

How Strategies of Secession Affect International Legitimacy: Experimental Evidence from the United States and United Kingdom*

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Abstract

Why do secessionists often engage in time-intensive and costly strategies, such as restricting civilian victimization and developing robust governing institutions? Existing research suggests that these strategies of secession have beneficial effects on domestic support and recruitment. We document an additional benefit of these strategies: international legitimization. We first develop a theory to explain how international audiences evaluate the legitimacy of secessionists based on two commonly used strategies of secession: violence against civilians and social service provision. While committing violence generally decreases legitimacy, we argue that secessionists can demonstrate sovereign capacity and reduce the negative effects of violence on legitimacy by providing social services. We then test our theory of secessionist legitimacy in survey experiments conducted in the United States and United Kingdom. Consistent with the theory, international audiences view groups that avoid civilian killings and provide services as more legitimate than groups that kill civilians and do not provide services, respectively. Further, we show that violent and non-violent strategies interact to shape legitimacy evaluations. Social service provision allows secessionists to reduce – and, in some cases, eliminate – the reputational costs of civilian killings. These findings provide a novel explanation for rebel state-building and have important implications for ongoing secessionist conflicts.

Keywords: civil war, terrorism, social service provision, governance, survey experiments

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In their pursuit of independence, Kurdish insurgents in Iraq have invested time and resources to establish many of the political and administrative trappings of a sovereign state. Iraqi Kurds have created governing institutions, engaged in foreign policy, and even held a democratic referendum on independence in 2017. The Iraqi Kurds' state-building efforts mirror those of other secessionist insurgencies, which often construct welfare and social service institutions (Mampilly 2011), abide by international law (Jo 2015), and comply with international norms concerning the use of child soldiers (Lasley and Thyne 2015) and terrorism against civilians (Fazal 2013; Stanton 2016). Moreover, insurgents often invest additional time and resources broadcasting these state-building efforts globally, including through the use of diplomatic channels (Jones and Mattiacci 2017; Coggins 2015; Huang 2016; Bob 2005). Although such behaviors may cultivate local support and aid recruitment, they also impede access to critical military resources (Kalyvas 2006; Wood 2010) while offering no guarantee of achieving secessionists' ultimate goal of international recognition.

Why then do secessionists often engage in these time-intensive and costly strategies? Existing research suggests that these "strategies of secession" allow rebels to secure domestic support and resources (e.g., Huff and Kruszewska 2016; Berman and Laitin 2008; Coggins 2015; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Cunningham 2013, 2014; Chenoweth and Cunningham 2013). However, these studies focus overwhelmingly on how strategies of secession affect *local* civilians, overlooking how strategies of secession affect the opinions of important international audiences (but see Huff and Kruszewska 2016). While scholars have raised the possibility that non-violent strategies may cultivate a positive image both domestically and internationally (Bob 2005; Mampilly 2011; Huang 2016; Fazal 2013; Stanton 2016; Jo 2015), no existing study tests the joint effects of violent and non-violent strategies on *international* public opinion. As a result, we know little about how international audiences evaluate insurgents who employ both violent and non-violent tactics — a common occurrence in secessionist conflict (Mampilly 2011; Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly 2014; Arjona 2016; Jo 2015; Huang 2016). This is especially surprising since secessionists actively attempt to shape attitudes far beyond the theater of conflict (Bob 2005; Huang 2016; Coggins 2015;

[Jones and Mattiacci 2017](#)).

In this article, we develop a theory to explain how international audiences evaluate the legitimacy of secessionist insurgencies. We focus on secessionist rebels because they are especially reliant on the international system for material resources and political support ([Coggins 2011](#); [Mampilly 2011](#); [Fazal 2013](#); [Jo 2015](#); [Huang 2016](#)), and we limit our analysis to two commonly used strategies of secession — avoidance of civilian predation ([Kalyvas 2006](#); [Fazal 2013](#); [Fortna 2015](#)) and social service provision ([Mampilly 2011](#); [Arjona 2016](#); [Stewart 2017](#)) — affect international legitimacy evaluations. While we expect that groups that kill civilians will generally be viewed as less legitimate than groups that avoid targeting civilians, we argue that the magnitude of this negative violence effect will depend on groups' record of service provision — in particular, whether groups provide no services, services only to supporters (i.e., restrictive provision), or services to both supporters and those outside the rebel group (i.e., extensive provision). The key rationale is that avoiding civilian targeting and service provision demonstrates state-like behavior, which in turn cultivates legitimacy for insurgencies that seek to govern as sovereign states. As a result, insurgents that do not provide social services fail to demonstrate sovereign capacity and thus pay a high price for civilian killings.

We test our theory with survey experiments in the United States and United Kingdom. The experiments, which resemble news media coverage of international insurgencies (e.g., [Hammer 2016](#); [Fuller 2012](#); [Wax 2016](#); [Gray 2007](#)), randomize the information provided about real-life international secessionists' record of service provision and violence against civilians before measuring multiple dimensions of legitimacy. We find that groups that avoid killing civilians and groups that provide social services are viewed as more legitimate than groups targeting civilians and groups that do not provide services, respectively. Moreover, we find that violent and non-violent behaviors interact to shape international evaluations of legitimacy: while international audiences view groups that use indiscriminate violence as less legitimate than groups that avoid using indiscriminate violence, this negative violence effect is reduced — and in some cases eliminated — when services are provided and as these services become more inclusive.

These results improve our understanding of the incentives facing rebels when deciding among potential strategies of secession. While our results suggest that state-building and non-violence cultivate international legitimacy, we emphasize that increased legitimacy may not lead to international recognition. Indeed, existing research suggests that dominant states privilege geo-strategic concerns, such as security and the preservation of international boundaries, when considering whether or not to recognize secessionists (Coggins 2011, 2014; Herbst 1989). As a result, secessionists who provide services or engage in non-violence may enjoy increased legitimacy but remain unrecognized by dominant states. Secessionists thus receive mixed messages from the international system. More research is needed to disentangle the processes through which power politics and legitimacy intersect to lead to international recognition and the creation of new states. As we discuss further, the mixed signals facing secessionists also have important implications for policy-makers responding to ongoing conflicts. If secessionists recognize that state-building and non-violence are unlikely to result in international recognition, they may abandon these behaviors, which could result in more violent civil wars with weaker governance apparatuses to mitigate humanitarian fallout that frequently accompanies domestic conflict.

Existing Research and Theory

Strategies of Secession and the International Community

Since World War II, secessionist insurgents have relied on a portfolio of strategies — both violent and non-violent — to achieve their long-term goals (Fazal 2013; Lasley and Thyne 2015; Fortna 2015; Jo 2015; Huang 2016). Although domestic political factors affect insurgents' choice of tactics, the international community significantly shapes — and in some cases determines — the violent and non-violent strategies that insurgents choose to deploy (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010; Fazal 2013; Lasley and Thyne 2015; Jo 2015; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Chenoweth and Cunningham 2013; Cunningham 2013, 2014; Stewart 2017). The international community is especially important for *secessionist* insurgencies — the types of groups we study in this article. International

political recognition is essential for accomplishing secessionists' ultimate goal of establishing a sovereign state, as sovereignty cannot be achieved without international recognition (Bob 2005; Fazal 2013; Lasley and Thyne 2015; Cunningham 2014).

To gain international recognition, secessionist insurgents attempt to legitimate themselves and their goals to sovereign states (Lasley and Thyne 2015; Fortna 2015; Jo 2015; Huang 2016). Heraclides (1990, 373) argues that international support arises from the belief in the justice and legitimacy of a secessionist insurgency's cause. In pursuit of international legitimacy, and in turn recognition, rebels engage in certain behaviors that they believe will be looked upon favorably by the international community and eschew other behaviors that they believe will be looked upon unfavorably.

Two of these legitimizing behaviors include complying with international expectations regarding wartime violence (Fazal 2013; Fortna 2015; Lasley and Thyne 2015; Stanton 2016) and developing robust governing institutions (Grynkewich 2008; Mampilly 2011; Arjona 2016; Stewart 2017). We consider both of these strategies in turn. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, the strategic use of violence offers many advantages: insurgents may be able to quickly extract resources or recruits and promote order and compliance in the territories they control (Kalyvas 2008; Wood 2010; Levi 1989). Sexual violence has also been shown to improve in-group cohesion (Cohen 2013). Terrorism can serve as a signal of resolve, commitment, and determination (Lapan and Sandler 1993; Hoffman and McCormick 2004), and can prolong civil wars (Fortna 2015).

However, committing violence against civilians entails substantial public costs and may undermine secessionist rebels' ability to cultivate international legitimacy. When civilians are victimized, public support for the perpetrators declines, even among people who may be likely to support the movement (Lyall, Blair, and Imai 2013). Because of these public costs, secessionists often avoid using terrorism and strategic violence against civilians (Fazal 2013; Stanton 2016). Moreover, limiting civilian victimization adheres to international expectations and norms of warfare, thereby increasing the perceived legitimacy of the organization and its goals (Fazal 2013; Lasley and Thyne 2015; Jo 2015; Stanton 2016). Likewise, secessionists who refrain from using

indiscriminate violence against civilians demonstrate a capacity to instill discipline and control among subordinates, contributing to an overall sense of order and rule of law.

Another commonly used strategy of secession that may promote legitimacy is the establishment of governing institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals; [Mampilly 2011](#); [Arjona 2016](#); [Stewart 2017](#)). The extent and inclusivity of rebel governance varies widely. Some secessionists offer services *inclusively* – to both supporters and those less likely to support the organization ([Wilson 1991](#), 94) – while others offer services *restrictively* – only to supporters. Many secessionist groups with territorial control tend to provide social services inclusively, which allows them to demonstrate economic viability and more clearly perform the role of the state ([Mampilly 2011](#); [Stewart 2017](#)). For instance, the POLISARIO of the Western Sahara claims to manage, administrate, and govern their territory in order “to prove that they are ready for self-rule – a practice-run for statehood” ([Organization for Statehood and Freedom 2010](#)). This sort of expansive service provision enhances secessionists’ domestic legitimacy relative to the incumbent state and may increase international support for the secessionist group’s long-term goals ([Mampilly 2011](#); [Grynkewich 2008](#); [Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov 2013](#)).

A large literature demonstrates that secessionist violence and service provision affect the attitudes and behaviors of local civilians who are directly affected by these tactical choices ([Kalyvas 2006](#); [Grynkewich 2008](#); [Mampilly 2011](#)). Importantly, existing research assumes or implies that these effects primarily extend to secessionists’ domestic constituency ([Weinstein 2006](#); [Berman and Laitin 2008](#); [Grynkewich 2008](#)). However, while there are clear domestic benefits to engaging in these behaviors, secessionist insurgencies frequently highlight these behaviors to international audiences that are uninvolved in the conflict and will never benefit directly from secessionists’ efforts. These public relations and propaganda campaigns are often aimed at citizens in foreign countries, who can lobby their home governments and, in some cases, send material resources to support the insurgency ([Bob 2005](#); [Coggins 2015](#)). For instance, Eritrean activists in the United States during the Eritrean war for independence visited the “liberated territories” behind the frontlines in Eritrea. Delegates recorded daily activities and published this information back home

in the United States. For activists abroad, such details about rebel governing institutions “were the most desired and coveted”; “by documenting every aspect of the [Eritrean People’s Liberation Front]’s state-like structure, [Eritrean activists] not only felt a sense of belonging to the nation, but also solidified their commitment to ushering it into existence” (Hepner 2009, 85). Other diaspora communities, such as the Tamils living in Canada or Irish Americans in the United States, have lobbied their host countries to support independence projects in their home countries, and politicians are often highly attuned to such pressures from ethnic communities (Saideman 1997).

Likewise, national liberation movements, such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Biafran independence movement, rely on global networks of advocates and academics in the United States, Europe, and Australia to lobby foreign governments and raise public awareness. Sudanese secessionists went so far as to hire public relations firms to help the organization craft a positive public image (Bob 2005). As technology has changed over time, secessionists’ diplomatic efforts now include appeals on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (Bodine-Baron, Helmus, Magnuson, and Wikelman 2016; Jones and Mattiacci 2017), where rebels highlight their governing efforts. Insurgencies even publicize and raise awareness of other rebel movements using these social media platforms: in October 2017, the English-language twitter account of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) tweeted their support of Iraqi Kurd’s referendum on independence, as well as a petition for recognizing the results of said referendum, and characterized Kurdistan as “model of tolerance and coexistence” and a “democratic, and secular society” that is “home to people from all ethnic and religious backgrounds” and a “guardian for equal rights with a universal constitution.”¹

Insurgents also make appeals to elites in foreign states. For instance, secessionists sometimes invite observers from powerful Western governments to view their extensive administrative and governance structures. Secessionists as diverse as the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), the African Party of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), and the Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN) have invited observers from the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Australia to

¹https://twitter.com/FARC_EPeace/status/915000005563490304

visit hospitals, listen to class lectures, or even travel on roads built by insurgencies ([Stewart 2017](#)).

Still other secessionists organize publicity campaigns consisting of press releases, interviews with sympathetic media outlets, or speeches in front of international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) or the United States Congress. For example, FRETILIN engaged in almost all of these behaviors over a brief two year period ([FRETILIN 1976](#); [Shackleton 1975](#); [FRETILIN 1977](#)). In its speeches to the UN, FRETILIN noted its state-building achievements in the territories it controls, underscoring the number of schools and hospitals it built. During the Cold War, newspapers in socialist countries frequently published editorials, missives from the field, and interviews with national liberation rebel leaders engaged in conflict abroad in their local papers, despite the fact that their readership had little connection to the conflicts at hand, in order to drum up worldwide support for certain secessionist rebels ([Bimbi 1982](#), 205). Though not a secessionist movement, Fidel Castro's first interview after surviving the failed landing of *The Granma* was not with a Cuban or Spanish-language newspaper, but rather with the *New York Times*. The front page Sunday morning coverage of Castro's movement was meant to win over the prized support of the American public ([New York Times 2017](#)).

Strategies of Secession, Legitimacy, and Recognition

Despite secessionists' decision to employ and highlight these legitimizing activities, international recognition often remains elusive ([Seymour 2017](#)). Some scholars argue that the strategic concerns of powerful actors – and not the perceived legitimacy of insurgents – are the most important factors that determine whether secessionist movements are recognized as independent states ([Coggins 2011, 2014](#)). For example, both domestic and international concerns led the United States to support a referendum for independence in South Sudan, spearheaded by the brutally violent and poorly governing Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) ([Mampilly 2011](#)). Likewise, FRETILIN gained recognition not at the height of its state-building and military achievements in the mid-1970s, but in 2002, after significant Portuguese lobbying brought about European support

for independence ([Weldemichael 2013](#)). Secessionist insurgencies' reliance on strategies that are costly in terms of time and resources is thus puzzling, especially as reliance on these strategies offers no guarantee of international recognition. Why then do secessionists continue to rely on resource- and time-intensive strategies that do not necessarily lead to victory?

We argue that secessionist rebels' continued reliance on costly strategies cannot be explained by domestic factors alone, though these factors are surely important and raises the question of why secessionist rebels propagate these behaviors internationally if they only affect secessionist insurgents' domestic constituency. At the same time, a lack of international recognition does not imply that secessionists' legitimation efforts have failed to influence international audiences. Rather, we contend that secessionist rebels deploy these strategies and continue to highlight these behaviors internationally because they do in fact cultivate international legitimacy. We argue that demonstrations of sovereignty and avoiding civilian targeting increase international perceptions of legitimacy, and that even if rebels victimize civilians, the penalties to perceived legitimacy internationally can be mitigated by providing extensive and robust governance. However, legitimacy may not be a sufficient condition for formal political recognition: rebels may gain substantial legitimacy in the eyes of international audiences while never receiving recognition.

Consistent with the expectations of secessionist rebel leaders themselves, avoiding killing civilians and providing social services facilitates the cultivation of international legitimacy (in addition to among domestic audiences, as previous research suggests). International audiences are sensitive to civilian victimization: historical public opinion data from the United States show that international publics generally "abhor" terrorism abroad ([Downes-Le Guin and Hoffman 1993](#), 16), and are skeptical of foreign military interventions that could involve high levels of civilian casualties ([Eichenberg 2005](#), 172; [Burk 1999](#), 56; [Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009](#), 256). By contrast, when secessionists limit violence against civilians, they comply with international expectations regarding norms of warfare and demonstrate discipline and order within their ranks ([Fazal 2013](#); [Jo 2015](#); [Stanton 2016](#)). This compliance with international expectations should generate international legitimacy for the secessionist movement; conversely, engaging in violence

against civilians should reduce international legitimacy.² We thus expect that:

H1: International audiences will view secessionists that avoid targeting civilians as more legitimate than secessionists that target civilians.

Similarly, social service provision represents a clear imitation of state behavior, especially when services are provided broadly, and as noted above, rebels propagate their service provision to the international community. These demonstrations of state capacity, and attempts to highlight them to foreign publics, increase the likelihood that international audiences recognize insurgents and their goals as legitimate (Mampilly 2011, 2015; Stewart 2017). Moreover, the more extensive the services — and thus the more state-like the rebel group — the more legitimacy that secessionist-seeking rebels will enjoy. Thus governance — and especially more extensive governance — will enhance the international legitimacy of a rebel group:

H2: International audiences will view secessionists are more legitimate as social service provision becomes more extensive.

Of course, these two strategies of secession are not mutually exclusive and are not deployed in a vacuum. Information about both violent and non-violent behaviors shapes public opinion simultaneously. Put differently, international audiences process multiple pieces of information about rebel groups, and civilian victimization alone will not determine how these audiences form legitimacy evaluations. For instance, despite nearly universal public distaste for terrorism, almost half of the American public reports that terrorists could have legitimate grievances (Downes-Le Guin and Hoffman 1993). Thus, even when rebels do victimize civilians, negative attitudes towards violence are not insurmountable, and can be mitigated by demonstrations of state-building or compliance with international expectations. We thus predict that:

²In formulating our hypotheses, we rely on a growing body of research which demonstrates that while citizens often lack knowledge of specific facts in international politics, they are capable of using predispositions and available information to form reasonably coherent opinions about foreign affairs (Reifler, Scotto, and Clarke 2011; Page and Xie 2010; Jenkins-Smith, Mitchell, and Herron 2004; Richman, Malone, and Nolle 1997; Chittick, Billingsley, and Travis 1995; Page and Shapiro 1992; Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Kertzer and Zeitsoff 2017). For instance, citizens in the U.S. and U.K. — the settings for our experiments — hold relatively stable foreign policy outlooks that inform their views on particular issues (Goren, Schoen, Reifler, Scotto, and Chittick 2016; Rathbun, Kertzer, Reifler, Goren, and Scotto 2016; Kertzer, Powers, Rathbun, and Iyer 2014; Reifler, Scotto, and Clarke 2011; Herrmann, Fetlock, and Visser 1999).

H3: Violent and non-violent tactics will interact to shape international perceptions of insurgent legitimacy, such that the negative effect of violence on legitimacy will be attenuated as service provision becomes more inclusive.

In summary, secessionist rebels continue to rely on time-intensive strategies, such as avoiding civilian victimization and service provision, precisely because these strategies cultivate international legitimacy.³ Yet, while these strategies successfully generate international legitimacy, secessionist movements still fall short of international recognition. We suggest that the point of tension is located, not at whether rebel strategies are successful in cultivating legitimacy, but at whether legitimacy leads to recognition. In other words, while “good” behaviors may lead to broader domestic and international legitimacy, international legitimacy does not necessarily lead to international recognition. Therefore, secessionist rebels receive mixed signals: secessionist insurgents are correct in that state-building and the avoidance of certain violent behaviors lead to greater international legitimacy. Because these “good behaviors” are actually effective in legitimating the goals of insurgent groups and secessionist organizations themselves, rebels continue to rely on the same costly legitimation processes. However, secessionist rebels may be mistaken in thinking that international legitimacy necessarily leads to success and recognition.

We test our hypotheses in the following section. If international attitudes do not respond to information about civilian victimization and state-building activities, the evidence would support the idea that secessionist insurgents’ legitimation strategies do not extend beyond the domestic community. If international attitudes only vary in response to information about civilian victimization, then this evidence would support the idea that only certain types of international legitimation strategies are successful. If, on the other hand, civilian attitudes toward secessionist rebel groups vary in response to information on both civilian victimization and state-building, this supports our argument that international legitimation strategies are successful in cultivating international legitimacy, but international legitimacy may fail to lead to recognition.

³As discussed, these strategies may also have important domestic functions, such as increasing legitimacy or aiding recruitment (Grynkewich 2008); these domestic effects have been studied in existing research and are outside the scope of this paper.

Data and Methods

Experimental Design

We tested our hypotheses with survey experiments in the United States and United Kingdom. The experiments randomize the information provided about insurgents' record of violence and service provision before measuring multiple indicators of perceived legitimacy (see [Huff and Kruszevska 2016](#) for a similar approach).⁴ This experimental approach allows us to isolate the effects of violence and service provision — both independently and jointly — on the perceived legitimacy of international insurgents.

Study 1 asked a sample of participants in the United States (N=605) to evaluate the Karen National Union (KNU) in Myanmar, and Study 2 asked a sample of participants in the United Kingdom (N=617) to evaluate the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in Ethiopia.⁵ Although international insurgencies are often covered in U.S. and U.K. media, we focus on low salience groups to minimize the risk that participants associate our treatments with particular groups ([Huff and Kruszevska 2016](#), 1777). Both the KNU and OLF are currently engaged in conflict, both are organized around an ethnic cleavage, and both are secessionists.

Both experiments used a 3×2 between-subjects design. All participants were provided with some background information about the insurgency, which covered its history, geographic location, and strategic objectives. Because all participants received this information, the analyses below consider how public opinion responds to variation in insurgent tactics holding information constant. The vignettes used in both studies are highly similar in length and style (see Appendix A). Participants were randomly assigned into one of six experimental conditions displayed in [Table 1](#).⁶ Following our theory, we manipulate two factors hypothesized to affect perceptions

⁴We opt for multiple measures to increase external validity and because there is no agreed upon method for measuring the concept (e.g., [Marquez 2016](#)).

⁵Participants in both studies were recruited using the Internet. For Study 1, we used Qualtrics to recruit a sample that resembles the U.S. population in terms of age, race, region of residence, and party affiliation. For Study 2, we used Prolific Academic ([Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, and Acquisti 2017](#)) to recruit a non-student sample (N=617) of United Kingdom residents. Study 1 was fielded in February 2016 and Study 2 in November 2016. Demographic information on both samples is provided in Appendix B.

⁶In both studies, randomization checks confirm that conditions were balanced on relevant pre-treatment covari-

Table 1: Experimental Design

	No indiscriminate violence against civilians	Indiscriminate violence against civilians
No mention of social services	Condition 1	Condition 2
Restrictive social service provision	Condition 3	Condition 4
Inclusive social service provision	Condition 5	Condition 6

of insurgent legitimacy: violence against civilians and social service provision. We discuss each experimental factor in turn.

Violence. While there are countless possible ways to operationalize violence, we focus on perhaps the most widely employed and discussed violent tactic: the killing of civilians (Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009; Eichenberg 2005; Downes-Le Guin and Hoffman 1993). As shown in Table 1, conditions 1, 3, and 5 read that the insurgency actively avoids harming civilians during its operations, while participants in groups 2, 4, and 6 read that the group targets civilians.⁷ The non-violent and violent treatments indicated that:

No violence: The [KNU’s/OLF’s] military strategy advocates avoiding the targeting of civilians at all costs. During the decades-long struggle for Karen independence, the [KNU/OLF] has meticulously avoided killing civilians.

Violence: The [KNU’s/OLF’s] military strategy advocates pursuing independence at all costs. During the decades-long struggle for [Karen/Oromo] independence, many civilians have died at the hands of [KNU/OLF].

Social Service Provision. The extent and inclusivity of insurgent social service provision varies widely. For instance, from 1945-2003, about 25 percent of all insurgencies that controlled territory provided inclusive services, while the remaining 75 percent of rebels provided no services, ates. See Appendix B for more information on covariate balance and robustness.

⁷All participants received information about the insurgency’s record of violence or non-violence. We made this design choice for two reasons. First, because violence is an extremely common feature of media coverage of international insurgencies (e.g., Powell 2011), participants may assume the group is violent unless told otherwise. Pre-treatment effects like these could bias the between-condition comparisons needed to test our hypotheses (Druckman and Leeper 2012; Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk 2007). Second, adding an additional level of the violence treatment would expand the design by one-half, significantly reducing statistical power.

or limited provision to active supporters only (Stewart 2017). We therefore manipulate not only whether the group provides services, but also the inclusivity of the group's social service apparatus. As shown in Table 1, conditions 1 and 2 were not provided with any information about service provision, conditions 3 and 4 read that the group provides services *restrictively* (i.e., to supporters only), and conditions 5 and 6 read that the group provides services *inclusively* (i.e., to supporters and opponents). The restrictive and inclusive services treatments indicated that:

Restrictive Services: The [KNU/OLF] provides a number of social services, including education and healthcare, in the areas where it operates. The [KNU/OLF] is the only service provider in these areas, and if residents cannot access the [KNU's/OLF's] services, they have no other way to obtain these services. For the past several decades, the [KNU/OLF] has provided these services only to civilians who are members of, or support the goals of, the [KNU/OLF].

Inclusive Services: The [KNU/OLF] provides a number of social services, including education and healthcare, in the areas where it operates. The [KNU/OLF] is the only service provider in these areas, and if residents cannot access the [KNU's/OLF's] services, they have no other way to obtain these services. For the past several decades, the [KNU/OLF] has provided these services to anyone, including civilians who will likely never become members of, or even support the goals of, the [KNU/OLF].

After reading the experimental treatment, participants answered three outcome measures that captured perceived legitimacy: the extent to which the group is a legitimate alternative to the existing government (1-7), the extent to which the group is capable of governing an independent state (1-5), and support for an independent state (1-7).⁸ We focus our in-text discussion primarily on the first outcome variable, though we present results on all three variables in the tables that follow. Question wordings for all dependent variables are provided in Appendix A.

Our experimental design reflects the range of insurgencies currently operating across the world. As shown in Table 2, there are real-world analogues for all six possible combinations of violence and service provision treatments. For example, as shown in the top left cell of the

⁸These interval scales allow us to examine how information about violence and service provision affects the strength of participants' legitimacy evaluations. To evaluate whether the treatments affect the probability that participants view insurgents as legitimate, we conducted robustness checks using dichotomized versions of our outcome measures (e.g., 1 if strongly/somewhat/slightly agree that the group is legitimate, 0 otherwise). Our results are substantively the same when we use dichotomous outcome measures (see Appendix D).

table, the Front for the National Liberation of the Congo (FNLC) neither commits violence against civilians nor provides social services. By contrast, Hamas is found in the bottom right cell because it commits violence and provides inclusive social services. As a result, our experiments offer insight into how citizens evaluate a wide range of real life insurgencies.

While our experiments are well suited to isolate the causal effects of violence and service provision on legitimacy evaluations, one possible concern is external validity. As [McDermott \(2011, 37\)](#) explains, “conducting a series of experiments that include different populations, involve different situations, and use multiple measurements establishes the fundamental basis of external validity.” Following this logic, we took several steps to maximize the external validity of our experiments. First, as mentioned, we recruited participants from two countries and asked them to evaluate two different international insurgencies. We can therefore evaluate the extent to which our results generalize across countries with distinct political cultures. Second, we consider how our treatments affect multiple indicators of perceived legitimacy. Finally, we crafted our treatments to resemble both news coverage of international insurgencies (e.g., [Hammer 2016](#); [Fuller 2012](#); [Wax 2016](#); [Gray 2007](#)) and the public statements of insurgents themselves. For instance, consider how the OLF describes its stance on civilian violence: the group’s website states that “OLF armed resistance targets the government’s coercive machinery, not innocent civilians. The OLF has an unswerving anti-terrorism stand and opposes terrorism as means of struggle to achieve the right of the Oromo people” ([Oromo Liberation Front 2017](#)). The website also highlights the OLF’s inclusive approach to non-Oromo people living in OLF controlled territory: “there are minorities who have distinct identity and culture of their own. Minorities in Oromia are economically, culturally, and politically closely linked with the Oromo people. The OLF recognizes and respects the right of national minorities in accordance with internationally accepted principles to develop their culture, administer their own affairs, enjoy equal rights in every field of activity” ([Oromo Liberation Front 2017](#)). Our experiments therefore capture how citizens respond to the types of information they may encounter in the real world.

Table 2: Real World Analogues for Each Experimental Cell

	No violence against civilians	Violence against civilians
No social services	Front for the National Liberation of the Congo (FNLC)	Kurdish Worker’s Party (PKK)
Restrictive social services	Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU/ZANU)	Mong Tai Army (MTA)
Inclusive social services	Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), Karen National Union (KNU)	Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE)

Estimating Treatment Effects

In both studies, we test our hypotheses by estimating a series of OLS regression models. The models regress each dependent variable on binary indicators for violence, restrictive service provision, and inclusive service provision; we also include interaction terms between violence and the two levels of service provision. The result is a series of models that take the following form:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Violent}_i + \beta_2 \text{Restrictive Services}_i + \beta_3 \text{Inclusive Services}_i + \beta_4 \text{Violent} \times \text{Restrictive Services}_i + \beta_5 \text{Violent} \times \text{Inclusive Services}_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

This model specification permits straightforward tests of our hypotheses. Hypothesis 1, which suggests that violent groups will be viewed as less legitimate than non-violent groups, implies that the coefficient on violence will be negative ($\beta_1 < 0$). Hypothesis 2 posits that legitimacy will increase as social services become more inclusive. Our models allow two tests of Hypothesis 2. The first is whether groups that provide restrictive or inclusive services are viewed as more legitimate than groups that provide no services (i.e., $\beta_2 > 0$ and $\beta_3 > 0$, respectively). A second, more stringent, test is whether people view inclusive service providing groups as more legitimate than restrictive service providing groups (i.e., $\beta_3 > \beta_2$). (Based on the theory discussed above, we are confident that restrictive and inclusive service providing groups will be viewed as more

legitimate than groups that do not provide services. However, we are agnostic about whether citizens will recognize the marginal increase in inclusivity from restrictive to inclusive and adjust their legitimacy evaluations accordingly.) Hypothesis 3 suggests that the negative effects of violence on legitimacy will diminish as service provision becomes more inclusive. Testing this hypothesis requires us to calculate the effect of violence conditional on various levels of service provision. These conditional violence effects can be calculated by summing the relevant coefficient estimates (e.g., the effect of violence among groups that provide no services is simply β_1).⁹ Because the significance of interactive effects like these is difficult to interpret, we follow [Brambor, Clark, and Golder \(2006\)](#) and plot the estimated effect of violence conditional on different levels of service provision and 95 percent confidence intervals.

Results

In discussing the results of both studies, we present three regression models (corresponding to our three outcome measures). We also present one plot for each study, which displays the interactive effects necessary to test our key hypothesis. Means and standard deviations for all variables in both studies are available in Appendix C.

Study 1 (United States)

Study 1 asked a sample of participants in the United States to evaluate the Karen National Union (KNU) in Myanmar. [Table 3](#) displays the regression results for Study 1. We begin by examining Hypothesis 1, which posits that violence will decrease perceived legitimacy. Looking across the top row of [Table 3](#), we see strong support for this hypothesis across all three outcome measures. Compared to the group that does not commit violence against civilians, the violent group is viewed as less of a legitimate alternative to the existing state ($\beta = -0.64, p < .01$) and less capable of governing an independent state ($\beta = -0.42, p < .01$); participants are also

⁹Among groups that provide restrictive services, this same effect is $(\beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_4) - \beta_2 = (\beta_1 + \beta_4)$. Among groups that provide inclusive services, this effect is $(\beta_1 + \beta_3 + \beta_5) - \beta_3 = (\beta_1 + \beta_5)$.

Table 3: OLS Regression Models Predicting Legitimacy Evaluations (Study 1)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Legitimate Alternative (1-7)	Capable of Governing (1-5)	Support Independent State (1-7)
Violent	-0.64*** (0.19)	-0.42*** (0.13)	-0.41** (0.18)
Restrictive Services	0.31 (0.20)	0.06 (0.14)	0.31 (0.20)
Inclusive Services	0.11 (0.19)	0.17 (0.13)	0.34* (0.19)
Violent x Restrictive Services	0.39 (0.28)	0.45** (0.19)	0.14 (0.27)
Violent x Inclusive Services	0.67** (0.27)	0.19 (0.18)	0.10 (0.26)
Constant	4.07*** (0.13)	3.19*** (0.09)	4.21*** (0.13)
Observations	605	605	605

Note: All independent variables are binary. Significance codes: *** $p < .01$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$.

less supportive of an independent state when told that the group is violent ($\beta = -0.41$, $p < .05$).¹⁰ These results suggest that committing violence against civilians has far-reaching negative consequences for perceived legitimacy.

We now turn to Hypothesis 2, which suggests that perceived legitimacy will increase as service provision becomes more inclusive. As discussed, the simplest test of this hypothesis is whether groups that provide restrictive or inclusive services are viewed as more legitimate than groups that do not provide services. As shown in the second row of Table 3, restrictive service provision increases all three forms of legitimacy, though the effects are insignificant ($p = 0.13$

¹⁰All reported p-values come from two-sided tests.

for legitimate alternative; $p = 0.64$ for capable of governing; $p = 0.12$ for support independent state). Similarly, the effects of inclusive service provision on three outcomes measures are in the expected direction, but mostly insignificant. The effect of inclusive services is largest on support for an independent KNU state ($\beta = 0.34, p = 0.07$).

As mentioned, a more stringent test of Hypothesis 2 is whether inclusive services have a larger positive effect on perceived legitimacy than restrictive services (i.e., whether $\beta_3 > \beta_2$). Across all three models in Table 3, we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no difference between these coefficients.¹¹ Collectively, these results suggest that although citizens may view service providing groups as more legitimate than groups that do not provide services, citizens do not distinguish between groups that provide services restrictively and inclusively.

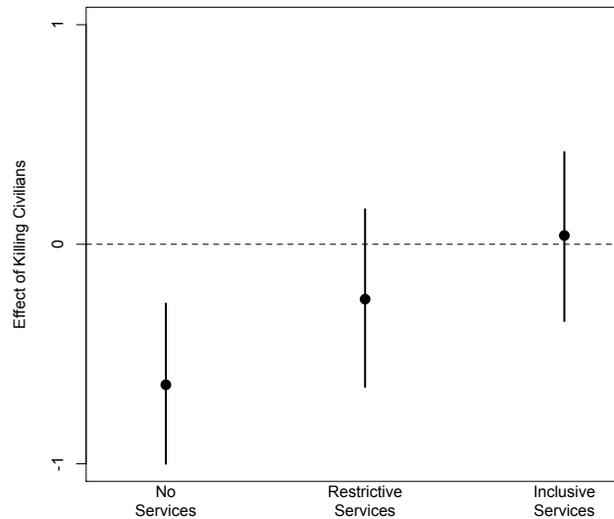
Finally, we consider our key hypothesis (H3), which posits that the negative effects of violence on legitimacy will decrease as service provision becomes more inclusive. As explained above, the effect of violence on perceived legitimacy can be calculated for each level of service provision by summing the relevant coefficient estimates. Consider the effect of violence on the first outcome variable: the extent to which participants view the KNU as a legitimate alternative to the existing state (first column in Table 3). The estimated effect of violence on legitimacy among groups that do not provide services is simply $\beta_1 = -0.64$. Among groups that provide restrictive services, this estimated effect is considerably smaller: -0.25 . Finally, among groups that provide inclusive services, the estimated effect of violence on legitimacy is actually positive: 0.04 .

These estimated effects of violence (along with 95 percent confidence intervals) are displayed graphically in Figure 1.¹² As shown in the left-most bar, the estimated effect of violence on perceived legitimacy among groups that do not provide services is negative and statistically distinguishable from zero (95% CI: $[-1.00, -0.27]$). By contrast, the estimated effect of violence is

¹¹The p-values are $p = 0.33$ (legitimate alternative), $p = 0.41$ (capable of governing), and $p = 0.88$ (support independent state).

¹²In both studies, we test each conditional violence effect against a null of no effect. We opt for this straightforward test because it allows us to examine our key prediction that groups that do not provide services will pay a significant price for killing civilians while service providing groups will not. Of course, the difference between significant and insignificant effects is not necessarily itself significant (Gelman and Stern 2006). As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the conditional violence effect is more responsive to changes in service provision in study 1 compared to study 2.

Figure 1: Effect of Killing Civilians on Perceived Legitimacy, by Level of Social Service Provision (Study 1)



Note: Dots give the estimated effect of killing civilians on perceived legitimacy conditional on level of service provision. Lines contain 95% confidence intervals.

indistinguishable from zero among groups that provide social services — either restrictively or inclusively. As shown in the middle bar in Figure 1, among groups that provide restrictive services, the 95 percent confidence interval around the estimated violence effect is $[-0.14, 0.64]$. Among groups that provide inclusive services, this interval is $[-0.45, 0.37]$. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, these patterns indicate that groups that do not provide social services pay a significant price for killing civilians, while groups that provide services pay no such price.

Study 2 (United Kingdom)

We conducted a second experimental study to further test our hypotheses. This experiment asked a sample of non-student participants in the United Kingdom to evaluate the Oromo Liberation Front in Ethiopia. [Table 4](#) displays the regression results for Study 2.

We again begin by testing Hypothesis 1, which asserts that violence will decrease legitimacy evaluations. Mirroring the results from Study 1, we find strong support for this hypothesis across

Table 4: OLS Regression Models Predicting Legitimacy Evaluations (Study 2)

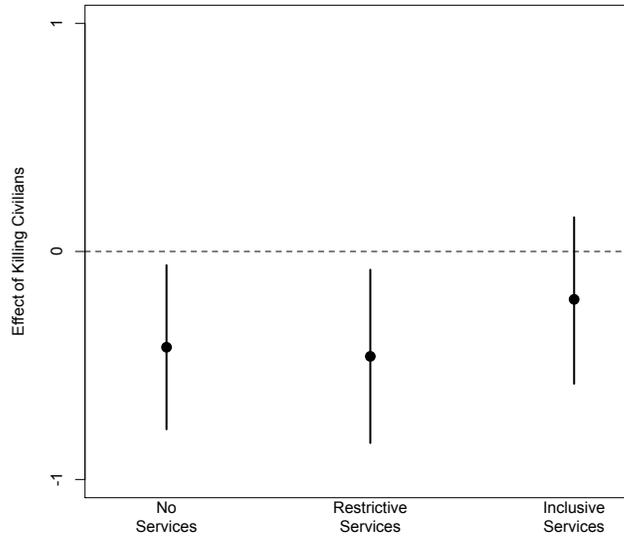
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Legitimate Alternative (1-7)	Capable of Governing (1-5)	Support Independent State (1-7)
Violent	-0.42** (0.18)	-0.40*** (0.11)	-0.50*** (0.16)
Restrictive Services	0.41** (0.20)	0.20* (0.12)	0.13 (0.17)
Inclusive Services	0.40** (0.19)	0.46*** (0.12)	0.25 (0.17)
Violent x Restrictive Services	-0.04 (0.27)	0.30* (0.16)	0.17 (0.24)
Violent x Inclusive Services	0.20 (0.26)	0.23 (0.16)	0.22 (0.23)
Constant	3.91*** (0.13)	3.00*** (0.08)	4.26*** (0.12)
Observations	611	611	611

Note: All independent variables are binary. Significance codes: *** $p < .01$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$.

all three outcome measures (see top row in Table 4). Compared to the the non-violent group, the violent group is viewed as less of a legitimate alternative to the existing state ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < .01$) and less capable of governing an independent state ($\beta = -0.40$, $p < .01$). Participants are also less supportive of independence for the violent group compared to the non-violent group ($\beta = -0.50$, $p < .01$). As in Study 1, these results suggest that killing civilians has strong negative effects on all three measured dimensions of legitimacy.

Turning our attention to Hypothesis 2, we again start with the simplest test: whether groups that provide restrictive or inclusive services are viewed as more legitimate than groups that do not provide services. Looking at the second row of Table 4, we see that groups that provide restrictive

Figure 2: Effect of Killing Civilians on Perceived Legitimacy, by Level of Social Service Provision (Study 2)



Note: Dots give the estimated effect of killing civilians on perceived legitimacy conditional on level of service provision. Lines contain 95% confidence intervals.

services are viewed as more legitimate alternatives to the existing state ($\beta = 0.41, p < .05$) and more capable of governing an independent state ($\beta = 0.20, p < .10$). (Participants are also more supportive of independence for the group that provides restrictive services, though this effect is insignificant.) The results are highly similar when we examine the effect of inclusive services. As shown in the third row of [Table 4](#), groups that provide inclusive services are viewed as more legitimate alternatives ($\beta = 0.40, p < .05$) and as more capable of governing an independent state ($\beta = 0.46, p < .01$). (Participants are more supportive of independence for inclusive service providing groups, though this effect is again insignificant.)

We now conduct the more stringent test of Hypothesis 2 by examining whether participants view inclusive service providing groups as more legitimate than restrictive service providing groups (i.e., whether $\beta_3 > \beta_2$). Unlike the previous study, Study 2 suggests that citizens are capable of distinguishing between restrictive and inclusive service provision and adjusting their

legitimacy evaluations accordingly. Consider the second model in [Table 4](#), which predicts perceived governing capacity – the outcome most closely tied to the restrictive versus inclusive provision comparison. In this model, the coefficient on inclusive services is significantly larger than the coefficient on restrictive services ($p = .04$), suggesting that citizens view groups that provide wide-ranging social services as more capable at governing than groups that provide more restrictive services. This difference in coefficients is insignificant in the other two models (legitimate alternative: $p = .96$; support independent state: $p = .50$) – understandable since those two outcome variables are arguably more distant from the service provision treatments.

We conclude by considering Hypothesis 3. Following the procedure above, we calculate the conditional effect of violence on perceived legitimacy (left column in [Table 4](#)) by summing the relevant coefficient estimates. Among groups that do not provide services, the estimated effect of violence is simply $\beta_1 = -0.42$. Among groups that provide restrictive services, this estimated effect is similar: -0.46 . Finally, among groups that provide inclusive services, this estimated effect is -0.21 .

These estimated effects of violence (along with 95 percent confidence intervals) are displayed graphically in [Figure 2](#). As shown in the figure, the estimated effects of violence on perceived legitimacy among groups that do not provide services (left most bar) or provide restrictive services (middle bar) are negative and statistically distinguishable from zero (95% CI for no services: $[-0.78, -0.06]$; 95% CI for restrictive services $[-0.84, -0.08]$). By contrast, the negative effect of violence among groups that provide inclusive services is statistically indistinguishable from zero (95% CI: $[-0.58, 0.15]$). Thus, consistent with Hypothesis 3, these patterns suggest that the negative effects of killing civilians diminish as service provision becomes more inclusive.

Discussion and Conclusion

A growing body of research suggests that violent and non-violent strategies of secession shape public opinion towards insurgencies. However, existing studies focus overwhelmingly on domes-

tic public opinion and fail to consider how violent and non-violent tactics might interact to shape opinion. This article developed a theory to explain how both sets of tactics affect a critical aspect of international public opinion: perceived legitimacy. In particular, we theorized that although committing violence against civilians generally decreases legitimacy, insurgents can demonstrate sovereign capacity and reduce these public costs by providing social services. We tested the theory with survey experiments that asked samples of U.S. and U.K. residents to evaluate two contemporary international insurgencies. Consistent with the theory, we find that social service provision allow rebels to decrease — and in some cases eliminate — the public costs of violence. We showed that this effect persists across multiple groups and multiple important dimensions of legitimacy. For instance, in Study 1, we show that service provision leads people to view violent insurgents as equally legitimate alternatives to the existing state; and in Study 2, we show that inclusive service provision allows insurgents to reduce the negative effects of violence on support for an independent OLF state — the ultimate goal of the insurgency. These findings highlight the importance of rebel diplomacy for international public opinion (Coggins 2015; Huang 2016).

Of course, the experiments reported here are not without limitations. First, although our experiments focused on two commonly used tactics, rebel groups make many other decisions that could potentially affect international public opinion. For example, it would be worthwhile to examine whether the violence effects reported here generalize to other types of violence (e.g., sexual violence, torture). Second, insurgents may adjust their tactics in response to unfavorable media coverage or public protest in foreign states. Our experiments cannot capture these over-time dynamics and future research should therefore consider how public opinion responds to changes in insurgent tactics. Third, future research should investigate sources of heterogeneity in how individuals evaluate insurgencies.¹³ Citizens who are more militaristic or interventionist might, for instance, be more inclined to oppose violent groups regardless of whether they provide services (e.g., Kertzer et al. 2014). Similarly, the effects we find here for the public writ large could be *weaker* than effects among interested and invested members of the international community,

¹³This strikes us as an especially important avenue for future research. We did not offer heterogeneous effect predictions due to our sample size and limited power.

such as a diaspora. Members of diaspora communities may be more willing to accept violence against civilians than citizens with no personal connection to the contested territory, and the anecdotal evidence discussed in the theory suggests that social service provision generates favorable responses among diaspora members that may fully eliminate the negative consequences of violence.

At the very heart of this research lie the questions of what makes an actor a sovereign and the conditions under which that sovereignty is recognized by international audiences. [Butcher and Griffiths \(2017\)](#) argue that sovereignty is both the ability to interact with others in the international system as well as the creation of a hierarchical ordering over space. The non-violent strategies of secession studied here may achieve both in that they demonstrate a capacity for internal ordering, thus mirroring sovereign states. While this study only tests two dimensions of non-violent behavior (avoiding terrorism and service provision), other methods of demonstrating state capacity (e.g., ability to secure entire territorial space, build roads, compliance with international law) might also yield similar results.

Although we focused our analyses on secessionists, some evidence points to the fact that non-secessionist insurgencies might also benefit from highlighting non-violent activities. While center-seeking insurgents may not require international recognition to be successful, these nonetheless benefit from international support. Under certain conditions, center-seeking rebel organizations may borrow from the successful contentious repertoires — both violent and non-violent — that secessionist use to cultivate broad international support or intervention against the state.

Perhaps most importantly, our findings have critical implications for foreign policy and media coverage of ongoing secessionist movements, including those in Palestine, Kurdistan, and elsewhere. For instance, the United States has recently allied with Kurdish groups in Iraq and Syria to push back against ISIS incursions. In covering this conflict, some American media coverage has emphasized Kurdish social service institutions, including inclusive institutions that partner with and provide services to non-Kurdish individuals (e.g., [Enzinna 2015](#)). The evidence presented here suggests that international publics take account of this sort of information as they

form opinions about international insurgencies. Indeed, the extent to which secessionists pay a public price for problematic behaviors — including civilian killings — depends in large part on these groups' choice of non-violent tactics.

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Appendix A: Experimental Treatments and Dependent Variables

Study 1

We are interested in your opinions towards some events recently in the news.

Please read the information on the next page before answering the questions that follow.

– Page Break –

The Karen National Union (KNU) is a rebel group seeking to establish an independent Karen country in present-day Myanmar, a country in southeast Asia. Operating since the late 1940s, the group claims that the Karens — an ethnic group within Myanmar — were never a part of Myanmar historically or culturally. The group argues that their region was incorporated into Myanmar by British colonists without the consent of the Karen people. Although the organization is nearly 70 years old, it continues to pursue its goal of independence to this day.

[Non-violent:]

The KNU's military strategy advocates avoiding the targeting of civilians at all costs. During the decades-long struggle for Karen independence, the KNU has meticulously avoided killing civilians.

[Violent:]

The KNU's military strategy advocates pursuing independence at all costs. During the decades-long struggle for Karen independence, many citizens have died at the hands of the KNU.

[Restrictive Services:]

The KNU provides a number of social services, including education and healthcare, in the areas where it operates. The KNU is the only service provider in these areas, and if residents cannot access the KNU's services, they have no other way to obtain these services. For the past several decades, the KNU has provided these services only to civilians who are members of, or support the goals of, the KNU.

[Inclusive Services:]

The KNU provides a number of social services, including education and healthcare, in the areas where it operates. The KNU is the only service provider in these areas, and if residents cannot access KNU's services, they have no other way to obtain these services. For the past several decades, the KNU has provided these services to anyone, including civilians who will likely never become members of, or even support the goals of, the KNU.

– Page Break –

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? ... The KNU is a legitimate alternative to the existing government in Myanmar.

- Strongly Agree [7]
- Somewhat Agree [6]
- Slightly Agree [5]
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree [4]
- Slightly Disagree [3]
- Somewhat Disagree [2]
- Strongly Disagree [1]

— Page Break —

Do you think the KNU is capable or incapable of governing an independent country?

- Definitely capable [5]
- Probably capable [4]
- Not sure/no opinion [3]
- Probably incapable [2]
- Definitely capable [1]

— Page Break —

Do you support or oppose the establishment of an independent Karen country in Myanmar?

- Strongly Support [7]
- Somewhat Support [6]
- Slightly Support [5]
- Neither Support Nor Oppose [4]
- Slightly Oppose [3]
- Somewhat Oppose [2]
- Strongly Oppose [1]

Study 2

We are interested in your opinions towards some events recently in the news.

Please read the information on the next page before answering the questions that follow.

— Page Break —

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is a rebel group seeking to establish an independent Oromo country in present-day Ethiopia, a country in sub-Saharan Africa. Operating since the mid-1970s, the OLF claims that the Oromos — an ethnic group within Ethiopia — were never part of Ethiopia culturally or economically. The group argues that the Ethiopian government has denied Oromos the right to self-govern and displaced them from their ancestral territory. Although the organization is over 40 years old, it continues to pursue its goal of independence to this day.

[Non-violent:]

The OLF's military strategy advocates avoiding the targeting of civilians at all costs. During the decades-long struggle for Oromo independence, the OLF has meticulously avoided killing civilians.

[Violent:]

The OLF's military strategy advocates pursuing independence at all costs. During the decades-long struggle for Oromo independence, many civilians have died at the hands of the OLF.

[Restrictive Services:]

The OLF provides a number of social services, including education and healthcare, in the areas where it operates. The OLF is the only service provider in these areas, and if residents cannot access the OLF's services, they have no other way to obtain these services. For the past several decades, the OLF has provided these services only to civilians who are members of, or support the goals of, the OLF.

[Inclusive Services:]

The OLF provides a number of social services, including education and healthcare, in the areas where it operates. The OLF is the only service provider in these areas, and if residents cannot access the OLF's services, they have no other way to obtain these services. For the past several decades, the OLF has provided these services to anyone, including civilians who will likely never become members of, or even support the goals of, the OLF.

— Page Break —

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? ... The OLF is a legitimate alternative to the existing government in Ethiopia.

- Strongly Agree [7]
- Somewhat Agree [6]
- Slightly Agree [5]
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree [4]
- Slightly Disagree [3]
- Somewhat Disagree [2]
- Strongly Disagree [1]

— Page Break —

Do you think the OLF is capable or incapable of governing an independent country?

- Definitely capable [5]
- Probably capable [4]
- Not sure/no opinion [3]
- Probably incapable [2]
- Definitely capable [1]

– Page Break –

Do you support or oppose the establishment of an independent Oromo country in Ethiopia?

- Strongly Support [7]
- Somewhat Support [6]
- Slightly Support [5]
- Neither Support Nor Oppose [4]
- Slightly Oppose [3]
- Somewhat Oppose [2]
- Strongly Oppose [1]

Appendix B: Sample Demographics and Randomization Checks

Appendix Table A1: Randomization Checks (Study 1)

	Experimental Condition					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Median Age (K-W $\chi^2=321.32$, $p=0.19$)	43.0	46.0	37.5	45.0	39.0	47.5
Median Education (1-5) (K-W $\chi^2=21.02$, $p=0.40$)	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
% Male ($\chi^2=10.06$, $p=0.07$)	41.1	48.2	42.9	60.6	53.3	49.0
% White ($\chi^2=3.65$, $p=0.60$)	65.4	67.5	65.5	61.6	57.1	59.4
% Democrat ($\chi^2=4.48$, $p=0.48$)	43.0	46.5	54.8	46.5	54.3	46.9
% Republican ($\chi^2=3.10$, $p=0.68$)	42.1	40.4	33.3	42.4	34.3	38.5
Mean Ideology (1-7) ($\chi^2=30.47$, $p=0.44$)	4.09	3.96	3.80	4.01	3.56	4.26

KW=Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test for difference-in-medians.

As shown in the table, randomization resulted in a slight imbalance on gender across conditions in Study 1. To ensure that our results are unaffected by this imbalance, we re-estimated the regression models presented in Table 3 in the main text. Specifically, we estimated one model that controlled for gender (male=1, 0 otherwise) and another model that controlled for all demographic variables presented in Appendix Table A1. The results are displayed in Appendix Table A2. Our results are the substantively unchanged.

Appendix Table A2: Robustness Checks (Study 1)

Violent	−0.64*** (0.19)	−0.64*** (0.19)
Restrictive Services	0.30 (0.20)	0.32 (0.20)
Inclusive Services	0.09 (0.19)	0.07 (0.19)
Violent × Restrictive Services	0.38 (0.28)	0.36 (0.28)
Violent × Inclusive Services	0.69** (0.27)	0.70** (0.27)
Male	0.10 (0.11)	0.11 (0.12)
Age		0.01 (0.004)
Education		0.01 (0.05)
White		−0.19 (0.12)
Democrat		−0.34* (0.18)
Republican		−0.22 (0.20)
Ideology		−0.07 (0.04)
Constant	4.03*** (0.14)	4.39*** (0.33)
Observations	605	603

Note: Dependent variable is the extent to which participants view the KNU as a legitimate alternative to the existing state (1-7). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent. Significance codes: *p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A3: Randomization Checks (Study 2)

	Experimental Condition					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Median Age (K-W $\chi^2=6.17$, $p=0.29$)	39.0	36.0	36.0	37.0	37.0	37.0
% Graduated Higher Education ($\chi^2=2.17$, $p=0.40$)	64.7	68.8	61.4	63.7	65.2	69.7
% Male ($\chi^2=5.45$, $p=0.36$)	43.1	45.9	31.3	44.2	37.9	39.4
% White ($\chi^2=7.46$, $p=0.19$)	90.2	82.6	86.7	91.2	90.5	92.7
% Labour ($\chi^2=3.11$, $p=0.68$)	38.9	50.7	51.6	46.1	50.0	46.1
% Conservative ($\chi^2=1.28$, $p=0.94$)	43.1	35.2	35.5	39.5	37.5	39.5
% Liberal Democrat ($\chi^2=1.08$, $p=0.96$)	18.1	14.1	12.9	14.5	12.5	14.5
Mean Ideology (1-10) ($\chi^2=50.23$, $p=0.27$)	4.70	4.56	4.90	4.94	4.59	4.56

Note: KW=Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test for difference-in-medians.

Appendix C: Condition Means and Standard Deviations

Appendix Table A4: Condition Means and Standard Deviations (Study 1)

	Experimental Condition					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Legitimate Alternative (1-7)	4.07 (1.37)	3.44 (1.38)	4.38 (1.38)	4.13 (1.27)	4.18 (1.52)	4.22 (1.42)
Capable of Governing (1-5)	3.19 (0.92)	2.76 (0.88)	3.25 (0.80)	3.27 (0.95)	3.36 (1.05)	3.13 (0.98)
Support Independent State (1-7)	4.21 (1.42)	3.80 (1.39)	4.51 (1.16)	4.24 (1.25)	4.54 (1.51)	4.24 (1.34)

Appendix Table A5: Condition Means and Standard Deviations (Study 2)

	Experimental Condition					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Legitimate Alternative (1-7)	3.91 (1.19)	3.50 (1.28)	4.33 (1.48)	3.87 (1.40)	4.32 (1.34)	4.10 (1.29)
Capable of Governing (1-5)	3.00 (0.78)	2.60 (0.78)	3.20 (0.91)	3.10 (0.83)	3.46 (0.77)	3.29 (0.83)
Support Independent State (1-7)	4.26 (1.20)	3.76 (1.12)	4.40 (1.37)	4.06 (1.28)	4.52 (1.06)	4.23 (1.03)

Appendix D: Robustness Check with Dichotomized Outcome Measures

Appendix Table A6: Regression Models Predicting Legitimacy Evaluations (Study 1)

	<i>Original DV (OLS):</i>			<i>Dichotomized DV (OLS):</i>		
	Legitimate Alternative (1-7)	Capable of Governing (1-5)	Support Ind. State (1-7)	Legitimate Alternative (0-1)	Capable of Governing (0-1)	Support Ind. State (0-1)
Violent	-0.64*** (0.19)	-0.42*** (0.13)	-0.41** (0.18)	-0.10 (0.06)	-0.24*** (0.06)	-0.09 (0.06)
Restrictive Services	0.31 (0.20)	0.06 (0.14)	0.31 (0.20)	0.08 (0.07)	0.02 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)
Inclusive Services	0.11 (0.19)	0.17 (0.13)	0.34* (0.19)	0.06 (0.06)	0.06 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)
Violent × Restrictive Services	0.39 (0.28)	0.45** (0.19)	0.14 (0.27)	0.07 (0.09)	0.26*** (0.10)	-0.004 (0.10)
Violent × Inclusive Services	0.67** (0.27)	0.19 (0.18)	0.10 (0.26)	0.18** (0.09)	0.19** (0.09)	0.03 (0.09)
Constant	4.07*** (0.13)	3.19*** (0.09)	4.21*** (0.13)	0.30*** (0.05)	0.41*** (0.05)	0.34*** (0.05)
Observations	605	605	605	605	605	605

Note: Models in columns 1–3 are the same as presented in the main text. For models in columns 4–6, the dependent variable is a dichotomized version of perceived legitimacy (1 if 5-7 on the original scale, 0 otherwise); capability of governing an independent state (1 if 4-5 on the original scale, 0 otherwise); and support for an independent KNU state (1 if 5-7 on the original scale, 0 otherwise). All models are estimated with OLS regression (see below for robustness checks using logistic regression). Significance codes: *p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A7: Regression Models Predicting Legitimacy Evaluations (Study 1)

	<i>Original DV (OLS):</i>			<i>Dichotomized DV (Logit):</i>		
	Legitimate Alternative (1-7)	Capable of Governing (1-5)	Support Ind. State (1-7)	Legitimate Alternative (0-1)	Capable of Governing (0-1)	Support Ind. State (0-1)
Violent	-0.64*** (0.19)	-0.42*** (0.13)	-0.41** (0.18)	-0.52* (0.31)	-1.25*** (0.32)	-0.44 (0.30)
Restrictive Services	0.31 (0.20)	0.06 (0.14)	0.31 (0.20)	0.37 (0.31)	0.07 (0.30)	0.39 (0.30)
Inclusive Services	0.11 (0.19)	0.17 (0.13)	0.34* (0.19)	0.28 (0.29)	0.23 (0.28)	0.43 (0.28)
Violent × Restrictive Services	0.39 (0.28)	0.45** (0.19)	0.14 (0.27)	0.41 (0.44)	1.32*** (0.44)	0.04 (0.43)
Violent × Inclusive Services	0.67** (0.27)	0.19 (0.18)	0.10 (0.26)	0.88** (0.43)	1.05** (0.43)	0.18 (0.42)
Constant	4.07*** (0.13)	3.19*** (0.09)	4.21*** (0.13)	-0.85*** (0.21)	-0.36* (0.20)	-0.68*** (0.20)
Observations	605	605	605	605	605	605

Note: Models in columns 1-3 are the same as presented in the main text. For models in columns 4-6, the dependent variable is a dichotomized version of perceived legitimacy (1 if 5-7 on the original scale, 0 otherwise); capability of governing an independent state (1 if 4-5 on the original scale, 0 otherwise); and support for an independent KNU state (1 if 5-7 on the original scale, 0 otherwise). Models in columns 1-3 are estimated with OLS regression; models in columns 4-6 are estimated with logistic regression. Significance codes: *p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A8: Regression Models Predicting Legitimacy Evaluations (Study 2)

	<i>Original DV (OLS):</i>			<i>Dichotomized DV (OLS):</i>		
	Legitimate Alternative (1-7)	Capable of Governing (1-5)	Support Ind. State (1-7)	Legitimate Alternative (0-1)	Capable of Governing (0-1)	Support Ind. State (0-1)
Violent	-0.42** (0.18)	-0.40*** (0.11)	-0.50*** (0.16)	-0.12* (0.06)	-0.13** (0.06)	-0.19*** (0.06)
Restrictive Services	0.41** (0.20)	0.20* (0.12)	0.13 (0.17)	0.20*** (0.07)	0.20*** (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)
Inclusive Services	0.40** (0.19)	0.46*** (0.12)	0.25 (0.17)	0.12* (0.07)	0.24*** (0.06)	0.05 (0.07)
Violent × Restrictive Services	-0.04 (0.27)	0.30* (0.16)	0.17 (0.24)	-0.02 (0.09)	0.03 (0.09)	0.11 (0.09)
Violent × Inclusive Services	0.20 (0.26)	0.23 (0.16)	0.22 (0.23)	0.04 (0.09)	0.10 (0.09)	0.12 (0.09)
Constant	3.91*** (0.13)	3.00*** (0.08)	4.26*** (0.12)	0.28*** (0.05)	0.23*** (0.04)	0.35*** (0.05)
Observations	611	611	611	611	611	611

Note: Models in columns 1–3 are the same as presented in the main text. Models in columns 4–6 are dichotomized indicators of perceived legitimacy (1 if 5–7 on the original scale, 0 otherwise); capability of governing an independent state (1 if 4–5 on the original scale, 0 otherwise); and support for an independent OLF state (1 if 5–7 on the original scale, 0 otherwise). Models in columns 1–3 were estimated with OLS regression. Models in columns 4–6 were estimated with logistic regression. Significance codes: *p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01.

Appendix Table A9: Regression Models Predicting Legitimacy Evaluations (Study 2)

	<i>Original DV (OLS):</i>			<i>Dichotomized DV (Logit):</i>		
	Legitimate Alternative (1-7)	Capable of Governing (1-5)	Support Ind. State (1-7)	Legitimate Alternative (0-1)	Capable of Governing (0-1)	Support Ind. State (0-1)
Violent	-0.42** (0.18)	-0.40*** (0.11)	-0.50*** (0.16)	-0.70** (0.34)	-1.06*** (0.41)	-1.01*** (0.33)
Restrictive Services	0.41** (0.20)	0.20* (0.12)	0.13 (0.17)	0.85*** (0.31)	0.92*** (0.32)	0.29 (0.30)
Inclusive Services	0.40** (0.19)	0.46*** (0.12)	0.25 (0.17)	0.52* (0.30)	1.09*** (0.31)	0.20 (0.29)
Violent × Restrictive Services	-0.04 (0.27)	0.30* (0.16)	0.17 (0.24)	0.13 (0.45)	0.61 (0.51)	0.69 (0.45)
Violent × Inclusive Services	0.20 (0.26)	0.23 (0.16)	0.22 (0.23)	0.35 (0.45)	0.93* (0.50)	0.71 (0.44)
Constant	3.91*** (0.13)	3.00*** (0.08)	4.26*** (0.12)	-0.92*** (0.22)	-1.23*** (0.24)	-0.61*** (0.21)
Observations	611	611	611	611	611	611

Note: Models in columns 1-3 are the same as presented in the main text. For models in columns 4-6, the dependent variable is a dichotomized version of perceived legitimacy (1 if 5-7 on the original scale, 0 otherwise); capability of governing an independent state (1 if 4-5 on the original scale, 0 otherwise); and support for an independent OLF state (1 if 5-7 on the original scale, 0 otherwise). Models in columns 1-3 are estimated with OLS regression; models in columns 4-6 are estimated with logistic regression. Significance codes: *p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01.