

# **Autonomous Weapon Systems: Public Opinion and Security Issues**

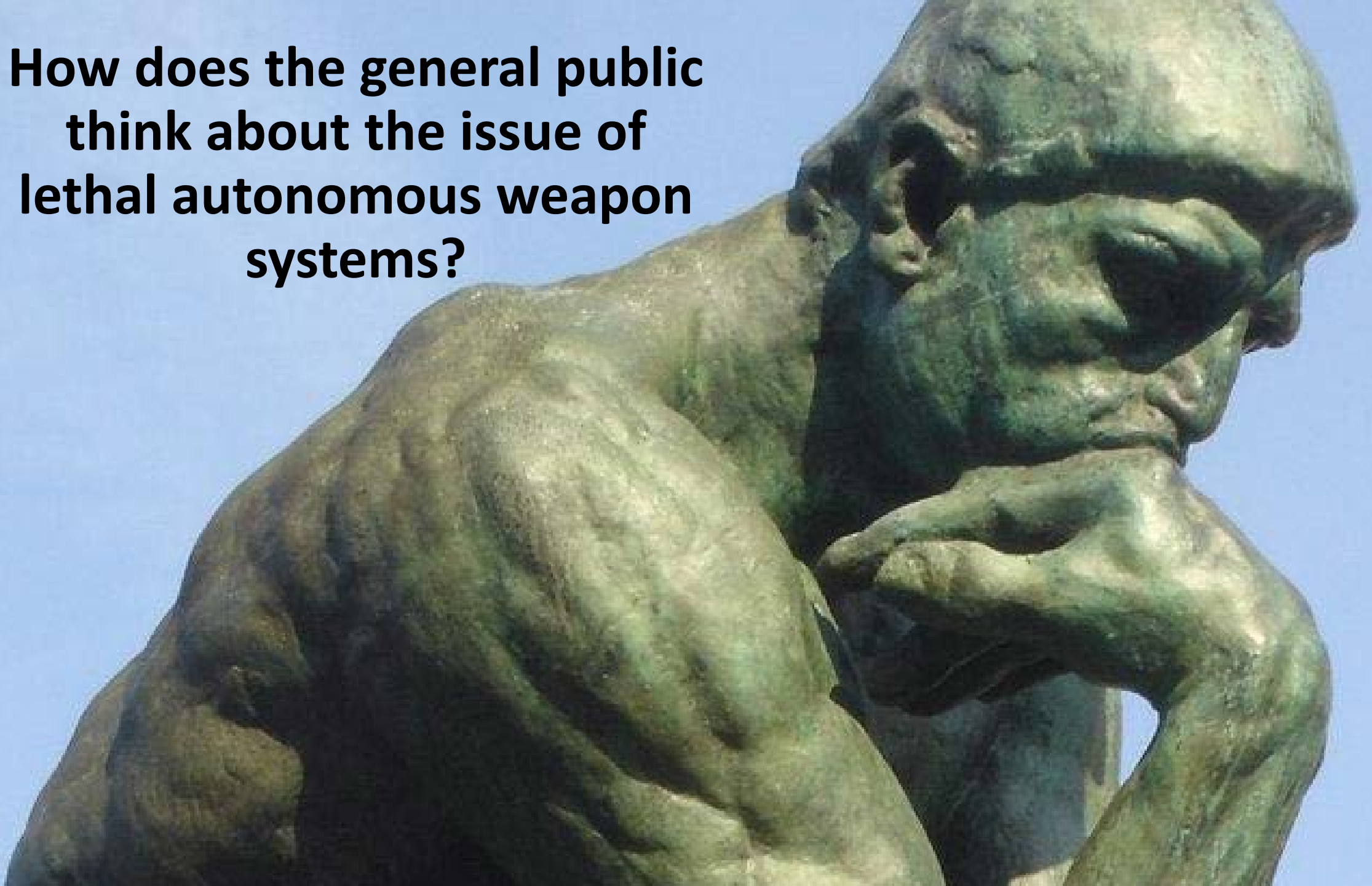
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**How does the general public  
think about the issue of  
lethal autonomous weapon  
systems?**



# Martens Clause and Public Opinion

- What does it mean for a weapon system to violate “the dictates of the public conscience”?
- Public opinion is one part of how to evaluate the “public conscience”, though not the only part



# The Bar For Claiming That A Weapon System Violates The Dictates Of The Public Conscience Is High

- Hard to measure the public conscience
- Public opinion is often nuanced and malleable – especially on emerging issues
- **Implication: Need clear evidence of overwhelming public opposition to be confident LAWS violate public conscience**



# What Do We Know Right Now About Public Opinion And Autonomous Weapon Systems?

- Existing research (Carpenter, Moon et al.) suggests autonomous weapon systems are unpopular and that the public supports a ban, especially in the United States
- Is this true?
- Their findings depend in part on how they asked the questions



# Public Opinion Survey Methodology Matters

- Survey details:
  - Sample size
  - The questions you ask
  - How you ask them
- On new topics where the public lacks knowledge, providing **context** is critical to gathering informed opinions
- Study: Ask populations in US and India questions about autonomous weapon systems to gauge support/opposition

# **Test #1a: Ask About A Military Intervention And Whether The US Public Supports Sending LAWS or US Military Personnel**

- Country: United States
- Type of sample: Nationally representative
- Date: October 2014
- Sample Size: 1000
- Concept: Respondents asked about a hypothetical military intervention by the United States and whether they would rather the United States use LAWS or US military personnel to intervene

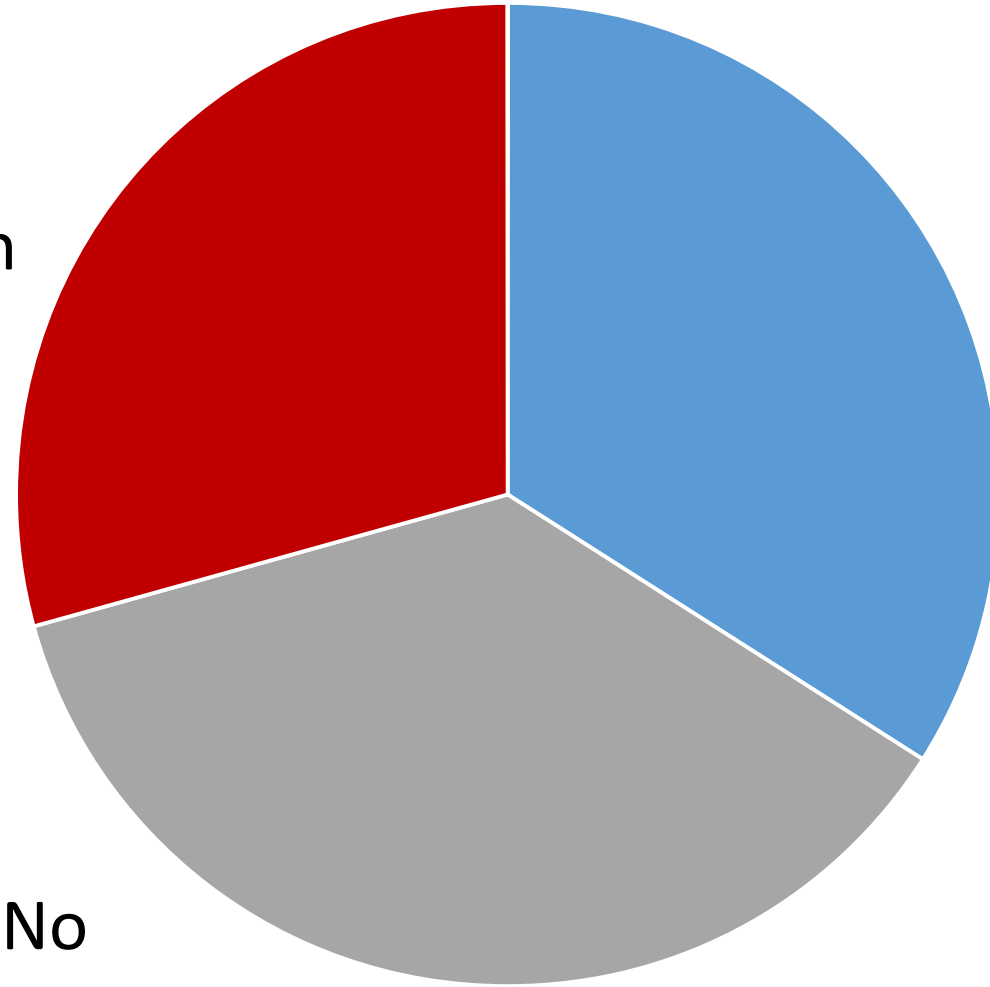
**Question: Do You Support Sending LAWS or US military personnel in a hypothetical military intervention?**

Support using human forces, 29%

Support using autonomous weapons, 34%

No preference, 37%

**Public not significantly more opposed to autonomous weapons**

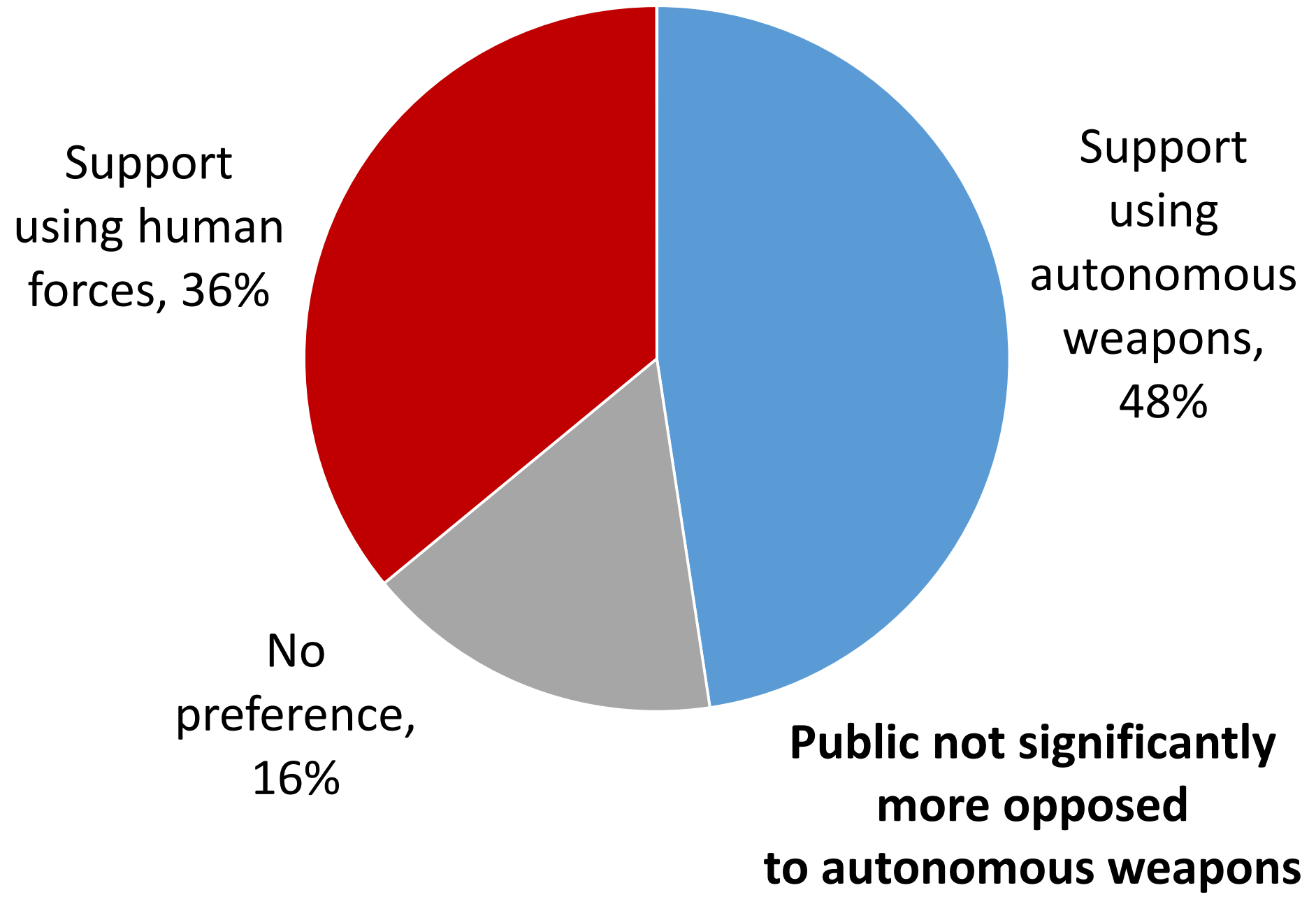




# **Test #1b: Ask About A Military Intervention And Whether The Indian Public Supports Sending LAWS or Indian Military Personnel**

- Country: India
- Type of sample: Convenience (not nationally representative)
- Date: April 2015
- Sample Size: 300
- Concept: Respondents asked about a hypothetical military intervention by India and whether they would rather India use LAWS or Indian military personnel to intervene

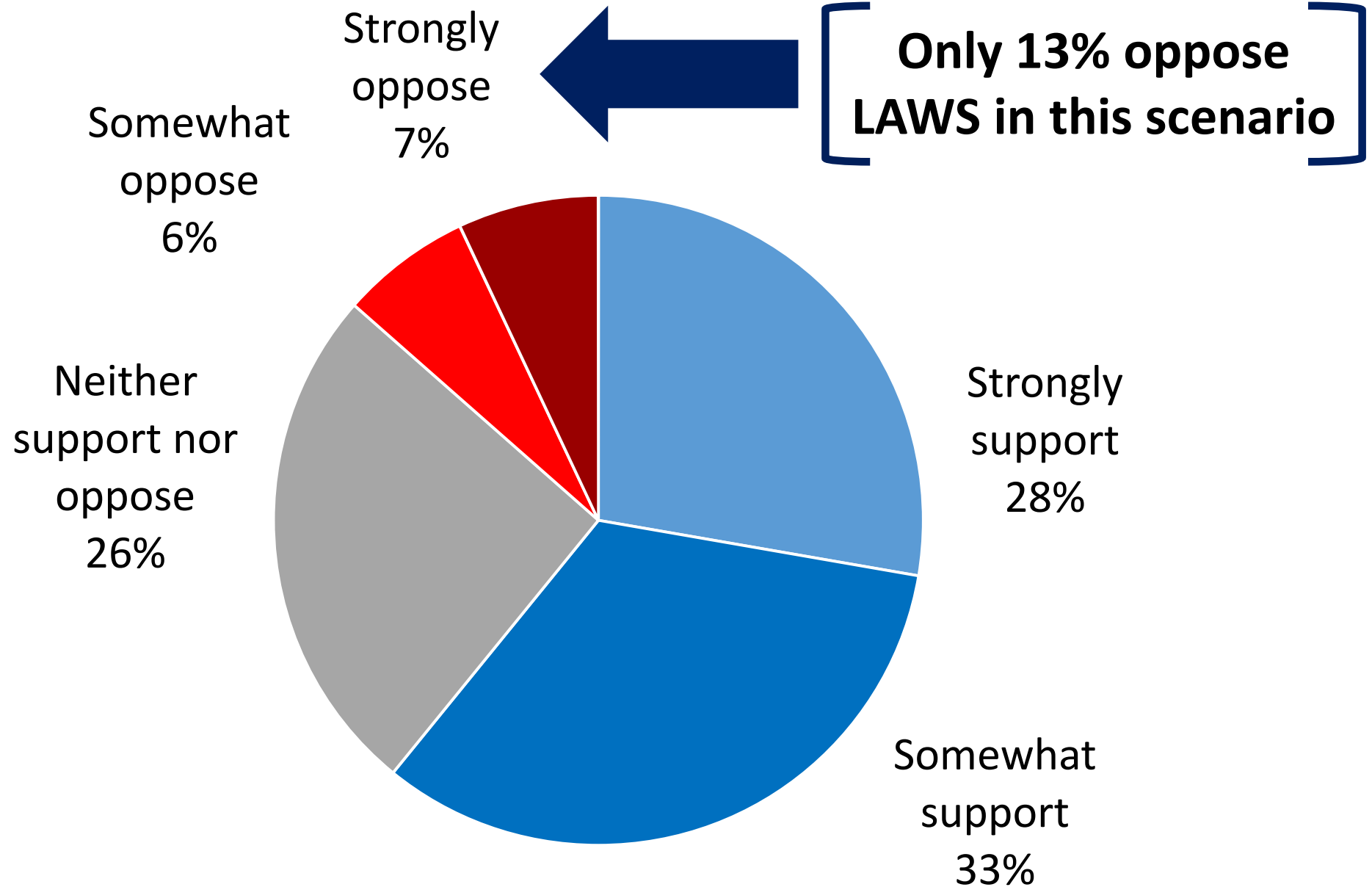
**Question: Do You Support Sending LAWS or Indian military personnel in a hypothetical military intervention?**



# Test #2a: Ask US Public About Support For LAWS In A Particular Usage Scenario

- Country: United States
- Type of sample: Nationally representative
- Date: October 2014
- Sample Size: 1000
- Concept: Respondents asked directly about whether they would support the US government developing and using LAWS in a particular context

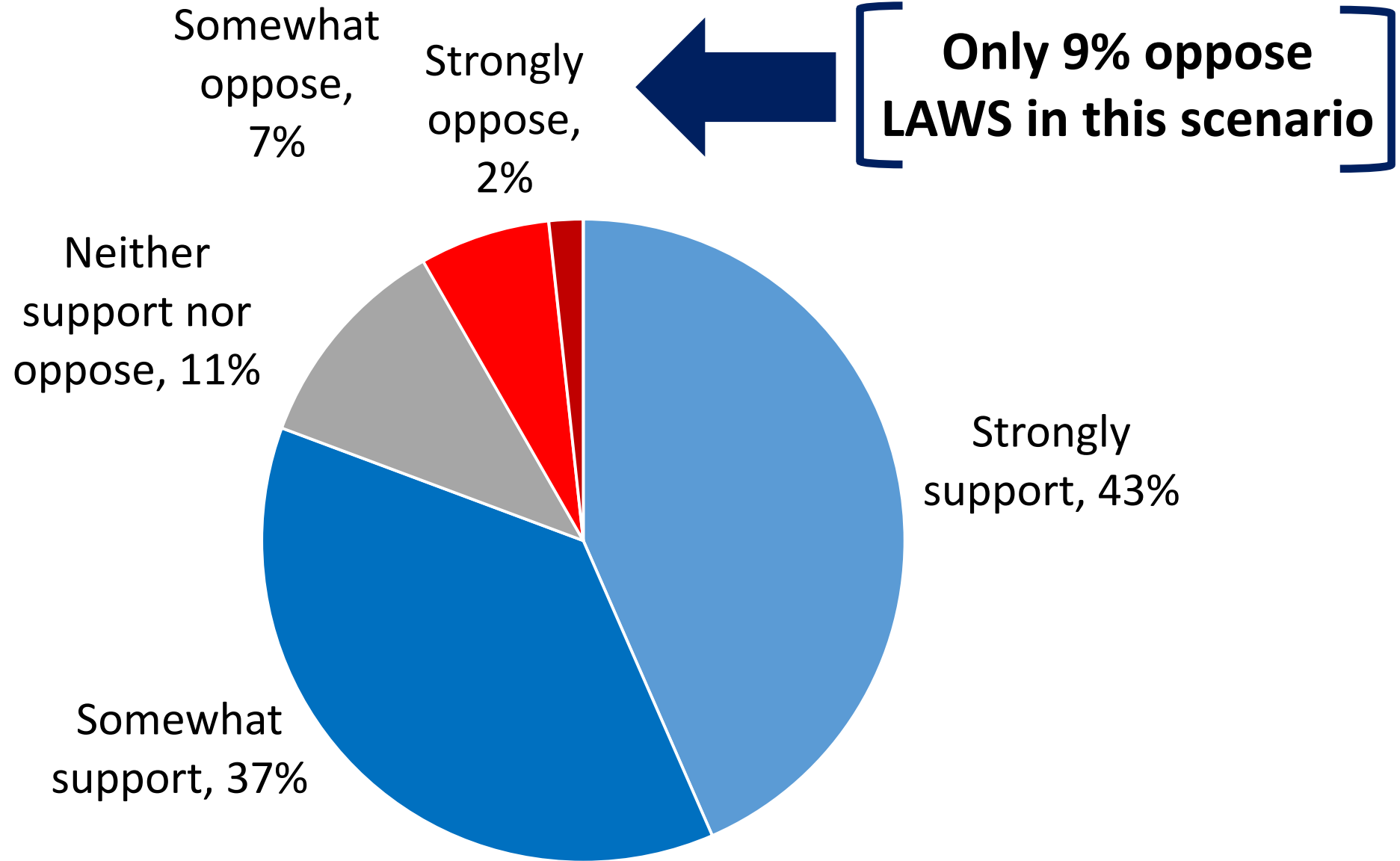
**Question:  
Should the US  
develop and  
use LAWS to  
protect US  
ships, planes,  
and military  
bases from  
attack?**



# Test #2b: Ask Indian Public About Support For LAWS In A Particular Usage Scenario

- Country: India
- Type of sample: Convenience (not nationally representative)
- Date: April 2015
- Sample Size: 300
- Concept: Respondents asked directly about whether they would support the Indian government developing and using LAWS in a particular context

**Question:  
Should India  
develop and  
use LAWS to  
protect Indian  
ships, planes,  
and military  
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# So What Does The Public Really Think About Autonomous Weapon Systems?

- Complicated and depends on **context**: how you ask the questions and who you ask really matters
- Bar for claiming that survey results speak for the conscience of humanity should be extremely high
- Results demonstrate, at the very least, that it is **too soon to say** that autonomous weapon systems necessarily violate the “public conscience” provision of the Martens Clause from a public opinion perspective
- Next steps: **Representative** survey samples in other countries

For more information, including details on the survey questions, methods, or results, contact Michael C. Horowitz at:

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