen values determine the relative weight attached to the government's image, values will interact with image to determine support for the incumbent government.

In our main specification, we proxy foreign policy values with "militant internationalism" (MI), a composite measure of hawkish attitudes. In *H4*, we hypothesized that hawkish individuals (i.e., those with high MI scores) are more likely to support governments with a strong image for allegiance to citizens compared to low-MI individuals. We expect the opposite relationship with respect to the government's image for lawfulness.

To test these expectations, we analyze how each of the four image components interacts with MI to predict government support. We estimate a series of linear probability models to assess how a respondent's likelihood of voting for the government responds to the government's image and the respondent's foreign policy orientation. The coefficients on the interaction terms indicate whether individuals with more hawkish preferences prioritize different elements of government image in their vote choice. Unlike the experimental tests above, we are unable to randomly distribute MI scores or perceptions of the government's image among respondents. As a result, these tests can establish correlations consistent with our theoretical mechanism, but they are not causally identified.

Our results suggest that citizens weigh the multiple dimensions of government image based on individual values. Each element of image is a significant predictor of respondent support for the government in a hypothetical election. But there are meaningful differences in the way hawkish and dovish citizens evaluate the dimensions of image. Specifically, hawkish respondents (i.e., those with high MI scores) are substantially less likely to reward governments with an image for morality and lawfulness.

Figure 3 plots the effect of increasing the government's image for morality and lawfulness

Effect of Moral Image on Gov Support   **Effect of Lawful Image on Gov Support**
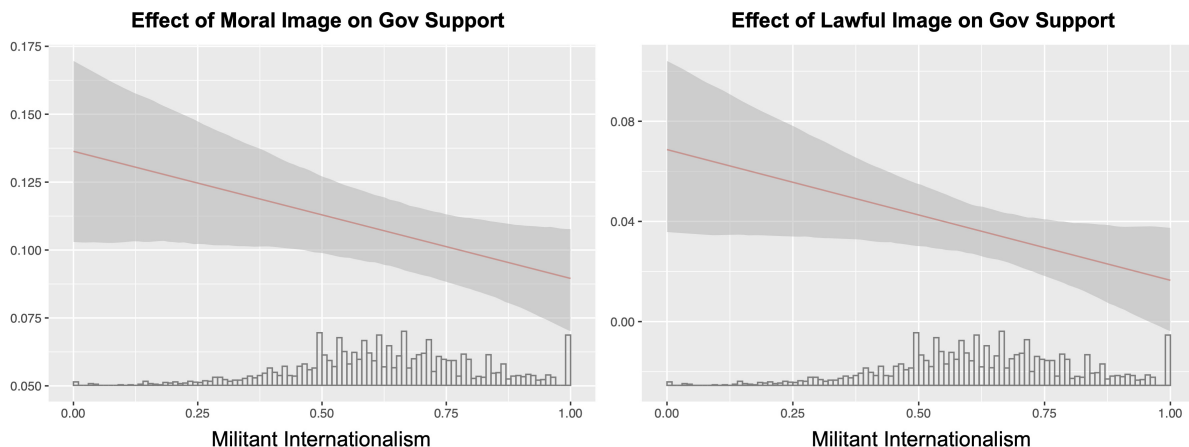
Figure 3: *Interactive Effects of Government Image and Militant Internationalism*: The figures shows the estimated effect of a one-unit increase in the government's image on the likelihood that respondents support the government in a hypothetical election. In both panels, estimated support decreases with militant internationalism (x-axis). Estimates and 95% confidence intervals are derived from models 2 and 3 in Table A2.

as a citizen's MI score increases. We report the full regression results in appendix Table A2. The other two elements of government image – performance and allegiance – do not strongly interact with militant internationalism. We therefore find mixed support for *H4*.[28]

Together, these findings suggest that government strategies may themselves generate heterogeneous effects among citizens with different value structures. By maximizing some elements of image at the expense of others, the response strategies will vary in their appeal to different constituents. We examine this in Appendix Figure A5, which displays separate treatment effects of the original response strategies for "hawks" and "doves."[29] Compared to

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[28]In tables A3 and A4 in the appendix, we repeat these analyses with two other potential measures of citizen values: cooperative internationalism and partisan identification. We find no evidence that cooperative foreign policy values condition the effect of government image on vote choice. The effects of party ID are similar to militant internationalism: Republicans are less likely to reward a government image for morality and lawfulness, compared to Democrats.

[29]Here, we define hawks as respondents who score above the 75th percentile on militant internationalism, and doves as those who score below the 25th percentile.

hawks, doves respond more favorably to *atonement* responses and the compliance condition.

The finding that citizens differ in their evaluation of government image is significant, because it is likely to shape how governments select specific image management strategies. A government's political coalition is not a random sample from the general population. Some leaders, for example, may rely on particularly hawkish citizens, donors, or interest groups for political support. During a political crisis, they are likely to choose strategies that appeal to these core supporters. This constrains their freedom to employ strategies like *atonement*, even if doing so serves broader foreign policy goals.

6   Conclusion

Both international rules and violations are subject to significant interpretational ambiguity. We theorize that how a government responds to an alleged violation of international law is part of a larger strategy of image management. Governments use accusations to shape citizen beliefs' about different aspects of their character and abilities. Drawing from scholarship on public relations and corporate communication, we conceptualize a government's image as comprised of four primary traits: moral authority, performance, lawfulness, and allegiance to citizen interests. We argue that policymakers face tradeoffs in improving different characteristics, and are also constrained by the underlying values of their supporters.

Our results, drawn from a survey experiment, shed new light on the link between international law and domestic politics. Image management can take many different forms, and each distinct response strategy is likely to affect a government's image in different ways. By highlighting the causal chain between response strategy, government image, citizen values, and political support, we illustrate why international law violations can become politically salient, even when the issue at hand might be removed from the every day lives of citizens. Alleged violations are political opportunities for governments to shape their image

with supporters.

Our paper opens a promising new agenda for additional research. Future work should test the effect of image management strategies in the context of multiple competing messages by the government and opposition parties, civil society organizations, or international organizations. Additional theoretical development is needed to unpack how our observed public opinion effects might interact with other mechanisms of domestic political pressure such as activist mobilization. Finally, scholars of international cooperation can examine how image management strategies shape the resilience and perceived legitimacy of international regimes.

7   Acknowledgements

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Appendix

A.1: Survey Experiment Text

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three issue areas, where they received one of three introductory texts.

- Torture - *The United States is a member of the Convention Against Torture, an international treaty that seeks to promote human rights around the world. Under this agreement, governments pledge that they will abide by a set of rules prohibiting all forms of torture against people residing in their countries. They also agree not to transfer individuals to the custody of other countries where they are likely to be tortured. An international body of experts assesses compliance with the Convention Against Torture's rules.*

- Trade - *The United States is a member of the World Trade Organization, an international organization that seeks to promote free trade between countries around the world. Under this organization, governments pledge that they will abide by a set of rules to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably, and freely as possible. An international body of experts assesses compliance with the World Trade Organization's rules.*

- Chemical Weapons - *The United States is a member of the Chemical Weapons Convention, an international treaty that seeks to eradicate chemical weapons around the world. Under this agreement, governments pledge that they will abide by a set of rules not to produce, acquire, or use chemical weapons, and to destroy any stockpiles that they already may have. An international body of experts assesses compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention's rules.*

All respondents then read the same text:

> *On the next page we will describe a hypothetical situation that could take place in the future, involving allegations that a future US government violated these international rules. Please read the description carefully. After you have read about the situation, we will ask for your opinions.*

Respondents then received a description of a rule violation corresponding to their assigned issue area. We randomize the partisanship of the president who committed the violation.

- Torture - *Imagine it is 2025 and the United States is led by a [Democratic/Republican] president. The expert review body of the Convention Against Torture determines that the United States has violated Convention Against Torture rules by transferring an individual to be imprisoned in a foreign country known to torture prisoners. The foreign government reportedly tortured the individual after the transfer. These findings are summarized in a public report, which generates a debate about the US government's actions.*

- Trade - *Imagine it is 2025 and the United States is led by a [Democratic/Republican] president. The expert review body of the World Trade Organization determines that the United States has violated World Trade Organization rules by imposing tariffs, which discourages consumers from buying goods from other countries. These findings are summarized in a public report, which generates a debate about the US government's actions.*

- Chemical Weapons - *Imagine it is 2025 and the United States is led by a [Democratic/Republican] president. The expert review body of the Chemical Weapons Convention determines that the United States has violated Chemical Weapons Convention rules by failing to destroy its stockpiles of chemical weapons. These findings are summarized in a public report, which generates a debate about the US government's actions.*

After learning of the violation, respondents are randomly assigned to one of the following conditions:

- Control (No additional information provided)

- Atonement 1: Recommitment - *In response to the report, the US government reiterates its support for the agreement and commits to following the rules more closely in the future.*

- Atonement 2: Apology - *In response to the report, the US government accepts full responsibility for the violation and apologizes to victimized parties.*

- Disassociation - *In response to the report, the US government announces the firing of a low-level bureaucrat who failed to follow US policy when committing the violation.*

- Attack 1: National interest appeal - *In response to the report, the US government argues that its first obligation is to protect US interests, even when it contradicts international law.*

- Attack 2: Legitimacy challenge - *In response to the report, the US government argues that the international body has no authority to pass judgment on the United States.*

We also include a compliance condition. Respondents who are assigned to this condition receive the following information (in the Chemical Weapons Convention case):

Imagine it is 2025 and the United States is led by a [Democratic/Republican] president. The expert review body of the Chemical Weapons Convention reviews allegations that the United States has violated Chemical Weapons Convention rules by failing to destroy its stockpiles of chemical weapons.

The review body determines that the violation did not occur and that the United States is in compliance with the agreement. These findings are summarized in a public report.

We ask additional questions to measure how respondents update their beliefs about different traits associated with the government. Specifically, we ask "If the situation happened just as we described, would you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

- The US government looks out for the best interests of its citizens.

- the US government is truthful.

- The US government has the skills to achieve its foreign policy objectives.

Respondents then select from one of five options, ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Responses are used to estimate the government's image for allegiance to citizen interests, morality, and performance, respectively.

We also probe respondent beliefs about future violations by the government. We ask (in the chemical weapons issue), "Based on what you read, what is the likelihood that the US government described in the scenario will violate the Chemical Weapons Convention in the future?" Respondents answer on a 5-point scale from "Extremely unlikely" to "Extremely likely." Responses are used to estimate the government's image for lawfulness.

Finally, we measure overall political support for the government by asking "Suppose there is an upcoming presidential election in which you have an opportunity to vote for or against the government described in the scenario. If the situation happened just as we described, how would you vote?" Respondents choose from "definitely vote for the government," "probably vote for the government," "probably not vote for the government," and "definitely not vote for the government."

A.2: Additional Results

Variable	Sample Proportion
Party ID	
Democrat	0.45
Republican	0.43
Independent	0.12
Age	
18-30	0.19
31-45	0.29
46-60	0.28
over 60	0.28
Education	
High School or Less	0.22
Some College	0.26
Bachelor's Degree	0.30
Post-Graduate	0.16
Ethnicity	
White	0.78
Black or African American	0.09
Asian	0.05
Hispanic	
Yes	0.10
No	0.09
Household Income	
< $25,000	0.24
$25-45,000	0.21
$45-65,000	0.18
$65-95,000	0.16
> $95,000	0.19
Region	
Northeast	0.20
Midwest	0.20
South	0.36
West	0.24

Table A1: *Survey sample statistics*

	DV: Intention to Vote for Govt				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Govt Morality	0.160***	0.137***	0.104***	0.106***	0.105***
	(0.025)	(0.017)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Govt Lawfulness	0.065***	0.033***	0.069***	0.035***	0.035***
	(0.020)	(0.006)	(0.018)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Govt Performance	0.035	0.048***	0.047***	0.049***	0.048***
	(0.023)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.018)	(0.007)
Govt Allegiance	0.072***	0.114***	0.113***	0.113***	0.108***
	(0.024)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.016)
MI Score	0.164	0.198***	0.202***	0.772	
	(0.107)	(0.099)	(0.075)	(0.099)	
MI × Morality	−0.086**	−0.048*			
	(0.037)	(0.023)			
MI × Lawfulness	−0.048*		-0.052**		
	(0.028)		(0.026)		
MI × Performance	0.020			-0.002	
	(0.035)			(0.027)	
MI × Allegiance	0.063*				0.008
	(0.036)				(0.023)
Observations	5,031	5,031	5,031	5,031	5,031
Adjusted R^2	0.343	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342

Table A2: *Effect of Government Image and Citizen Foreign Policy Values on Political Support.* The table displays results from linear regression models predicting respondents' likelihood of voting for the incumbent government in a future election. Standard errors clustered by respondent. Statistical significance is denoted by: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

	DV: Intention to Vote for Govt	
	(1)	(2)
Govt Morality	0.105***	0.095***
	(0.007)	(0.010)
Govt Lawfulness	0.032***	0.052***
	(0.005)	(0.008)
Govt Performance	0.047***	0.041***
	(0.007)	(0.009)
Govt Allegiance	0.112***	0.118***
	(0.007)	(0.010)
Republican	0.066***	0.108**
	(0.015)	(0.047)
Independent	0.0004	0.089
	(0.022)	(0.065)
Republican × Morality		−0.024*
		(0.014)
Republican × Lawfulness		−0.037***
		(0.012)
Republican × Performance		0.017
		(0.015)
Republican × Allegiance		0.022
		(0.015)
Independent × Morality		−0.016
		(0.025)
Independent × Lawfulness		−0.030
		(0.021)
Independent × Performance		-0.007
		(0.022)
Independent × Allegiance		0.017
		(0.024)
Observations	5,046	5,046
Adjusted R^2	0.344	0.346

Table A3: *Effect of Government Image, Party ID on Political Support.* Replication of Table 1 with Party ID (held out condition = "Democrat"). Standard errors clustered by respondent. Statistical significance is denoted by: *$p<0.1$; **$p<0.05$; ***$p<0.01$.

	DV: Intention to Vote for Govt	
	(1)	(2)
Govt Morality	0.107***	0.073***
	(0.007)	(0.022)
Govt Lawfulness	0.027***	0.033*
	(0.006)	(0.019)
Govt Performance	0.047***	0.054**
	(0.007)	(0.024)
Govt Allegiance	0.112***	0.120***
	(0.007)	(0.021)
CI Score	−0.225***	−0.274***
	(0.032)	(0.047)
CI Score × Morality		0.050
		(0.031)
CI Score × Lawfulness		−0.009
		(0.026)
CI Score × Performance		−0.007
		(0.033)
CI Score × Allegiance		−0.013
		(0.030)
Observations	5,039	5,039
Adjusted R²	0.349	0.349

Table A4: *Effect of Government Image, Cooperative Internationalism on Political Support.* Replication of Table 1 with Cooperative Internationalism. Standard errors clustered by respondent. Statistical significance is denoted by: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.
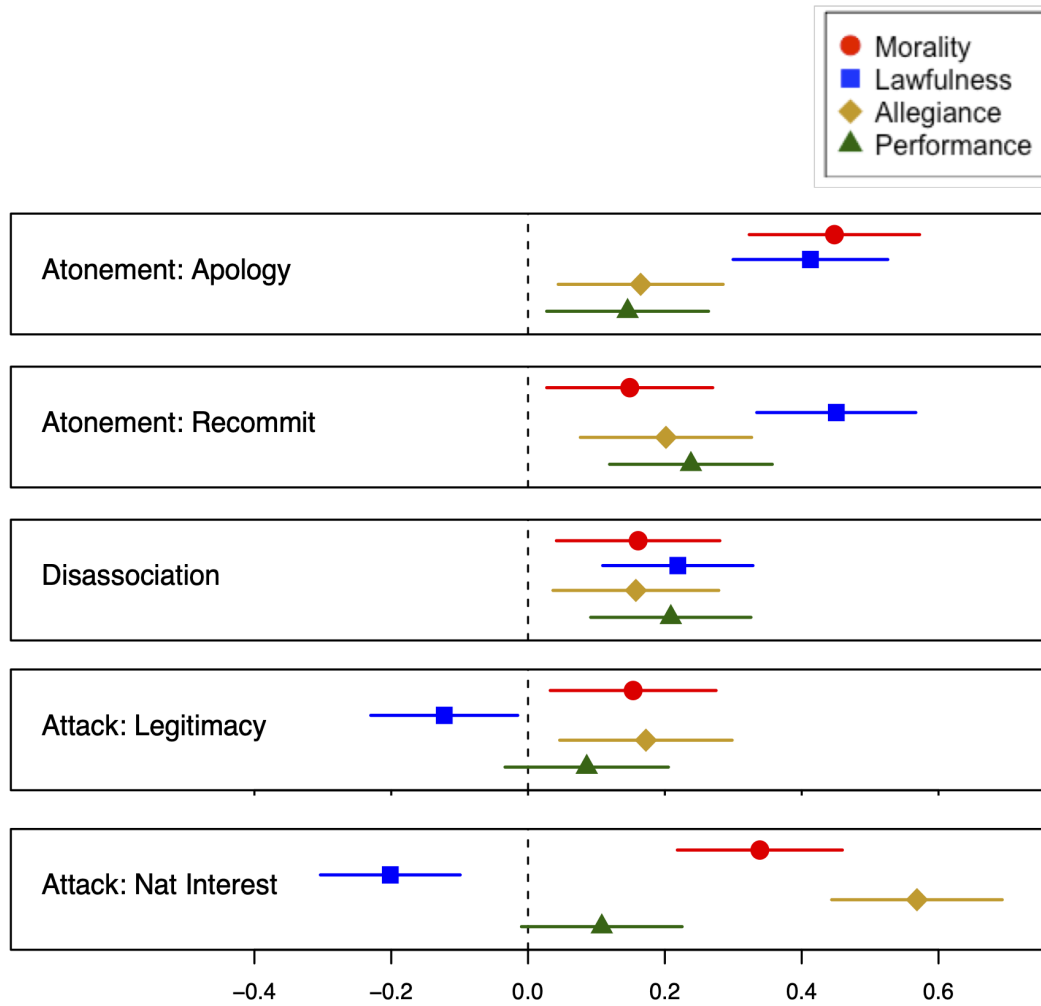
Figure A1: *Treatment Effects of Five Response Strategies on Government Image*: The figure shows the treatment effect of each response strategy on the core dimensions of government image, compared to the control condition.
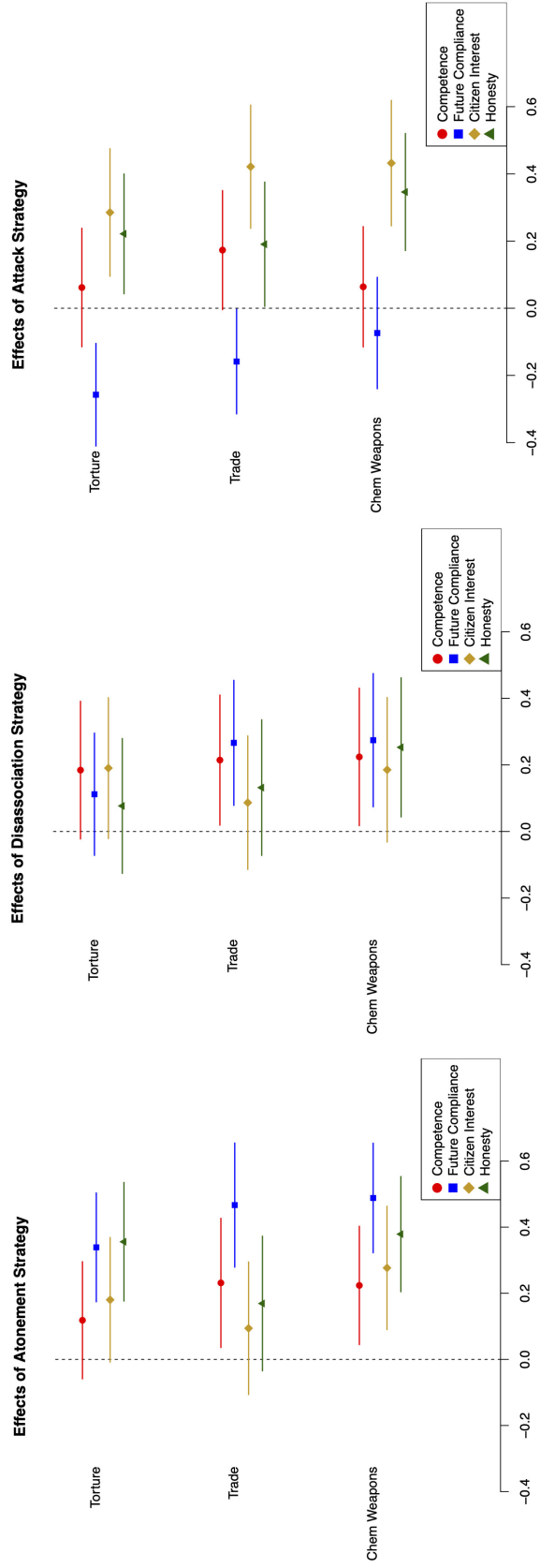
Figure A2: *Treatment Effects of Response Strategies By Issue Area:* The figure shows the treatment effect of the *Atonement*, *Disassociation*, and *Attack* strategies in the left, middle, and right panels, respectively. Within each panel, we separate estimated effects by the three issue areas: torture, trade, and chemical weapons. Estimates are highly consistent across issue areas. When we include the issue area as an interaction term, only *Atonement* has a statistically significant interactive effect at the 0.1 level, increasing perceptions of honesty in the domain of chemical weapons more than in the domain of trade.
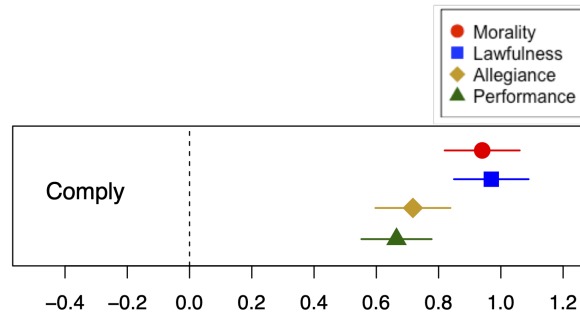
Figure A3: *Treatment Effects of Compliance on Government Image*: The figure shows the treatment effect of the *Comply* condition, in which respondents are told that a subsequent review determines the government has complied with its legal obligations, on the core dimensions of government image.
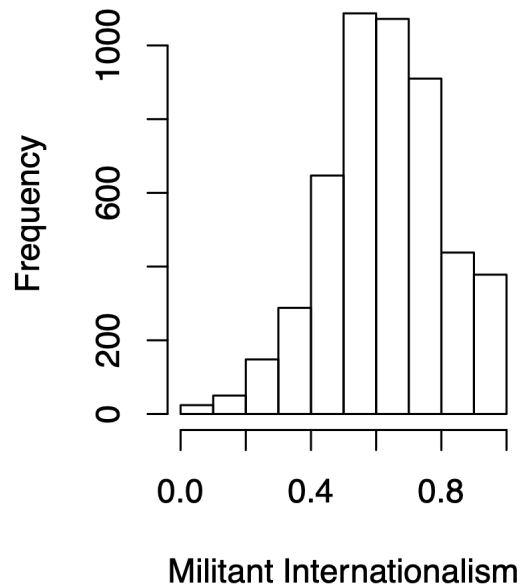

Figure A4: *Sample Distribution of Militant Internationalism*: The histogram summarizes the distribution of respondents on the dimensions Militant Internationalism.

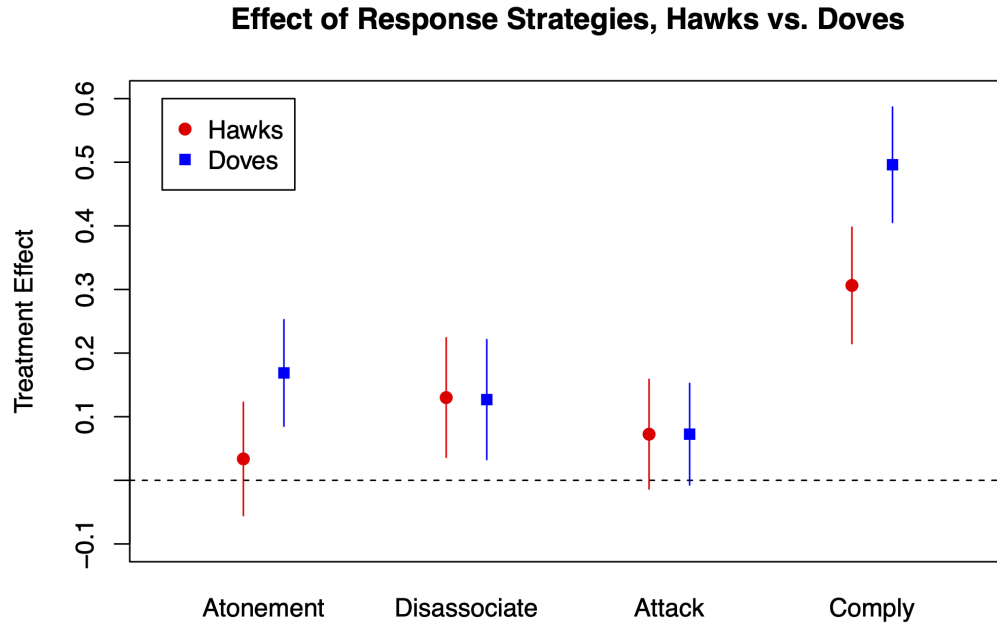**Effect of Response Strategies, Hawks vs. Doves**

Figure A5: *Effect of Response Strategies on Public Support, Hawks vs. Doves*: The figure shows treatment effects of the three image management response strategies (*Atonement*, *Disassociate*, and *Attack*) and the *Comply* treatment on respondents' willingness to vote for the incumbent government. We provide separate estimates for "Hawks" (i.e., those with MI scores in the 75th percentile or above) and "Doves" (MI scores in the 25th percentile or below).