

Ubiquitous but heterogeneous: International organizations' influence on public opinion in China, Brazil, Japan, and Sweden

Clara H. Suong¹, Scott Desposato²,
and Erik Gartzke²

¹*Department of Political Science, Virginia Tech, 220 Stanger Street, 531 Major Williams Hall (0130), Blacksburg, VA, 24061, USA;* ²*Department of Political Science, University of California, San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, #0521, La Jolla, CA, 92093-0521, USA*

Corresponding author: Department of Political Science, Virginia Tech, 220 Stanger Street, 531 Major Williams Hall (0130), Blacksburg, VA, 24061, USA. E-mail: clara.suong@vt.edu

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Abstract

Existing work on the effect of international organizations' (IOs) approval of the use of force on public support for it tends to focus on the established great powers in the Global North and its positive main effect. In this research note, we contribute to this literature in two ways with a survey experiment conducted in four countries: Brazil, China, Japan, and Sweden. First, we examine the generalizability of existing findings to relatively understudied countries that

include aspiring great powers in the Global South. Second, we examine the heterogeneity of the effect of IOs' authorization of the use of force. We confirm the generalizability of the positive effect of IOs' approval on public support for war. At the same time, we find that individuals' positive responses to IOs' endorsement are heterogeneous and vary by their beliefs in militant internationalism and educational attainment, and by their home country.

Keywords: international organization; use of force; survey experiment; Brazil; China; Japan; Sweden

1. Introduction

Recent experimental work in International Relations (IR) shows that international organizations (IOs) can shape public attitudes about military action by authorizing or not authorizing it (e.g. [Chapman 2011](#); [Grieco et al. 2011](#); [Togo and Ikeda 2015](#); [Matsumura and Togo 2019](#); [Recchia and Chu 2021](#); [Lushenko, Raman, and Kreps 2022](#)). Fielding survey experiments on individuals of mostly WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) countries ([Bassan-Nygate et al. 2024](#)), scholars have found that citizens are more supportive of the use of force when told that the United Nations (UN) has authorized such action.

Yet, key questions remain about the relationship between IOs and public attitudes about the use of force. Specifically, we lack a definitive answer about the IO influence's coverage and variation at the individual- and country-level. Are IOs influential in driving public attitudes outside the great powers that are mostly wealthy, Anglo democracies? If so, is the effect homogenous across different contexts—such as individual and country traits?

While IR scholars have established that IO authorization can sway public opinion in some countries, they have yet to generalize this result. Many existing studies that use survey experiments focus on the influence of UN authorization of military action on citizens of the US, the UK, or other developed democracies that are also great powers. Yet, these cases and their view of IOs may teach us little about IOs' influence on individuals in non-Anglo middle powers and non-democracies. The interpretation of IO endorsement may differ for individuals based in these countries.

Relatedly, studies on IO endorsement's effect on public support for war have focused more on inter-IO variation and generally under-explored the inter-individual variations in the IO effect and their relations with individual and country factors. This contrasts with the recent literature on varying public perceptions of IO legitimacy (e.g. [Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera 2022](#); [Dellmuth et al. 2022b](#); [Brutger and Clark 2023](#); [Ghassim 2024](#)). It is possible that the effect of IOs' endorsement of the use of force on public opinion may be heterogeneous by individuals and countries.

We use survey experiments to contribute to this literature in several ways. First, we examine whether existing findings about IOs' impact on public opinion may be extended to other cases, including non-Anglo, developing, and non-democratic countries. Our country cases of Brazil, China, Japan, and Sweden are selected to expand the geographical scope of existing research on IO endorsements. We include the cases that have garnered less attention in these literatures—such as Brazil and Sweden—and exclude the cases that have been frequently studied—such as the USA, the UK, Germany, and France. Our choice of countries also reflects the “design of purposive variations” discussed in the recent literature on the generalizability of experimental results across countries ([Bassan-Nygate et al. 2024](#)), which allows us to formally test the generalizability of the findings using sign-generalization tests ([Egami and Hartman 2023](#)). Second, we study the individual-level and country-level factors that underlie the heterogeneity in the effect of IO endorsement, following the recent literature on IO legitimation (e.g. [Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera 2022](#); [Dellmuth et al. 2022b](#); [Ghassim 2024](#)).

We report two primary findings. First, IO influence on public opinion does generalize broadly. In each of our cases, respondents are more willing to use force when it was sanctioned by the UN. IO influence is substantively large among our Brazil, China, Sweden, and Japan samples and its positive effect is generalizable according to our sign-generalization tests and our “raked” data with post hoc survey weights ([DeBell and Krosnick 2009](#); [Caughey et al. 2020](#)).

Second, we find significant heterogeneity in the effect of IO authorization on public attitudes toward the use of force. Some of this heterogeneity is explained by individual-level factors—foreign policy dispositions and educational attainment in particular. Individuals who are college-educated are much more likely to be influenced by the UN's

endorsement of the use of force than those who are not. In contrast, respondents exhibiting “militant internationalism”—those who believe in nations’ moral commitment to using military force—are generally less likely to follow the UN’s stance on the use of force. Part of the heterogeneity is also due to the characteristics of respondents’ home country. We find that the effect of IO authorization is smaller on the citizens of China—undemocratic but institutionally privileged as a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC)—than those in other countries.

After reviewing the relevant literature, we provide the details of our theoretical argument. We then lay out our experimental design, discussing our vignette and dual treatment experimental design. We then present the data and the results of its analysis. We conclude by summarizing our findings and offering suggestions for future research.

2. Under-investigated generalizability and heterogeneity of IOs’ sway over the public

IR scholars have long debated the relevance of IOs to the processes of war and peace (e.g. [Angell 1933](#); [Mitrany 1933](#); [Wallace and Singer 1970](#); [Haas 1986](#); [Jacobson, Reisinger, and Mathers 1986](#); [Domke 1988](#)). In particular, scholars have debated the manner in which IOs can shape public opinion, exploring the impact of international institutions on conflict by examining the relationship between IOs’ authorization and public attitudes toward the use of force. Many identify the approval of international institutions as a key factor in determining popular support for the offensive use of force, arguing there exist moral/legalistic or pragmatic/informational pathways in which IO authorization persuades the public. According to these scholars, subjects listen to IOs because of a moral obligation ([Claude 1966](#); [Ruggie 1992](#); [Cortell and Davis 1996](#); [Finnemore 2003](#); [Coleman 2007](#)) or because of what an IO endorsement (or its absence) signals about the costs, benefits, and likely outcomes of action ([Tango 2007](#); [Fang 2008](#); [Thompson 2009](#); [Chapman 2011](#); [Grieco et al. 2011](#); [Recchia 2016, 2020](#)).

Many of these works feature survey experiments that focus on unearthing the causal mechanisms of the effects of the UN on citizens of select countries. Yet experimental scholarship has differed in its conclusions about the causal mechanism, despite the shared methods.

Some studies find support for the normative arguments (Tingley and Tomz 2012; Matsumura and Tago 2019; Lushenko, Raman, and Kreps 2022), whereas others detail evidence of the informational claims (Chapman 2011; Grieco et al. 2011; Maliniak and Tierney 2014; Tago and Ikeda 2015; Recchia and Chu 2021).

For example, Tingley and Tomz (2012) find in a survey experiment on a sample of American citizens that informing experimental subjects of the U.N. Security Council's approval boosts public support for the use of force by "legalizing" the proposed action, granting it moral authority. Similarly, surveying a sample of Japanese respondents, Matsumura and Tago (2019: 406) note that IO authorization of the use of force "consistently [positively] affects Japanese respondents' perceptions of legality, legitimacy, public goods" and that "cost and burden-sharing perceptions are not affected by the cues."

In contrast, Maliniak and Tierney (2014) discover in their experiment on UK citizens that international approval serves as a signal to their British subjects that the proposed military action would have low costs and a high likelihood of success. Similarly, Tago and Ikeda (2015) find some evidence that IO approval functions as an informational cue to a sample of Japanese subjects. Finding that a treatment for the size of international coalitions produces a greater change in support for using force than a treatment for the presence of the UN Security Council's approval, they conclude that IO cues are about the expected success or cost of military action rather than its righteousness. Additionally, Recchia and Chu (2021) conclude from their experiments in the USA, the UK, and Germany that approval from IOs, such as the UN and the African Union, increases public support for contributing to military coalitions by mainly functioning as an informational cue.

Despite innovative approaches and interesting results, there remain concerns about this literature. First, the generalizability of the available findings about the effect of IOs on public attitudes toward the use of force has been generally understudied. Existing studies have focused on the populations in developed countries with stable democratic systems in the Global North—some with a history of having invaded other countries—such as the USA (e.g. Grieco et al. 2011; Tingley and Tomz 2012), the UK (e.g. Johns and Davies 2014; Maliniak and Tierney 2014), Japan (e.g. Ikeda and Tago 2014; Matsumura and Tago 2019), Germany (e.g. Recchia and Chu 2021), France (e.g. Lushenko,

Raman, and Kreps 2022), Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Spain (Tomz, Weeks, and Bansak 2023). Many of these countries are WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) (Bassan-Nygate *et al.* 2024), differing from many developing countries or Global South countries. Second, the heterogeneity of individuals' allegiance to IOs' policy stance has received relatively less attention in the literature.¹ This contrasts with the recent surge of scholarship on individuals' beliefs in IO legitimacy, which examines the variation in individuals' perception of IOs and individual- and country-level heterogeneity (e.g. Dellmuth and Tallberg 2021; Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera 2022; Brutger and Clark 2023; Ghassim 2024).

While the results of current studies are indicative, it is essential to determine whether the effect of international institutional approval on public attitudes is homogeneous or instead varies by individuals and national publics. National public opinion is made up of the attitudes and prejudices of millions of individual citizens. It is exceedingly unlikely that each citizen will respond equivalently to an external endorsement from an authoritative source, such as an IO. Differences in the national makeup of individual public attitudes may then help to account for a country's overall willingness to consider military force, and for the magnitude of the effect on public approval associated with IO authorization.

3. Theory and hypotheses

We assess the sway of UN approval over the public in two ways: by assessing the generalizability of existing findings on IO effects on public opinion to other countries; and by analyzing the heterogeneity in such effects. We outline the theoretical justifications below.

3.1 Generalizability of the positive IO effect on individuals' support for war

First, we assess the universality of the appeal of IO approval. We assess whether the strong appeal of IO approval, found in the literature on IO

1 C.f. Matsumura and Tago (2019) and Recchia and Chu (2021) are an exception in that they examine how the IO effect on public opinion on military action varies by individuals' cooperative internationalism and partisanship.

effects on public support for the use of force, holds across different countries and contexts. Most, if not all, of the existing experimental studies find that UN approval has a strong, positive effect on public attitudes toward the use of force through the normative/legal (Tingley and Tomz 2012; Matsumura and Tago 2019; Lushenko, Raman, and Kreps 2022) or rational/signaling mechanisms (Chapman 2011; Grieco et al. 2011; Maliniak and Tierney 2014; Tago and Ikeda 2015; Recchia and Chu 2021). However, it is also possible that the effect will not generalize outside of the mostly WEIRD countries that are Anglo and militarily capable. For example, the UN's popularity surprisingly varies by country, especially among countries that are not permanent members of the UN Security Council according to Pew Research Center's recent survey (Fagan 2023). In Brazil, 29% (or 53%) of those surveyed viewed the UN unfavorably (or favorably). In Japan, 50% (or 40%) of the respondents saw the UN unfavorably (or favorably). This contrasts with Sweden where only 16% (or 81%) of the respondents saw the UN unfavorably (or favorably).

Individuals' confidence in the UN as a political authority also varies at the individual- and country-level. According to Ecker-Ehrhardt (2016)'s analysis of the World Values Survey from 2005 to 2007, individuals vary in their overall preferences for the authority of the UN. Specifically, individuals can differ in their preferences for the UN, instead of their own governments, to take charge of global issues, such as international peacekeeping, protection of the environment, aid to developing countries, refugees, and human rights, and in which issues should fall under the UN's purview. The study also finds that individuals from powerful countries are more supportive of empowering the UN, compared to those from less powerful countries. Consequentially, it is possible for these individual-level and country-level differences to limit the generalizability of the effect of IO approval.

Thus, we test the following hypotheses about the generalizability of the effect of IO approval:

H_{Universality}: IO approval will (positively) affect individual support for the use of force universally.

H_{Non-universality}: IO approval will not (positively) affect individual support for the use of force universally.

3.2 Heterogeneous effects of IO approval by individual and by country

Does the effect of IO approval on public attitudes toward the use of force vary across individuals and countries? If so, what are the sources of the heterogeneity? Existing scholarship suggests several country- and individual-level sources of the variation in the effect on individuals' attitudes toward military action (e.g. [Scheve and Slaughter 2001](#); [Hainmueller and Hiscox 2006](#); [Inglehart and Norris 2017](#)).

First, the effect of IO approval on individuals' attitudes toward military action can vary by attributes of their home countries, such as their current status in IOs, population size, and regime type ([Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015](#); [Ecker-Ehrhardt 2016](#); [Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera 2022](#)). Existing literature notes a significant country-level variation in individuals' attitudes toward IOs and attributes it to their "home country bias"—whether an IO or its features benefits or harms their home countries and their home countries' influence within and outside the IO ([Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015](#); [Ecker-Ehrhardt 2016](#); [Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera 2022](#)). This view generates different predictions about how country attributes may interact with the effects of IO authorization of the use of force on their citizens. First, some works imply that individuals from countries that are currently in institutionally privileged positions in an IO, hence benefiting from the IO, are likely to be more positively affected by the IO's endorsement of the use of force than individuals in countries that are currently less influential in the IO or dissatisfied with the institutional status quo. This may be for two reasons—because the former view the IO more favorably than the latter and/or because the former view the IO's endorsement as a signal from their own national government. In the context of the UN, citizens of countries that are permanent members of the Security Council tend to "favor UN authority much more" (108) than citizens of countries that are not ([Ecker-Ehrhardt 2016](#)). It is also possible that the UN's seal of approval of military action works as a signal to individuals from the UNSC's permanent member countries. In their view, that the UN has approved the use of force may imply a stamp of approval, or at least a lack of non-approval, by the UN Security Council and, by extension, by their own government.

This scholarship also implies that citizens living in large or powerful countries are also likely to react more positively to IOs' endorsement of the use of force than citizens of smaller or less powerful countries. Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera (2022) find that individuals' attitudes toward the UN differ by whether their home countries are "very large" (e.g., China or India), "large" (e.g., Russia or the USA), or "intermediate" (e.g., Argentina or Spain). Interestingly, citizens of "powerful states" tend to favor UN authority much more than those from "weaker countries" because the former believe that the UN "privileges" the powerful countries and the latter believe that the UN "disadvantages" the less powerful countries (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2016, 99).

This overall implies that individuals living in countries that are powerful or permanent members of the UN Security Council—including China—are likely to react more positively to the UN's authorization of the use of force than individuals living in countries that are not—such as Brazil, Japan, and Sweden. It also implies that individuals in countries dissatisfied with the institutional status quo and seek institutional UN reforms (Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera 2022), such as Brazil and Japan, are likely to react less positively to the UN's authorization of military action than individuals based in countries satisfied with the institutional status quo, such as China and Sweden.

Additionally, this scholarship suggests that the effect of IO endorsement of the use of force on individuals can vary by the regime type of their home country—whether it is a democracy or non-democracy. Scholars note that individuals' perceptions of IOs are strongly and positively correlated with their trust in domestic political institutions (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2020; Dellmuth et al. 2022a,b). This implies that individuals living in non-democratic countries, such as China, are also more likely to be suspicious of IOs' calls to action because they find it difficult to trust the national government. In comparison, individuals in democratic countries—where domestic institutional trust is likely to be higher—are more likely to also trust and follow IOs' decisions. In other words, this implies that individuals living in countries that are democracies—such as Brazil, Japan, and Sweden—are likely to react more positively to the UN's authorization of the use of force than individuals living in non-democratic countries—such as China.

Thus, we hypothesize as follows about the heterogeneous effect of IO approval on public support for the use of force:

H_{China}^{ijb} : The effect of IO approval on support for the use of force is larger for individuals from a country that is a permanent member of the UNSC, compared to those from a country that is not.

H_{China} : The effect of IO approval on support for the use of force is larger for individuals from a non-democratic country, compared to those from a democratic country.

$H_{Brazil, Japan}$: The effect of IO approval on support for the use of force is smaller for individuals from countries that seek UNSC reforms compared to those from other countries.

Second, existing literature suggests that the effect of IO endorsement on individuals' attitudes toward the use of force can vary by individuals' political, economic, and social attributes, such as their socioeconomic status (Dellmuth *et al.* 2022b) and their political values (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2016; Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera 2022; Dellmuth *et al.* 2022b) or dispositions (Zaller and Feldman 1992; Kertzer *et al.* 2014).

Specifically, scholars show that individuals' socioeconomic status—educational attainment in particular—to be a crucial factor in their heterogeneous responses to international issues, such as free trade (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Mayda and Rodrik 2005; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2006). In particular, scholars have identified an elite-citizen gap in perceptions of IO legitimacy in Brazil, Germany, the Philippines, Russia, and the USA, noting that elites' socioeconomic status can explain their acceptance of IOs' legitimacy (Dellmuth *et al.* 2022b). They posit that individuals with high socioeconomic status usually possess the political knowledge or are sufficiently politically sophisticated to recognize the value of IOs, whereas those without high socioeconomic status lack the knowledge. This implies that individuals with high socioeconomic status are also more likely to align with the UN in their views about the use of force, whereas those without the knowledge are unlikely to do so.

Additionally, individuals' policy-related dispositions and values can be closely associated with their international attitudes (Inglehart and Norris 2017; de Wilde *et al.* 2019; Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019) and heterogeneous reactions to IOs (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2016; Inglehart and Norris 2017; Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019; Brutger and Li 2022; Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera 2022; Dellmuth *et al.*

2022b; Brutger and Clark 2023). Specifically, individuals' heterogeneous reactions to IOs can be driven by their foreign policy preferences—consistent beliefs and stances about how their own country's foreign policy should be implemented, such as cooperative and militant internationalism (Wittkopf 1986, 1990, 1994) or isolationism (Holsti 1979).

Militant internationalism refers to individuals' belief in the use of force as a righteous and important foreign policy tool for their government (Kertzer et al. 2014; Rathbun et al. 2016). Militant internationalists are likely to react conditionally to any third-party approval of the use of force because of their strong belief in military action as a legitimate tool in international politics. They will side with an IO's decision only when it authorizes the use of force because they prioritize the use of force over following IOs. In other words, we hypothesize the IO effect to be smaller among militant internationalists than non-believers of militant internationalism, reflected in a negative interaction between the IO effect and subjects' militant internationalism.

Cooperative internationalists typically believe that their countries should actively engage with international politics (Kertzer et al. 2014; Rathbun et al. 2016). In their view, their countries are morally obligated to engage with—and if necessary intervene in—other countries. At the same time, they believe that the main means to engage is to cooperate with other countries—not through the use of force, which distinguishes them from militant internationalists. Consequentially, cooperative internationalists are much more likely to embrace IOs' calls to action than non-believers of cooperative internationalism because IOs represent cooperation and responding to their calls would be ethical to cooperative internationalists. In other words, the effect of IO authorization would be larger among the individuals who believe in cooperative internationalism than those who do not. Thus, we hypothesize a positive interaction between individuals' cooperative internationalism and the effect of IO approval.

Isolationism refers to an individual's belief that one's own country should prioritize resolving domestic issues and withdraw from engaging in international politics (Kertzer et al. 2014; Rathbun et al. 2016). Isolationist individuals believe engaging in international politics does not “pay off” for their countries. Isolationists are also likely to conditionally align with an IO's endorsement of military action. They are

likely to agree only with its decision to endorse inaction because their allegiance to non-engagement trumps their receptiveness to the IO's calls. In other words, we predict the IO effect to be smaller among believers of isolationism than non-believers of isolationism.

In short, we hypothesize the following relations between individuals' attributes and the effect of IO approval on their support for military action:

$H_{Socioeconomic\ status}^{ijh}$: The effect of IO authorization of the use of force is larger among individuals with high socioeconomic status than those with low status.

$H_{Militant\ internationalism}^{ijh}$: The effect of IO authorization of the use of force is smaller among individuals with high militant internationalism than those with low militant internationalism.

$H_{Cooperative\ internationalism}^{ijh}$: The effect of IO authorization of the use of force is larger among individuals with high cooperative internationalism than those with low cooperative internationalism.

$H_{Isolationism}^{ijh}$: The effect of IO authorization of the use of force is smaller among individuals with high isolationism than those with low isolationism.

4. Experimental design

4.1 Vignette design

Our experiment features a vignette in which the two conditions for UN approval are embedded. Specifically, each respondent in our experiment is randomly assigned to one of the two conditions about UN authorization of the use of force. He is asked to read a short scenario ("vignette") about potential conflicts between two hypothetical countries ("Country A" and "Country B") that features an experimental condition about the UN authorization (or lack thereof) for Country A's use of force—whether or not the UN has authorized Country A to use force against Country B (Suong *et al.* 2023).² Following the

2 An additional treatment was a dichotomous assignment of the regime type of the target country, Country B, as democratic or not democratic. We focus on this treatment in another article. Our models include the democratic target treatment as a control variable and find that it does not affect our results about IO authorization. Our experiment also includes two waves of treatments on UN authorization. This article focuses on the first wave only, and a different manuscript highlights the second wave.

vignette, each respondent is requested to express his support for or opposition to the use of force in the scenario by answering the question “Should Country A attack and use force to resolve the situation?” The subject is expected to respond to this key question with either “attack” or “not attack.”

4.2 Sample selection

We conducted online survey experiments on subjects based in four countries: Brazil, China, Japan, and Sweden. Our country cases of four non-Anglo countries are selected to expand the geographical and empirical scopes of experimental research on IO endorsements. Accordingly, our non-Anglo four national samples represent a diverse set of attributes that should be relevant to national decisions on the use of force. All are relatively capable nations, with militaries and economies that are able to project power, and are a great power (in the case of China) and three middle powers—Brazil, Japan, and Sweden. They include a permanent member of the UN Security Council—China—and two aspiring members—Brazil and Japan. They include an autocracy (China), a “third wave” democracy (Brazil), and two non-Anglo, mature democracies Japan and Sweden. The four countries in our sample are geographically diverse and located on three different continents (Europe, South America, and Asia). In addition, the four countries differ from each other and from the main subjects of previous research (the USA and the UK) in their history, alliance structures, political alignments, and military postures.

Our selection criteria are similar to those of other recent cross-national experimental studies on IO legitimation (e.g. [Dellmuth et al. 2022b](#); [Ghassim 2024](#)), including a study on public attitudes toward reforms at the UN ([Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera 2022](#)). In particular, our criteria are very similar to [Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera \(2022\)](#)’s reasons for selecting Argentina, China, India, Russia, Spain, and the USA—countries with “a substantial degree of diversity in terms of world region, formal status in the UN organization, economic and military power, per capita incomes, population size, and regime type” (6).

Additionally, our selection of countries follows the “design of purposive variations” discussed in the recent literature on the generalizability of

experimental results across countries and contexts (Bassan-Nygate *et al.* 2024; Egami and Hartman 2023). The “design of purposive variations” refers to the experimental design that incorporates the “variations in relevant external validity dimensions” by including “diverse populations, multiple treatments, outcomes, and contexts” (Egami and Hartman 2023: 1080). This allows us to utilize tools for formally examining the generalizability of the effect of IO authorization on public opinion via sign-generalization tests that evaluate whether the sign of causal effects assessed in experiments is generalizable to other contexts, including other countries (Egami and Hartman 2023).

To study the generalizability of causal effects, we also complement our sign-generalization tests with post hoc survey weights that account for the imbalance within country samples with post hoc survey weights. In this manuscript, we “rake” our data (DeBell and Krosnick 2009; Caughey *et al.* 2020) with post hoc weights based on the marginal distribution of each country’s population by age and gender reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau 2024). The weights reflect the distribution of the four countries’ total adult population and each country’s adult population by age and gender to account for any imbalance in our samples, including different sample sizes.³ We analyze both our raw, unweighted data and raked, weighted data to check for the robustness of our results.

5. Data

Our study was fielded from late 2013 to early 2014. Our results thus precede the period of increased nationalism and heightening international tensions roughly coinciding with the 2016 election in the USA. We collected a total of 4,214 responses from Brazil on August 21–September 17, 2013; 5,744 responses from one sample in China on August 22–September 13, 2013; 1,866 responses from Sweden on November 14–December 18, 2013; and 888 responses from Japan on February 13–19, 2014.⁴

3 Ghassim (2024) also utilizes survey weights in his cross-national experiments on public perceptions of IO legitimization.

4 Our sample size in Japan was constrained due to practical reasons.

Subjects were recruited by professional polling companies in Brazil, China, and Japan and by the University of Gothenburg's Laboratory of Opinion Research for Sweden (Martinsson et al. 2013). In Brazil and China, subjects were provided with an online link to the survey experiment and routed back to the survey firm's website where they were compensated for their participation. In Sweden, our study was run as part of the eighth Citizen Panel, an online panel survey that has been regularly administered by the University of Gothenburg's Laboratory of Opinion Research since 2010. In Japan, our study was run as part of a larger survey conducted by researchers at Kobe University.

Our survey instrument included the vignette and questions on support for the use of force as well as questions about subjects' demographic and attitudinal formation. We asked each respondent about his or her age, gender, education, income, religious beliefs, religiosity, and frequency of reading international news. [Supplementary Appendix A](#) includes the full text of the vignette and key questions. [Supplementary Appendix B](#) includes descriptive statistics about the sample, including balance tables for the UN approval treatments.

6. Results

Our analyses in this section focus on two goals. First, we examine the generalizability of the main effect of IO authorization on public opinion—by comparing the outcomes by treatment and by sign-generalization tests. Second, we assess the heterogeneity of the treatment effect by fitting linear models on the data. For both, we utilize both unweighted and weighted data.

6.1 Ubiquitous persuasiveness of IO approval

Our analysis documents the sweeping effect of UN authorization on public support for the use of force in all four national samples. The positive effect of UN authorization on public support for military action was statistically significant at the 0.05 level for all samples. Our findings imply robust support for our hypothesis about the universality of IO approval on public opinion about the use of force.

[Figure 1](#) shows the percentage of respondents in all country samples who support military action by treatment and their 95% confidence

Figure 1. Main effect of IO authorization (pooled). A. Unweighted data. B. Weighted data.
 Note: The error bars represent 95% CIs.

intervals (CIs), illustrating the main effect of IO authorization. Panel A includes the results from our raw, unweighted data, and Panel B those from our weighted, raked data.

Our analysis of the raw data (Panel A) shows that UN approval significantly increases public support for military action, documenting an increase of about 12% points. Without a UN endorsement, only about 35% of our respondents are supportive of the use of force (95% CI: 33.85–36.2%). However, with a UN endorsement, about 47% are supportive (95% CI: 45.82–48.28%). Similarly, our analysis of the weighted data documents a large effect of IO endorsement on public support for the use of force—approximately 12% points as well (Panel B). This analysis shows that military action without UN authorization is popular among approximately 40% of our subjects (95% CI: 38.37–42.32%) but military action with it garners the support from 52% of them (95% CI: 49.96–54.09%). The increase in war support is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The large average treatment effect of IO authorization of the use of force also emerges in our analysis of the unweighted and weighted data by country. Figure 2 includes individuals' support for military action by treatment and by country, captured in our raw data (Panel A) and weighted data (Panel B).

The increase in support for war due to UN endorsement exists in all unweighted (or weighted) country samples. In Sweden, UN

Figure 2. Main effect of IO authorization (by country). A. Unweighted data B. Weighted data.

authorization results in an increase of about 20.3% (or 20.04%) points. The use of force without UN authorization gains the support of only about 17% (or 16.52%) of Swedish respondents (95% CI: 14.49–19.46% or 5.43–27.61%) whereas the equivalent with UN authorization is supported by 37.3% (or 36.56%) of Swedish subjects (95% CI: 34.19–40.46% or 19.9–53.21%). Among the Brazilian subjects, UN authorization also increases war support—by about 14.2% (or 19.86%) points. The use of force without UN authorization garners support of only about 28.8% (or 24.24%) of the Brazilian respondents (95% CI: 26.84–30.73% or 19.46–29.02%), whereas the equivalent with UN authorization is supported by approximately 43% (or 44.1%) of subjects (95% CI: 40.88–45.09% or 38.37–49.83%). In China, UN endorsement increases support for the use of force by approximately 8.3% (or 8.86%) points. Military action not endorsed by the UN is supported by only about 47.4% (or 47.45%) of the Chinese respondents (95% CI: 45.56–49.21% or 45.18–49.71%) whereas military action blessed by the UN is supported by about 55.7% (or 56.31%) of subjects (95% CI: 53.85–57.5% or 54.04–58.58%). In Japan, UN authorization results in an increase of about 10.7% (or 16.45%) points. Military force without UN endorsement garners support of only about 20% (or 16.9%) of Japanese respondents (95% CI: 16.31–23.69% or 11.25–22.55%), whereas military force with UN authorization is supported by approximately 30.7% (or 33.35%) of Japanese subjects (95% CI: 26.35–35.08%

Figure 3. Sign-generalization test for the main effect of IO authorization.

or 26.03–40.67%). The increase in war support due to UN authorization is statistically significant at the 0.05 level for all samples except for the Swedish weighted sample.

Furthermore, the effect of UN approval is likely to be externally valid. Figure 3 shows the P -values from a sign-generalization test (partial conjunction P -values) on our results (Egami and Hartman 2023). All P -values from the test on our four samples are well below the conventional threshold of 0.05. This implies that we can safely reject the hypothesis that the effect of the UN approval treatment is negative or null for the four countries (and potentially beyond) and support the hypothesis that it is positive.

6.2 Individual-level and country-level heterogeneity in the persuasiveness of IO approval

The strong effect of IO approval can be disaggregated into individual- and country-level variations. Our analysis of the heterogeneity in the treatment effect of IO approval implies that the effect can be moderated by individuals' educational attainment and militant internationalism and by home country.

We examine the effect of IO approval by estimating the following logistic regression model of war support with interaction terms for key independent variables and UN approval of the use of force:

$$\text{Pr}(\text{Support War})_{ij} = \frac{\exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{UN Approval}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Home Country}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{Socioeconomic Status}_{ij} + \beta_4 \text{Foreign Policy Orientation}_{ij} + \beta_5 \text{UN Approval}_{ij} \times \text{Home Country}_{ij} + \beta_6 \text{UN Approval}_{ij} \times \text{Socioeconomic Status}_{ij} + \beta_7 \text{UN Approval}_{ij} \times \text{Foreign Policy Orientation}_{ij} + \beta_8 \text{UN Approval}_{ij} \times \text{Control}_{ij})}{1 + \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{UN Approval}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Home Country}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{Socioeconomic Status}_{ij} + \beta_4 \text{Foreign Policy Orientation}_{ij} + \beta_5 \text{UN Approval}_{ij} \times \text{Home Country}_{ij} + \beta_6 \text{UN Approval}_{ij} \times \text{Socioeconomic Status}_{ij} + \beta_7 \text{UN Approval}_{ij} \times \text{Foreign Policy Orientation}_{ij} + \beta_8 \text{UN Approval}_{ij} \times \text{Control}_{ij})}$$

Variable *Support War* refers to whether a respondent supports (when 1) or opposes (when 0) the use of force. Variable *UN Approval* denotes whether the UN has endorsed (when 1) the use of force or not (when 0). Variable *Home Country* represents which of the four countries—Brazil, China, Japan, and Sweden—the individual is living in. We operationalize the variable *Socioeconomic Status* by whether he has a college degree (when 1) or not (when 0) or by whether their household income is in the median or above income categories of each country sample. Variable *Foreign Policy Orientation* represents his levels of militant and cooperative internationalism and isolationism on a 0-1 scale, respectively. Variable *Control* includes the regime type of the target he is assigned to in the vignette (1 if democratic and 0 if non-democratic) and his demographics, such as his age, gender (1 represents being female and 0 being male), and being religious.

Figure 4 displays the coefficient estimates from logistic regression models of war support fitted on our unweighted (Panel A) and weighted (Panel B) data. Supplementary Appendix C includes full results.

Several observations about the coefficient estimates stand out. First, they reaffirm the strongly positive main effect of IO approval on public opinion on war. Even after controlling for its conditional effects and other variables, the estimates imply that IO approval of the use of force increases public support both among the unweighted sample (Panel A) and the weighted sample (Panel B). All estimates of the main effect are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Second, our results also suggest that the effect of IO endorsement may be moderated by attributes of individuals and their home countries. The negative interaction between the variables for living in China

Figure 4. Coefficient estimates from logistic regression models of war support (pooled). A. Unweighted data. B. Weighted data.

Note: The error bars represent 95% CIs for the coefficient estimates. See [Supplementary Appendix Tables C.1–C.4](#) for full results.

and IO approval—statistically significant at the 0.05 level for both models of raw and raked data—implies that the effect of UN approval on Chinese respondents may differ from that on Swedish respondents (the baseline category).

The distinctive Chinese responses to IO approval are notable in our cross-country comparison of predicted probabilities of war support visualized in [Fig. 5](#). Panel A in [Fig. 5](#) displays the predicted probabilities of war support derived from Model 4 fitted on the raw data, and Panel B those generated by Model 4W fitted on the raked data. The probabilities are calculated with all non-key variables held at their medians.

Predicted probabilities of war support based on both unweighted and weighted data underscore the relative Chinese unresponsiveness to the UN's approval of the use of force. The predicted probability of a representative Chinese respondent from the unweighted (or weighted)

Figure 5. Predicted probability of support for use of force. A. Unweighted data. B. Weighted data.

Note: The error bars represent 95% CIs for the predicted probabilities. The predicted probabilities are generated by Model 4 and Model 4W in [Supplementary Appendix Tables C.1 and C.3](#). All non-key variables are held at their medians.

sample to support the use of force without IO approval is about 0.51 (or 0.48) (95% CI: 0.48–0.54 or 0.45–0.51) but the equivalent with UN approval is about 0.62 (or 0.59) (95% CI: 0.59–0.65 or 0.56–0.62). The small increase—about 0.11 (or 0.11)—in the predicted probability of Chinese war support due to IO approval contrasts with the large increase in the predicted probability of Swedish war support by IO approval. The predicted probability of a representative Swedish respondent to support the use of force without UN approval is very low—about 0.26 (or 0.21) (95% CI: 0.22–0.31 or 0.12–0.29). The probability increases with UN approval to approximately 0.52 (or 0.52) (95% CI: 0.47–0.56 or 0.41–0.62). The increase in the predicted probability for the Swedish respondent—about 0.26 (or 0.3)—is more than twice the size of the increase for the Chinese respondent.

In contrast to the Chinese case, representative subjects from Brazil and Japan do not significantly differ from the Swedish representative in responding to IO approval of the use of force. The predicted probability of the Brazilian representative supporting the use of force is 0.39 (or 0.29) without UN approval (95% CI: 0.36–0.43 or 0.23–0.33) and 0.61 (or 0.57) with UN endorsement (95% CI: 0.57–0.64 or 0.53–0.62) in our unweighted (or weighted) data, displaying an increase of about

0.22 (or 0.28) by IO approval. The predicted probability of the Japanese representative supporting military action is 0.24 (or 0.16) without IO approval (95% CI: 0.19–0.3 or 0.13–0.21) and 0.43 (or 0.42) with IO endorsement (95% CI: 0.37–0.5 or 0.36–0.48) in our unweighted (or weighted) data, demonstrating an increase of about 0.19 (or 0.26) in the probability by IO approval. Our results also suggest that the effect of IO approval may be moderated by individuals' educational attainment. The positive interaction term for the variables for having college degrees and IO approval—statistically significant at the 0.05 level in the models for unweighted and weighted data—implies that the effect of UN approval on college graduates may differ from that on individuals without a college degree (the baseline category). This conditional effect of IO endorsement by educational attainment is observable in the comparison of predicted probabilities of war support visualized in Fig. 6. Panel A in Fig. 6 displays the predicted probabilities of war support derived from Model 4 fitted on the unweighted data, and Panel B those generated by Model 4W fitted on the weighted data. The probabilities are calculated with all non-key variables held at their medians.

The predicted probabilities of war support highlight the importance of education as a major cleavage in views of global governance. The calculations based on both unweighted and weighted data underscore the responsiveness of college-educated individuals to the UN's approval of the use of force. The predicted probability of an individual with a college degree from the unweighted (or weighted) sample to support military action without the UN's blessing is about 0.51 (or 0.48) (95% CI: 0.48–0.54 or 0.45–0.51) among the unweighted sample but the equivalent with UN approval is about 0.62 (or 0.59) (95% CI: 0.59–0.65 or 0.56–0.62). The increase—about 0.11 (or 0.11)—in the predicted probability of college graduates' war support due to IO approval contrasts with the relatively smaller increase in the predicted probability of non-college graduates' war support by IO approval. The predicted probability of an individual without a college degree to support military action without UN approval is also low—about 0.57 (or 0.57) (95% CI: 0.53–0.61 or 0.5–0.6). The probability increases with UN approval to approximately 0.63 (or 0.58) (95% CI: 0.59–0.66 or 0.54–0.61). The increase in the predicted probability for the respondent

Figure 6. Predicted probability of support for use of force. A. Unweighted data. B. Weighted data.

Note: The error bars represent 95% CIs for the predicted probabilities. The predicted probabilities are generated by Model 4 and Model 4W in [Supplementary Appendix Tables C.1 and C.3](#). All non-key variables are held at their medians.

without a college degree—about 0.06 (or 0.01)—is smaller than the increase for the respondent with a college degree.

We also find that the heterogeneity in individuals' sensitivity to IO approval can be attributed to their differences in foreign policy dispositions—militant internationalism in particular. The interaction terms for individuals' militant internationalism and UN endorsement of the use of force in the logistic regression models are statistically significant at the 0.05 level in the models for both unweighted and weighted data. [Figure 7](#) plots the predicted probability of our “representative” respondent to support the use of force by treatment and by their militant internationalism. Panel A shows the predicted probabilities from our raw data, generated by Model 4, and Panel B from our raked data, generated by Model 4W. For both, all independent variables other than the key ones, are held at their medians.

The predicted probabilities from both weighted and unweighted data show that the effect of IO approval varies by individuals' level of militant internationalism. The predicted probability that an individual with low militant internationalism from the unweighted (or weighted) sample to support military action without IO endorsement is about 0.29 (or 0.27) (95% CI: 0.26–0.32 or 0.24–0.3) among the unweighted sample but the equivalent with IO approval is about 0.42 (or 0.4) (95%

Figure 7. Predicted probability of support for use of force. A. Unweighted data B. Weighted data.

Note: The error bars represent 95% CIs for the predicted probabilities. The predicted probabilities are generated by Model 4 and Model 4W in [Supplementary Appendix Tables C.1 and C.3](#). All non-key variables are held at their medians.

CI: 0.39–0.45 or 0.37–0.44). The predicted probability of an individual with a medium level of militant internationalism to support the use of force without UN approval is approximately 0.51 (or 0.48) (95% CI: 0.48–0.52 or 0.45–0.51). The probability increases with UN endorsement to approximately 0.62 (or 0.59) (95% CI: 0.59–0.65 or 0.56–0.62). The predicted probability of an individual with strong militant internationalism to support for the use of force without IO approval is approximately 0.73 (or 0.7) (95% CI: 0.7–0.76 or 0.67–0.72). The probability increases with IO endorsement to approximately 0.78 (or 0.75) (95% CI: 0.76–0.81 or 0.73–0.78). The predictions indicate a rise in the predicted probabilities coincides with a decrease in individuals' militant internationalism. The increase in the predicted probabilities of supporting military action by UN approval is about 0.13 (or 0.13) for an individual with low militant internationalism, 0.11 (or 0.11) for one with moderate militant internationalism, and 0.05 (or 0.05) for one with high militant internationalism.

In contrast, we fail to find consistent evidence that other foreign policy orientations moderate the effect of IO approval on public opinion toward the use of force. While the interaction terms for individuals' cooperative internationalism and UN approval are statistically significant at the 0.05

level in the models fitted on the unweighted data, they are significant only at the 0.1 level in the models for the weighted data. Moreover, the interaction terms for individuals' isolationism and IO endorsement of military action are not statistically significant at the 0.05 or 0.1 levels in any of the models included in [Supplementary Appendix Tables C.1–C.4](#).

6.3 Robustness checks

For robustness checks, we fit linear probability models on our unweighted and weighted data. These results, included in [Supplementary Appendix D](#), do not significantly differ from our main results of logistic regression models, included in [Supplementary Appendix C](#).

7. Conclusion

In this research note, we show that IO influence on public opinion extends beyond the USA and the UK. Our survey experiments on individuals from Brazil, China, Japan, and Sweden find a consistently positive reaction to UN approval. We assess the generalizability of the main effect of IO approval on public support for the use of force via sign-generalization tests and raking the raw data with survey weights based on their demographics. The results confirm the main effect of IO authorization of the use of force on public attitudes.

We also find heterogeneity in the effect of IO approval on public support for the use of force. Some of the heterogeneity is related to individuals' foreign policy orientations, militant internationalism in particular, and educational attainment. As hypothesized, we find the effect of IO endorsement of the use of force to be smaller among individuals who view military force as a moral means in international politics than those who do not believe in the moral value of using military force. The effect of IO approval is larger among individuals with college degrees than those without college degrees.

Additionally, our results suggest a country-level source of the heterogeneity in the effect of IO endorsement on public support for the use of force. We find respondents of China—an autocratic country that is institutionally privileged as a permanent member of the UN Security Council—to be less likely to respond to IO approval than

respondents from Brazil, Japan, and Sweden—democratic countries without such privilege.

Our findings make two contributions to existing literature. First, we examine the cross-country generalizability of IOs' approval of the use of force in uence on public support, previously documented in the IR literature on public opinion on the use of force (Chapman 2011; Grieco et al. 2011; Tago and Ikeda 2015; Matsumura and Tago 2019; Recchia and Chu 2021; Lushenko, Raman, and Kreps 2022). Second, we study the heterogeneity of such in uence over the public and its micro-level foundations, extending the literature on IO legitimation and public opinion (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2016; Brutger and Li 2022; Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi, and Cabrera 2022; Dellmuth et al. 2022b; Brutger and Clark 2023; Ghassim 2024).

It is possible that our estimate for the effect of IO approval on public support for war may be larger than usual. After all, our experiment features a preventive war against nuclear proliferation, for which the use of force without UN authorization carries high risks. We leave to future research the task of testing whether our findings would generalize to other types of war.

Nonetheless, our study underscores the challenges and importance of studying the intricacies of public opinion formation in non-Anglo, non-Western countries. Our study showcases results that are similar and different from findings from the usual WEIRD countries. We hope our study highlights the value of the innovative experimental work on non-WEIRD countries.

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Supplementary data

Supplementary data are available at *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* Journal online.

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Data availability information

Online Appendix is available at the corresponding author's website: <https://clarahsuong.com/>.

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