

Faculti Summary

<https://faculti.net/soldiers-dilemma-foreign-military-training-and-liberal-norm-conflict/>

The study discusses how militaries navigate conflicts between two key liberal norms: respect for human rights and obedience to civilian authority. The presenter refers to this tension as "liberal norm conflict." When political leaders command military actions that suppress human rights, soldiers face a dilemma on which norm to prioritize.

Using the 1979 Rice riots in Liberia as a historical case, where the military was ordered to fire on protestors, the study argues that militaries often default to a third norm of cohesion—essential for collective military functioning—over the two liberal norms during crises. This video phenomenon is particularly pronounced in weakened democracies where the military confronts conflicting expectations.

The United States, a major provider of foreign military training, places significant emphasis on instilling respect for human rights and civilian authority during training programs. The study analyzes how such training influences military decision-making in situations of norm conflict. The findings suggest that, contrary to expectations, militaries under stress are more likely to prioritize cohesion rather than uphold human rights, especially when U.S. training is involved.

Key results from a survey of 270 Liberian military personnel indicate that those exposed to norm conflict showed less support for prioritizing human rights and more for cohesion. The research highlights the impact of training variations, suggesting that U.S.-trained soldiers were less likely to support liberal norms in conflict situations.

The study concludes that while training is intended to promote liberal norms, it may inadvertently encourage outcomes that favor cohesion, potentially leading to norm violations. Future recommendations include exploring how to decouple training for military capabilities from norms and strengthening institutional frameworks, like military justice systems, to manage behaviors during crises effectively.