

# Cueing Foreign Elite Consensus or Divisions: The Effect of Unanimity in International Organizations on Public Opinion\*

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## Abstract

This study presents the first experimental evidence to test the proposition that a single international organization can convey various different signals to members of the American public. Specifically, a unanimous vote conveys a cue of consensus among foreign elites in support of a policy, whereas approval despite dissent or non-approval due to a veto signals that foreign elites are divided over the policy. Drawing on American public opinion scholarship, which shows that members of the public tend to be rationally ignorant about foreign policy and form an opinion by observing unity or disagreements among well-informed and trusted elites, this paper argues that the signaling effect of international organizations on public opinion depends on whether they cue consensus or divisions. Two survey experiments administered to a national sample of U.S. citizens test this argument in the issue area of international security. The study finds that the unanimous endorsement of a U.S. military intervention by the UN Security Council increases popular support for the use of force by six to ten percentage points, in comparison to the Council's approval of the same action despite dissent. In addition, unanimous approval – as opposed to approval by a divided organization – significantly reduces the likelihood that Americans blame their own government for unanticipated difficulties that arise during the intervention. In line with elite cue theory, the large majority that places at least a modicum of trust in the UN Security Council is driving these effects. Causal mediation analyses provide evidence on the mechanisms at work.

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The public debate on American foreign policy is said to be dominated by two issues: the dispute between isolationists and internationalists and the controversy over unilateralism and multilateralism (Corbetta and Dixon, 2004, 5). Numerous studies have found that the American public generally prefers US military interventions that are undertaken with multilateral support over unilateral military actions by the US - and it is particularly supportive of American military actions that have been endorsed by the UN Security Council (Kull and Destler, 1999; Chapman and Reiter, 2004; Holsti, 2004; Eichenberg, 2005; Chapman, 2009; Grieco et al., 2011; Tingley and Tomz, 2012; Bearce and Cook, 2015). Surprisingly, we still lack evidence to explain the puzzle of why interveners routinely seek the Security Council's unanimous support even though they only require nine out of the fifteen Council members' votes under the organization's rules. Interveners even agree to costly compromises and side-payments to secure consensus in the Council. Drawing on recent insights on the effect of elite cues on American public opinion, this paper presents the argument that unanimous support in an international organization signals agreement among foreign elites while the adoption of a policy despite vocal dissent inside the same organization cues disagreements between foreign elites. Elite-cue theory implies that these two signals have different effects on public attitudes about the policy: the signal of elite consensus causes a much larger public opinion rally behind the intervention than the cue of foreign elite divisions. Evidence from two survey experiments administered to a national sample of American respondents supports this argument. The endorsement of interventions by a unanimous UN Security Council causes far greater public support for the use of force than the authorization of the same military action by a divided Council, which conveys a similar signal of foreign elite disagreements as non-approval due to a great-power veto.

This paper makes four contributions to the literature on international organizations and public opinion. First, it reports the results from the first test of the proposition that the same international organization can convey multiple different signals about a given policy to members of the American public. In contrast, previous studies do not allow us to disentangle

gle the effects of foreign elite unity or disagreements, because they conceive of the signals conveyed by international organization as binary (support of a policy or opposition to it) without taking into account whether the organization's decision cues foreign elite consensus or divisions.

Second, the paper leverages causal mediation analysis to conduct the first test of all four different causal mechanisms that may plausibly explain why the American public tends to prefer multilateral use of force by the United States over unilateral interventions. The study adjudicates between the alternative propositions that Americans value UN approval as a second opinion about the president's decision to intervene, that they interpret UN approval as heralding burden-sharing with other countries, that Americans' preference for UN-authorized interventions stems from a normative attachment to international law, or that they view a Security Council resolution as a public commitment they wish to uphold.

Third, this study improves on previous studies by investigating the effect of the Security Council's approval of the use of force in two separate survey experiments that vary across several dimensions that affect American public attitudes: the objectives of the U.S. intervention, its perceived cost, and its salience to American national interests and human rights. Thus, it takes seriously the concern that the results of survey experiments are sensitive to the wording of the vignette (Gilens, 2011). Since both experiments generate consistent results in different settings we can be confident about the external validity of the findings.

Fourth, the study contributes to the debate whether elites are merely a conduit for mass opinion or whether their signals have an independent effect on mass opinion. Domestic elites are responsive to domestic public opinion and simultaneously seek to influence it. This pattern makes the theoretical relationship between the opinions of domestic elites and publics deeply endogenous (see, e.g., Saunders, 2015). While even foreign elites may strategically react to American public opinion, they are likely to be more responsive to their own domestic audience, which holds the key to their removal from office. Consequently, foreign elites' opinion tends to be more independent from U.S. public opinion than domestic elite opinion.

This makes foreign elites a particularly good case to test the proposition that elites affect the attitudes of the American public.

This paper is organized as follows. The first part introduces the puzzle of great powers' desire to secure the unanimous backing of the UN Security Council. The following part introduces the argument that the unanimous backing of an international organization cues consensus among foreign elites while the endorsement despite vocal dissent signals disagreements among foreign elites. Part three presents the research design of two survey experiments to test the effect of these two signals on members of the American public. Parts four and five summarize the results and robustness checks and covariate balance analyses. The final part concludes.

## **1 The UN Security Council and U.S. military interventions**

It is increasingly common for great powers to seek and obtain authorization by international organizations prior to the use of force abroad. During the Cold War, only 8 percent of the cases in which the US used force abroad were authorized by an international organization. Between 1989 and 1998, the corresponding figure quadrupled to 32 percent (Tago, 2005).<sup>1</sup> One study concludes that “foreign intervention without some effort to gain external approval is now virtually obsolete” (Thompson, 2006, 2). The UN Security Council has come to play a uniquely important role in authorizing the use of force after the Cold War; even in cases when it did not endorse military interventions, interveners made intense diplomatic efforts to gain its approval (Thompson, 2006). The 2003 Iraq war exemplifies this pattern. By 2003, “Council approval had become the critical test of legitimacy and legality. ... That the world’s sole superpower - and an administration quite skeptical of the United Nations - felt compelled to seek council approval was a telling gauge of how the world had changed [since the end of the Cold War]” (Bosco, 2009, 225).

Remarkably, great powers consistently pursue the UN Security Council’s unanimous approval even though the Council’s formal rules do not require unanimity. The UN Charter

stipulates that decisions are adopted if nine of the Council’s fifteen members cast a positive vote and the permanent members (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and United States) do not use their veto. Even so, great powers consistently pursue the unanimous approval of their preferred policies. At a recent retreat Security Council members declared that “consensus is always the preferred option” (United Nations, 2016, 34). In fact, 89 percent of all resolutions are adopted unanimously.<sup>1</sup> Great powers also incur costs for securing unanimity for their preferred policies: they share disproportionately large influence on the Council’s work with minor powers that temporarily serve on the Security Council (Mikulaschek, 2016), and they allocate additional aid and loans to buy votes in the Council (Kuziemko and Werker, 2006; Vreeland and Dreher, 2014). A former ambassador of Singapore on the Council explains that the desire of the five veto powers to attain consensus levels the playing field between them and less powerful Council members (Mahbubani, 2004, 258). British, Tanzanian, and Ugandan diplomats who served on the Council during the past fifteen years concur with this assessment.<sup>2</sup>

Do great powers pursue consensus in the UN Security Council since the unanimous endorsement of their preferred policy has a particularly strong effect on public opinion? Anecdotal evidence from a former British ambassador on the Security Council suggests that they do: “It is generally reckoned that the wider the support for a resolution in the Council, the greater its impact ... As a result, ... there was a tendency to try to achieve consensus, which ... by giving the impression of a united Council, has a much greater impact on public opinion.” (Crowe, 1981, 95). Lim and Vreeland (2013, 39) present the related conjecture that “the elected members effectively serve as the voice for the ‘rest of the world,’ and the legitimacy that their votes confer makes unanimity highly coveted”. Moreover, U.S. presidents frequently stress *unanimous* approval of their desired outcome in the Security Council (see, e.g., Clinton, 1999; Office of the White House Press Secretary, 2002, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2016;

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<sup>1</sup>Author’s calculation based on UN voting records for 1989 to 2014.

<sup>2</sup>Author’s interviews in Kampala on 17 July 2014, in Dar-es-Salaam on 28 July 2014, and phone interview conducted on 11 March 2015.

Trump, 2017). A plausible explanation of U.S. presidents' habit of emphasizing the Security Council's unanimous support for their preferred policy is that they believe that signaling the backing of a united Council increases public approval of the policy. The following section presents a theoretical argument about the signaling effect of international organizations on public opinion, which explains why great powers seek and stress the Security Council's unanimous approval of their preferred military actions.

## **2 U.S. public opinion and approval of U.S. interventions by a unanimous or divided UN Security Council**

What determines public attitudes on the use of force abroad? The literature presents two broad strands of theories. First, event-response theories posit that public opinion responds to the characteristics and the course of armed conflict. Thus, public attitudes reflect the number of casualties (Mueller, 1973) or their rate (Slantchev, Alexandrova and Gartzke, 2005) or trend (Gartner, 2008), the principal political objective of the intervention (Jentleson, 1992) or the probability of success (Larson, 1996; Eichenberg, 2005; Gelpi et al., 2005). This set of explanations of public opinion has been challenged by studies that show that most members of the public do not closely follow foreign affairs and lack the information that would be necessary to form an opinion based on the probability of success or trends in casualty rates (Zaller, 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Holsti, 2004). Moreover, the public's perception of an intervention's political objective is endogenous to elites' efforts to frame these events opportunistically (Baum and Potter, 2008).

The second set of explanations, elite-cue theories, do not dismiss that public attitudes about military interventions reflect the characteristics and the course of a war, but it instead focuses on how the public learns about foreign events. Since most members of the public are rationally ignorant about foreign affairs, they form their opinion on the basis of signals conveyed by knowledgeable and trusted elites (Zaller, 1992; Berinsky, 2007).<sup>3</sup> When citizens

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<sup>3</sup>This argument echoes the general insight in Ferejohn (1990, 5) that citizens employ simple heuristics, i.e.

form an opinion on a foreign intervention, they consider whether elites agree or disagree on the merit of using force: “when elites uphold a clear picture of what should be done, the public tends to see events from that point of view ... When elites divide, members of the public tend to follow the elites sharing their general ideological or partisan predisposition” (Zaller, 1992, 9). In line with this argument, studies have shown stark differences in the public’s response to signals of elite unity and cues about elite divisions. Brody (1991) explains that the presence or absence of elite consensus around the decision by the U.S. president to use force influences the magnitude of a ‘rally around the flag’ effect (see also Baker and Oneal, 2001). Information that contradicts the president’s preferred message or elite debate about the use of force attenuates rallies (Colaresi, 2007). Elite debate hastens the dissipation of the information gap between the public and the government, which is most pronounced at the onset of a crisis, and thereby it increases the potential for the public to interfere in the policy-making process (Baum and Potter, 2008, 51). Unity among elites has the opposite effects. If elite consensus on a U.S. intervention is strong, public support remains high even if the number of American casualties grows (Larson, 2000). Elite consensus also mitigates audience costs from backing down (Levendusky and Horowitz, 2012).

While most elite-cue theories posit that citizens form their opinions based on signals from domestic elites, a recent literature emphasizes that foreign government officials also transmit elite cues that influence the domestic public’s opinion about military interventions (Hayes and Guardino, 2011). International organizations in particular convey informative signals about foreign elite opinion to the domestic public (Chapman and Reiter, 2004; Chapman, 2011; Grieco et al., 2011; Tingley and Tomz, 2012).<sup>4</sup> Among international organizations,

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decision rules that “entail remaining ignorant on most issues most of the time, making inferences about the likely behavior of officeholders from very little information, and basing one’s vote or other political actions on a relatively sparse set of signals about governmental activity.” Following Brody (1991, 65) the term elites is used to refer to “individuals - often but not exclusively government officials - who by role, experience, or expertise are in a position to comment on matters of public concern and are seen to be in that position by those who would contribute to public understanding ...”.

<sup>4</sup>The observation that international organizations convey signals about foreign elite opinion does not presume an elite-driven foreign policy process. It is consistent with the notion that the foreign policy choices of the elites who represent their countries in international organizations may be responsive to public opinion in their respective home countries.

the UN Security Council “offers a uniquely strong signal to the American public” (Chapman and Reiter, 2004, 887; see also Thompson, 2009, 37), because the Council’s pivotal member holds more dovish preferences about U.S. military intervention than the American president. The Council’s approval of an American intervention contradicts this perceived bias, and therefore it conveys a credible signal about the merit and legitimacy of the intervention (Chapman, 2011; Grieco et al., 2011) and about the likelihood that other states will share the burden of the intervention.<sup>5</sup> The foreign elite cues emitted by international organizations reach the public primarily through news coverage by the mass media. Such signals receive intense coverage, because journalists tend to focus on reporting the opinions of authoritative political elites who are in a position to influence policy outcomes - such as officials of foreign governments that may help the U.S. or hamper its chance to succeed militarily (see Baum and Groeling, 2010, 4 and below).

Elite-cue theory implies that a united international organization conveys a fundamentally different signal to the American public than a divided organization. Approval of a U.S. military intervention by a united international organization signals consensus among foreign elites in favor of the use of force by the U.S. This cue should rally public opinion in support of the intervention. In contrast, support for the intervention by a divided international organization signals that foreign elites are split about the intervention. Consequently, support of a military intervention by a divided international organization should have a much smaller positive impact on support for the intervention within the American public. The nonapproval of the use of force due to a great-power veto in the Security Council conveys a similar signal about foreign elite divisions as the intervention’s approval despite dissent. Therefore, elite-cue theory expects that approval with dissent and a veto that blocks approval should have similar effects on American public attitudes. The added value of unanimous support from an international organization (as opposed to the organization’s endorsement despite vocal dissent) should be particularly pronounced for those Americans who trust the judgment

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<sup>5</sup>Voeten (2005, 528) observes that “governments across the globe appear more willing to cooperate voluntarily once the [Security Council] has conferred its blessing on a use of force.”



of the organization, because they are most likely to consider the organization's position an informative cue from a trustworthy elite.

Signals on consensus or disagreement among foreign elites, which can be conveyed by international organizations, are particularly informative at the start of military interventions. This is precisely the time when the UN Security Council approves the use of force - either unanimously or with dissent - or refrains from endorsing the intervention. At the start of a military intervention abroad, U.S. Congressional elites have an incentive to refrain from taking a position on the use of force, because they face little electoral advantage from claiming credit for being on the right side even though they risk being blamed for making the wrong choice under high uncertainty (Schultz, 2003). During this period, domestic opposition leaders tend to either refrain from critical comments or make cautiously supportive statements (Brody and Shapiro, 1989, 355), and the U.S. administration is the primary domestic source of information (Baum and Potter, 2008). If domestic elites are reluctant to express criticism and do not offer original insights beyond cautious support of the government, the media will likely refer to dissent among foreign elites when they try to balance the news that originates from the administration (Hayes and Guardino, 2011). This explains why the mass media transmit cues about foreign elite opinion to the public when the government decides to embark on a military intervention abroad. Evidence from the content analysis of news media reports confirms that the mass media indeed transmit cues about foreign elite unity or disagreements to the public (see below).

### **3 Research design**

Two survey experiments were designed to test the argument about the effect of cues of foreign elite unity or divisions conveyed by international organizations. In each experiment, respondents were confronted with a hypothetical scenario, which involved a country's invasion by its neighbor and a genocide committed in another country, respectively. After reading a short vignette about the scenario, respondents were asked whether they favor or

oppose military action by the U.S. in response to this situation. Both online experiments were administered to the same respondents in random order as part of the same survey. Each experiment was introduced with the following script: “You will read about a situation our country has frequently faced in the past and will likely face again. This situation not about any specific country in the news today. We will ask for your opinion on a response to this situation by the United States.”

The ‘war’ experiment confronted respondents with the following scenario, which is similar to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990:<sup>6</sup>

“A country sent its military to take over a neighboring country in order to get more power and resources. The attacking country has a weak military in comparison to the United States. Victory by the attacking country would hurt the safety and economy of the United States.”

In the ‘genocide’ experiment, respondents read about a different crisis, which shares some similarities with atrocities in Darfur, Sudan, in the early 2000s and with ethnic cleansing in Srebrenica, Bosnia, ten years earlier:

“Genocide started in a region of a foreign country. The violence killed more than 13,000 civilians. It would not take a major effort for the United States military to stop the genocide.”

The two scenarios vary across several dimensions that may affect American public attitudes: the principal political objective of the intervention, the perceived cost to the United States, and the salience to American national interests and humanitarianism. These differences make it unlikely that results obtained from both experiments would be an artifact of the specific context provided to respondents. In line with recent scholarship (Tomz and

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<sup>6</sup>This vignette and parts of the introductory script are loosely based on the text for a survey experiment on audience costs reported in Tomz (2007, 824). The vignette is similar to that in Tingley and Tomz (2012).

Weeks, 2013) names of specific countries or leaders were intentionally omitted to avoid priming respondents. Moreover, responses to a follow-up question that probes whether respondents were thinking about specific countries when they formed opinions on the hypothetical scenarios do not reveal any evidence of context effects (see below).

Immediately after reading the vignette of either experiment, respondents were asked about their attitudes on a possible US intervention in response to the situation: “Would you favor or oppose military action by the United States to push out the attacking country?” or “Would you favor or oppose military action by the United States to stop the genocide?” Respondents could choose between five options along an ordinal Likert scale (strongly favor, somewhat favor, neither favor nor oppose, somewhat oppose, strongly oppose). This dependent variable was dichotomized to make the results more easily interpretable, but the results are robust to using the untransformed five-point scale (see Table 9 in the Online Appendix).<sup>7</sup> A secondary dependent variable, which was only recorded for the ‘war experiment’ due to budget constraints, measured respondents’ blame attribution if the intervention does not unfold according to plan: “Imagine that the military action by the United States turns out to be more costly and to take longer than the United States government, the United Nations Security Council, and most experts expected. Should we blame the United States government for this outcome?”<sup>8</sup> Response options included “Completely”, “Very much”, “Moderately”, “Slightly”, and “Not at all”. Descriptive statistics for all outcome measures are displayed in Table 1 in the Online Appendix.

Each experiment manipulated respondents’ perception of the UN Security Council’s stance on the use of force by the United States. Respondents who were randomly assigned to the ‘unanimous UNSC authorization’ treatment condition read the following sentence at the end of the vignette displayed above: “In a unanimous vote, the United Nations Security

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<sup>7</sup>The question was posed as a forced-choice question since the alternative option of presenting a policy choice (e.g., the US president’s decision to take military action) to be agreed or disagreed with is more prone to invite acquiescence by less educated respondents than a forced-choice question (Schaeffer and Presser, 2003).

<sup>8</sup>The reference to the Security Council was omitted for the control condition (see below).

Council authorized military action by the United States.” In contrast, respondents in the ‘UNSC authorization with dissent’ condition were informed that “The United Nations Security Council authorized military action by the United States, but all three small countries that are near the attacked country voted against authorizing this military action, because they opposed such military action.” Two additional treatment conditions conveyed the information that “The United Nations Security Council did not authorize military action by the United States since Russia cast a veto, because it opposed such military action.” or that “The United Nations Security Council did not authorize military action by the United States, because most countries in the world opposed such military action.” Respondents in the control condition did not receive any cue about the UN Security Council.

Content analyses of news articles that cover the onset of NATO airstrikes against the Libyan government in 2011 indicate that the information in the experimental vignettes resemble cues conveyed in the mass media. These analyses rely on a dataset of 463 English-language news published in 162 newspapers in 38 states on the first day of the airstrikes.<sup>9</sup> 88 percent of these newspapers reported that the UN Security Council had authorized the airstrikes against Libya. 44 percent reported that the Council’s vote was not unanimous. Moreover, nine different CNN news programs covered the lack of unanimity in the Security Council throughout the first day of the airstrikes.<sup>10</sup> The news media’s attention to the signal of foreign elite opinion conveyed by the Security Council is remarkable for two reasons. First, even though there were no negative votes in the Security Council more than four in ten papers reported on the dissenting opinions of Council members that abstained from the vote. Second, newspapers had already covered the Security Council’s vote when it was taken two days earlier. Even so, the media found it important to remind their readers of the Council’s stance in their news reports on the onset of hostilities. This news media content analysis

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<sup>9</sup>The dataset was compiled by searching the Lexis Nexis Academic database for newspaper articles that appeared on 19 March 2011 and contained the word “Libya” anywhere in the article. This search yielded 463 articles that were at least partly dedicated to the conflict. Letters to the editor, front-page teasers of other articles, and financial market reports that merely mentioned Libya in passing were dropped.

<sup>10</sup>The transcripts of all CNN programs aired in the U.S. on 19 March 2011 were searched in the Lexis Nexis Academic database. Future versions of this paper will include similar statistics for other news networks.

provides anecdotal evidence that suggests that the information about foreign elite cues in the experimental vignettes resembles the signals about the UN Security Council that mass media convey to citizens when the U.S. launches a military intervention.

Two manipulation checks confirm that the treatments are not unrealistically strong. The real-world equivalent of the experiments would be short news reports about U.S. military interventions. Some viewers or readers would miss the point about the UN Security Council’s position. Analogously, the treatment should be so subtle that some respondents fail to absorb it (Kinder, 2007, 157). 78 percent of respondents were able to correctly state whether the vignette for the ‘war experiment’ mentioned the UN Security Council or not, and 71 percent remembered the Council’s position on the use of force by the U.S. The corresponding figures for the ‘genocide experiment’ are 73 and 66 percent. All models include the respondents who did not pass the manipulation check. Thus, they estimate an intention-to-treat effect, which is more conservative and less likely to overestimate real-world effects of mass media cues than the treatment effect on the treated, which is estimated for the subset that takes up the treatment (see Barabas and Jerit, 2010). Thus, the intention-to-treat effect approximates the effect we would observe in a non-experimental setting where only seven in ten citizens who hear about foreign elite opinion from the mass media absorb this information.

Pretreatment attitudes on the UN Security Council and the US government were assessed separately on a five-point Likert scale that captures respondents’ answers to two questions about whether they trust these bodies’ judgment about taking military action. These questions were asked at the end of the survey to avoid priming effects in the two experiments.<sup>11</sup>

Randomized treatment assignment makes it unnecessary to add demographic controls to the model for the purpose of causal identification, but the results are robust to including them these covariates: respondents’ age, gender, education, income level, political orientation, and interest in politics and foreign affairs (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). OLS models with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors are used to estimate the impact of the signals

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<sup>11</sup>The experimental treatments did not affect respondents’ levels of trust, which are balanced across treatment conditions.

conveyed to respondents. The baseline is established by the responses of the group assigned to the unanimous UNSC approval condition. Dichotomous treatment variables indicate whether respondents were told that the UNSC had authorized the intervention despite dissent, that Russia had vetoed an authorization, or that most states opposed authorizing it. Causal mediation analysis is used to investigate the causal mechanisms that explain the effect of these treatments (Imai et al., 2011).

Both experiments were administered online through Amazon MTurk to a national sample of 3,824 adult U.S. citizens who were physically located in the US when they took the survey.<sup>12</sup> Survey respondents recruited through Amazon MTurk tend to be younger, more likely to be female, more educated, and more ideologically liberal than the American public, but they have been found to display treatment effects that are consistent with prior research conducted with national probability samples (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz, 2011, see also Huff and Tingley, 2015). A comparison of demographic characteristics of the sample for this study with those of recent nationally representative samples in Table 2 in the Online Appendix indicates patterns that align with those observed by Berinsky, Huber and Lenz (2011).

## 4 Results

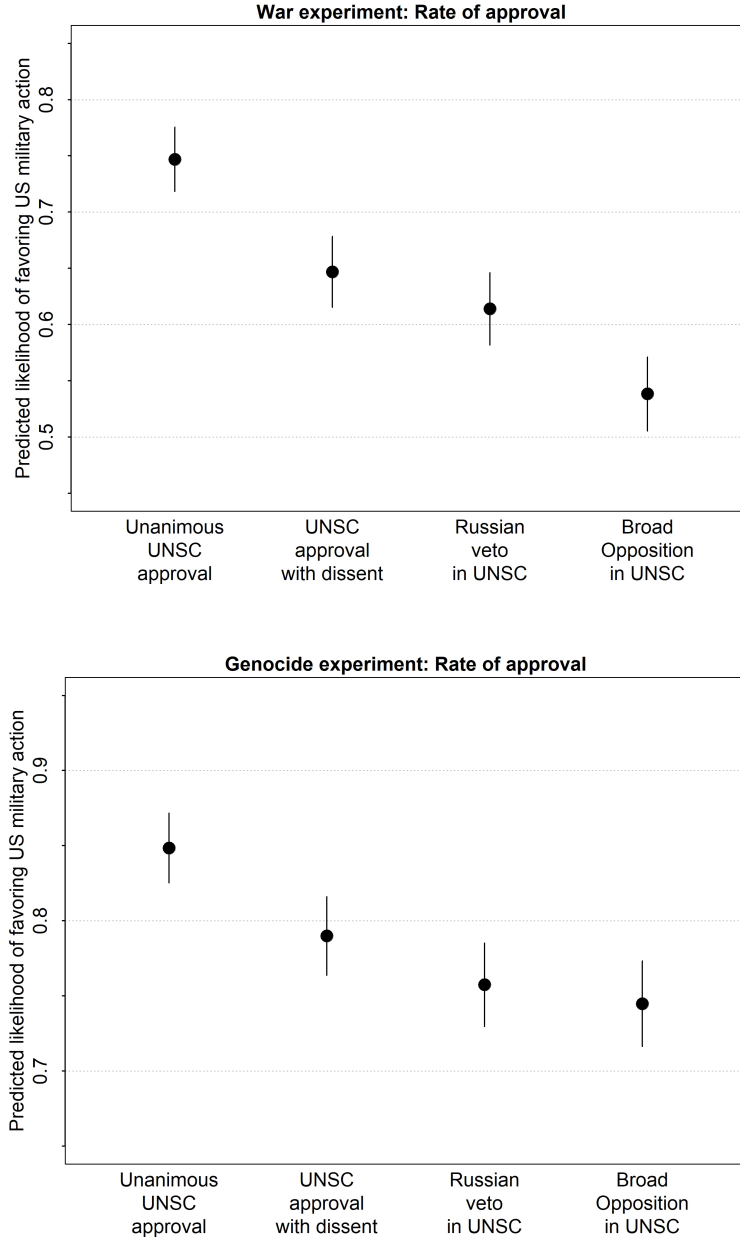
### *Effect of cues about united or divided foreign elite opinion*

In line with the argument on cues about divided or united foreign elites, respondents' attitudes on the use of force greatly vary depending on whether the UN Security Council unanimously approves it, expresses support despite vocal dissent, or opposes it (see Figure 1). In the 'war experiment', 75 percent favor an intervention that is unanimously authorized

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<sup>12</sup>112 (2.9 percent) of these responses had to be discarded, because respondents took the survey at an unreasonable speed. This approach follows the recommendation by Mutz (2011, 88) to drop subjects in survey experiments based on the time they took to respond. These respondents completed the entire survey in 4 minutes or less (median duration = 8 minutes, mean = 11 minutes), which makes it inconceivable that they expressed genuine attitudes. Another 47 respondents (1.2 percent) were dropped since they failed a basic attention check that asked subjects to "select the third answer option from the top to show that you are paying attention to this question" with five answer options. Respondents received USD 0.41 upon completion of the survey.

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of support for U.S. use of force



*Note:* The figure depicts the predicted probabilities of support of U.S. military action in five treatment conditions, which were derived from models 1 and 3 in Table 1). The upper panel shows results from the ‘war experiment’, and the lower panel displays the corresponding results for the ‘genocide experiment’.

by the Security Council. In contrast, approval by a divided Council is associated with popular support that is ten percentage points lower. UN authorization despite the opposition of three small states with seats on the Security Council conveys the signal of foreign elite divisions, and it has almost the same effect as the UN's non-approval due to a Russian veto in the Security Council, which conveys a similar cue of foreign elite divisions. Finally, support for the intervention drops to 54 percentage points when the use of force is not authorized by the Security Council due to the opposition of most states in the world. Both signals of foreign elite divisions (i.e., UN approval with dissent or non-approval due to a Russian veto) cause a significant decline in support for the intervention ( $p < 0.01$ ), in comparison to the signal of unanimous support by foreign elites, which serves as the baseline in the models in Table 1. The coefficient of non-approval due to broad opposition indicates that the effect of widespread foreign elite opposition is even more pronounced than the effect of foreign elite divisions. All results are robust to the inclusion of covariates that describe respondents' socio-economic characteristics, location, and political orientation. The significant differences between average responses in the treatment conditions displayed in Figure 1 shows that previous studies on the signaling effect of the Security Council, which conceive of these signals as binary (approval or opposition), miss most of the variation expected by elite-cue theory.

Even though the 'genocide experiment' presents a strikingly different scenario, it yields results that are consistent with those of the 'war experiment'. 85 percent of the respondents favor the intervention that has the backing of a united Security Council. Support declines to 79 and 76 percent when the Security Council is divided due to dissent by three small states or a Russian veto, respectively. Widespread opposition in the Security Council causes drop in support to 74 percent (see Figure 1).<sup>13</sup> The models in Table 1 indicate that the differences between a signal of elite unity and the three other cues are significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).

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<sup>13</sup>Support for a U.S. intervention is strikingly high across treatment conditions. This may be due to the fact that all respondents learned that it would not take a major effort for the United States military to stop the genocide. This result echoes strong support for the humanitarian intervention in Somalia in December 1992 and January 1993, when between 76 and 80 percent of respondents favored the decision to deploy U.S. troops (Klarevas, 2000, 533) while the costs of using force were believed to be low.

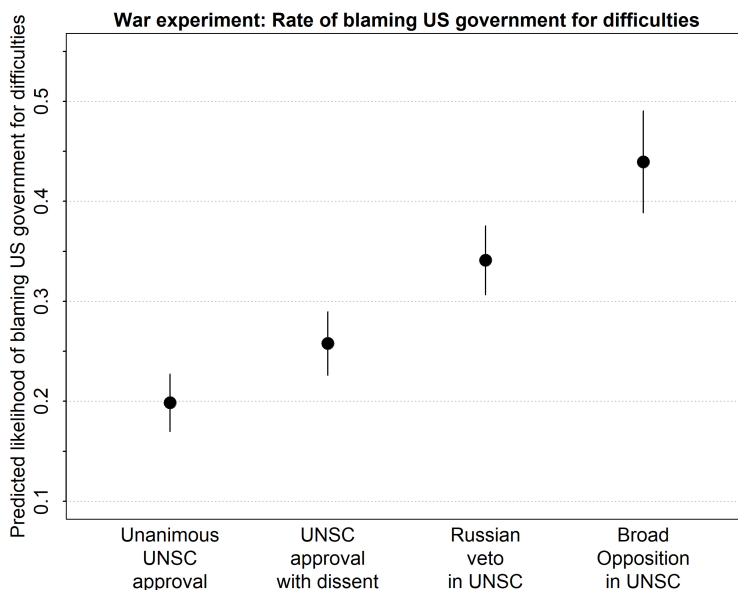


Table 1: U.S. public attitudes about American interventions and cues about foreign elite consensus and disagreements: Results from OLS models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Favor intervention in			Blame U.S.		
	war experiment	genocide experiment	intervention in government	war experiment	genocide experiment	intervention in government
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
UNSC approval with dissent	-0.100*** (0.021)	-0.103*** (0.022)	-0.059*** (0.018)	-0.062*** (0.018)	0.059*** (0.022)	0.061*** (0.022)
UNSC non-approval (Russian veto)	-0.133*** (0.022)	-0.132*** (0.022)	-0.091*** (0.019)	-0.098*** (0.019)	0.142*** (0.023)	-0.143*** (0.023)
UNSC non-approval (broad opposition)	-0.209*** (0.022)	-0.208*** (0.022)	-0.104*** (0.019)	-0.105*** (0.019)	0.241*** (0.030)	-0.239*** (0.030)
Female		-0.045*** (0.017)		0.034** (0.015)		-0.036* (0.019)
Age		0.001 (0.001)		-0.001** (0.001)		0.000 (0.000)
Income		0.047* (0.026)		0.026 (0.022)		-0.012 (0.029)
Educ. (some college, no degree)		-0.005 (0.030)		-0.005 (0.026)		-0.025 (0.035)
Educ. (Associate's degree)		-0.031 (0.036)		0.005 (0.030)		-0.013 (0.040)
Educ. (Bachelor's degree)		-0.010 (0.030)		0.010 (0.025)		-0.041 (0.034)
Educ. (Master's or Doctorate)		0.014 (0.034)		0.012 (0.030)		-0.038 (0.040)
Interested in politics		0.016 (0.011)		0.007 (0.010)		0.009 (0.013)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.006 (0.011)		0.027*** (0.010)		0.013 (0.014)
Liberal		-0.054*** (0.007)		-0.001 (0.006)		0.018** (0.008)
Observations	2,926	2,858	2,932	2,867	2,561	2,500
R <sup>2</sup>	0.029	0.062	0.012	0.024	0.032	0.040

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS models with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. Positive coefficients designate variables' positive marginal effects on the likelihood of respondent's support for the intervention (models 1-4) or the likelihood that she will blame the U.S. government for unforeseen difficulties with the intervention (models 5-6). All effects are measured in comparison to the baseline of unanimous support in the UN Security Council. Models 2, 4, and 6 include three dummies designating geographic region, whose coefficients are not displayed. *N* varies across models due missing values.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of blaming U.S. government for unanticipated complications

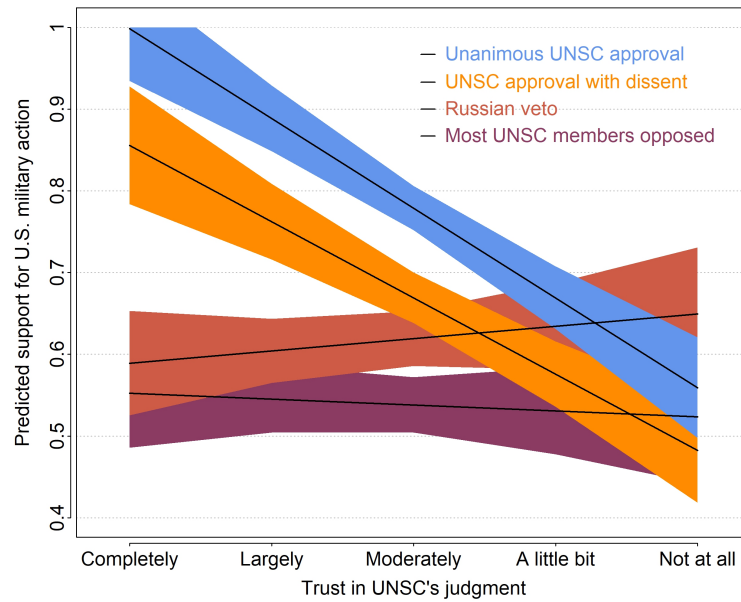


*Note:* For five treatment conditions the figure depicts the predicted probability of respondents who assign blame to the U.S. government if the military action in the ‘war experiment’ takes longer and is more costly than expected. The predictions were derived from model 5 in Table 1.

Signals about foreign elite unity or divisions also affect whether American citizens blame their own government if a military intervention turns out to be more costly and less swift than decision-makers and most experts expected. Only 20 percent of the respondents assign blame for unanticipated difficulties to the U.S. government if the intervention was authorized by a unanimous Security Council (see Figure 2). In contrast, 26 and 34 percent blame the government if the Council was divided due to three negative votes by small states or a Russian veto, respectively. 44 percent blame the government for the adverse outcome of an intervention that faced widespread opposition in the Security Council. Models 5-6 in Table 1 show that the effect of cuing foreign elite divisions or widespread foreign elite opposition on blame attribution is statistically significant.

In line with elite-cue theory, the cue of unanimous backing of the use of force by the UN Security Council tends to have a particularly strong effect on the public attitudes of those Americans who view the Council as a trustworthy foreign elite. Respondents who

Figure 3: Results on heterogeneous effects of foreign elite cues conveyed by UN Security Council



*Note:* This table depicts the predicted probability of favoring U.S. military intervention in the ‘war experiment’ by respondents’ pre-treatment level of trust in the UN Security Council. It shows that the four different cues about foreign elite opinion do not cause variation in attitudes of those respondents who have no or little trust in the Security Council’s judgment about using force. In line with elite-cue theory, signals of unanimity or disagreements among foreign elites strongly affect the attitudes of those respondents who view the Security Council as a trustworthy elite. The difference between the cue of unanimous support by foreign elites and the signal about disagreements among foreign elites (i.e., approval with dissent) almost doubles in size from an insignificant 8 percent among respondents with no trust in the Security Council to a significant 14 percent among those who trust the Council completely. All predicted probabilities were derived from model 7. For the distribution of respondents across the five levels of trust see Figure 3 in the Online Appendix.

report that they do not trust the Council’s judgment present very similar views on a U.S. intervention described in the ‘war experiment’ regardless of whether the UN Security Council had unanimously approved or opposed it (see Figure 3). Unanimous approval (rather than opposition) by the Security Council significantly improves the attitudes of respondents who place at least moderate trust in the Council’s judgment. For respondents who completely trust the Council’s judgment the cue about unanimous approval by the Council translates into a 45 percentage point increase in support for the use of force (in comparison to a cue about broad opposition in the Council). Similarly, the average difference between the effect of foreign elite consensus (cued by unanimous Council endorsement) and foreign elite divisions (Council endorsement with dissent) is significant for all respondents except for those who do not trust the Council at all; Figure 1 in the Online Appendix indicates that only 13 percent of the respondents do not harbor at least minimal trust in the judgment of the Security Council and do not respond to cues about foreign elite unity or division that originate in this organization. The effect of unanimous approval (as opposed to approval with dissent) increases from 8 to 14 percent as respondents move from no trust to complete trust in the Council’s judgment.<sup>14</sup>

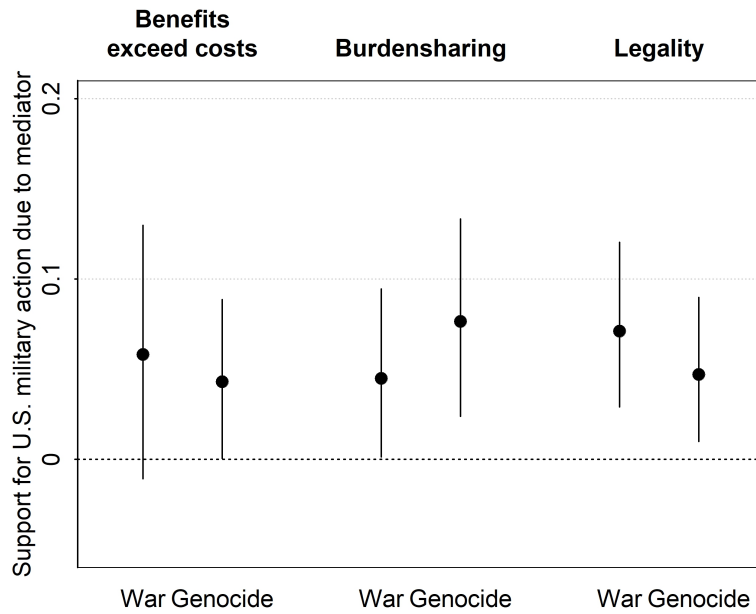
### *Causal mechanisms*

Causal mediation analyses shed light on the reason behind the causal effect of the signal of foreign elite consensus on U.S. public opinion. Specifically, they investigate the changes in respondents’ beliefs about the U.S. military interventions that are triggered by the cues about the UN Security Council, and they test which of these changes in beliefs lead to greater

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<sup>14</sup>In the ‘genocide experiment’, the signaling effect of foreign elite consensus (compared to foreign elite disagreements) is not significantly different for respondents who trust the Security Council’s judgment than it is for others (see Table 3 in the Online Appendix). This result is likely due to a ceiling effect: 71 percent of the respondents who do not trust the UN and who receive the cue of unanimous support among foreign elites in the Security Council favor military action. This relatively high rate of approval leaves little room for an additional effect of the cue about foreign elite consensus for those respondents who place high trust in the UN.

Figure 4: Results from causal mediation analysis



*Note:* This figure displays the average effect of unanimity in the Security Council on public attitudes about a U.S. intervention that is causally mediated by three sets of respondents' beliefs about military actions that are authorized by a united Security Council. The figure reports results for all mediators that are significant in both experiments at least at the 90 percent confidence level. It thus omits the insignificant results for alternative mediators (expectations of the intervention's success, views on the likelihood of obstructionism by other states, and assessments of the intervention's morality).

support for the use of force by the U.S.<sup>15</sup> Causal mediation analyses indicate that the added value of unanimous approval of an intervention by the Security Council - as opposed to an authorization with dissent - stems from U.S. citizens' belief that consensus among foreign elites in favor of an American intervention leads to more burden-sharing with other countries, a better cost-benefit balance for the U.S., and that an intervention that is endorsed by a united Security Council has a more robust legal status under international law than an intervention that is authorized by a divided Council. Figure 4 displays the results for all mediators with an average causally mediated effect that was significant at least at the 90 percent level in both experiments.

In contrast, a cue about unanimous foreign elite support for a U.S. intervention does not alter public support for that intervention by affecting citizens' perceptions of the likelihood that the military action will succeed or that other countries will refrain from obstructing it. Causal mediation analyses also do not uncover any evidence that suggests that unanimous backing by foreign elites shapes U.S. public attitudes by affecting their judgments on the intervention's morality or their assessments of America's moral duty to use force. Table 4 in the Online Appendix summarizes all results from the causal mediation analyses. Overall, the results from the causal mediation analysis underline that their concern with the cost-benefit balance of the intervention, which is partly a function of burden-sharing with other countries, drives American public attitudes. Moreover, they point to an interesting misconception about international law, which makes it rational for U.S. presidents who want to signal to the American public that they follow due process under international law to seek consensus in the Security Council even though the UN Charter does not require unanimity.

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<sup>15</sup>These analyses are conducted by sequentially fitting two sets of OLS regressions. The first set of models estimates the effect of unanimity in the Security Council on respondents' beliefs about the intervention's legality, its costs and benefits, and about burdensharing behavior of other countries. The second set of regressions estimates how these beliefs influenced support for the intervention, holding constant unanimity (or its absence) in the Security Council (see Imai et al. 2011). One caveat about applying causal mediation analysis to this setting where the mediators cannot be randomly assigned to respondents is that we have to assume that all potential confounders are included in the model (Imai, Tingley and Yamamoto, 2013). Table 1 in the Online Appendix displays descriptive statistics for all mediators.

### *Alternative explanations*

Further analyses show that alternative explanations cannot explain the effect of the cue about foreign elite consensus. First, respondents might plausibly have reacted to a cue about ‘unanimous’ support without paying close attention to the identity of the supporter. Alternatively, respondents might value the unanimous backing of the Security Council because they infer widespread support among domestic elites from a signal about consensus among foreign elites. Both versions of this alternative explanation imply that respondents would react positively to a signal about foreign elite opinion even if they are indifferent to the views of those actors. In that case, the effect of the cue would change in the presence of a second cue about consensus among domestic elites. To test this proposition, half of the respondents in each experiment were assigned to a second treatment that consisted in the information that “Democrats and Republicans in Congress supported military action by the United States to push out the attacking country” or “to stop the genocide”, as applicable. This treatment was randomized independently of the cue about the UN Security Council. In both experiments, the effect of unanimous support by foreign elites is robust to adding the cue about consensus among domestic elites to the model (see Table 5 in the Online Appendix). Moreover, the interaction between the effect of consensus abroad and bipartisan support at home is insignificant (see Table 6 in the Online Appendix). These results indicate that respondents assign an intrinsic value to cues about foreign elite opinion and do not merely use such signals as rough proxies for the views of domestic elites.

Interestingly the cue about consensus among foreign elites has a bigger effect on American public attitudes than the signal about bipartisan consensus in Congress. While the statistically significant difference between unanimous Security Council approval and endorsement despite dissent translates into six and ten percentage points in public approval (in the genocide and war experiments, respectively), the cue about consensus between Democratic and Republican members of Congress increases support by three and four percentage points in

the genocide and war experiments, respectively (see Table 5 in the Online Appendix).<sup>16</sup> Bipartisan support in Congress does not have a significant effect on the attribution of blame for unforeseen complications that render the intervention more costly and longer than planned.

Evidence from a third independently randomized treatment disconfirms a second alternative explanation. Respondents might plausibly respond to a cue of unanimous backing in the Security Council since they expect that such a signal will influence elites and publics in other countries so that the latter will contribute blood and treasure to the U.S. intervention. This rationale would lead even those Americans who do not view cues about foreign elite opinion as informative to take such cues into account - simply because they expect that others value those signals. If the effect of unanimity in the Security Council on U.S. public attitudes was driven by the expected impact on foreign countries, then the American public's response to the signal of foreign elite consensus would change in the presence of a second cue that clarifies that a number of other countries actively participate in the intervention. To test this proposition, half of the respondents in each experiment were assigned to vignettes that described an intervention by "a large coalition of states led by the United States" and asked them to indicate their support or opposition of military action by a large group of countries. The other respondents read the version of the vignette described in the research design section, which named the U.S. as the intervening power.

In the 'war' and 'genocide' experiments, the cue of foreign elite consensus sent by the Security Council's unanimous endorsement of the intervention has the same effect regardless of whether the United States is described as intervening alone or at the helm of a large coalition of states (see Table 8 in the Online Appendix). While the signal of unity among foreign elites has a large impact on American public attitudes, the number of coalition partners does not sway American public opinion about the use of force (see Table 7 in the Online Appendix).<sup>17</sup> However, respondents are less likely to blame the U.S. government

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<sup>16</sup>Both cues are of similar length. The vignette displays one directly below the other.

<sup>17</sup>This finding echoes the null finding on the number of coalition partners in survey experiments conducted in Japan (Ikeda and Tago, 2014).



for unforeseen difficulties over the course of the intervention if the U.S. used military force in conjunction with a large coalition of states (see Models 25-26 in Table 7 in the Online Appendix). This effect of coalition size on blame attribution does not attenuate the effect of the cues about foreign elite opinion conveyed by the UN Security Council. Since information about other states' participation in the intervention does not alter the effect of UN approval on U.S. public attitudes, we can conclude that members of the American public do not merely respond to cues about foreign elite opinion because they expect that such cues will lead foreign publics to support contributions of blood and treasure.

### *Sensitivity analyses and context effects*

Random assignment of the cues about foreign elite opinion ensures that average respondents in each treatment condition are similar in expectation, and sensitivity analyses confirm that in fact there are no significant differences between them. Four models regress a binary indicator of assignment to the different cues about the UN Security Council (as opposed to assignment to any other signal) on all covariates in the models that investigate the 'war experiment'. Neither of the 52 demographic covariates in these models significantly predicts treatment assignment. In four additional models that implement the same test for the 'genocide experiment' only five of the 52 covariates are significant at the 95 percent confidence level.<sup>18</sup> Random chance is the most plausible explanation, and Models 3-4 in Table 1 indicate that the results do not change when these covariates are added to the model. Thus, randomized treatment assignment successfully achieved covariate balance on numerous observables, which makes the assumption of covariate balance on unobservable confounders plausible.

Additional analyses do not find any evidence of context effects that might explain the results by the specific wording of the questions, which could remind respondents of an actual past intervention and thereby trigger an idiosyncratic reaction to this specific situation rather than evoking an attitude to the hypothetical scenario. Only six percent of the respondents

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<sup>18</sup>These results are available from the author.

named a specific country that they thought the vignette of the ‘war experiment’ describes. The corresponding share is one percentage point lower for the ‘genocide experiment’. All results are robust to excluding these respondents from the sample.<sup>19</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

This study presents experimental evidence to test the proposition that a policy’s approval by a single international organization can convey multiple different signals to members of the American public, depending on whether the endorsement was unanimous or not. Specifically, a unanimous vote conveys a cue of consensus among foreign elites in support of a policy, whereas approval despite dissent or non-approval due to a veto signals that foreign elites are divided over the policy. Drawing on American public opinion scholarship, which shows that members of the public tend to be rationally ignorant about foreign policy and form an opinion by observing unity or disagreements among well-informed and trusted elites, this paper argues that the signaling effect of international organizations on public opinion depends on whether they cue consensus or divisions. Two survey experiments administered to a national sample of U.S. citizens test this argument in the issue area of international security. The study finds that the unanimous endorsement of a U.S. military intervention by the UN Security Council increases popular support for the use of force by six to ten percentage points, in comparison to the Council’s approval of the same action despite dissent. In addition, unanimous backing by foreign elites significantly reduces the likelihood that Americans blame their own government for unanticipated difficulties that arise during the intervention. In line with elite-cue theory, the effect is driven by respondents who consider the Security Council a trustworthy foreign elite. Remarkably, the effect of cues about unanimous support of an American intervention in the Security Council has a larger effect than bipartisan consensus in the U.S. Congress. Causal mediation analyses suggest

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<sup>19</sup>Additional results are available from the author. Russia was most frequently named in the ‘war experiment’ and Syria in the ‘genocide experiment’.

that the effect of unanimity in the Security Council on American public attitudes is due to the way it shapes the public's assessment of the costs and benefits of the intervention and the likelihood that other countries will share the burden, and that it is also driven by the surprising misconception that unanimously adopted Security Council resolutions carry more legal weight than those adopted under the qualified majority required under the UN Charter. The external validity of these results stems from the fact that they are consistent across two separate survey experiments that involve hypothetical military interventions with different characteristics and contexts.

The effect of unanimity in the Security Council on public opinion may explain why great powers typically agree to costly compromises and side-payments in order to secure the consent of all Council members - rather than passing their preferred policy by the qualified majority required under the institution's formal rules. In turn, this impact on public opinion may help answer the question why unanimity is not just the Security Council's default decision-making practice but also across many other international organizations.

This study leaves open the question whether unanimity in the Security Council really increases the prospect of burdensharing with other countries and improves the cost-benefit balance of American military interventions. Tago (2005, 593, 596) argues that in many cases in which the U.S. used force as part of a multilateral coalition, the U.S. paid most of its allies' material costs in order to secure their participation.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, a large majority in the American public seems to believe that the unanimous approval of the American use of force increases the prospect of burden-sharing. This raises the possibility that the U.S. seeks the unanimous endorsement of the Security Council not in order to share the burden with other countries, but to convince the American public that the financial and human toll of the intervention will be partly borne by other countries.

In real life, most cues about consensus or disagreements among foreign elites in the UN Security Council are delivered to the public through the news media and by domestic elites.

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<sup>20</sup>See also Kreps (2011, 83) and Keohane (1971, 163).

Therefore, framing effects may significantly impact the effect of signals from foreign elites (Baum and Potter, 2008). For instance, such framing effects might explain why intense media coverage of foreign elite opinion about the 2003 Iraq war did not keep the American public from misreading the UN Security Council's stance on the conflict. In a poll conducted on February 21, 2003, 68 percent of Americans agreed that the unanimously adopted Security Council resolution 1441 (2002) authorized the Iraq War (Chapman and Reiter, 2004, 894) even though most legal experts would disagree with this assessment. Framing effects introduce interesting twists in the way in which the political processes examined in the two survey experiments would play out in a non-experimental setting. Future studies could investigate how these framing effects shape the perception and impact of cues about foreign elite consensus and divisions in international organizations.

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**Cueing Foreign Elite Consensus or Division: The Effect of  
Unanimity in International Organizations on Public Opinion**

*Online Appendix of Supporting Information:*

*Not for publication*

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Mean	St.dev.	Min.	Max.
<b>Dependent variables</b>					
Support for military action ('war experiment')	2,926	0.637	0.439	0	1
Support for mil. action ('war exp.'): 5-point scale	2,926	3.343	1.212	1	5
Support for military action ('genocide experiment')	2,932	0.785	0.369	0	1
Support for mil. action ('genocide exp.'): 5-point scale	2,932	3.861	1.107	1	5
Blame U.S. government for difficulties	2,561	0.290	0.454	0	1
Blame U.S. government: 5-point scale	2,561	2.881	1.153	1	5
<b>Randomized treatments</b>					
Unanimous UNSC approval ('war exp.')	2,926	0.255	0.436	0	1
Unanimous UNSC approval ('genocide exp.')	2,932	0.250	0.433	0	1
UNSC approval with dissent ('war exp.')	2,926	0.248	0.432	0	1
UNSC approval with dissent ('genocide exp.')	2,932	0.252	0.434	0	1
UNSC non-approval: Russian veto ('war exp.')	2,926	0.248	0.432	0	1
UNSC non-approval: Russian veto ('genocide exp.')	2,932	0.251	0.434	0	1
UNSC non-approval: Broad opposition ('war exp.')	2,926	0.249	0.433	0	1
UNSC non-approval: Broad opposition ('genocide exp.')	2,932	0.247	0.431	0	1
Bipartisan consensus in Congress ('war exp.')	2,926	0.496	0.500	0	1
Bipartisan consensus in Congress ('genocide exp.')	2,932	0.492	0.500	0	1
Large U.S.-led coalition of states ('war exp.')	2,926	0.505	0.500	0	1
Large U.S.-led coalition of states ('genocide exp.')	2,932	0.502	0.500	0	1
<b>Mediating variables</b>					
Benefits exceed costs ('war experiment')	1,468	0.436	0.287	0	1
Benefits exceed costs ('genocide experiment')	1,439	0.332	0.293	0	1
Burdensharing ('war experiment')	1,481	0.482	0.268	0	1
Burdensharing ('genocide experiment')	1,449	0.561	0.277	0	1
Legality ('war experiment')	1,506	0.608	0.488	0	1
Legality ('genocide experiment')	1,470	0.667	0.471	0	1
Nonobstruction by other countries ('war exp.')	1,481	0.482	0.268	0	1
Nonobstruction by other countries ('genocide exp.')	1,483	0.491	0.277	0	1
Likelihood of success ('war experiment')	1,457	0.763	0.228	0	1
Likelihood of success ('genocide experiment')	1,493	0.755	0.228	0	1
Morality ('war experiment')	1,419	0.685	0.465	0	1
Morality ('genocide experiment')	1,462	0.882	0.322	0	1
Moral obligation ('war experiment')	2,926	0.459	0.498	0	1
Moral obligation ('genocide experiment')	2,932	0.719	0.450	0	1
Moral obligation ('genocide experiment')					
<b>Pretreatment covariates</b>					
Trust in UNSC's judgment	2,932	3.276	1.006	1	5
Female	2,932	0.615	0.487	0	1
Age	2,932	36.257	12.115	18	83
Family income (in USD 100,000k)	2,932	0.547	0.329	0.050	1.200
Educ. (no more than high school degree or equivalent)	2,932	0.099	0.299	0	1
Educ. (some college, no degree)	2,932	0.269	0.444	0	1
Educ. (Associate's degree)	2,932	0.112	0.315	0	1
Educ. (Bachelor's degree)	2,932	0.362	0.481	0	1
Educ. (Master's or Doctorate)	2,932	0.157	0.364	0	1
Interested in politics	2,932	3.373	1.075	1	5
Interested in foreign affairs	2,931	3.142	1.015	1	5
Liberal	2,932	3.198	1.185	1	5

Table 2: Comparison of demographic characteristics of MTurk sample and nationally representative samples

Variable	Category label	Percent in MTurk sample	Percent in nationally representative sample
Age	18 to 24	15.52	12.33
	25 to 34	39.64	17.10
	35 to 44	21.77	15.38
	45 to 54	12.88	17.25
	55 to 59	4.78	9.21
	60 to 64	3.11	8.21
	65 to 74	2.15	12.03
	75 to 80+	0.10	8.50
Education	No more than high school	9.54	37.96
	Some college, no degree	27.14	20.25
	Associate’s degree	11.45	10.18
	Bachelor’s degree	36.60	20.22
	Master’s or Doctorate	15.28	11.38
Gender	Female	61.11	51.15
	Male	38.89	48.85
Political attitudes (self-reported)	Conservative	31.03	43.60
	Moderate	23.92	28.34
	Liberal	45.04	28.06

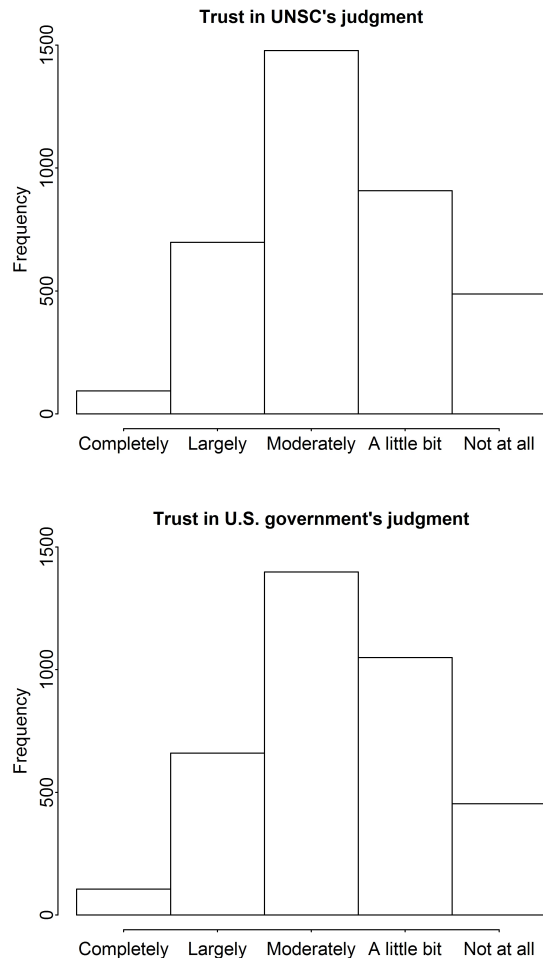
*Note:* The table compares demographic characteristics of the sample for this study, which was recruited through Amazon MTurk, to those of the subset of adult U.S. citizens in nationally representative surveys conducted in 2016. Age, education, and gender measures come from the Current Population Survey (CPS) 2016 conducted by the United States Census Bureau (2016). The subset of non-U.S. citizens was dropped to establish an appropriate comparison to the MTurk sample of U.S. citizens. The data on political attitudes was gathered during the pre-election waves of the American National Election Study (ANES) 2016. The distribution of respondents in this survey was retrieved from the SDA Archive at the University of California, Berkeley (Survey Documentation and Analysis, 2017). In order to treat the CPS and ANES surveys as the best estimates of true population parameters, weighted results from these surveys are reported. The unweighted characteristics of the raw CPS and ANES samples somewhat under-represent some parts of the population that are also underrepresented in the MTurk sample (e.g., women and citizens with low education: see Berinsky, Huber and Lenz 2011). Some variable categories were collapsed to facilitate comparison. The middle category of the political attitudes variable was labeled “Moderate, middle of the road” in the ANES survey and “Neither conservative nor liberal” in the survey for this study.

Table 3: U.S. public attitudes about American interventions, cues about foreign elite consensus and disagreements, and trust in foreign elite opinion: Results from OLS models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Favor intervention in war experiment	Favor intervention in genocide experiment
	(7)	(8)
UNSC approval with dissent	-0.159** (0.069)	-0.017 (0.056)
UNSC non-approval (Russian veto)	-0.444*** (0.073)	-0.215*** (0.062)
UNSC non-approval (broad opposition)	-0.592*** (0.073)	-0.213*** (0.065)
Trust in UNSC's judgment	-0.110*** (0.014)	-0.079*** (0.013)
Trust * UNSC approval with dissent	0.017 (0.021)	-0.014 (0.018)
Trust * Russian veto	0.095*** (0.022)	0.038** (0.019)
Trust * Broad opposition	0.117*** (0.022)	0.035* (0.020)
Female	-0.050*** (0.016)	0.025* (0.014)
Age	0.001 (0.001)	0.001* (0.001)
Income	0.039 (0.025)	0.014 (0.022)
Educ. (some college, no degree)	-0.002 (0.030)	-0.000 (0.025)
Educ. (Associate's degree)	-0.028 (0.035)	0.010 (0.029)
Educ. (Bachelor's degree)	-0.011 (0.029)	0.011 (0.025)
Educ. (Master's or Doctorate)	0.013 (0.034)	0.012 (0.029)
Interested in politics	0.014 (0.011)	0.008 (0.010)
Interested in foreign affairs	0.003 (0.012)	0.021* (0.010)
Liberal	-0.064*** (0.007)	-0.014** (0.006)
Observations	2,858	2,867
R <sup>2</sup>	0.088	0.056

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS models with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. Positive coefficients designate variables' positive marginal effects on the likelihood of respondent's support for the intervention. All effects are measured in comparison to the baseline of unanimous support in the UN Security Council and complete trust in the Council's judgment about using force. All models include three dummies designating geographic region, whose coefficients are not displayed. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Figure 1: Distribution of respondents' level of trust in the judgment of the UN Security Council and the U.S. government about using military action: Descriptive statistics



*Note:* The upper histogram displays the distribution of respondents' level of trust in the UN Security Council's judgment about taking military action. It shows that 40% of respondents report a moderate amount of trust. Relatively few respondents completely trust the Council (3%) or do not trust this institution at all (13%). The lower panel displays respondents' trust in the U.S. government's judgment about taking military action. It shows that, on average, the national sample of American citizens places slightly more trust in the UN than in its government (mean = 3.276 for the UN and mean = 3.287 for the U.S. on a five-point scale from completely trust [1] to no trust at all [5]).

Table 4: U.S. public attitudes about American interventions and cues about foreign elite consensus: Results from causal mediation analyses

	<i>Mediator:</i>					Moral obligation	
	Benefits exceed costs	Burdensharing	Legality	Nonobstruction	Likelihood of success		Morality of intervention
<i>War experiment</i>	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
ACME	0.058*	0.045**	0.071***	0.045**	0.037	0.074	0.052**
ADE	0.214*	0.211***	0.342***	0.213***	0.331***	0.163**	0.269***
Total Effect	0.273***	0.256***	0.413***	0.258***	0.368***	0.237***	0.321***
Prop. Mediated	0.211*	0.174**	0.169***	0.174**	0.101	0.308	0.162**
Observations	737	725	736	725	705	706	1,443
<i>Genocide experiment</i>	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(22)
ACME	0.043**	0.077***	0.047***	0.018	0.030	0.073*	0.027
ADE	0.225***	0.106	0.096	0.274***	0.208***	0.264***	0.218
Total Effect	0.268***	0.183**	0.143*	0.292***	0.239***	0.337***	0.244***
Prop. Mediated	0.160**	0.415**	0.311*	0.059	0.126	0.216*	0.108
Observations	697	706	708	736	745	734	1,442

*Note:* \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . Stars designate significance level of Average Causally Mediated Effect (ACME), Average Direct Effect (ADE), total effect, and the proportion of the total effect that is causally mediated. In all models, the total effect consists in the difference in responses in the unanimous UNSC treatment condition and the UNSC approval with dissent condition. Models 9-15 implement causal mediation analyses for the war experiment. Models 16-22 conduct the same analyses for the genocide experiment.  $N$  varies across models because the questions for different mediators were administered to different randomly selected subsets due to budget constraints.

Table 5: U.S. public attitudes about American interventions and cues about foreign elite consensus and disagreements and domestic elite consensus: Results from OLS models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor intervention in war experiment (23)	Favor intervention in genocide experiment (25)	Favor intervention in experiment (26)	Blame U.S. government (27) (28)
UNSC approval with dissent	-0.100*** (0.022)	-0.103*** (0.022)	-0.062*** (0.018)	0.059*** (0.022)
UNSC non-approval (Russian veto)	-0.133*** (0.022)	-0.131*** (0.022)	-0.098*** (0.019)	0.143*** (0.023)
UNSC non-approval (broad opposition)	-0.208*** (0.022)	-0.207*** (0.022)	-0.105*** (0.019)	0.241*** (0.030)
Bipartisan consensus in Congress	0.034** (0.015)	0.041** (0.016)	0.027* (0.014)	0.005 (0.018)
Female		-0.047*** (0.017)	0.034** (0.015)	-0.036** (0.019)
Age		0.001 (0.001)	-0.001** (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
Income		0.048* (0.026)	0.025 (0.022)	0.018 (0.029)
Educ. (some college, no degree)		-0.007 (0.030)	-0.005 (0.026)	-0.025 (0.035)
Educ. (Associate's degree)		-0.034 (0.036)	0.003 (0.030)	-0.013 (0.040)
Educ. (Bachelor's degree)		-0.009 (0.030)	0.010 (0.025)	-0.042 (0.034)
Educ. (Master's or Doctorate)		0.015 (0.034)	0.012 (0.030)	-0.038 (0.040)
Interested in politics		0.016 (0.011)	0.007 (0.010)	0.009 (0.013)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.008 (0.012)	0.028*** (0.010)	0.013 (0.014)
Liberal		-0.054*** (0.007)	-0.001 (0.006)	0.018** (0.008)
Observations	2,926	2,858	2,867	2,561
R <sup>2</sup>	0.031	0.064	0.026	0.032

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS models with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. Positive coefficients designate variables' positive marginal effects on the likelihood of respondent's support for the intervention (models 23-26) or the likelihood that she will blame the U.S. government for unforeseen difficulties with the intervention (models 27-28). All effects are measured in comparison to the baseline of unanimous support in the UN Security Council and no cue about domestic elite opinion. Models 24, 22, and 28 include three dummies designating geographic region, whose coefficients are not displayed. *N* varies across models due to missing values.



Table 6: U.S. public attitudes about American interventions, cues about foreign elite consensus and disagreements and domestic elite consensus, and interactions between foreign and domestic elite cues: Results from OLS models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor intervention in war experiment (29)	Favor intervention in genocide experiment (31)	Favor intervention in genocide experiment (32)	Blame U.S. government (34)
UNSC approval with dissent	-0.133*** (0.031)	-0.065** (0.026)	-0.063** (0.026)	0.063** (0.031)
UNSC non-approval (Russian veto)	-0.161*** (0.031)	-0.100*** (0.027)	-0.108*** (0.027)	0.128*** (0.032)
UNSC non-approval (broad opposition)	-0.230*** (0.031)	-0.116*** (0.027)	-0.105*** (0.027)	0.239*** (0.042)
Bipartisan consensus in Congress	-0.007 (0.029)	0.014** (0.024)	0.015* (0.024)	-0.003 (0.030)
Bipartisan consensus * UNSC approval with dissent	0.066 (0.043)	0.014 (0.036)	0.002 (0.036)	-0.006 (0.044)
Bipartisan consensus * Russian veto	0.057 (0.044)	0.019 (0.037)	0.019 (0.038)	0.030 (0.046)
Bipartisan consensus * Broad opposition	0.044 (0.044)	0.025 (0.038)	0.024 (0.038)	0.005 (0.060)
Female		-0.047*** (0.017)	0.034** (0.015)	-0.036* (0.019)
Age		0.001 (0.001)	-0.001** (0.001)	0.000 (0.000)
Income		0.048* (0.026)	0.026 (0.022)	-0.011 (0.029)
Educ. (some college, no degree)		-0.006 (0.030)	-0.005 (0.026)	-0.026 (0.035)
Educ. (Associate's degree)		-0.033 (0.036)	0.003 (0.030)	-0.012 (0.040)
Educ. (Bachelor's degree)		-0.008 (0.030)	0.010 (0.026)	-0.041 (0.034)
Educ. (Master's or Doctorate)		0.015 (0.034)	0.012 (0.030)	-0.038 (0.040)
Interested in politics		0.016 (0.011)	0.007 (0.010)	0.009 (0.013)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.007 (0.012)	0.028*** (0.010)	0.013 (0.014)
Liberal		-0.054*** (0.007)	-0.001 (0.006)	0.018** (0.008)
Observations	2,926	2,932	2,867	2,561
R <sup>2</sup>	0.032	0.014	0.026	0.033

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS models with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. Positive coefficients designate variables' positive marginal effects on the likelihood of respondent's support for the intervention (models 29-32) or the likelihood that she will blame the U.S. government for unforeseen difficulties with the intervention (models 33-34). All effects are measured in comparison to the baseline of unanimous support in the UN Security Council and no cue about domestic elite opinion. Models 30, 32, and 34 include three dummies designating geographic region, whose coefficients are not displayed. N varies across models due to missing values.

Table 7: U.S. public attitudes about American interventions, interventions by large U.S.-led coalitions, and cues about foreign elite consensus and disagreements: Results from OLS models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Favor intervention in		Blame U.S.			
	war experiment (35)	(36)	Favor intervention in genocide experiment (37)	(38)	government (39)	(40)
UNSC approval with dissent	-0.100*** (0.022)	-0.103*** (0.022)	-0.059*** (0.018)	-0.062*** (0.018)	0.059*** (0.022)	0.061*** (0.022)
UNSC non-approval (Russian veto)	-0.133*** (0.022)	-0.132*** (0.022)	-0.091*** (0.019)	-0.098*** (0.019)	0.143*** (0.023)	-0.143*** (0.023)
UNSC non-approval (broad opposition)	-0.209*** (0.022)	-0.208*** (0.022)	-0.103*** (0.019)	-0.105*** (0.019)	0.216*** (0.031)	-0.215*** (0.032)
Large U.S.-led coalition	0.005 (0.016)	0.003 (0.016)	-0.005 (0.014)	-0.005 (0.014)	-0.049*** (0.019)	-0.048*** (0.019)
Female		-0.045*** (0.017)		0.034** (0.015)		-0.036** (0.019)
Age		0.001 (0.001)		-0.001** (0.001)		0.000 (0.001)
Income		0.047* (0.026)		0.026 (0.022)		0.001 (0.029)
Educ. (some college, no degree)		-0.006 (0.030)		-0.005 (0.026)		-0.025 (0.035)
Educ. (Associate's degree)		-0.031 (0.036)		0.005 (0.030)		-0.013 (0.040)
Educ. (Bachelor's degree)		-0.010 (0.030)		0.010 (0.025)		-0.041 (0.034)
Educ. (Master's or Doctorate)		0.014 (0.034)		0.012 (0.030)		-0.037 (0.040)
Interested in politics		0.016 (0.011)		0.007 (0.010)		0.008 (0.013)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.006 (0.012)		0.028*** (0.010)		0.013 (0.014)
Liberal		-0.054*** (0.007)		-0.001 (0.006)		0.018** (0.008)
Observations	2,926	2,858	2,932	2,867	2,561	2,500
R <sup>2</sup>	0.029	0.062	0.012	0.025	0.035	0.042

*Note:* \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01. OLS models with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. Positive coefficients designate variables' positive marginal effects on the likelihood of respondent's support for the intervention (models 35-38) or the likelihood that she will blame the U.S. government for unforeseen difficulties with the intervention (models 39-40). All effects are measured in comparison to the baseline of unanimous support in the UN Security Council for an intervention conducted by the U.S. Models 36, 38, and 40 include three dummies designating geographic region, whose coefficients are not displayed. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table 8: U.S. public attitudes about American interventions and cues about foreign elite consensus and controversy about interventions by the U.S. or large U.S.-led coalitions: Results from OLS models

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor intervention in war experiment (41)	Favor intervention in genocide experiment (42)	Favor intervention in genocide experiment (43)	Blame U.S. government (44)
UNSC approval with dissent	-0.118*** (0.031)	-0.130*** (0.031)	-0.068** (0.026)	0.067** (0.032)
UNSC non-approval (Russian veto)	-0.151*** (0.031)	-0.160*** (0.031)	-0.072*** (0.026)	0.155*** (0.033)
UNSC non-approval (broad opposition)	-0.198*** (0.031)	-0.210*** (0.032)	-0.097*** (0.027)	0.223*** (0.034)
Large U.S.-led coalition	-0.007 (0.029)	-0.025 (0.030)	0.004 (0.024)	-0.036 (0.029)
Large coalition * UNSC approval with dissent	0.036 (0.043)	0.053 (0.044)	0.019 (0.036)	-0.016 (0.044)
Large coalition * Russian veto	0.035 (0.044)	0.055 (0.044)	0.038 (0.037)	-0.024 (0.046)
Large coalition * Broad opposition	-0.020 (0.044)	0.004 (0.045)	-0.014 (0.038)	
Female		-0.046*** (0.017)	(0.038)	-0.036* (0.019)
Age		0.001 (0.001)	(0.015)	0.000 (0.001)
Income		0.048* (0.026)	0.027 (0.022)	-0.001 (0.002)
Educ. (some college, no degree)		-0.004 (0.030)	-0.007 (0.026)	-0.026 (0.035)
Educ. (Associate's degree)		-0.031 (0.036)	0.003 (0.030)	-0.013 (0.040)
Educ. (Bachelor's degree)		-0.009 (0.030)	0.009 (0.025)	-0.042 (0.034)
Educ. (Master's or Doctorate)		0.014 (0.034)	0.010 (0.030)	-0.037 (0.040)
Interested in politics		0.016 (0.011)	0.007 (0.010)	0.008 (0.013)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.007 (0.012)	0.028*** (0.010)	0.013 (0.014)
Liberal		-0.054*** (0.007)	-0.001 (0.006)	0.018** (0.008)
Observations	2,926	2,858	2,932	2,561
R <sup>2</sup>	0.030	0.063	0.013	0.035

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. OLS models with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. Positive coefficients designate variables' positive marginal effects on the likelihood of respondent's support for the intervention (models 41-44) or the likelihood that she will blame the U.S. government for unforeseen difficulties with the intervention (models 45-46). All effects are measured in comparison to the baseline of unanimous support in the UN Security Council for an intervention conducted by the U.S. Models 42, 44, and 46 include three dummies designating geographic region, whose coefficients are not displayed. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table 9: U.S. public attitudes about American interventions and cues about foreign elite consensus and disagreements: Results from OLS models with five-point ordinal outcome variables

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Favor intervention in war experiment (47)	Favor intervention in genocide experiment (49)	Favor intervention in government (51)	Blame U.S. government (52)	
UNSC approval with dissent	-0.306*** (0.060)	-0.228*** (0.056)	-0.240*** (0.055)	0.167*** (0.058)	0.166*** (0.058)
UNSC non-approval (Russian veto)	-0.408*** (0.060)	-0.320*** (0.057)	-0.335*** (0.057)	0.429*** (0.058)	0.425*** (0.059)
UNSC non-approval (broad opposition)	-0.620*** (0.062)	-0.388*** (0.058)	-0.398*** (0.058)	0.679*** (0.073)	0.680*** (0.074)
Female	-0.125*** (0.046)		0.061 (0.043)		-0.159* (0.047)
Age	0.001 (0.002)		-0.006*** (0.002)		-0.007*** (0.002)
Income	0.141* (0.071)		0.101 (0.067)		-0.076 (0.074)
Educ. (some college, no degree)	-0.008 (0.087)		-0.010 (0.078)		-0.032 (0.091)
Educ. (Associate's degree)	-0.111 (0.100)		-0.010 (0.089)		-0.024 (0.106)
Educ. (Bachelor's degree)	-0.048 (0.085)		0.033 (0.078)		-0.016 (0.088)
Educ. (Master's or Doctorate)	0.061 (0.096)		0.013 (0.090)		0.028 (0.100)
Interested in politics	0.061* (0.032)		0.036 (0.030)		0.001 (0.033)
Interested in foreign affairs	0.017 (0.034)		0.097*** (0.031)		0.041 (0.035)
Liberal	-0.168*** (0.019)		0.005 (0.018)		0.089*** (0.019)
Observations	2,926	2,932	2,867	2,561	2,500
R <sup>2</sup>	0.034	0.017	0.036	0.042	0.064

*Note:* \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01. OLS models with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. Positive coefficients designate variables' positive marginal effects on the likelihood of respondent's support for the intervention (models 47-50) or the likelihood that she will blame the U.S. government for unforeseen difficulties with the intervention (models 51-52). The outcomes are measured on five-point ordinal scales from strongly oppose to strongly favor (models 47-50) and from no trust to complete trust (models 51-52). All effects are measured in comparison to the baseline of unanimous support in the UN Security Council. Models 48, 50, and 52 include three dummies designating geographic region, whose coefficients are not displayed. *N* varies across models due to missing values.