

# Citizens' Perceptions of Policy Objectives and Support for Military Action: Looking for Prudence in Germany

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## Abstract

This article is concerned with the role of perceived policy objectives in German citizens' attitude formation toward military action in Afghanistan. While some scholars have claimed that public opinion is prudent because citizens assess the effectiveness of a mission on the basis of these perceptions, micro-level tests of this kind of prudence remain scarce. Drawing on two cross-sectional surveys of the German population conducted in 2008 and 2009, we use responses to open-ended questions about the German government's policy goals in Afghanistan to analyze whether such perceptions influenced support and whether any such influence was mediated via the perceived effectiveness of the mission. The results indicate that, irrespective of the level of political awareness, it was virtually irrelevant what German citizens perceived the military mission's objectives to be. In contrast, value-based attitude formation emerges as more important, with the foreign policy pre-dispositions antimilitarism and Atlanticism exhibiting especially large effects.

## Keywords

use of force, public opinion, policy objectives, Germany

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In the last decade, the German public witnessed the largest deployment of its army abroad since the end of World War II. Between 2002 and 2014, up to 4,500 German soldiers were stationed in Afghanistan as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which was aimed at rebuilding the state while holding an insurgency of the Taliban at bay (Schreer 2012; Suhrke 2008). Little is known about the relevance of these objectives for German public support. When forming an attitude toward the German ISAF mission, did it matter what objectives citizens perceived their government to pursue?

It has long been argued that public opinion toward the use of military force varies with policy objectives. According to Bruce Jentleson (1992, 71), this is so because citizens have a “pragmatic sense of strategy.” Accordingly, after perceiving a particular mission’s objectives they consider whether military force is an effective and legitimate way of achieving them. They are then believed to form their attitudes on the basis of these considerations. In this line of reasoning, citizens are “prudent” not only in the sense that they use such reasonable evaluation criteria but also because they apparently attribute the same effectiveness and legitimacy levels to mission objectives as a foreign policy expert would (Eichenberg 2005; Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Oneal, Lian, and Joyner 1996). While macro-level evidence lends credence to this notion of public prudence, individual-level evidence for the link between perceived objectives and mission support remains scarce.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we study whether German citizens’ attitudes toward the ISAF mission vary with perceived mission objectives using data from two cross-sectional surveys conducted in 2008 and 2009. In both surveys, respondents were asked an open-ended question about what they believed the government’s objectives in Afghanistan to be.<sup>2</sup> These unique data allow us to address specific micro-level hypotheses implied in the macro-level studies by Jentleson and others. Most importantly, it allows testing whether the perception of a reasonable policy goal increases mission support in a real-world setting. Furthermore, if the micro model proposed by Jentleson is correct, the influence of these perceptions should be mediated via beliefs about the ISAF mission’s effectiveness, that is its success.<sup>3</sup> Besides expectations concerning the effect of perceived objectives, we consider the hypothesis that predispositions are the more important explanatory factors.

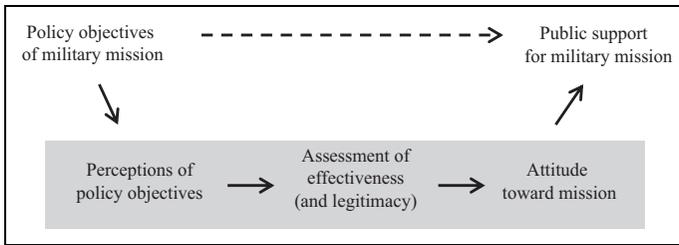
German public opinion concerning the ISAF mission is a doubly illuminative case for studying these hypotheses. First, it provides a context completely different from that of the United States, the country most studies concerned with mission objectives and public opinion have drawn their data from (but see Fletcher, Bastedo, and Hove 2009). Germany’s foreign policy culture has been characterized by a strong antimilitarism, which has only recently begun to change toward a more active use of its armed forces; public debates about this issue have tended to focus on norms and values and less on national interest (e.g., Baumann and Hellmann 2001; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2006; Longhurst 2004). This raises the question whether German citizens view military missions with the same kind of pragmatic sense of strategy which Jentleson diagnosed in the US public, or whether they take a more value-

driven view. Second, the (German) ISAF mission in Afghanistan was characterized by a shifting priority of objectives, from nation building to counterinsurgency. The data thus cover two different stages in the evolution of the ISAF mission. Furthermore, the second survey was conducted in late 2009, shortly after numerous civilians were accidentally killed near Kunduz by a NATO air attack ordered by a German officer. This incidence might have deflected citizens' attention away from the operational mission objectives. Considering evidence from 2008 and 2009 may therefore illuminate whether the link between perceived policy objectives and support of a single mission varied across contexts.

In the following section, we describe the micro-level assumptions of the "pretty prudent public" (PPP) perspective, that is, the notion that citizens base their attitude on perceived objectives. To better understand the theoretical claims that connect policy objectives and public support, we reconstruct them within a multilevel framework. This way we can make the PPP perspective accessible to individual-level research and juxtapose it with value-based attitude formation. Then specific micro-level hypotheses about perceptions, policy predispositions, and mission support are derived, taking into account the specific context of the case studied here. Using data from two representative personal surveys of the German public, we estimate regression models to test the hypotheses. The article concludes by summarizing the main findings, discussing limitations, and drawing implications concerning the prudence of the PPP perspective in Germany and beyond.

## **Perceived Policy Objectives and Mission Support**

Jentleson (1992, 53-54) argues that policy objectives and public support for military missions are linked because the objectives vary in the legitimacy and effectiveness with which military force can be used to achieve them. Foreign policy restraint (FPR) missions typically have clear standards of success and are justified, for example, by the principle of sovereignty in international law. In contrast, in missions aimed at internal political change (IPC) in another country it is harder to devise "operational military plans" (Jentleson 1992, 53) and to claim legitimacy. When forming an attitude toward a given mission, citizens are expected to base their evaluation on their perception of its principal objective. Additionally, it is assumed that citizens associate the same levels of effectiveness and legitimacy with the different objectives as a foreign policy expert would, that is, the ones just discussed. An implication of these theoretical claims is the rank ordering of public support depending on the principal policy objective observed by Jentleson, namely that FPR missions garner higher levels of support than IPC missions. A later extension (Jentleson and Britton 1998) added an additional policy objective type, humanitarian relief. The individual-level argument remains the same: Humanitarian interventions garner midlevel support because the effectiveness and legitimacy of using military force to achieve this objective is somewhere between the two other objectives.



**Figure 1.** The prudent public model: The influence of policy objectives on public support for military missions. The gray area marks the part of the model we studied empirically here.

Figure 1 depicts the causal chain implied in the PPP perspective. In the first step, the mission objectives are perceived by the individuals.<sup>4</sup> On the basis of these perceptions about mission objectives, citizens then assess a given mission's effectiveness and legitimacy. The resulting considerations are finally integrated into an overall attitude toward the mission. Consequently, if citizens do not perceive any objective, it seems to follow that they would rate such a mission as maximally ineffective and illegitimate and oppose it.<sup>5</sup>

The model in Figure 1 relaxes the assumption that only the principal policy objective is considered when forming an attitude about a mission. As Jentleson (1992, 54) points out, governments typically pursue more than one objective, and citizens may vary not only in how many and which objectives they perceive but also which one of these they believe to be the principal one. Also, the model does not assume a fixed hierarchy of legitimacy and effectiveness implied by the different mission objectives. As Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2009, 107) have argued, it is unrealistic to expect that both the pool of potential mission objectives and the effectiveness and legitimacy associated with them are fixed. As times and places change, so do the instruments, tactics, and norms that can be employed. In turn, the effectiveness and legitimacy with which different objectives can be pursued militarily change (see, e.g., Finnemore (2003) on the changing norms of military interventions). Relaxing this assumption does not necessarily violate the notion of a "prudent" public which forms attitudes on the basis of effectiveness and legitimacy considerations. Abandoned are merely the fixed levels of effectiveness and legitimacy associated with the objectives.

Survey experiments suggest that information about a mission's objective does influence support (e.g., Drury et al. 2010; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009, 100-10; Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser 1999; Mader and Schoen 2013). Yet the rank-order hypothesis is not unequivocally confirmed in these studies. For example, in an experiment conducted by Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2009), support for a hypothetical mission in Yemen, aimed at FPR, was actually lower than that for a humanitarian mission. Support was highest in a third treatment that asked about the support for military action "if Yemen provided safe haven to Al-Qaeda terrorist bases" (Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009, 100).<sup>6</sup> Drury et al. (2010, 90) found roughly

equal effect sizes for frames of FPR and internal political change. In contrast, evidence which is in line with expectation stems from an experiment by Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser (1999, 562), where support for an intervention countering a cross-border attack was higher than for restoring peace in a country that has fallen into civil war. In these experiments, information about a hypothetical mission's objective is varied across treatment groups. This way respondents are forced to base their attitude on the mission's objective because no other contextual information is available. What is being tested could be depicted in Figure 1 with an arrow pointing directly from "Policy objective(s)" to "Individual mission support." The drawback of this procedure is that it blends out the process of perceiving the objective(s) of a mission and activating these perceptions to form an attitude toward it. Consequently, what we cannot learn from such experiments is which objectives citizens perceive and whether they use them to form attitudes in real-world settings.

In addition to the perceived objectives, we consider the alternative explanation that citizens draw on general political values and predispositions to deduce their attitudes toward a military mission (Feldman 1988; Goren 2012; Hurwitz and Peffley 1987). Given previous research and the German foreign policy culture, these factors are likely alternatives to the mission-specific beliefs about objectives (e.g., Chittick, Billingsley, and Travis 1995; Juhász 2001; Mader and Pötzschke 2014; Peffley and Hurwitz 1993; Reifler et al. 2014). With regard to attitudes toward military action and the realm of foreign and security policy more generally, three predispositions have been identified that seem to be of special import. These are citizens' general preferences regarding the level of international involvement of their country (isolationism-internationalism), the use of military force for political purposes (militarism-antimilitarism), and the degree of policy coordination and cooperation with allies and within international institutions (unilateralism-multilateralism). A specific variant of multilateralism that appears to be important in the German context is what Asmus, Everts, and Isernia (2005) called Atlanticism, a general predisposition for coordinating foreign and security policy decisions within NATO, and especially with the United States.

Beyond their relevance as alternative explanatory factors, predispositions are potential confounders of the link between perceived objectives and attitudes because they also influence what citizens perceive and store in long-term memory (Taber and Lodge 2006; Zaller 1992). Numerous empirical studies have shown predispositions to bias beliefs about specific military missions, for example, American citizens' perceptions of casualty numbers (Berinsky 2009; Gaines et al. 2007) and German citizens' expectations of success (Jedinger and Mader 2015). We, therefore, include measures of the three policy predispositions internationalism, antimilitarism, and Atlanticism in the following analysis.

## **Hypotheses**

Before individual-level hypotheses are proposed, it is expedient to shortly describe the framing of the German ISAF mission's policy objectives by German

governments from its beginning up to autumn 2009, the time the second survey analyzed here was conducted. In the first years, the German government declared the ISAF mission to pursue the dual objectives of countering the threat of the Taliban regime harboring terrorists and of promoting democracy and human rights in Afghanistan. As time progressed and it became increasingly clear that democratization was too ambitious a goal to achieve, German policy makers reframed the mission objectives to (mere) peacekeeping and stabilization. By late 2009, counterinsurgency played an important part in German policy makers' justifications for the engagement. In the wake of the increased efforts of the United States to win the struggle against the Taliban (President Obama's "surge" strategy), the German ISAF mission was refocused on stabilizing the non-Taliban-governed Afghan state and on preventing it from becoming a safe haven for international terrorism again (Müller and Wolff 2011; Schreer 2012). In short, the mission's objectives were diverse and changing, ranging from FPR to humanitarian relief to internal political change.

As the second survey was conducted in October, 2009, an important event to consider is the NATO bombardment of road tankers abducted by Taliban forces on September 4, 2009. The attack, which took place near Kunduz in the area of the German regional command, claimed numerous civilian lives. Not only because of the sheer number of victims but also because it was a German colonel who ordered the bombardment, this event sparked a debate in Germany about the legitimacy and effectiveness of the mission and the use of German military force abroad in general. In this discussion, operational goals of the ISAF mission only played a minor role (Schröer 2014; von Bredow 2011).

Given theoretical considerations and empirical context, we expect the statistical analysis to reveal particular micro-level associations between perceptions, predispositions, and support. Following the PPP perspective, citizens should employ their pragmatic sense of strategy when forming attitudes about military mission. They should consider the ISAF mission's effectiveness and legitimacy, which in turn should depend on the perceived objectives. Thus, if citizens perceive the mission to have no objective at all, the mission can be expected to receive very low support, as it will be judged as illegitimate and ineffective. In comparison, the perception of any mission objective should trigger higher support. Given its theoretical implausibility and the shaky evidence for it, we refrain from formulating a rank-order hypothesis but treat it as an empirical question whether effect sizes vary between different perceived objectives. As an alternative to the PPP perspective, value-based theories suggest that foreign and security policy predispositions should drive citizens' attitudes. Thus, general preferences for an active German role in international politics and for transatlantic policy coordination should trigger stronger support. In contrast, a principled opposition to using military force as a tool in foreign policy should lower support for specific interventions. The empirical analysis below should thus reveal the following patterns:

**Hypothesis 1a:** Perceptions of mission objectives will be associated with higher levels of support.

**Hypothesis 1b:** Internationalism and Atlanticism will be associated with higher levels of support, antimilitarism with lower levels.

These undifferentiated expectations might paint over differences between citizens with high and low political awareness. Especially, judging a military mission on the basis of its objectives necessitates a minimum level of involvement and expertise (e.g., Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser 1999, 566), which some citizens might just not possess. Consequently, citizens with high political awareness<sup>7</sup> should rely to a greater extent on their perceptions of the respective policy objective.

**Hypothesis 2:** The influence of the perceived policy objectives on mission support will be larger among the politically aware.

The mechanism which connects the perceived mission objectives and ISAF mission support posits that the influence of the perceived objectives is mediated via perceptions of success. In turn, perceptions of success should lead to increased mission support. Given theories on perception biases and motivated reasoning, the policy predispositions internationalism, Atlanticism, and antimilitarism should influence perceived success as well.

**Hypothesis 3:** Perceptions of reasonable objectives, internationalism, and Atlanticism will be associated with higher, antimilitarism with lower perceived success. Perceived success, in turn, will be associated with lower levels of support.

A final hypothesis concerns the dynamic perspective. As noted above, the period between the two surveys was characterized by an evolution of mission objectives from peace-keeping, political stability, and democratization to fighting terrorism and countering the insurgency. The public debate about this shift might have made it easier for citizens to derive attitudes from perceived objectives. At the same time, the event of the Kunduz bombing might also have primed citizens to think about the engagement in terms of general principles, while overlaying any considerations of effectiveness and legitimacy derived from perceived objectives. Therefore, one might argue that the policy predispositions, especially antimilitarism, should emerge as more important in 2009 than in 2008, due to the Kunduz incidence. Overall, it is difficult to propose clear expectations regarding effect size changes given the complex short- and long-term developments. We, therefore, propose the following hypothesis only tentatively.

**Hypothesis 4:** The effect of the policy predispositions will be larger in 2009 than in 2008; the relevance of all perceived objectives except fighting terrorism and countering the insurgency will be smaller.

## Data and Measures

The data for the analysis come from two representative cross-sectional surveys conducted in 2008 and 2009 on behalf of the *Bundeswehr* Institute of Social Sciences (SOWI).<sup>8</sup> In the first survey, which was administered by TNS Emnid between May 28 and June 30, 2008, 2,422 interviews were completed. In the second survey, administered by Ipsos Operations GmbH between September 28 and November 14, 2009, 2,100 interviews were completed. In both cases, the sample frame consisted of German-speaking persons who were sixteen years or older, and the interviews were conducted personally.

With one important exception discussed below, the same survey questions were used in 2008 and 2009 to measure the concepts of interest. Due to space considerations, we describe only the two most important variables of the analysis in detail here, that is, attitudes toward the German ISAF mission as the dependent variable and the perceived policy objectives of the mission. All the other measures are documented in the appendix. Attitudes toward the German ISAF mission were measured with a question that asked respondents whether they support or oppose the participation of the Bundeswehr in the ISAF in Afghanistan using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from one (*strongly disapprove*) to six (*strongly approve*).

The perceived policy objectives of the German ISAF mission were measured with an open question that asked, “Which objectives do you think does the government pursue with the Bundeswehr mission in Afghanistan?” Up to three perceived objectives were taken down by the interviewers. The advantage of using open-ended questions is that no additional information is relayed to the respondent about what might be an acceptable answer—in this case, the perceived objectives of the German ISAF mission. Thus, respondents have to generate answers all by themselves, without guidance from response options given to them in close-ended questions. This question format is thus less prone to measure nonattitudes, or in this case rather nonperceptions (Converse 1970).

The primary investigators did not insist that the original records from the interviewers be included in the data sets. Responses were categorized by the two research institutes instead, with slightly different and overlapping categories being used in 2008 and 2009. For example, while in 2008 perceptions that the German government tried “to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan” were filed in one category, in 2009 there are two categories, namely, that the goal was “to stabilize Afghanistan politically and economically” and “to build up/give developmental aid to Afghanistan.”<sup>9</sup> To ensure comparability, categories were collapsed to create new ones which are distinct from each other and equivalent across time points. Dummy variables were created to indicate whether respondents perceived a particular objective. With regard to content, the new categories cover the spectrum of objectives the German government forwarded during the evolution of NATO’s strategy in Afghanistan (Müller and Wolff 2011; Schreer 2012). The six different policy objectives of the ISAF mission as perceived by the respondents are “fight terrorism,” “counterinsurgency,”

“peacekeeping,” “nation building,” “democratization,” and “meet international obligations.”<sup>10</sup>

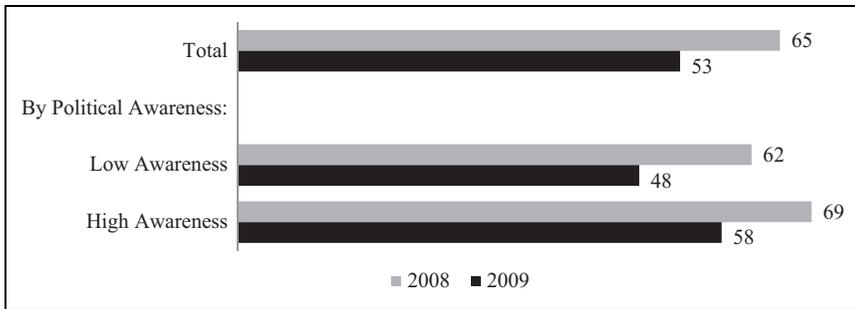
The first five objectives constitute substantive mission goals in the sense that they aim at changing the situation in Afghanistan. All except one are applied in both years. The objective counterinsurgency was mentioned only in 2009. The sixth category, meet international obligations, captures responses about Germany’s obligations as an ally and a responsible member of the international community. Meeting international demands for an increased participation in international conflict management both of allies and of international organizations such as the United Nations has been an important justification for German policy makers to send the army abroad. This objective lies on another dimension than the others as it does not refer to changing the reality on the ground but constitutes a procedural goal about the conduct of German foreign and security decision making.

In the following analysis, poststratification weights provided by the survey organizations were used to correct for sampling bias. The weights for the 2008 data were constructed to match the German population in terms of gender, age, education, states (*Bundesländer*), and city size utilizing information from the Media Analysis 2007 as target figures. Utilizing data from official statistics, information on the same characteristics was used in constructing weights for the 2009 data.<sup>11</sup> Since nonresponse was only a minor problem, listwise deletion was used in the regression analysis to handle missing values.

## Findings

The empirical analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we describe the predispositions, perceptions, and attitudes German citizens held in 2008 and 2009. We then discuss the results of a series of linear regression models of ISAF mission support to gauge the total effects of perceived mission objectives and policy predispositions. Finally, we take a closer look at the suggested mechanism connecting perceived objectives, policy predispositions, and attitudes by considering the indirect effects of both perceived objectives and policy predispositions on ISAF mission support via success perceptions. Given the hypothesis that citizens with low and high political awareness might differ in what they perceive and how they relate these perceptions to attitudes, we present evidence both for the whole population and for these subgroups separately.

In June 2008, when the first survey was conducted, a clear majority of the German public (65 percent) was at least somewhat supportive of the Bundeswehr participation in the ISAF mission. At the time of the second survey in October 2013, fifteen months after the first survey and three weeks after the Kunduz incidence, still about half of the population supported the mission (53 percent). In both years, the politically aware were more supportive of the mission than the politically unaware. The gap between the groups with low and high political awareness was about seven percentage points in 2008 and ten points in 2009. The drop in average support was



**Figure 2.** Support for German International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in 2008 and 2009 (overall and by political awareness). Weighed data. All bars show percentages of “strong approval,” “mostly approval,” or “rather approval than disapproval” of the German participation in the ISAF mission. Low (high) awareness is operationalized as a below-median (above-median) political awareness score.

about the same in both subgroups, that is roughly ten percentage points. Thus, while the politically aware were on average more supportive of the mission than the unaware, both groups showed roughly the same dynamic of support (Figure 2).

Turning to the perceived policy objectives, the descriptive statistics in Table 1 clearly reveal the heterogeneity in citizens’ perceptions. They differ both in the number of objectives perceived and in what they perceived these objectives to be. What’s more, the number and type of objectives perceived vary between citizens with high and low political awareness and change—insofar as it can be determined with cross-sectional data—from one point in time to the next.

As for the number of perceived objectives, the majority of respondents perceived one mission objective in 2008. Roughly, one in four citizens was able to name two or even the maximum admissible number of three objectives. As can be expected, citizens with low political awareness were more frequently unable to name a government objective than the highly involved (30 percent vs. 17 percent) and less frequent to name two or three goals (19 percent vs. 32 percent). Virtually, the same pattern regarding citizens that perceived two or three objectives can be found in 2009. Given the increase in respondents that did not report a perceived policy objective, the group of citizens who perceived one objective was smaller, albeit still constituting the largest group in the total population.

The percentage of citizens who did not perceive any policy objective was substantially higher in 2009 (36 percent) than in 2008 (24 percent), although the issue was more salient in 2009 due to the Kunduz incidence. This might be attributed to the fact that public debate revolved around the Kunduz incidence itself and eclipsed discussions of the German ISAF mission’s operational objectives. Alternatively, this pattern might reflect rationalization among citizens, if supporters of the ISAF mission tried to come up with a justification for the mission, while opponents did not.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Objectives (POs), Policy Predispositions, and Perceived Success in 2008 and 2009 (Overall and by Political Awareness).

	2008			2009		
	Overall	By Political Awareness:		Overall	By Political Awareness:	
		Low	High		Low	High
No. of PO <sup>a</sup>						
0 Objectives	24	30	17	36	47	24
1 Objective	51	51	51	36	33	40
2 Objectives	22	16	28	21	15	27
3 Objectives	3	3	4	7	5	9
Average No. of PO	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.0	0.8	1.2
Type of PO <sup>b</sup>						
Fight terrorism	15	12	17	15	11	20
Counterinsurgency				9	7	11
Peacekeeping	37	37	38	26	24	28
Nation building	30	26	35	27	20	35
Democratization	10	7	12	13	9	17
Meet international obligations	13	9	17	9	7	12
Policy predispositions <sup>c</sup>						
Internationalism	47	39	56	49	42	57
Antimilitarism	28	28	28	31	34	28
Atlanticism	41	38	44	50	43	56
Perceived success <sup>d</sup>	45	43	47	38	31	45

Note: Weighed data. See appendix for question wording and coding.

<sup>a</sup>Percentages of respondents by number of objectives perceived; up to three answers were recorded by the interviewers. Row 5 reports the mean number of perceived objectives.

<sup>b</sup>Percentages of respondents who perceived a respective objective.

<sup>c</sup>Percentages of respondents who prefer an active foreign and security policy (Internationalism), which abstains from using military force (Antimilitarism) and is coordinated with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies (Atlanticism), respectively.

<sup>d</sup>Percentage of respondents who perceive the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission as successful.

The nonresponse to the open question would then have to be interpreted as an indicator of opposition to the ISAF mission.<sup>13</sup>

As for the type of objectives, peacekeeping and nation building were the most frequently perceived goals. In 2008, roughly 70 percent of the citizens perceived one of these two goals. The fight against terrorism, democratization and meeting international obligations were perceived by 10 to 15 percent of the citizens, respectively. The most notable differences between citizens with low and high political awareness—which also account for the higher average number of perceived objectives—are the substantially higher frequencies with which the politically aware

reported nation building (35 percent vs. 20 percent among the less aware) and meeting international obligations (17 percent vs. 9 percent).

The major difference in perceived objectives in 2008 and 2009 is the shift from peacekeeping and nation building to counterinsurgency. While still roughly 50 percent of the respondents named one of the two former goals, about one in ten citizens mentioned the more recent latter goal. This is quite a substantial increase, considering that counterinsurgency was not mentioned at all in 2008. Interestingly, the share of respondents perceiving the objective of nation building became less frequent among the politically less aware (26 percent vs. 20 percent) but remained the same among the aware (28 percent). The former might have lost sight of the overarching goal of nation building, given their lower information level, while the latter saw counterinsurgency and the Kunduz incidence as short-term phenomena that did not touch upon the objective of nation building.

The lower third of Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the other variables of interest. Noteworthy here are the increase in Atlanticism in the total population and the decrease in perceived success of the ISAF mission among the politically less aware when comparing 2008 and 2009. The former is most likely grounded in an Obama bonus, whose election caused an interim surge in US popularity in Germany. The latter can most likely be attributed to the Kunduz incidence, which dominated public discourse and eclipsed the question of operational successes and failures of the mission.<sup>14</sup>

What influence did these perceptions have on the attitudes toward the ISAF mission in Germany? To address this question, we estimated linear regression models with ISAF mission support as the dependent variable and the perceived mission objectives and policy predispositions as the central independent variables.<sup>15</sup> In the analyses of the whole sample, political awareness was included as an independent variable to control for communication skills and motivation. Furthermore, a dummy for respondents who perceived more than one objective was included, since supporters of the mission may have rationalized their attitudes by naming multiple objectives. The results are reported in Table 2 and displayed graphically in Figure 3.<sup>16</sup>

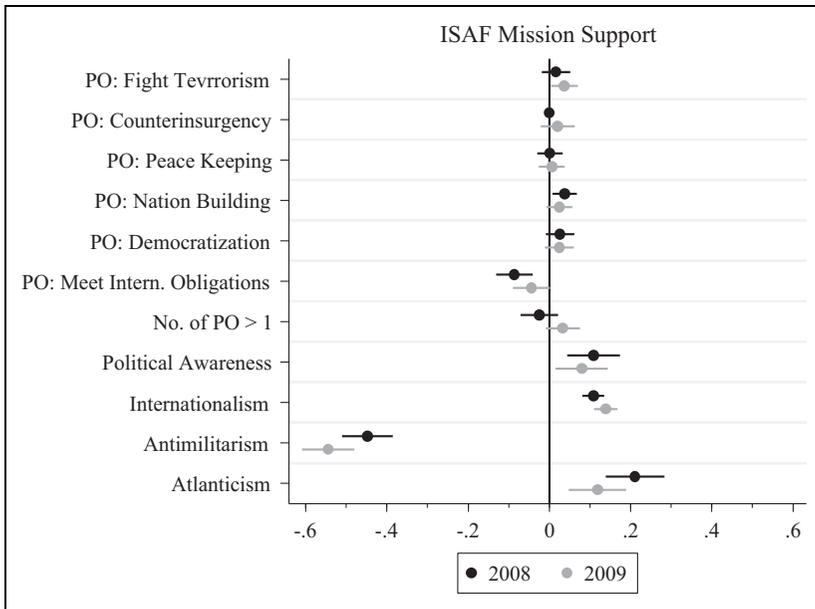
According to hypothesis 1a, perceived objectives should have positive statistical effects on mission support. Figure 3 reveals only weak associations between perceptions of substantive objectives (fight terrorism, counterinsurgency, peacekeeping, nation building, and democratization) and mission support. All coefficients are small, and only “nation building” in 2008 ( $b = 0.04$ ) and “fight terrorism” in 2009 ( $b = 0.04$ ) are statistically significant.<sup>17</sup> The perception that the German government participated in the ISAF mission to comply with international obligations actually lowers mission support in both years, as indicated by statistically significant, moderate effect sizes ( $b = -0.09$  and  $b = -0.11$ ). This is remarkable because German governments frequently used the argument of meeting international obligations and living up to one’s responsibility to justify the deployments of German troops abroad. At least in the period considered here, the citizens apparently did not accept this as a reason to support the ISAF mission. Overall, the pattern of

**Table 2.** Effects of POs and Policy Predispositions on ISAF Mission Support in 2008 and 2009 (by Political Awareness).

	2008				2009			
	By Political Awareness				By Political Awareness			
	Overall	Low	High	Diff.	Overall	Low	High	Diff.
Perceived objectives								
Fight terrorism	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.04)	0.04* (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)	0.04 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)
Counterinsurgency					0.02 (0.02)	0.05 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)
Peacekeeping	0.00 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	0.05 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.05 (0.03)
Nationbuilding	0.04* (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)
Democratization	0.03 (0.02)	0.05 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.04)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.03)	0.04 (0.02)	0.04 (0.04)
Meet international obligation	-0.09*** (0.02)	-0.08* (0.04)	-0.09*** (0.03)	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.11*** (0.03)	-0.00 (0.03)	0.11* (0.05)
No. of POs > 1	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.07 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.08 (0.05)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.04)
Political awareness	0.11** (0.03)				0.08* (0.03)			
Predispositions								
Internationalism	0.11*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.02)	0.13*** (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)	0.14*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.02)	0.06* (0.03)
Antimilitarism	-0.45*** (0.03)	-0.51*** (0.05)	-0.38*** (0.04)	0.13* (0.06)	-0.54*** (0.03)	-0.57*** (0.05)	-0.52*** (0.05)	0.05 (0.06)
Atlanticism	0.21*** (0.04)	0.15*** (0.05)	0.28*** (0.05)	0.12 (0.07)	0.12*** (0.04)	0.12* (0.05)	0.13** (0.05)	0.01 (0.07)
Constant	0.52*** (0.03)	0.65*** (0.05)	0.51*** (0.04)		0.53*** (0.03)	0.62*** (0.05)	0.53*** (0.05)	
Observations	1,982	936	1,048		1,675	791	884	
R <sup>2</sup>	.34	.34	.34		.43	.42	.43	

Note: Weighed data. Reported are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Differences in coefficients were obtained by adding interaction terms between the independent variables and a dummy variable that identified respondents with low and high awareness. Low (high) awareness is operationalized as a below-median (above-median) political awareness score. Due to rounding, subtracting the coefficients of the low- and high-awareness groups does not always equal the difference reported in columns 4 and 8. POs = perceived objectives; ISAF = International Security Assistance Force.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .



**Figure 3.** Effects of perceived objectives and policy predispositions on International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission support in 2008 and 2009. Reported are unstandardized linear regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. They correspond with the coefficients reported in the first and fifth column of Table 2.

coefficients does not support hypothesis 1a.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, perceived objectives had hardly any influence on ISAF mission support in the general public. This finding casts considerable doubt on the validity of the micro model proposed by Jentleson (1992), at least for the case we study here.

Hypothesis 1b states that internationalism and Atlanticism should be positively associated with ISAF mission support, while antimilitarism should have a negative effect. The evidence supports this hypothesis, as the lower half of Figure 3 indicates. In both subgroups and at both points in time, all three predispositions have robust and (fairly) substantive effects on mission support. Antimilitarism is by far the most important one, with effect sizes of  $-0.45$  in 2008 and  $-0.54$  in 2009. The effect sizes of internationalism and Atlanticism vary between 0.11 and 0.21, which allocates them a midlevel relevance for ISAF mission support, somewhere between antimilitarism and the perceived objectives.

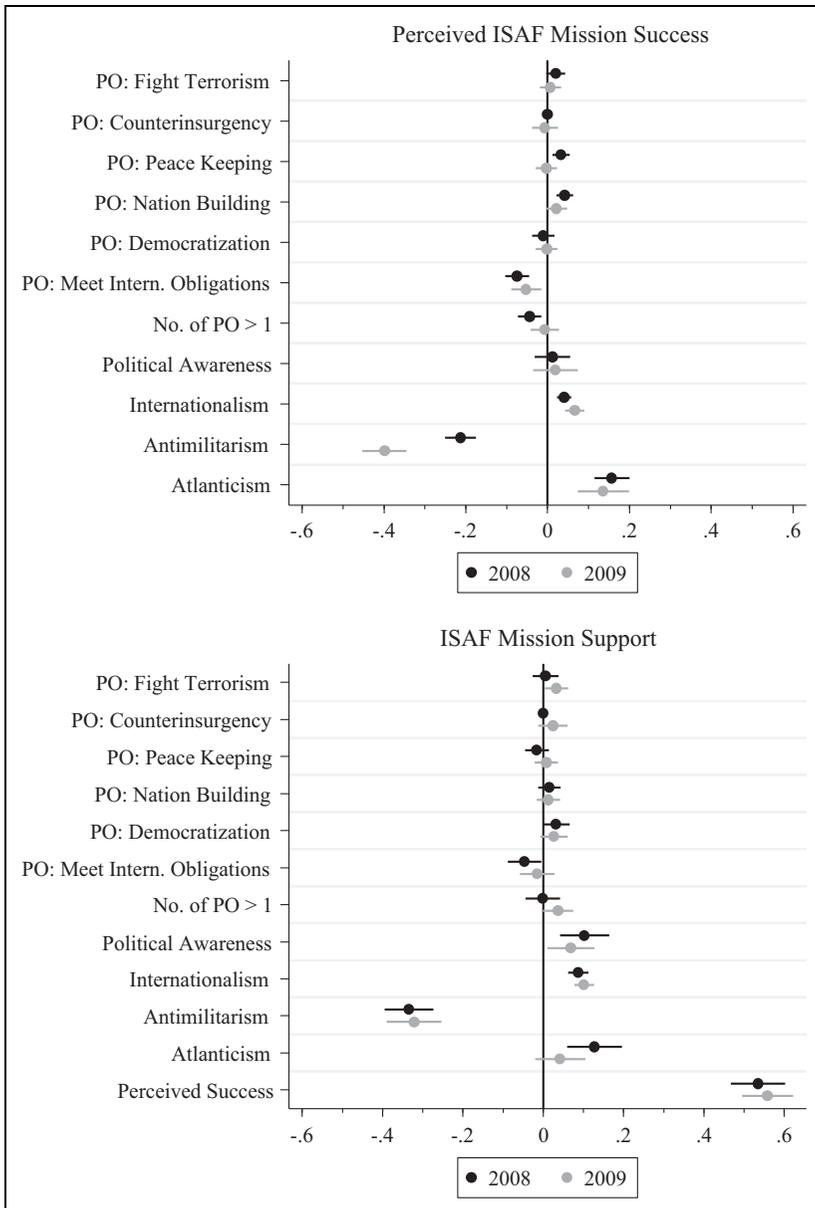
These findings regarding the general public might paint over differences between citizens with high and low awareness. Regarding the effects of perceived objectives, Hypothesis 2 states that citizens with high political interest and expertise should rely to a greater extent on these perceptions regarding the ISAF mission. Yet the results do not support this hypothesis. Table 2 shows the results from regression models in

which perceived objectives and policy predispositions were interacted with political awareness. Comparing the effect sizes among citizens with low and high awareness levels suggests that neither group relied on policy-perceived policy objectives when forming attitudes toward the German ISAF mission. The only noteworthy difference between the subgroups can be found in the data from 2009, where the perception of Germany meeting international obligations by participating is associated with lower support among citizens with low political awareness but not in the high awareness group. For the latter, the long-term changes in substantive mission objectives and the Kunduz incidence apparently overshadowed this procedural objective and eliminated it as a relevant factors in attitude formation.

In the next step of the empirical analysis, we look more closely at one of the suggested mechanisms connecting perceived objectives and mission support. This allows to determine why there are no substantial overall effects of the perceived objectives on mission support. Possibly, the very first link in the causal chain was broken, that is, these perceptions were inconsequential for citizens' evaluations of the mission's success. Alternatively, it might be that citizens did not consider their perceptions of success when deciding whether to support the mission or not. To shed light on this question, we estimated two more sets of regression models. In one, perceived success was regressed on the same set of independent variables as used before, namely, perceived objectives and policy predispositions. In the other, ISAF mission support was once more regressed on these variables with additionally considering perceptions of success. The results are presented in Figure 4.<sup>19</sup>

What emerges quite clearly from Figure 4 is that the perceived objectives are hardly associated with citizens' perceptions of success. These perceptions, in turn, have a large effect on ISAF mission support, with  $b = 0.53$  in 2008 and  $b = 0.56$  in 2009. This suggests that perceived objectives apparently had no effect on mission support because citizens did not consider the objectives when forming beliefs about the success of the mission. In contrast, policy predispositions do seem to have substantially influenced whether citizens believed the ISAF mission to be successful. Especially in 2009, when the Kunduz incidence sparked public debate about the feasibility and morality of military missions abroad, pacifists were much more pessimistic about the success of the mission than militarists. At the same time, Atlantacists were systematically more convinced that the engagement had been a success. Against this backdrop, the corresponding hypothesis (Hypothesis 3) is partially confirmed. We do find substantial indirect effects, but only for the policy predispositions, not for the perceived objectives.

Finally, we address hypothesis 4 regarding the intertemporal changes in attitude formation. Given the simultaneity of long-term change in the mission's character and the salient event of the Kunduz incidence, we have proposed that effects of the policy predispositions should be larger in 2009 than in 2008, while the relevance of all perceived objectives except fighting terrorism and countering the insurgency should be smaller. These expectations are partly backed by the evidence. The most notable difference between time points is the increased indirect effect of



**Figure 4.** Perceived objectives and policy predispositions as determinants of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission support in 2008 and 2009. Reported are unstandardized linear regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. See the online supplement for the corresponding regression table.

antimilitarism. Accordingly, perceived mission success was influenced much more strongly by antimilitarism in 2009 ( $b = -0.40$ ) than in 2008 ( $b = -0.21$ ). Consequently, as the descriptive statistics in Table 1 show, average perceived success of the ISAF mission declined. Since the statistical effect of mission success is the same in 2008 and 2009, this mechanism can account for some of the decline in overall support.<sup>20</sup> Against our expectation, citizens apparently based their evaluation of the mission less strongly on their general preference for a coordinated foreign and security policy within NATO in 2009 ( $b = 0.12$ ) than in 2008 ( $b = 0.21$ ). This is especially interesting since the average preference for such coordination was much higher in 2009 than in 2008, which could have been a stabilizing factor for public support for the ISAF mission. But the increased German enthusiasm for cooperating within NATO, which was most likely driven by the popularity of the newly elected President Obama, apparently did not carry through to the evaluation of the ISAF mission. As for the perceived objectives, the results do not indicate any substantive differences. The association between the perceived objectives and mission support is extremely weak in both years.

Overall, the results presented in this section consistently point to a disconnect between perceived objectives and ISAF mission support in the German public. As the descriptive statistics have shown, German citizens did perceive their government to pursue reasonable goals, and shifts in these perceptions between the years can be meaningfully interpreted considering the contextual features in 2008 and 2009. But irrespective of context and political awareness, these perceptions had little effect on the attitudes toward the ISAF mission in Afghanistan.

## Discussion

In this article, we used the case of the German ISAF mission in Afghanistan to test whether citizens' perceptions about the policy objectives were associated with their support for this mission. In 2008 and 2009, German citizens were asked open-ended questions to report what they believed to be the government's objectives in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Mission support was then regressed on these perceptions while controlling for policy predispositions as alternative explanatory and confounding factors. The results clearly indicated that, irrespective of political awareness, perceived objectives played only a minor role in attitude formation. Policy predispositions, especially the general willingness to commit troops for political gain, emerged as the dominant explanatory factors. Overall, these findings question the validity of the micro model proposed by Jentleson (1992) with regard to the German public.

Before we discuss the implications of these findings, we have to address limitations of our analysis. Foremost among them is the issue of using cross-sectional data to test causal hypotheses, as endogeneity problems cannot be ruled out using such a research design. For this article, this means that the estimated impact of the perceived objectives might be inflated if citizens rationalized their attitudes. But as

we have seen empirically, there is virtually no association. In other words, the evidence supports neither the notion of prudent citizens, who condition support on perceived objectives, nor the notion of rationalizing citizens, who name reasonable objectives based on their attitudes. For the main finding of the analysis, endogeneity seems therefore less of an issue. A more important simultaneity bias might be prevalent in the association between mission support and perceptions of success, since these phenomena are conceptually and empirically closely entwined (Berinsky and Druckman 2007). Furthermore, given the case we consider here, the experience of the ISAF mission, which has been the largest and most costly mission of the Bundeswehr ever, might have fed back to citizens' foreign policy predispositions. Yet until data from panel surveys specifically designed to measure the concepts in question are available, cross-sectional survey evidence remains the next best option to learn about real-world attitude formation processes.

Beyond these limitations from the research design, the findings have both methodological and substantive implications. One concerns the inconsistency between the small effects of perceived objectives found here and framing experiments, which have consistently produced evidence for the relevance of objectives, for example, in the United States (Drury et al. 2010; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009; Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser 1999) and in Germany (Mader and Schoen 2013). We believe that isolating certain aspects of a hypothetical military mission and confronting respondents with such information fragments is a poor simulation of reality. This bears the danger of artificially increasing effect sizes, because citizens are forced to derive their attitudes from the information given in the experiment. In contrast, in real-world settings citizens can draw on a plethora of considerations, among which those about mission objectives might easily drown.

Two contextual features of the specific case considered here merit further discussion. One is the evolution of objectives NATO pursued with the ISAF mission. Given that there was no clear-cut, unwavering mission objective but a constant change of goals, the ISAF mission might be considered a hard case to test the notion of a prudent public. The findings presented here might thus be interpreted as supporting the argument of Drury et al. (2010) who propose that the complexity of political cues moderate the relevance of mission objectives in attitude formation. Beyond the complexity of the informational context, its content is another potential scope condition to generate the (non-)findings concerning perceived mission objectives. German policy makers have been adamant (in their rhetoric) about conducting a value-based foreign and security policy. While the notion of national interest is almost frowned upon, democracy, human rights, and developmental considerations are usually forwarded when justifying policy decisions (Hellmann, et al. 2008). German citizens might thus have been primed to think about the policy issue not as a question of strategy but values (Chong and Druckman 2007).

Considering the political discourse suggests a different micro mechanism to create the macro-level patterns between objectives and public support and opens another perspective on the question of the public's prudence or lack thereof. If the

value-based attitude formation we found in the empirical analysis is (merely) a reflection of the German elite discourse, any evidence that American citizens use perceptions of mission objectives to form attitudes might analogously be a reflection of the realistic foreign policy tradition visible in public debate on foreign and security policy in the United States. Does that make the German public less prudent than the American? It seems unclear why following one's pragmatic sense of right and wrong should be less prudent than acting on one's pragmatic sense of strategy. The more sensible question to ask might be whether a public that merely mirrors elite debates can ever be prudent. It seems certainly prudent to study this question from a comparative perspective that allows for variation in contextual factors, whose relevance is otherwise easily overlooked in research on public opinion.

## Appendix

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### Question Wording and Coding<sup>21</sup>

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*Attitude toward the German ISAF mission:* "Please tell whether you support or oppose the participation of the *Bundeswehr* in the following missions: International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF)." (6-point Likert scale; recoded to range from 0 = *strong opposition* to 1 = *strong support*)

*Perceived Success:* "What do you think: Is the participation of the *Bundeswehr* in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan a success or a failure?" (7-point Likert scale; recoded to range from 0 = *strong opposition* to 1 = *strong support*)

*Perceived objectives:* "Which objectives do you think does the government pursue with the *Bundeswehr* mission in Afghanistan?" (open question; up to three perceived objectives were taken down and categorized by the research institute)

Dummy variables were created, with 1 indicating that a policy objective was mentioned by the respondent and 0 indicating that it was not mentioned. See the online appendix for details on how the original categories, which were chosen by the research institute and vary between 2008 and 2009, were combined.

*Number of perceived objectives > 1:* Dummy variable, with 1 indicating that more than one policy objective was perceived and 0 indicating that no or one objective was perceived.

*Internationalism:* "What do you think, how should Germany act in international politics?—Germany should pursue an active foreign policy and help solving problems, crisis, and conflicts." (agree/disagree)

Dummy variable with one indicating a preference for an active German foreign policy, and 0 indicating no such preference. In Table 1, "High Internationalism" reports the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement.

*Antimilitarism:* "What tasks should the *Bundeswehr* perform abroad? Do you agree or disagree with performing the following tasks? The *Bundeswehr* should be deployed abroad . . . [. . . to participate in the fight against international terrorism / . . . to disempower foreign governments that violate human rights / . . . to oversee the implementation of democratic elections / . . . to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction / . . . to ensure peace throughout the world]." (6-point Likert scale)

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**Appendix** (continued)

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**Question Wording and Coding**<sup>21</sup>

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The responses to the five items were averaged, with 0 indicating general opposition to using military force and 1 indicating general support for using military force ( $\alpha_{2008} = .79$ ;  $\alpha_{2009} = .82$ ). In Table 1, “High Antimilitarism” reports the percentage of respondents with an index score greater than 0.5.

*Atlanticism*: “The federal government can set different priorities in conducting foreign and security policy. How important are the following foreign and security policy goals to you? [... to cultivate the relationship with the United States / ... to preserve and advance the political and military cooperation within NATO].” (5-point Likert scale)

The responses to the two items were averaged, with 0 indicating no preference for transatlantic policy coordination and 1 indicating a strong preference ( $\alpha_{2008} = .62$ ;  $\alpha_{2009} = .71$ ). In Table 1, “High Atlanticism” reports the percentage of respondents with an index score greater than 0.5.

*Political awareness*: A political interest index and a political knowledge index were averaged, with 0 indicating low awareness and 1 indicating high awareness ( $\alpha_{2008} = .55$ ;  $\alpha_{2009} = .56$ ). To group respondents, a dummy variable was created with 1 indicating respondents with above-median scores and 0 indicating respondents with below-median scores. For the political interest index, the responses to three items were averaged, with higher values indicating stronger interest ( $\alpha_{2008} = .91$ ;  $\alpha_{2009} = .88$ ). The political knowledge index was created by counting the correct answers to nine knowledge questions, 0 indicating no correct answers and 1 indicating nine correct answers. For question wording of interest and knowledge items, which vary slightly between 2008 and 2009, see the online appendix.

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**Supplementary Material**

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**Notes**

1. The terms “attitudes” and “support” were used synonymously to denote affective summary evaluations of an object at a given time (Fazio 2007, 608).
2. Throughout this article, the terms “perception” and “belief” are used interchangeably.

3. Due to data limitations, we are unable to take account of the second mechanism Jentleson (1992: 71) names, via beliefs about the legitimacy of a mission.
4. We will not study this step of the causal chain empirically here. It is included in Figure 1 merely to depict how, following Jentleson, macro-level variation between mission objectives and public support should be connected to individual processes of attitude formation.
5. We are aware that support might also influence the beliefs about the policy objectives, if citizens try to rationalize their attitudes by stating what they feel to be reasonable goals. Analogously, if they oppose a given military mission, they might feel less inclined to come up with a rationalization when asked about the mission's objective. While rationalization processes seem to be important in electoral choice (Achen and Bartels 2006; Rahn, Jon, and Breuning 1994), citizens are likely to have invested less in attitudes toward military missions, which seems to reduce the likelihood of rationalization (Rahn, Jon, and Breuning 1994, 587). We will come back to this issue when discussing the results and drawing conclusions.
6. The authors interpret this objective as an objective which does not fit into any of the three categories proposed by Jentleson. Yet it aims at restraining an international actor who is most likely perceived by respondents as an aggressor. The frame could thus be categorized as portraying a foreign policy restraint objective. The finding would then support the rank-order hypothesis.
7. We understand political awareness as "the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics and understands what he or she has encountered" (Zaller 1992, 21).
8. We would like to thank the *Bundeswehr* Institute of Social Sciences (SOWI), now part of the *Bundeswehr* Center for Military History and Social Sciences (ZMSBW), for sharing the data with us.
9. See the online supplement for the complete coding schemes of the institutes.
10. An additional residual category "miscellaneous" was created to incorporate various perceived objectives which could not be readily integrated into one of the other categories and were not mentioned frequently enough to constitute a category of their own. While this residual category will not be considered here further, given its minor empirical importance, see the online supplement for descriptive statistics of the original categories as well as basic regression analyses utilizing these rather than the modified categories.
11. In both cases, equal probability of selection within households was achieved by interviewing the household member with the most recent birthday.
12. We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.
13. This problem might have been aggravated by the question order. In the interviews, respondents were asked about their ISAF mission support first and then about their beliefs about the government's objectives. The advantage of this question order is that respondents were not primed to think about the objectives before reporting their attitudes. The drawback is that respondents might have been induced to justify the general evaluation of the mission they had made when answering the question about the government's objectives.
14. Table 1 identifies only one-third of the German public to have pacifistic predispositions, although Germans are actually known for their reluctance to use military force (Baumann and Hellmann 2001; Longhurst 2004). The measurement employed here is likely to be

- biased toward militaristic predispositions, as it taps into preferences for the German army to achieve various abstract valence goals such as ensuring democratic elections abroad and securing peace worldwide.
15. Respondents who named only an objective filed as miscellaneous were excluded from all following analyses. This applies to 70 respondents in 2008 and 190 respondents in 2009. The results do not change if instead of excluding the respondents a further dummy variable that identifies them is included in the regression models.
  16. In additional estimations we included sociodemographic controls, which yielded virtually the same coefficients as those presented here. In line with previous findings from Germany, older respondents, females, and East Germans showed lower support for the ISAF mission (Juhász 2001). Due to data limitations, we were unable to control for political identification or ideology. Yet research on German support for military action in a similar setting has shown that omitting these concepts does not bias the results (Mader and Schoen 2013).
  17. Independent and dependent variables were scaled to 0–1. The coefficient of 0.04 for “nation building” thus means that respondents who perceived this objective had an ISAF mission support score that was 0.04 score points higher than that of respondents who did not perceive this objective.
  18. Additional analyses documented in the online supplement revealed no substantive interaction effects of policy predispositions and perceived objectives on mission support. This suggests that citizens with different predispositions did not rely to different degrees on perceived objectives when forming attitudes.
  19. See the online supplement for the results in tabular form.
  20. The increased indirect effect of antimilitarism on ISAF mission support via perceived success can be reproduced in a mediation analysis. We estimated a path model with the variables concerning perceived objectives, the policy predispositions, and political awareness as exogenous predictors, perceived success as a mediating variable, and mission support as the dependent variable. Standard errors were bootstrapped (10,000 replications) to take account of nonnormality (MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Williams 2004). As in the results reported here, the unstandardized indirect effect of antimilitarism on mission support substantially increased from one year to the next. See the online supplement for all results of this estimation.
  21. Items were translated from German. Unless indicated otherwise, the question wording was the same in the 2008 and 2009 surveys.

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