

MILLENNIALS ON WAR

PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

How do the leaders of tomorrow feel about war?

Fatalistic, hopeful, worried and uncertain, according to the answers coming from our new survey, 'Millennials on War'.

Millennials are the politicians, decision-makers, strategists, and opinion-makers of tomorrow. What they think about war today could give insight into the direction of the world in the future.

This survey explores millennials' perceptions of warfare – how it is fought, the weapons used, the rules, the consequences, the future.

Millennials appear to see cataclysmic war as a real likelihood in their lifetime. Alarmingly, almost half of millennials surveyed think a third world war is likely to occur in their lifetime, while a majority of millennials believe there will be a nuclear attack in the next decade.

While three-quarters of those surveyed support the premise that wars must have limits, the survey also points to a lack of respect for the basic human values enshrined in international law. As many as 36 per cent of millennials believe captured enemy combatants should not be allowed to contact their relatives, or that torture is acceptable under some circumstances.

Overall, these results indicate a significant level of fear that, in the future, there will be more, not fewer, wars. They reveal a worrying acceptance of dehumanizing language or actions towards perceived or real 'enemies' that is prevailing in an era of fake news, disinformation and polarized viewpoints.

It's no surprise that millennials struggle with these difficult issues. Dehumanization in public discourse has, for example, led to those connected to the Islamic State group being depicted as people to be 'annihilated' or 'exterminated', without either compassion or legal process. This discourse does not bring solutions. In fact, it victimizes individuals and entrenches societal divisions, which can fuel future violence.

But there is hope – and, somewhat paradoxically, it seems to be felt most strongly among those most directly affected by war today. Respondents from countries at war are more willing to stand up for humanity in times of war. Syrians showed the highest levels of disapproval for the use of weapons of mass destruction and expressed a resounding belief that captured enemy combatants should be allowed to contact their relatives, that torture is never acceptable, and that addressing mental-health needs of victims of conflict is just as important as addressing physical needs.

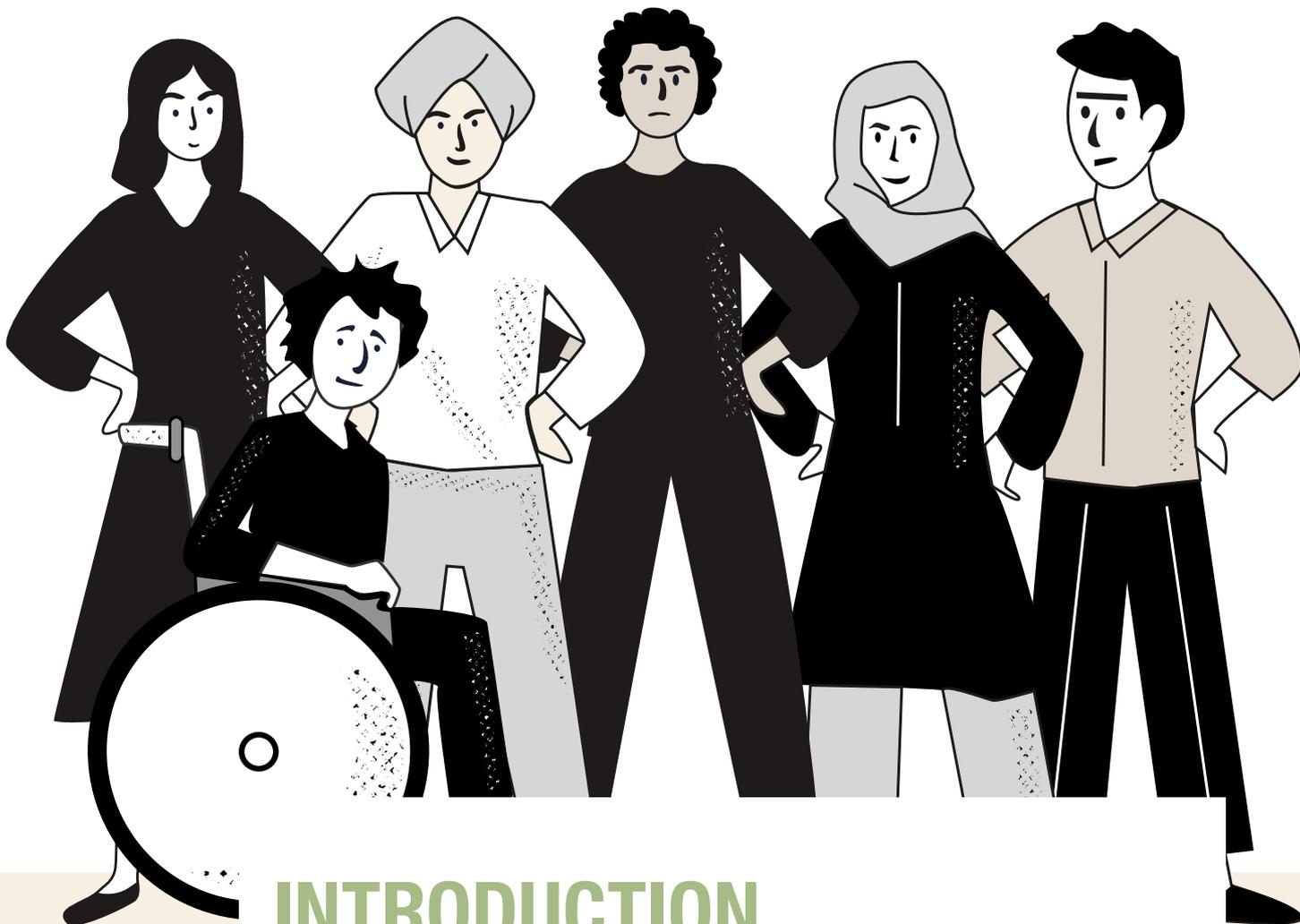
Things are not likely to get easier for millennials: they are living in a world in which wars are becoming more and more complex. If millennials are right about more wars or even a third world war in their lifetime, the rules of war will be essential to limiting the carnage. They make a real difference to peoples' lives, and the ICRC is witness every day to how restraint can limit violence and suffering and is critical for humanity.

Millennials and young people are also the fighters of today and the future. The way conflicts are and will be fought is in their hands. It is vital that we all do what we can to reinforce their belief in the norms of humanity, in innovative ways that resonate with their values. This is particularly true in countries experiencing or at risk of violence and conflict, but also on a global level, in order to foster a supportive environment in which humanitarian values can prevail.

No one is outside the bounds of our shared humanity, nor beyond the law. Everyone has a right to be treated with dignity. The basic tenets of humanity and the rules of war are not negotiable.



Peter Maurer
ICRC President



INTRODUCTION

'Millennials on War' is the fifth in a series of ICRC research initiatives whose overarching aims are to explore the general public's perceptions of war and increase awareness of international humanitarian law (IHL).

For this latest study, interviews took place in countries/territories affected by war and armed violence, and those that are enjoying peace. Consequently, the research highlights similarities and differences in attitudes among people living in vastly different contexts. Millennials, i.e. adults aged between 20 and 35, were surveyed in the following countries/territories:

- Afghanistan, Colombia, France, Indonesia, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, occupied Palestinian territory, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Syria, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States

More than 16,000 millennials took part in the survey, which was carried out by market-research company Ipsos using a mixed-methods design. Quotas were set on age, gender, region and type of settlement in order to ensure that the sample effectively represents the millennial population structures in the respective countries/territories. Some of the questions asked in the survey are reproduced in the following pages, alongside infographics showing the breakdown of the responses. Not all results may add up to 100 due to rounding.

The survey distinguishes between countries 'affected by' and 'not affected by' conflict, to examine whether people's personal exposure to or experience of conflict changes attitudes. Some of the countries considered as 'not affected by' conflict may, in fact, be parties to armed conflict, even though that armed conflict may have little impact on their own territory and general population. The survey uses the term 'war or armed conflict' and not simply 'war' or 'armed conflict' or 'conflict', to simplify and ensure understanding of the topic.

The terms used in this survey should not be construed as representative of the legal opinion of the ICRC.

KEY FINDINGS

- Millennials consider war and armed conflict to be among the top five most important issues affecting people around the world today.
- Millennials are **nervous about their future**, with more who think there'll be a third world war in their lifetime than those who don't, and more than half believing that **nuclear weapons are likely to be used** somewhere in the world in the next 10 years.
- At the same time, the clear majority of millennials think that **wars and armed conflict are avoidable**, with those from war-affected countries/territories more hopeful than those in conflict-free countries.
- Millennials believe **there should be limits in war and that civilian casualties should be avoided**, but the survey reveals worrying trends that point to an erosion of the basic human values enshrined in international norms.
- Millennials **overwhelmingly oppose the use of weapons of mass destruction** – be they nuclear, biological or chemical – in any circumstance.
- Although there is a widespread consensus among millennials that **nuclear weapons are a threat to humanity**, at the same time, almost half of millennials believe **nuclear weapons are an effective instrument of deterrence**.
- The majority of millennials believe **digital technology can have a positive impact** in supporting victims of war, and only a slight majority of millennials think that **artificial intelligence will increase the number of civilian casualties** in future wars and armed conflicts.

CALLS TO ACTION

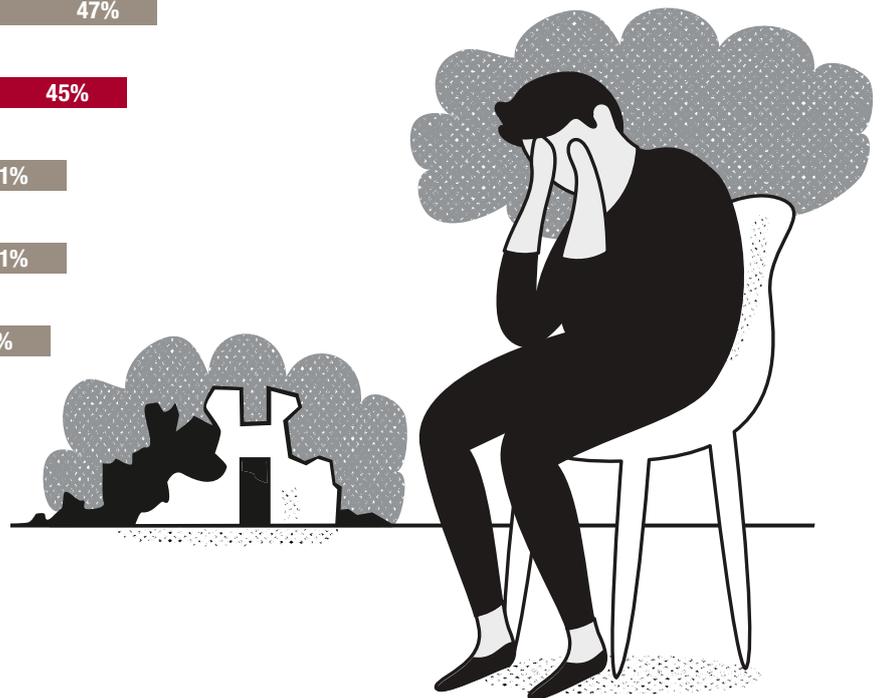
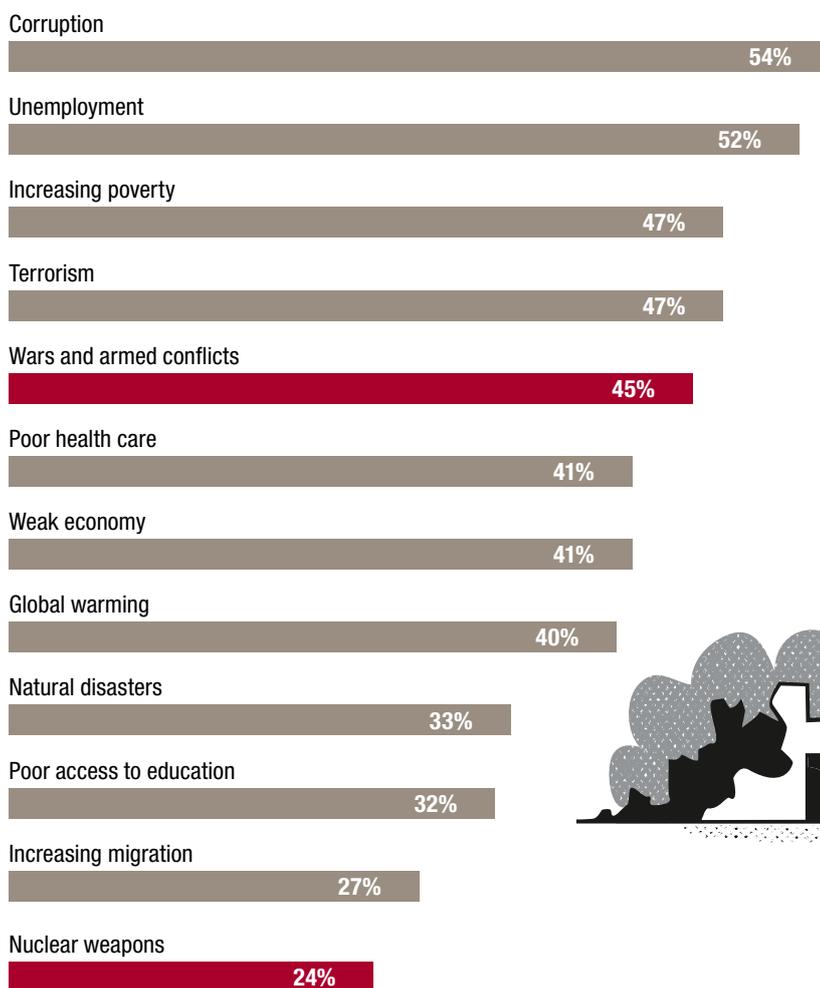
- We're asking millennials to **stand up for the basic values underpinning the rules of war**, which are critical for their own and humanity's future. These values must be maintained for the generations to come.
- We're urging people **not to use dehumanizing language** when referring to people they don't agree with or understand.
- We want millennials to **engage, listen to each other and empathize more**. We're asking them to think about actions they can take – once a day, once a week or even once a month – to break free of their bubble and engage, without prejudice, with someone whose views they disagree with. It may seem like a small step, but we believe that **willingness to engage with all sides of an argument, with people you don't agree with or understand, is critical for humanity**.

SURVEY RESULTS

MAIN CONCERNS AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

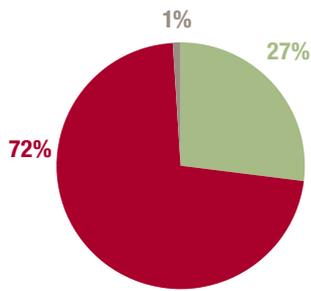
Wars and armed conflict are considered by millennials to be among the top five most important issues affecting people around the world today, having been cited by almost half the respondents from a list of 12 global issues.

*Which of the following do you see as the most important issues affecting people around the world today?
Please select all that apply.*



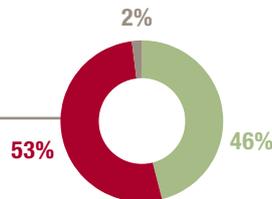
- Across all 16 countries/territories surveyed, one in four millennials (27 per cent) said they have had direct experience of war and armed conflict. Direct experience includes participation in combat, being wounded, being forced to leave their home, losing contact with a close relative, or any other situation that could arise due to armed conflict.
- In countries/territories affected by conflict, this percentage rises to almost half (46 per cent). In non-conflict countries, just one in ten has had some form of experience of war and armed conflict (12 per cent).
- Almost every Syrian millennial interviewed has experienced conflict (96 per cent); in Afghanistan, the figure stands at one in every two (55 per cent).

Have you directly experienced war or armed conflict?

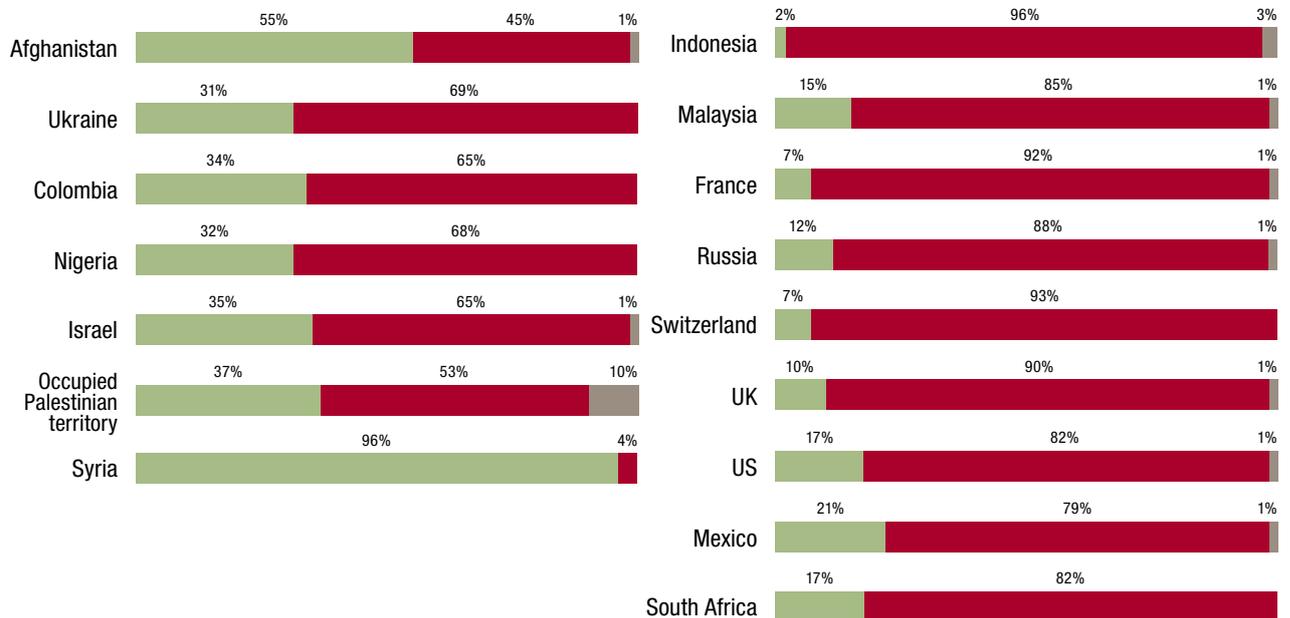
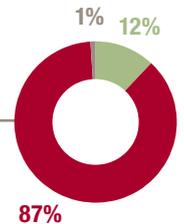


Yes, I have personally experienced it
 No, I have not personally experienced it
 Don't know/Prefer not to answer

COUNTRIES IN CONFLICT

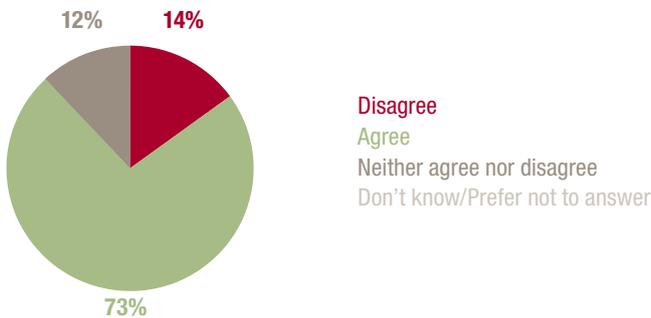


COUNTRIES IN PEACETIME

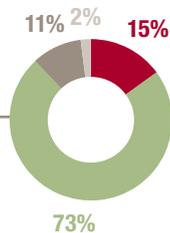


- Millennials living in countries/territories affected by conflict and who have personal experience of war view 'war and armed conflict' as the second biggest concern facing people in the world today (50 per cent), on a par with 'terrorism' (50 per cent) but below 'unemployment' (53 per cent).
- Three in ten millennials living in conflict-affected countries/territories believe the war in their country/territory will never end.
 - People in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory are least optimistic: 65 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively, believe that the fighting in their home areas will never end.
 - Conversely, people in Ukraine and Syria are most optimistic: 69 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively, believe the wars in their home countries are likely to end in the next five years.

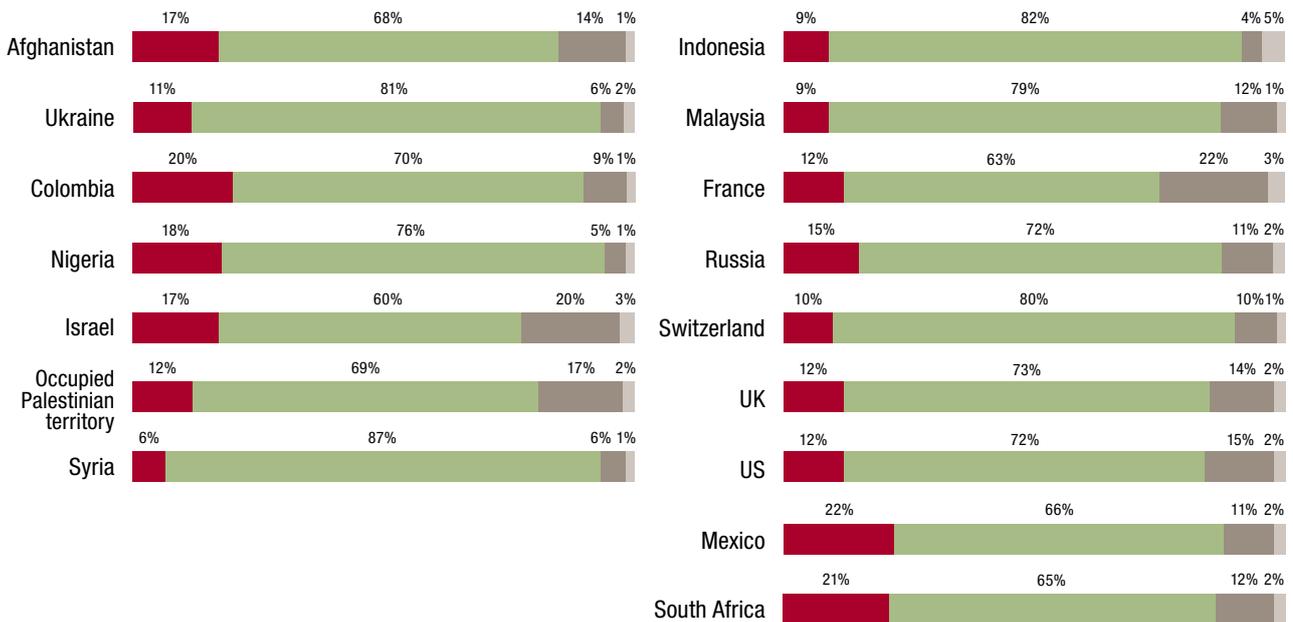
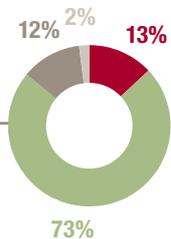
**Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
In supporting victims of wars or armed conflicts, the emotional or mental-health needs of victims are as important as water, food and shelter.**



COUNTRIES IN CONFLICT



COUNTRIES IN PEACETIME



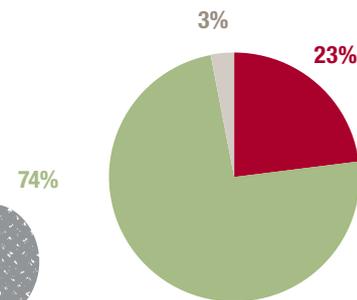
- Seven in ten millennials believe that the mental-health needs of victims of war are as important as food, water and shelter needs. People surveyed in Syria feel strongest in this regard (87 per cent).

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

While a majority of millennials think that wars and armed conflict could be avoided, there is a clear difference of opinion regarding the prevalence of war in the future.

- Overall, a clear majority of millennials surveyed (74 per cent) believe that most wars could be avoided.
 - Of the millennials surveyed in Israel, 69 per cent believe that wars and armed conflict could be avoided. In the occupied Palestinian territory, only 40 per cent of millennials held the same belief.

Please indicate which one of these statements you agree with the most:

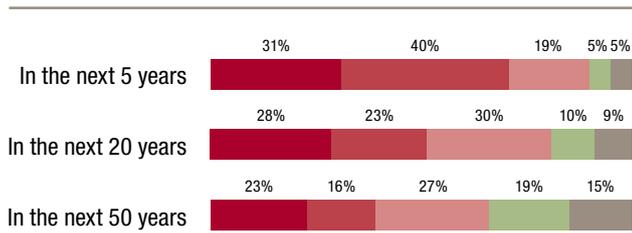


Most wars and armed conflicts are unavoidable
Most wars and armed conflicts could be avoided
Don't know/Prefer not to answer

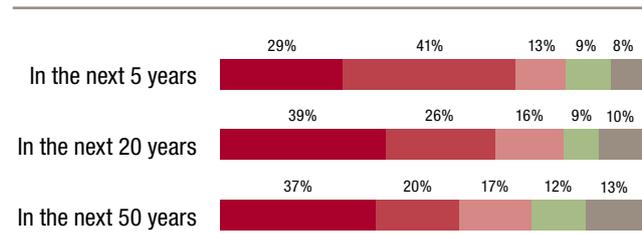
- Opinions are split among millennials on the prospect of a third world war in their lifetime: 47 per cent think one is likely, whereas 46 per cent think it is unlikely.
- Two in five millennials (42 per cent) from countries at peace believe it is 'somewhat' or 'very' likely that they will be affected by war or armed conflict in the future. Just over half (51 per cent) do not think they will be affected.
 - Millennials in Malaysia are most pessimistic – two in three (68 per cent) think it is likely that they will be personally affected by conflict in the future. Almost half of millennials from South Africa (49 per cent) and Russia (48 per cent) anticipate being affected.
 - Swiss and British millennials are the most optimistic, with 76 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively, considering it unlikely that they will be directly affected by war or an armed conflict in the future. They are closely followed by their counterparts in France (56 per cent) and Mexico (55 per cent).
- People in war-affected countries/territories are more likely to believe there will be fewer or no wars over the next 50 years, compared with respondents from countries at peace (46 per cent v. 30 per cent).

In your opinion, in the future, will there be more or fewer wars and armed conflicts across the world compared to now, or will their occurrence be about the same?

COUNTRIES IN CONFLICT



COUNTRIES IN PEACETIME



More wars or armed conflicts

About the same

Fewer wars or armed conflicts

No wars or armed conflicts

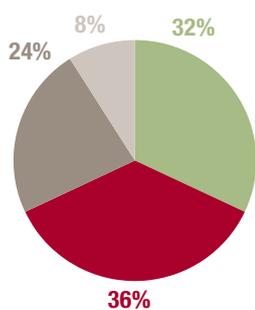
Don't know/Prefer not to answer

- More than half of millennials – 54 per cent – believe it is likely that a nuclear attack will occur in the next decade.
 - Malaysia has the highest share of people who believe that a nuclear attack will occur in the next decade (77 per cent), while Syria has the highest share of people who say such an attack is unlikely (56 per cent).

Opinion is also divided on the role of artificial intelligence in warfare and whether it will make wars and conflicts more or less humane. There is also a recognition that digital technology can have a positive impact in supporting victims of war.

- Marginally more people think that replacing human combatants with robots and drones in future wars and armed conflicts will increase the number of civilian casualties, compared with those who think it will reduce them (36 per cent v. 32 per cent). A sizeable minority (24 per cent) think it will make no difference.
- However, four times as many millennials think that digital technology can help respond to the various needs of victims of wars and armed conflicts than believe it cannot (58 per cent v. 15 per cent).

What, in your opinion, will happen if fully autonomous robots and drones, i.e. not controlled by humans, replace human combatants in the future?



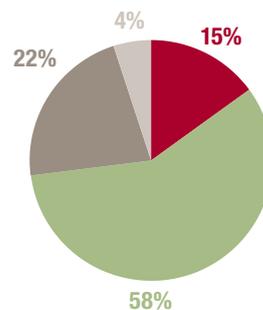
It will reduce the number of civilian casualties in wars and armed conflicts

It will increase the number of civilian casualties in wars and armed conflicts

It will make no difference to the number of civilian casualties in wars and armed conflicts

Don't know/Prefer not to answer

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the use of digital technology, like the internet and smart phones, can help respond to the various needs of victims of wars and armed conflicts?



Disagree

Agree

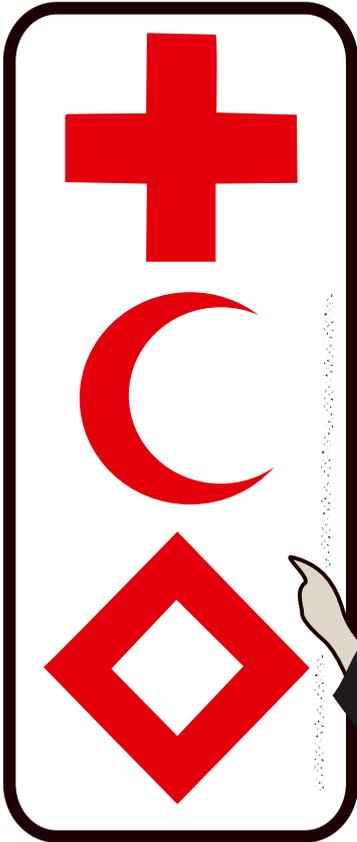
Neither agree nor disagree

Don't know/Prefer not to answer

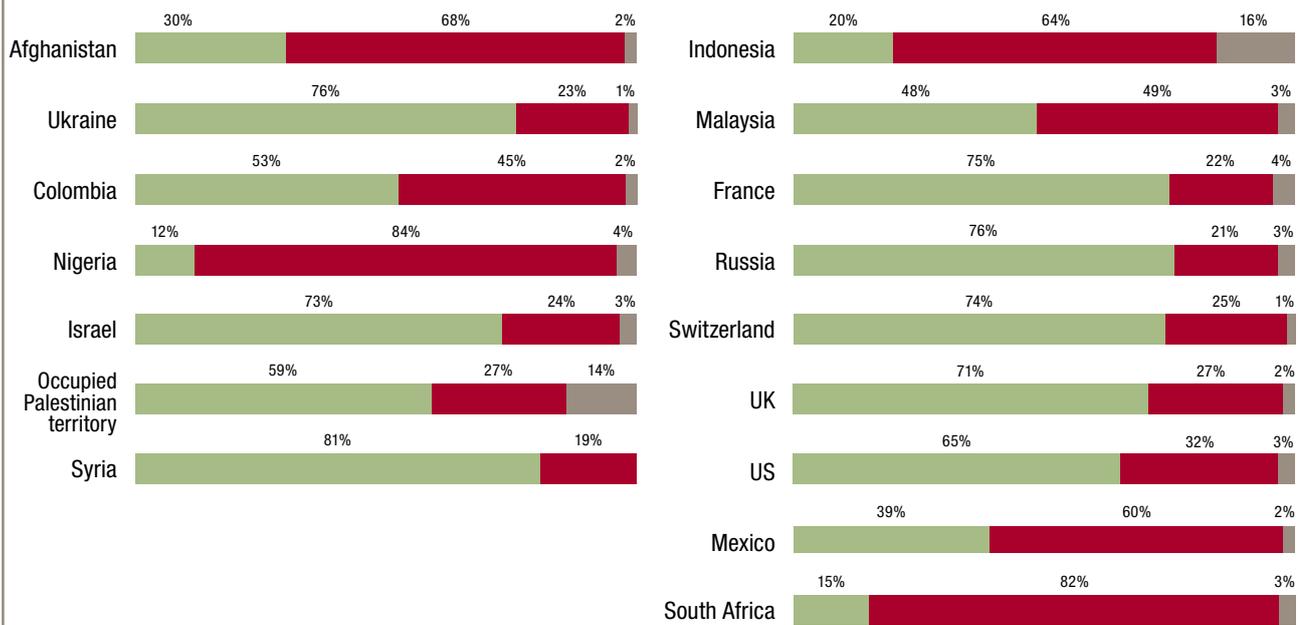
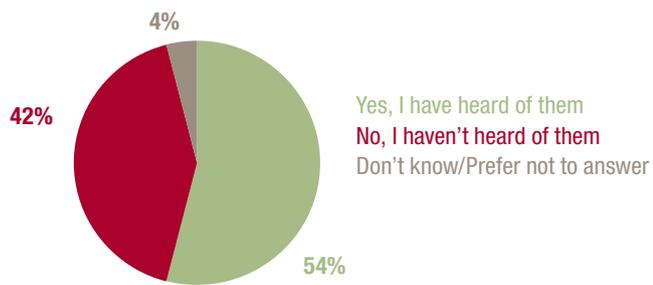
THE RULES OF WAR

The majority of millennials believe in the relevance of the Geneva Conventions, but they are less certain when it comes to the effectiveness of these instruments. There is almost no difference between millennials from countries/territories affected by conflict and those from conflict-free countries in terms of their level of awareness of the Geneva Conventions. However, millennials living in countries/territories affected by conflict are more likely to question their effectiveness.

- 54 per cent of millennials have heard of the Geneva Conventions. Awareness is highest among respondents in Syria (81 per cent), Russia (76 per cent), Ukraine (76 per cent) and France (75 per cent).
- Awareness was lowest among respondents in Nigeria (84 per cent), South Africa (82 per cent), Afghanistan (68 per cent) and Indonesia (64 per cent).



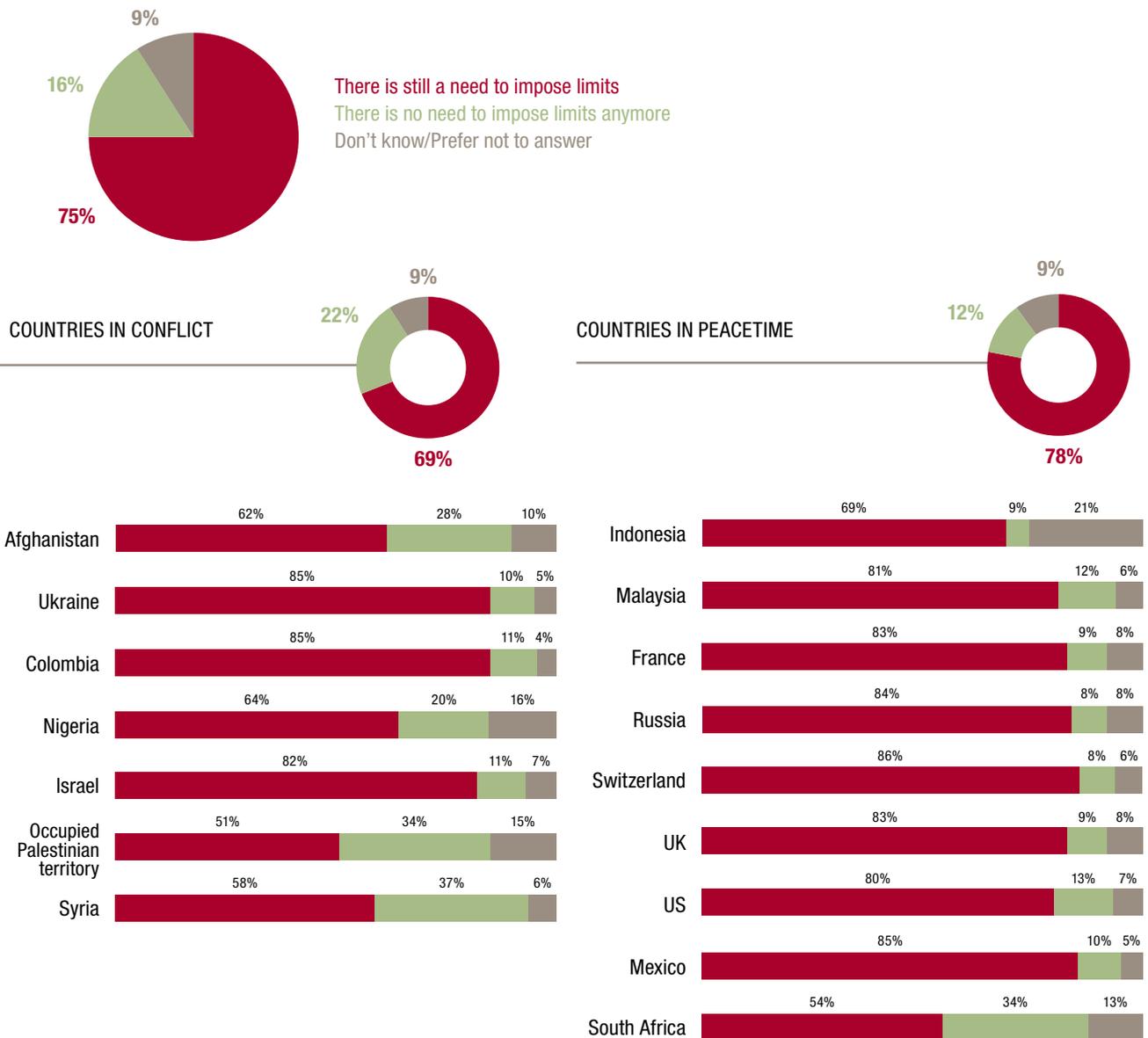
Have you ever heard of the Geneva Conventions?



- 75 per cent of all those surveyed think there is a need to impose limits on the ways in which wars are fought, demonstrating that the values underpinning international humanitarian law are largely endorsed by millennials.

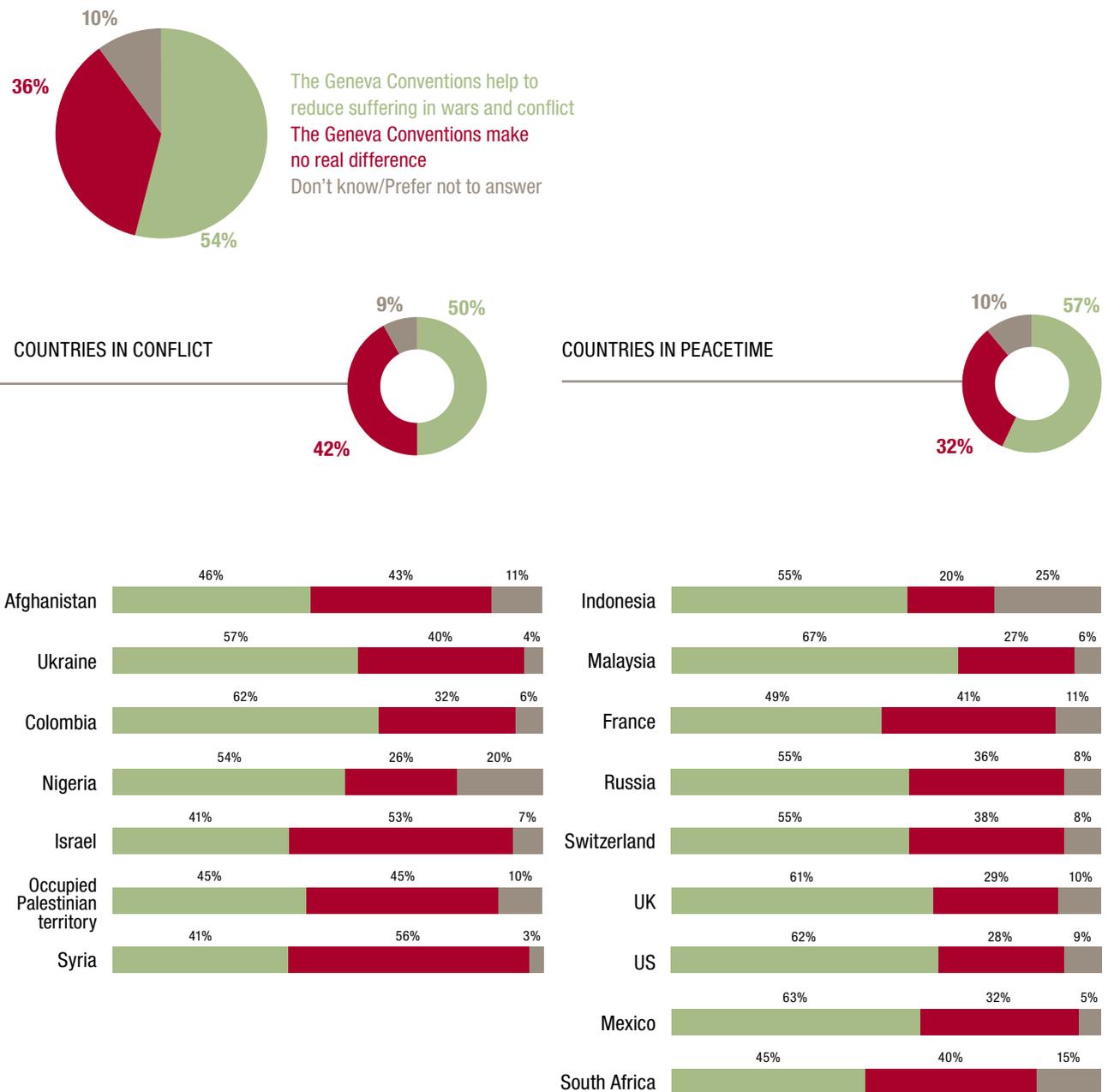
The Geneva Conventions are a series of international agreements that impose limits on the ways in which wars and armed conflicts may be fought (for example, avoiding civilian casualties as much as possible and forbidding torture). The Geneva Conventions were drawn up 70 years ago, after World War II, and all countries have now signed up to them.

70 years after the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, in your opinion, is there still a need to impose limits on the way wars and armed conflicts may be fought?



- Overall, 54 per cent believe that the Geneva Conventions help reduce suffering in wars and conflict, compared with 36 per cent who think they make no difference.
- Belief in the value of the Geneva Conventions is stronger among millennials in countries at peace (57 per cent) than those in countries/territories affected by war (50 per cent).
- Syria (56 per cent) and Israel (53 per cent) are the only countries in which a majority of those surveyed feel that the Geneva Conventions make no real difference.

Do you think the existence of the Geneva Conventions can help reduce the suffering in wars and armed conflicts, or do they make no real difference?



- A clear majority of millennials (78 per cent) think that, during war or armed conflict, combatants should avoid civilian casualties as much as possible, even if it makes it more difficult to achieve their military objectives.
- Syrians believe it is important to show humanity in times of war: 85 per cent say captured enemy combatants should be allowed to contact their relatives; 70 per cent say torture is never acceptable; and 87 per cent say addressing the mental-health needs of victims of conflict is just as important as addressing water, food and shelter.



But there are worrying trends that point to a lack of respect for the basic human values enshrined in international law:

- 36 per cent of millennials believe captured enemy combatants should not be allowed to contact their relatives – a basic right under international humanitarian law.
- 41 per cent believe that torture is acceptable under some circumstances. Even after having the UN Convention against Torture explained to them, 37 per cent still believe torture is acceptable under some circumstances.
- 15 per cent believe that combatants should do whatever it takes to win wars, regardless of the civilian casualties generated.

WEAPONS OF WAR



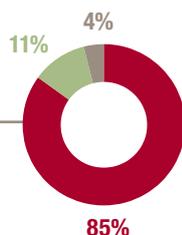
Millennials overwhelmingly oppose the use of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction under any circumstance, with Syrians showing the greatest level of intolerance for such weapons.

- Consensus is high regarding the prohibition of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, with four in five (84 per cent) millennials thinking that nuclear, biological (83 per cent) and chemical (81 per cent) weapons are never acceptable in wars and armed conflicts.
- While more than three in five millennials have the same opinion regarding anti-personal landmines (63 per cent) and cluster bombs (64 per cent), views on these weapons differ from country to country.
 - In Israel, only a third of respondents believe that the use of landmines and cluster bombs in wars and armed conflicts is never acceptable, as do around half of those surveyed in the US. However, 27 per cent of respondents in the latter country also say that the use of chemical weapons is acceptable in some circumstances.
- Syrians showed the highest levels of disapproval for weapons of mass destruction: 96 per cent said it is never acceptable to use chemical or biological weapons, while 98 per cent said it is never acceptable to use nuclear weapons.
- Overall, across the 16 countries/territories surveyed, three in five millennials agree that countries that have nuclear weapons should eliminate them (64 per cent) and countries that do not have nuclear weapons should not develop or obtain them (59 per cent).
- 84 per cent of all millennials surveyed believe the use of nuclear weapons is never acceptable. Millennials in Ukraine (92 per cent), Colombia (93 per cent), Syria (98 per cent) and Switzerland (92 per cent) felt strongest in this regard.
- Conversely, only 12 per cent of all those surveyed believe the use of nuclear weapons is acceptable under some circumstances. Nigeria (23 per cent), the US (22 per cent), Israel (18 per cent) and South Africa (17 per cent) felt strongest in this regard.

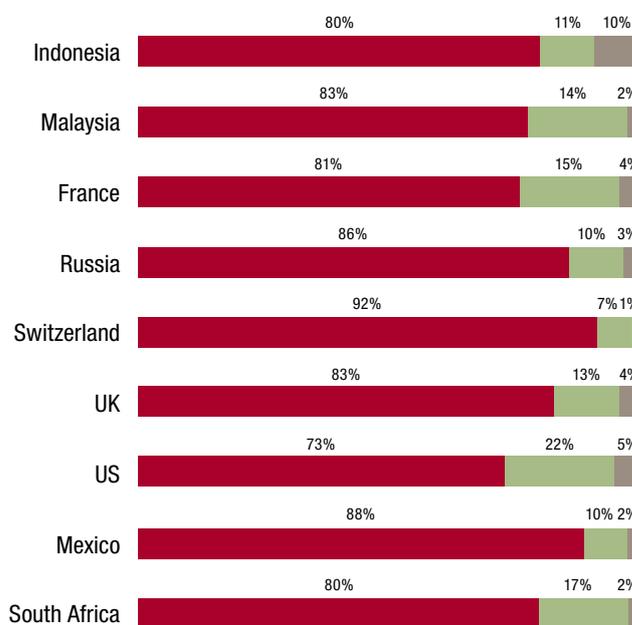
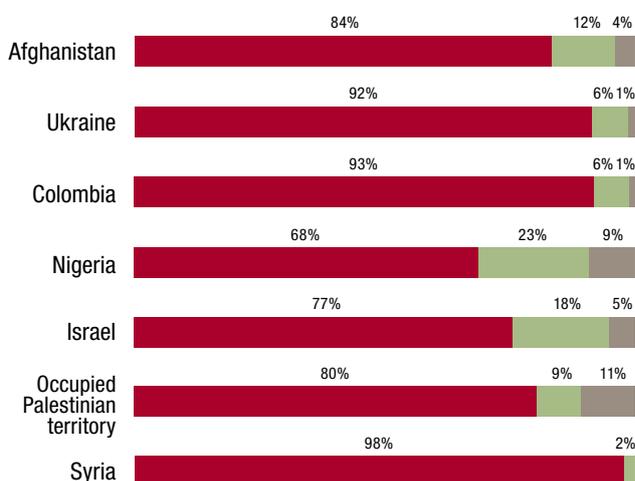
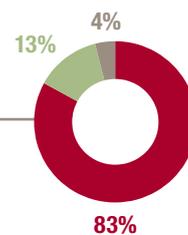
In your opinion, is the use of nuclear weapons in wars or armed conflicts acceptable under some circumstances, or is it never acceptable?



COUNTRIES IN CONFLICT



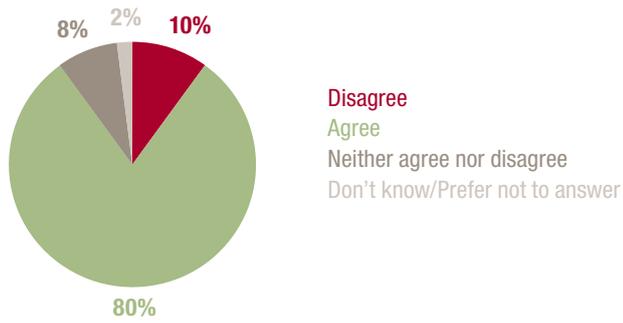
COUNTRIES IN PEACETIME



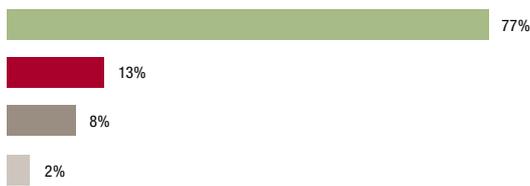
- Millennials who live in countries/territories affected by conflict are more inclined to agree that nuclear weapons are an effective instrument of deterrence (53 per cent v. 45 per cent) and, at the same time, are less inclined to agree that these weapons are a threat to humanity (77 per cent v. 82 per cent).

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

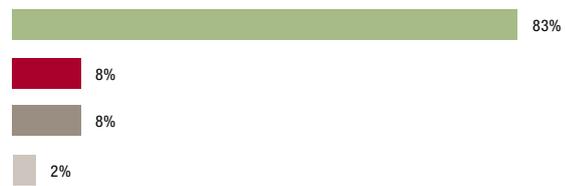
The existence of nuclear weapons is a threat to humanity



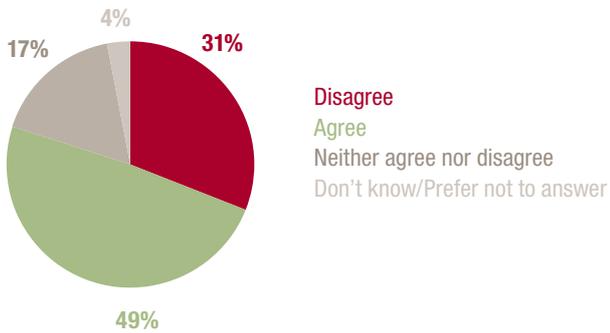
COUNTRIES IN CONFLICT



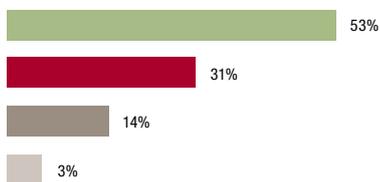
COUNTRIES IN PEACETIME



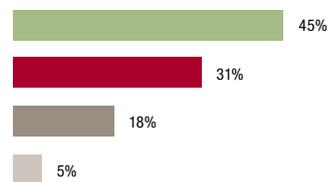
Nuclear weapons are an effective instrument of deterrence



COUNTRIES IN CONFLICT



COUNTRIES IN PEACETIME



We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything we can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

People know they can count on us to carry out a range of life-saving activities in conflict zones and to work closely with the communities there to understand and meet their needs. Our experience and expertise enable us to respond quickly and effectively, without taking sides.

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