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# Policy Objective of Military Intervention and Public Attitudes: A Conjoint Experiment from US and Turkey

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## Abstract

This paper scrutinizes the role of the principal policy objective of military intervention in conditioning citizen attitudes for the use of force. Extending the scope of analysis beyond the independent effects, it next assesses how the effects of two core variables of intervention, namely international organizations' approval of the operation and the regime type of the target country, vary for interventions with differing mandates. The results of the conjoint experiment in two dissimilar cases, the US and Turkey, show that despite substantial changes in relative support for different types of operations, policy objective is still a highly potent determinant of individual attitudes. The results also concur that compared to foreign policy restraint and humanitarian missions, individuals are more sensitive to international organizations' endorsements of the use of force for peace and internal political change operations. Finally, individuals are significantly disapproving of operations that seek internal political changes in democratic targets, though in contrast to the democratic peace theory, for other types of interventions, they are indifferent to the regime type of the opponent.

**Keywords** Public Opinion · Conflict · Military Intervention · US · Turkey

Incumbents often seek to obtain voter backing when calling to arms (Reiter & Stam, 2002), as public support (or opposition) for the use of force may affect incumbents' legislative capacities (e.g. Gelpi and Grieco 2015), policy options (e.g. Perla 2011), electoral prospects (e.g. Kiratli 2021), and political survival (e.g. Berinsky 2009).

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Replication data and documentation are available at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/TGUADW>.

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Consequently, a rich literature aims to ascertain the determinants of public attitudes on wars. One long-standing assumption presumes that the public is rather prudent in its judgments on military affairs. In a nutshell, the argument continues, the higher the perceived stakes and the lower the risks, the greater public support for war becomes. One critical factor that helps voters assess the potential “interests and stakes” is the reason for the use of force (Larson, 1996), or its “principal policy objective” (PPO), as Jentleson dubs it (1992).

The PPO argument groups military interventions under four categories: Foreign policy restraint (FPR) denotes cases where the use of force aims to “coerce an adversary engaged in aggressive actions against the United States or its interests” (Jentleson and Britton, 1999, 50). Internal political change (IPC), the second group of operations, seeks to implement domestic political changes – i.e. replacing the government or enacting constitutional changes – in the target country. Third are humanitarian interventions (HI) to address widespread human suffering that requires immediate action through military or other means. The final type of operations is peacekeeping, seeking to provide a neutral buffer zone between hostile parties, monitor the cease-fire, or demobilize combatants (Eichenberg, 2005).

Early empirical findings on American public opinion verified that the stated policy objective not only exerts consistently substantial effects on citizens’ evaluation of the operation but also that citizens have clear preferences with respect to each type of operation. Accordingly, Americans are highly disapproving of internal political change, moderately critical of peacekeeping, and comparatively favorable toward foreign policy restraint and humanitarian operations (Jentleson and Britton 1999, Eichenberg 2005). Investigations of PPO effects in other geographies are few and are limited to advanced Western powers (Clements, 2013; Mader, 2017). Notably, in those few analyses, the results considerably diverge from the American findings. For instance, in an analysis of German attitudes, Mader finds (2017) that the military objective is “virtually irrelevant” in shaping public opinion. Providing anecdotal evidence for cross-national differences in voter rankings, Eichenberg (2005) concurs that despite their risky nature, public support for peacekeeping operations seems to be substantially higher in European and other countries than in the US.

In this paper, I first test the PPO argument across time and location. Thirty years since the argument was first put forth and after unprofitable military adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan and shifting security perceptions, I investigate if the policy mandate of a military operation is still a potent determinant of preferences on the use of force among citizens in the US and Turkey. When faced with an actual proposal on military intervention, citizens need to simultaneously evaluate a complex set of factors alongside the policy objective of the operation. Hence, extending the scope of analysis beyond the isolated effects, I next explore the extent to which support for different operation mandates is moderated by two core situational factors that closely shape public assessments about the costs and legitimacy of military interventions: endorsement by international organizations (IOs) and the regime type of the target country. Specifically, I develop two hypotheses: first, because internal political change and peace operations are more demanding to legally justify and require extensive commitment and exhaustive resources to materially operationalize, citizens are more sensitive to IO endorsements of such operations compared to foreign policy

restraint and humanitarian interventions. Second, deriving from the democratic peace literature, relative to other operation types, citizens would be more critical of targeting democracies for internal political change operations, as toppling an electorally legitimate government would be perceived as unjustified as well as more cumbersome because democratic targets are formidable adversaries.

To investigate the relative explanatory power of policy objective when it is simultaneously confronted with other situational factors of the proposed military operations, this paper utilizes conjoint experiments. Conjoint designs to determine public attitudes toward military interventions have recently been gaining traction as they allow researchers to enumerate the information-rich character of international conflicts and simultaneously test separate theoretical expectations (e.g. Kertzer et al. 2021, Dill and Schubiger 2021, Muradova and Gildea 2021, Knuppe 2022). Theoretically, this study improves on previous efforts by exploring the interaction effects between the policy objective and other dimensions of the use of force proposals, thereby contributing to the assessment of the rather dynamic relationship between IO endorsement, the target regime, and preference for specific types of military intervention.

The results of the conjoint experiment that randomly distributes a total of 19 levels on 6 attributes on a sample of 1,490 respondents in the US and 1,002 respondents in Turkey show that in both countries, the policy objective is still a “powerful and parsimonious explanation for the variation in public support” (Jentleson & Britton, 1998, 396) and that internal political change operations remain the most unpopular type of operations. However, contrary to previous findings, in both samples, peace operations attain relatively high approval, significantly more than foreign policy restraint missions.

The results also demonstrate that the instrumental roles of the IO authorization and the regime type of the target country are highly contingent on the policy mandate of the operation. Confirming my theoretical expectations, respondents are more sensitive to IO endorsements for peace operations and partly for internal political change operations. Second, respondents are significantly critical of internal political change operations in democratic targets, though for other types of interventions, they are indifferent to the regime type. Finally, exploratory subgroup analyses reveal clear patterns of between-individual variations in preference for various operation types. Citizens with right-wing ideological orientations and hawkish foreign policy orientations are substantively more favorable of internal political change and policy restraint operations and less supportive of peace and humanitarian interventions, whereas those with left-wing ideologies are more inclined to support peace operations.

## Principal Policy Objective Argument

Having analyzed eight military actions executed by the US between 1982 and 1991, Jentleson concluded that Americans are fairly prudent in their assessment of the use of force and evaluate the deployment of troops primarily based on the PPO with a “pragmatic sense of strategy” (1992, 71). Accordingly, military interventions that sought to overthrow governments (IPC) are often resisted, whereas those that target restraining an adversary (FPR) threatening American interests attain particular sup-

port. There are two reasons for public skepticism toward IPC operations: one, these interventions typically have ambiguous standards of success, and the public consequently perceives them as being riskier. Second, because they infringe on another state's sovereignty, they are considered less legitimate (1992, 54).

With the end of the Cold War, the *raison d'état* of governments for deploying troops abroad has diversified. In a follow-up study, extending the original PPO argument on six more American military actions between 1992 and 1998, Jentleson and Britton (1999) introduced a third type of operation, namely humanitarian. The greater grounds for legitimacy and likely efficacy make HIs much more popular than IPC operations, the authors concurred. Subsequently, having scrutinized various opinion polls on American military operations from 1981 to 2005, Eichenberg (2005) conceptualized a final type: peacekeeping operations. Although the author operationalizes peacekeeping by analyzing data on questions that inquire only about neutral protection of peace agreements between the previously fighting parties and excludes operations that might involve actual participation in the conflict, his meta-analysis shows that due to their highly risky nature and ambiguously defined mandates, such operations have been just as unpopular as IPCs in polls.

The original PPO hypothesis was proposed during a period when American citizens evaluated the use of force based on the experiences of the Gulf War, Somalia, and Bosnia. The bitter experiences of Iraq, Afghanistan, and the war on terror have changed the dynamics of mass attitudes by amplifying the risk perceptions associated with direct forms of engagement (e.g. Davies and Johns 2016). At the same time, in parallel to the growing interconnectedness between countries, conventional security threats with narrower spatial referents are being replaced by new types of cross-border threats, such as unmanaged refugee flows, transnational terrorism, and contagious diseases. The closer coupling of national security with "global stability" has enhanced voter support for proactive engagements to address such problems at their roots.

Consequently, the broader delineations of the various operation mandates have blurred. In particular, with the growing traction of the principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) among the international community, modern peacekeeping and humanitarian missions have become largely synonymous with protecting civilians (e.g., Hultman 2013). This discursive shift partly explains why the number of UN peacekeepers and contributing countries has continuously risen in the last twenty years, reaching over 100,000 peacekeepers from almost 120 countries (Di Salvatore & Ruggeri, 2017). Such member state contributions largely garner popular support because they are perceived as targeting noble causes, i.e., ensuring political stability and helping those in distress (Kummel et al. 2004). Hence, there are ample grounds to retest the validity of the original PPO argument thirty years after its establishment and explore if there have been any changes in public preferences with respect to varying types of military interventions.

**H1** Citizens are more likely to approve of foreign policy restraint and humanitarian operations than internal political change and peace operations. (*original PPO hypothesis*)

The public is fairly sensitive to the policy objective of the use of force because each type entails different realities and sends different signals on the costs—both economic and human—and legitimacy of the operations. Indeed, according to the cited accounts that test PPO arguments (Jentleson and Britton 1999, Eichenberg 2005), mass skepticism toward IPC and peacekeeping operations does not stem from citizens' inherent opposition toward the primary objectives of such missions (though some might be), but rather because such operations are projected to be riskier and costlier endeavors, and their legitimacy is often tenuous.

This argument has two related implications: One, public assessments of the costs and legitimacy strongly differ across operation types. Two, if other factors related to the military intervention alleviate concerns over the potential costs and/or help contribute to the perceived legitimacy in the eye of the public, then support for such operations could be positively moved. However, the policy objective of an operation is not the sole factor that determines its expected cost or its legitimacy; public perceptions of both the costs and legitimacy of the use of force are closely affected by two situational factors in the conflict, namely international endorsement of the operation and the regime type of the target.

## **Policy Objective of Military Intervention and International Endorsement**

Public approval of the use of force greatly increases when there is IO endorsement for the operations (Grieco et al., 2011; Chapman & Reiter, 2004; Voeten, 2005). Two mechanisms drive public sensitivity toward cues from international actors: First, IOs enjoy a high degree of moral authority and legitimacy, and the global audience often considers them more politically neutral (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). This normative-moral superiority makes IOs serve as a legitimating device for intervening governments and an external check of incumbent policies for citizens. By authorizing the use of force, IOs assuage public concerns by informing them that military action is not merely to promote the parochial national interests of the intervening country but is instead truly necessary, morally justified, and subject to legal boundaries (e.g. Tingley and Tomz 2012, Wallace 2019, Tago and Ikeda 2015). On these grounds, citizens are markedly susceptible to cues provided by IOs they hold in higher regard, such as NATO (Grieco et al., 2011; Chapman & Reiter, 2004), or by “conservative” IOs, whose key players diverge in policy preferences, such as the UN (Chapman, 2012).

The second mechanism is burden-sharing. IO support for the use of force signals to citizens that the military and financial costs of the operations will not be shouldered alone, but instead be shared among various members of the international community (e.g. Grieco et al. 2011, Kull and Destler 1999). Consequently, when IOs endorse military action, citizens of the intervening country become more likely to believe that the risk of potential casualties and the material costs of engagement will be lower and the likelihood of success greater (Chapman, 2012).

Despite such benefits, seeking IO support forces states to relinquish some level of control over the decisions, thereby limiting the opportunity to pursue self-interests. Given the collective nature of these organizations, other member states could block

unfavorable decisions through vetoes or by building winning coalitions. Moreover, IOs have their own institutional structures and agendas, and, with sufficient autonomy, it is always possible that their policy choices may considerably differ from the preferences of individual member states. Thus, IO approval consumes time, takes away the element of surprise from the operation, and may require side payments to convince reluctant members (Recchia, 2015). The more the preferences of the approval-seeking state diverge from the other members of the IO, the higher the political and financial costs of approval will be.

Although citizens may prefer to obtain IO endorsement than not have it on average, their preference may depend on several contextual factors. Theoretically, citizens should value IO endorsement if they believe the legitimacy and burden-sharing gains are greater than the loss of control. Yet, legitimacy and burden-sharing benefits vary for different types of operations.

Citizens tend to disapprove of policies that violate international laws (Tomz, 2008; Wallace, 2019), and IPC and peace operations are demanding to legally justify. The legitimacy of IPC operations in another sovereign country hinges on a heavy burden of proof for the intervening country to find exemptions to the non-intervention principle, a core part of international law (Arend & Beck, 2014). In fact, this particular difficulty in finding legal exemptions often leads willing states to engage in covert operations for regime change and do so at the expense of considerable reputational costs (Poznansky, 2020).

The legitimacy of peace operations, on the other hand, requires proper identification of rights violations of civilians within the host country, assignment of responsibility between the fighting parties, and a credible threat to international peace. Moreover, such interventions need to be neutral and impartial and, whenever necessary, should be conducted with the consent of the host country. Consequently, the legal mandates for peacekeeping operations are predominantly obtained through the UN Security Council. The UN Charter stipulates that regional organizations such as NATO can also mandate and execute peacekeeping operations, though if there is an enforcement component, it must be authorized by the UNSC (Chapter VIII). Operations implemented without any authorization from IOs are rarer and more controversial (Wiharta 2009). For instance, Russia has frequently conducted “peacekeeping” operations in the former Soviet republics without a UN mandate, ranging from Georgia (JPKF - South Ossetia) and Moldova (OGRF- Transnistria) to Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan; however, such instances of the use of force—even if they acquire the consent of the fighting parties—are often condemned and considered a manifestation of national interests (Gilder 2022).

Second, compared to FPR operations, which seek to undo acts of aggression against national interests, or humanitarian actions, which aim to stop human suffering, the objectives in IPC and peace operations are broader, and the success criteria are often vague. As Sullivan argues (2012), military interventions that aim to change the target’s policies, as in IPC, or impose order among a target population, as in peace operations, require a certain degree of compliance of the local population to be effective. Disarming the opponent’s material capacity is often not enough for even powerful states; instead, the intervening countries should equally consider the opponent’s will of resistance (Rapport, 2015). Moreover, in IPC and peace operations, even if

the military action reaches its initial objectives, the intervening party is incentivized to continue monitoring the target's behavior closely to ensure compliance with the policy change or peace agreement (Schultz, 2010). By these factors, IPC and peace operations require a larger deployment of military and civilian security forces and a longer timeframe for engagement and carry the risk of potentially more casualties. With increased risks and material costs, citizens value the burden-sharing benefits of multilateral support even more.

**H2** For internal political change and peace operations, citizens will be more sensitive to IO endorsement than foreign policy restraint and humanitarian operations.

## Policy Objective of Military Intervention and Target Regime

The regime type of the target country is another potent determinant of public assessments of the costs as well as the legitimacy of the military interventions. Arguably the most powerful theory of international relations, the democratic peace puts forth the elegant argument that democracies do not fight one another. Broadly grouped, two strands explain the empirically verified dyadic democratic peace. According to the normative strand, voters and elites in democracies tend to define themselves and their counterparts in other democracies as belonging to the same liberal community, sharing a similar set of moral and civic norms. This discourse of positive identification between democracies also leads policymakers and the public to find aggressive actions against each other as morally wrong and “inappropriate” (Risse-Kappen 1995, Doyle 2005). Besides the moral implications, shared world views also encourage democratic publics to view each other as more reasonable and trustworthy and perceive lower threats from each other (Dixon, 1994). Even when disagreements emerge, bilateral dedication to negotiation, deliberation and compromise, and the institutional chain of checks and balances prevent conflicts from escalating (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995).

The instrumentalist strand, on the other hand, assumes that facing a democratic adversary alters the calculations of the expected costs and likelihood of success of going into wars, because on average democracies are more competent opponents than non-democracies (Tomz & Weeks, 2013). Following the audience cost argument, because the failure of military operations incurs adverse political consequences, democratic leaders resort to using force only when they anticipate success and are less likely to back down when they do so (Reiter and Stam 1998). Consequently, democracies are more selective about picking their battles, they enjoy bigger winning coalitions, are more willing to and capable of mobilizing resources, and show greater resolve to succeed (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999, Lake 1992). Because democracies fight more cautiously and harder, emerging as more capable and resolute adversaries, public approval, in democracies and non-democracies alike, of the use of force against democratic targets would be much weaker.

Research lending micro-level support for dyadic democratic peace has been limited and exclusively relied on experimental designs that entail specific vignettes that



force respondents to choose positions on a particular – and arguably an extreme – type of military intervention (e.g. Rousseau 2005, Mintz and Geva 1993). For instance, both the experiments of Johns and Davies (2012) and Tomz and Weeks (2013) feature a target country that develops nuclear weapons, with supposedly hostile intentions. As Tomz and Weeks admit, however (13), in such a high-stakes situation, the effect of democracy in tamping the threat perceptions and, in turn, the willingness to strike might be more prevalent. Indeed, when faced with an autocratic, revisionist nuclear power, respondents may perceive a grave, direct threat to American lives and interests. Yet, such a specific type of operation is rare: there are only a handful of countries with the intention of developing nuclear capabilities, and the US has never engaged in a military conflict to prevent another country from doing so. Hence, the way the vignette is framed around nuclear threats cues respondents to prioritize the political regime of the target country. Even in the absence of contextual cues, given the peculiarity of the proposed scenario, questions remain as to whether the democratic peace argument holds when governments engage in other types of operations.

Theoretically, in IPC operations citizens should be more sensitive to the target regime based on both concerns over legitimacy and the costs of such operations. If the primary causal mechanism behind citizens' reluctance to consent to the use of force against another fellow democracy stems from the shared identities, diminished threat perceptions, and moral reservations—as Tomz and Weeks have found (2013) for the American sample—citizens would be highly skeptical of a regime change mission in countries, as doing so disregards the sovereignty of their democratically legitimate government and the will of the people with which they feel aligned. On the other hand, if citizens avoid going against democratic opponents because they are viewed as capable adversaries, they would have similar major reservations about IPC operations in democratic targets, because as the most intense type among the four, these interventions present a relatively higher baseline of risk factors and require considerably deeper levels of engagement.

**H3** Citizens' sensitivity to the regime type of the target country varies across the policy objective of the operation, with the greatest sensitivity should be for internal political change operations.

## Country Cases

Studies have thoroughly investigated public war attitudes in the US, though we know relatively little on how American attitudes compare to international audiences. Specifically, with a few exceptions (e.g. Mader 2017), we lack evidence on how the public reacts to the use of force with different mandates, particularly in non-Western country contexts. However, the scope of arguments on the PPO and on the conditioning effects of IO endorsement and target regime might be limited to particular geographies. Thus, a research design that replicates the same experiment in two highly dissimilar country cases allows us test the external validity of the theoretical expectations and the extent to which the results are generalizable beyond the US context.

Turkey substantially differs from the US in terms of military might, political regime, influence in international institutions, major religion and culture, and geostrategic location. At the same time, despite being a mid-sized power, Turkey has an active military agenda, particularly in the last ten years, exemplified by several trans-border operations from Syria to Libya as well as a military presence in a wide geographical area ranging from Bosnia and Kosovo to Somalia, Lebanon, and Afghanistan. Such proactive military engagements make the incumbent's foreign policy decisions highly salient within the domestic political contestation (Kiratli, 2018).

Theoretically, the rank ordering among the four archetypes may vary considerably across countries, as citizens may differ in their assessments of national interests, cost-benefit calculations, standards of success, and risk perceptions. For instance, in line with the proposed model, because countries with more limited military capabilities are not necessarily expected to succeed in operations that require considerable effort and prolonged fighting, citizens in Turkey may be more skeptical of peace and political change operations over humanitarian ones, which require limited engagement and encompass a shorter timeframe.

A similar divergence between the two samples could arise with respect to citizens' sensitivity to IO cues. Constituencies in countries with firmer control over an IO's decisions and whose policy preferences overlap with other members of an IO tend to be less skeptical of delegation, since the cost of losing control over outcomes is comparatively lower (Milner & Tingley, 2013; Kiratli, 2022). The US is the leading power in NATO and owns a permanent seat on the UNSC and therefore wields considerable leverage in the decision-making processes of these organizations. Conversely, Turkey does not have a seat on the UNSC and, as a medium power, lacks opportunities to directly influence UN or NATO decisions. Yet, incidents such as President Erdogan's signal to veto Sweden and Finland's NATO accession process have exposed the division in the policy preferences of Turkey and other member countries. This divergence also has roots at the micro level, as various World Values Surveys report that the Turkish public has generally been highly distrustful of international institutions. For instance, in the latest wave of WVS, only 28.9 and 25.2% of Turkish citizens expressed some level of confidence in the UN and NATO, respectively, whereas these figures stand at 36.3 and 38.9% for the United States.

Finally, the regime differences between the US (democracy) and Turkey (partial democracy) could lead to differences in sensitivity to the regime type of the target country. As suggested, a prominent argument to explain the micro-level foundation of democratic peace rests upon the idea of shared norms and values and in-group identifications between democratic dyads. This assumption on dyadic affinity implies that micro-level support democratic peace should be particularly pronounced in consolidated democracies (US) given that the ideational ties and feeling of in-group solidarity are expected to be stronger the more democratic the home country is. In fact, if the alignment in regime type modifies individual threat perceptions from abroad as proposed, citizens of partial democracies (Turkey) might be even more suspicious of democratic regimes over other autocracies.

## Methodology

The extant literature on PPO effects has conventionally relied on either survey analyses of mass attitudes on a limited number of historical cases in a comparative perspective (e.g. Jentleson and Britton 1999, Eichenberg 2005, Brownlee 2020, Rapport 2015), or experiments with a limited number of manipulations (e.g. Herrmann et al. 1999). The first route, analyzing public opinion on real-world military interventions, may suffer from confounding bias triggered by extraneous factors that cannot be controlled in surveys (Perla, 2011). As a potential remedy to address bias, averaging across a large number of survey questions carries the tradeoff of capturing direct reactions to various types of military operations.

The second methodological choice, experiments that isolate a few features of a hypothetical operation and force respondents to make a judgment, is problematic in terms of realism because at decision points, respondents have to assess several more related factors of the proposed military intervention. Such designs also risk acquiring artificially high effect sizes by emphasizing the tested factors and hiding other relevant information. Subsequently, analyzing the perceived PPO in isolation without measuring it against other exogenous factors that do not vary prevents us from assessing its substantive effect.

In conjoint experiments, respondents are asked to evaluate varying policy proposals that differ on several key dimensions. Studies show that the enhanced realism of conjoint experiments over vignette designs that manipulate relatively few attributes reduces satisficing behavior and causes higher degrees of external validity (Hainmueller et al., 2015). More importantly, conjoint experiments allow for the simultaneous testing of several hypotheses within the same design. By this quality, unlike traditional designs, conjoint experiments can measure each factor's relative explanatory power in driving attitudes and improve causal inference.

The data for the empirical analysis is obtained through a conjoint survey experiment in the United States and Turkey fielded in January and February 2020. For the experiment in the US, a sample of 1,490 respondents were recruited from the Amazon MTurk marketplace and directed to the survey platform Qualtrics. The Turkish sample was drawn from an international panel company, Cint, and consists of 1,002 respondents. To minimize fraudulent responses and increase data quality, several measures have been taken. First, for the MTurk survey, only workers with 5,000 completed HITs and over 98% approval rate were employed, both numbers being well above the recommended threshold (e.g. Kennedy et al. 2020). Second, two attention check questions were included in both surveys, and data on those who failed any of the attention checks were not included in the final analysis. Third, and last, geolocations of IP addresses were screened using IP Hub platform to detect suspicious users and bot activity.

Although MTurk workers are on average more likely to be females, higher educated, and more liberal, previous studies suggest that experimental treatment effects on MTurk produce highly comparable results to those obtained on population samples (e.g. Berinsky et al. 2012). Additionally, in this study, to enhance the representability of the samples, quotas were introduced based on age, gender, and education levels in line with the population means. Consequently, the mean age of American

respondents was 41.7 (population mean  $\mu=38.1$ ), 51% of the sample consisted of females, and 36.4% had college degrees ( $\mu=38.1$ ). The Turkish sample’s average age was 33.4 ( $\mu=31.5$ ), 48.8% were females, and 22% had college degrees ( $\mu=21$ ).

### Experimental Setup

The experiment is implemented using choice-based format in which respondents, following basic socio-demographic questions and a brief overview of the forthcoming exercise, were provided with two side-by-side foreign policy proposals contemplating a military operation against a hypothetical target state that deployed troops to an American/Turkish ally and asked to approve of one. Studies on conjoint designs recommend limiting the number of attributes to 5–7 to minimize cognitive burden and satisficing, particularly if the survey is to be accessed via mobile devices. With this in mind, the proposals varied on six attributes, and each attribute had a varying number of levels.

Figure 1 depicts the vignette wording and an example comparison for the US sample, Appendix A-I outlines the Turkish sample, and Table 1 reports all the levels under each attribute. Each respondent had to complete six pairwise tasks and evaluate 12 proposals in total. Following the experimental part of the survey, respondents were posed several questions on general foreign policy attitudes and political ideology. The Appendix Table A-II presents the summary statistics of the covariates for each sample.

Note that this paper’s theoretical objective is to assess the *relative* weight of each factor and their interactions in driving citizen preferences, rather than measuring public approval for different types of interventions. For this reason, in the conjoint, no

*In response to international crises in two different parts of the world, the US government has convened to decide on two possible operations that involve sending military troops abroad. The details of these two operations are as follows.*

*If you had to choose only one, which of these two military operations would you approve?*

|                                     | Proposal A   | Proposal B   |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Objective of military operation     | Country A has deployed troops to a neighboring country, which is an ally of the US. The operation aims to expel the target country from the invaded territory. | Country B has deployed troops to a neighboring country, which is an ally to US. The operation aims to protect civilians in the conflict zone, many of whom are women and children. |
| Operation supported by              | US government only   | US government plus UN  |
| Attacking country’s regime          | Partial democracy  | Authoritarian  |
| Attacking country’s religion        | Muslim   | Christian  |
| Attacking country’s military power: | Strong   | Weak   |
| Mode of operation                   | Ground troops only   | Air Force only   |

Fig. 1 Example conjoint comparison for the US sample

**Table 1** Policy Attributes and Levels

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Objective of military operation          | <i>(Introductory text)</i> Target country has deployed troops to a neighboring country, which is an ally of the US/Turkey.<br>-The operation aims to expel the target country from the invaded territory. ( <i>Foreign policy restraint</i> )<br>-The operation aims to protect civilians in the conflict zone, many of whom are women and children. ( <i>Humanitarian intervention</i> )<br>-The operation aims to maintain peace between two sides. ( <i>Peace</i> )<br>-The operation aims to overthrow the government in the aggressor target country. ( <i>Internal political change</i> ) |
| Operation supported by                   | Only US government / US government plus UN / US government plus NATO allies / US government plus opposition party ( <i>parties in Turkey</i> )  |
| Aggressor country's regime               | Democracy / Partial democracy / Authoritarian   |
| Aggressor country's predominant religion | Muslim / Christian / Buddhist   |
| Aggressor country's military power:      | Strong / Weak   |
| Mode of operation                        | Ground troops only / Air force only / Both ground troops and air force  |

“neither” option was presented to the respondents. Methodologically, forced-choice conjoint designs urge respondents to evaluate the given information more cautiously and increase the reliability of answers (Bansak et al., 2021). Paired forced-choice conjoints produce relatively similar results to non-forced designs, which together significantly outperform single vignette designs in capturing individuals’ actual preferences in real-world situations (Hainmueller et al., 2015). The experiments were fully randomized, meaning the values of attributes are approximately uniformly distributed across choice tasks, thus enabling the estimation of causal effects—the average marginal component effect (AMCE)—of each level on the probability of a particular proposal is selected (Hainmueller et al. 2014).

Of the six manipulated attributes, the first one considers the policy objective of the operation, featuring the baseline scenario followed by additional information on either one of the four archetypes based on the PPO typology. A second attribute deals with the level of internal (opposition party) and external support (UN, or NATO as a regional, security IO) for the proposed operation. Arguably, while an endorsement by the UN is more effective in assuring citizens about the legality of the operations, an endorsement by NATO might send more credible signals about the burden-sharing benefits. A further three attributes specify the target country’s characteristics, namely its regime type to test H3, religion, and military power. A final attribute manipulates the mode of military involvement.

On the target country characteristics, religion is manipulated, as several studies have verified a significant association between the religion of the target country and

support for the use of force (Lacina & Lee, 2013, Johns and Davis 2012). The risk of casualties and probability of success is long considered a determinant of public support for military operations (e.g. Gartner and Segura 1998). Yet, casualties are extremely difficult to predict a priori, and military projections are rarely, if ever, communicated to the public, especially in countries where public sensitivity to human losses are high. Hence, I refrained from direct manipulation of likely casualties, but instead gauged the risk function by communicating information about the target country's military capabilities and the mode of operation. Operations using ground troops and targeting an adversary with a more capable military power may hamper mass support for military endeavors, as it will increase the physical risk to the operating country's soldiers. In contrast, interventions into a weaker target state and missions that rely solely on air strikes will evince significantly less skepticism, as they pose negligible risk of casualties.

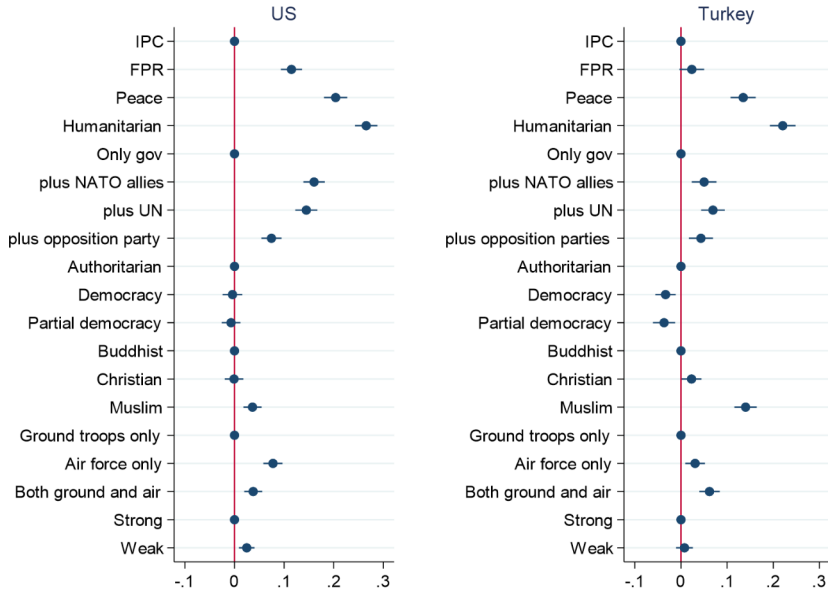
## Analysis

Following Hainmueller et al.'s (2014) estimation strategy on forced-choice conjoint experiments, I regress the dependent variable, namely respondent's choice among proposals on dummy variables for each level value, excluding the baseline level. Each coefficient captures the percentage change in the respondent's probability of choosing the given proposal if the attribute level changes to the presented value from the baseline category and relative to other levels in the model. To correct for within-respondent correlation, standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. Hence, the basic model is formulated as the following:

Respondent's choice =  $\alpha + I(\text{PPO}) \beta_1 + I(\text{external support}) \beta_2 + I(\text{target military strength}) \beta_3 + I(\text{target regime}) \beta_4 + I(\text{target religion}) \beta_5 + I(\text{mod of operation}) \beta_6 + \epsilon$ .

Figure 2 plots the estimated AMCEs for each of the six attributes from the US and Turkish surveys, respectively. The dots denote the median estimates while the horizontal lines specify the 95% confidence intervals (CIs). For each categorical variable, the effect sizes are compared to the baseline, reference levels signified by dots without CIs. In order, the baseline levels are IPC, government only, authoritarian, Buddhist, ground troops only, and strong military power. Appendix A-III also reports the unadjusted marginal means, which simply denote the probabilities of being chosen in forced-choice designs with two outcomes.

Regarding the PPO, the results of both surveys reveal that the objective of the military operation causes substantial variance in respondents' attitudes. Consistent with Jentleson's results, humanitarian operations evoke the highest degree of support in both countries and IPC operations the lowest. FPR operations are significantly more preferable to IPC operations among American respondents, while Turkish respondents are only weakly more favorable toward FPR operations ( $p$ -value 0.086). Importantly, contrary to previous findings, in both countries, peace operations garner relatively high levels of support, ranking just behind humanitarian missions. When all other variables are held at their means, the probability of supporting a peace operation is 55.8% for an American respondent and 53.8% for a Turkish one.



**Fig. 2** Effects of Military Intervention Attributes on Public Preferences

*Note:* Effects of military intervention attributes on public support for the use of force in the US (left panel) and Turkey (right panel). Horizontal lines indicate 95% robust confidence intervals; points with lines indicate the reference categories.

Concerning external support for operations, expectedly, respondents in both samples do not want to see their governments go alone. Yet, stark differences emerge in how the two populaces evaluate the value of external support. In the US survey, IO endorsement leads to substantial shifts in citizens' positions. An operation supported by NATO allies increases the probability of support by 16.1%, and an operation supported by the UN boosts support by 14.4% over a unilateral operation. The third category, an operation supported by the opposition party, also significantly increases support, though compared to IO endorsement support, the magnitude of this effect is considerably lower. In Turkey, on the other hand, the positive effect of IO support is much more limited, with the UN endorsement increasing the probability of support by 7 [4.4, 9.5] and NATO by 5.1 [2.5, 7.9] percent. These figures are overall on par with the effect of opposition parties' endorsement by 4.4 [1.8, 7] percent. In both countries, it is notable that the treatment effects of the UN and NATO are on par with each other. This suggests that while respondents care about IO endorsement, they do not have a preference between the UN and NATO.

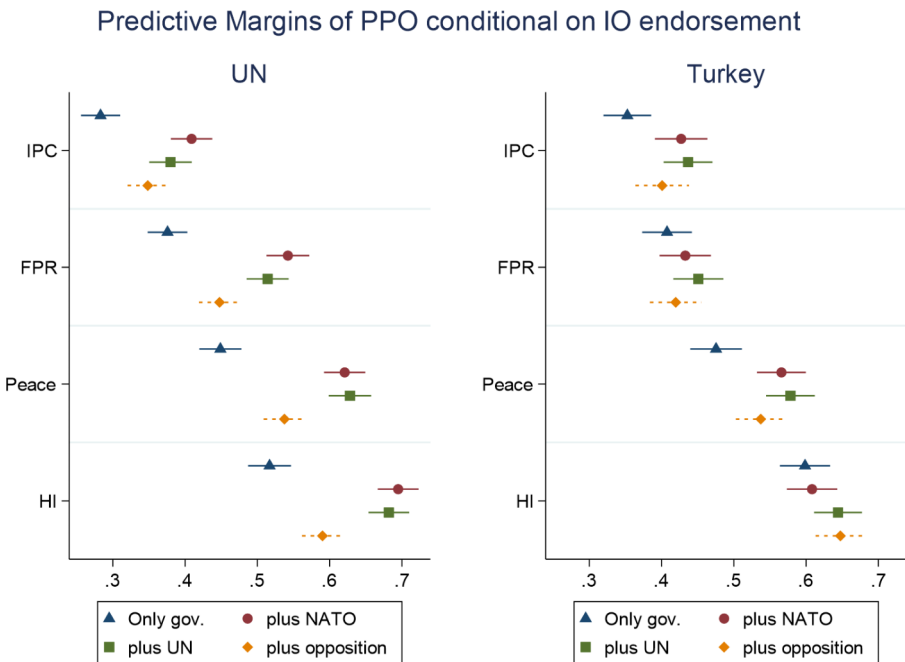
On the role of the target regime in shaping citizen attitudes, the average effects indicate remarkable contrasts to some of the previous findings on micro-level support for democratic peace. Contrary to expectations, in the US, respondents do not show restraint in consenting to military operations against another democracy, the average AMCEs report. Conversely, in Turkey, itself a partial democracy, democratic regimes

are less preferred targets than autocracies on average by a small, yet statistically significant, 3.3 [-5.6, -1.1] percent.

Another interesting finding considers the target country’s religion. In both countries, Muslim countries are more preferred targets for the use of force. Though in the US the substantial effects are relatively modest and conform to the security discourse promoted in the post-9/11 contexts as well as previous findings (e.g. Lacina and Lee 2013), in Turkey, not only are the effects of considerable size, but they also run counter to the “culture clash” hypothesis, given that Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country. These findings tentatively suggest that religious effects are often more nuanced and context-dependent than previous studies have established.

With regard to the other attributes of military intervention, expectedly, in both countries dispatching ground troops only is the least favored mode of engagement. In addition, in the US, operations against targets with weak military capabilities are preferred. Both the military strength of the opponent and the mode of operations alter the risk function that citizens associate with the deployment of troops. These experimental findings maintain that citizens prefer to avoid risky military operations, illustrating another facet of their “prudent” decision-making.

Next, I consider the effect of IO endorsement contingent on operation type to test H2. Figure 3 displays the predicted margins of principal policy objective conditional on external support (corresponding estimates in Appendix A-IV). The results show that in the US, IO endorsement significantly increases support in all four types of



**Fig. 3** Predictive Margins of PPO conditional on IO endorsement  
*Note:* The x-axis presents the predictive margins of principal policy objective on the dependent variable, for different values of IO endorsement, in the US (left panel) and Turkey (right panel).



operations, with the greatest effect sizes observed for peace operations. For instance, NATO endorsement increases voter support by 24.6% for peace operations, as opposed to 17.8% for humanitarian, 13.8% for FPR, and 12.6 for IPC missions. It is notable however, that despite signaling the legitimacy of the proposed operation and potential burden-sharing, both of which are critical components in citizens' support for IPC operations, the effect sizes of IO endorsement treatments in this type of operations are the smallest either when compared to unilateral operations or to operations supported by opposition parties only. In conjunction, these results lend partial support for H2, which expected citizens to be more sensitive to IO endorsement in peace and IPC operations.

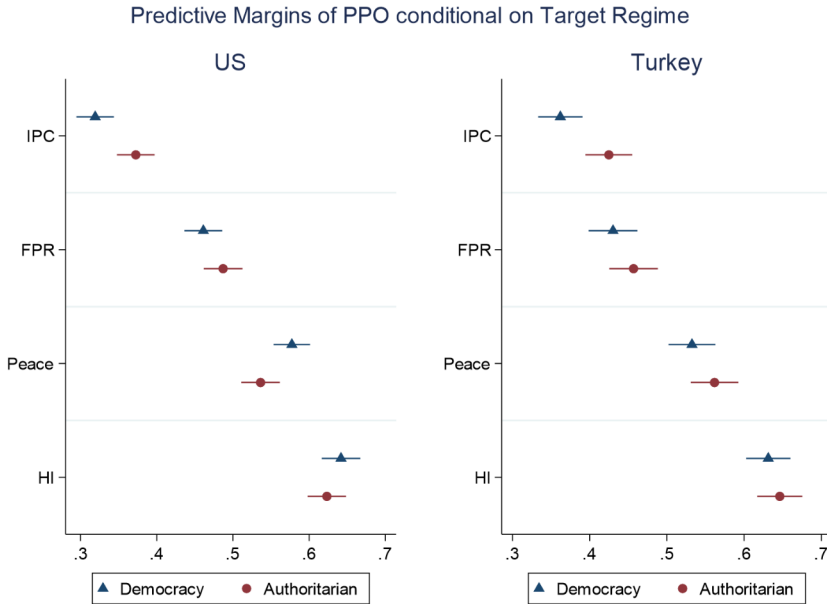
In Turkey by contrast, though the overall effects are much smaller in size, they fully confirm the theoretical expectation of H2. For this sample, IO endorsement significantly boosts support for peace and IPC operations by 8.2 and 9.2 points, respectively, whereas in FPR and humanitarian missions, it does not exert a statistically significant effect. We also observe that, in all four types of operations, opposition support and IO endorsement provide approximately similar degrees of change in respondents' attitudes. Arguably, these findings imply that the Turkish public is more skeptical of the moral and legal justification of IO endorsements and less convinced of the burden-sharing benefits of a possible multilateral operation than their American counterparts.

Finally, Figure 4 (corresponding estimates in Appendix A-V) reports the conditional effects of target political regime by the objective of intervention to test H3. When the use of force aims for an internal political change in the target country, there is a significant aversion to attacking another democracy. Namely, individuals in both samples are more reluctant, by 5 [1.6, 8.4] points in the US and 6.3 [2.1, 10.6] points in Turkey, to consent to the use of force directed at implementing political changes against the will of a democratically elected government. In contrast, for the other three PPO types, none of the individuals in the samples differentiate between democracies and autocracies.

## Robustness Tests and Subgroup Analyses

Because conjoint experiments allow the testing of many hypotheses at once, for a robustness test of the main results, I rerun the baseline model using Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons (Table A-VI). The Bonferroni correction produces highly conservative estimates, yet the substantive results we reach largely remain intact. The only exception is that the difference in support for IPC operations among the authoritarian and democratic targets does not reach statistical significance at 0.05 level (Bonferroni-adjusted  $p$  of pairwise comparison = 0.318 for the American and 0.173 for the Turkish sample).

In the Appendix, I implement two exploratory subgroup analyses on the heterogeneous effects of respondents' political ideologies and foreign policy dispositions. Previous studies evince that partisan orientations closely shape voters' attitudes with respect to the use of force (Berinsky, 2007). On average, left-wing voters are more averse to, whereas right-wing voters are more sympathetic toward, a strong military presence abroad (Holsti, 2004). Consistent with this ideological divide, in the US,



**Fig. 4** Predictive Margins of PPO conditional on Target Regime

*Note:* The x-axis presents the predictive margins of principal policy objective on the dependent variable, for different values of target regime, in the US (left panel) and Turkey (right panel)

Democrats are more appreciative of international institutions and multilateralism compared to Republicans (e.g. Voeten 2005).

To investigate whether respondents’ political dispositions moderate their support for different types of operations, in Figure-A-VII and A-VIII, I plot the average marginal effects of ideology and party identification across operation types. The results demonstrate that American left-wing voters and Democrat Party partisans are significantly more supportive of peacekeeping operations, whereas right-wing and Republican identifiers are more favorable toward FPR and IPC operations. In Turkey, left-wing and right-wing citizens significantly differ in their evaluations of IPC operations, though they do not diverge in other types of military interventions.

In Appendix A-IX, I present a further analysis on the moderating role of foreign policy beliefs using a battery of survey items selected from military assertiveness and internationalism/isolationism scales proposed by Herrmann et al. (1999). The results show that those who score highly on questions that measure support for a unilateral, hawkish foreign policy were substantially more favorable toward IPC and FPR operations, and less so toward peace and humanitarian interventions, particularly in the US. Conversely, Americans who are more sympathetic toward international cooperation and accommodativeness were moderately more approving of peace operations. These additional tests also demonstrate that those who score highly on accommodativeness in the US were also significantly more inclined to favor operations endorsed by the UN and oppose unilateral operations.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Despite positive findings on the isolated effect of policy objective in conditioning American voters' attitudes on the use of force, the extant literature lacks studies that measure the PPO's instrumental role relative to other core attributes of a military operation and explore the interactions between them. This is a critical gap, however, because the factors that causes public skepticism toward particular operation types, namely concerns over the potential costs and legitimacy, are closely shaped by the multilateral support for the use of force and the political regime of the target country. Moreover, while the objective of operations is often communicated to the public, not only it is not always objectively obvious which category of PPO an intervention fits into (i.e. in Somalia, 1992), but this communication is also subject to framing as leaders may have strategic incentives to conceal their true objective in order to maximize domestic support (i.e. in Iraq, 2003). In these ambiguous situations, voters become arguably more likely to rely on cues from IOs and tend to be more attentive to the target country characteristics.

The findings of a paired-conjoint experiment in two dissimilar countries, the US and Turkey, lend strong support to the prudent public argument. Although these countries differ in military capabilities, political regime, culture, and geostrategic locations, the American and Turkish public opinion was strikingly symmetrical: in both countries the policy objective of using force has potent power in driving respondents' evaluation of military action. Conforming to previous findings, citizens strongly challenge IPC operations and are most approving of humanitarian missions. Within the US context, these findings suggest that despite the mixed success of humanitarian interventions in the past, support for such normatively driven missions trumps other missions where the strategic calculations are more clear cut (also Maxey 2020). However, the findings are also suggestive of a shift in preferences: Peace operations have emerged as the second-most favored type of operations, significantly more so than FPR operations, in both the US and Turkey.

When the conditional effects of IO endorsement and the target country's regime type are considered, the policy objective effects become more nuanced. Consistent with the second opinion argument, the analysis evinced that institutional cues on the proposed military operation matter in moving public attitudes – and considerably more so in the US than in Turkey. Yet, the relative impact of IO endorsement was far from uniform across intervention types. Conforming to H2, in both samples respondents were most sensitive to external support in peace operations. Also, in line with H2, international support for the operation substantially influenced attitudes in internal political change operations in Turkey. Conversely, in the US, although citizens were sensitive to IO support for all types of operations, their sensitivity was relatively weaker for IPC operations, a finding that could partially be conditioned by American voters' notorious reluctance for IPC operations overall. Unilateral action did not garner much support in neither samples.

The two sample respondents also differed in their sensitivity to the target regime when assessing the use of force. In contrast to some—but not all—studies that investigate the micro-level determinants of the democratic peace theory, the American respondents on average were not opposed to intervening against a democratic coun-

try. This null finding in the American sample warrants closer scrutiny. As argued, the previous studies with positive evidence on individuals' disinclination to attack democracies often rely on dichotomous manipulations of democracy versus autocracy in experimental settings that pose an extreme, yet rare, type of crisis on nuclear proliferation. Moreover, direct treatment of regime type in vignette experiments where other situational factors about the crisis are not communicated runs the risk of pushing respondents to associate a number of confounding attributes to the hypothetical country, in turn biasing the effect of interest (Dafoe, Zhang and Coughy 2018). For instance, in the absence of further information, when told that the hypothetical target country is a democracy, respondents tend to revise their beliefs about other background attributes and consider it as being Christian, ethnically white, and developed (Dafoe, Zhang and Coughy 2018)<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, few studies suggested that when other characteristics of the target country are manipulated simultaneously, the political regime considerably loses its primacy in shaping public opinion (e.g. Johns and Davies 2012, Lacina and Lee 2013)<sup>2</sup>. Similar to these findings, having controlled for several covariates related to the target country and manipulated different rationales for the use of force, the average effect of target regime identified in the experiments was less pronounced than expected.

On the other hand, when the conditional effects of the target regime are analyzed, American and Turkish samples displayed remarkably similar attitudes. Namely, in both countries, respondents were significantly opposed to internal political change operations in democratic targets and indifferent to the regime type in other types of operations. This finding implies that rather than assigning a generic label of untouchability to democracies, the public differentiates among operation types and has clear preferences in terms of which types of operations against democracies should be resisted, and, for certain types of operations, where the target regime matters less.

Though inconclusive, this correspondence in individual attitudes in two politically dissimilar regimes is informative on the underlying causal mechanisms behind the micro-level roots of democratic peace. If the driving mechanism is the presence of a common ideational outlook between citizens of democratic dyads, citizens of non-consolidated democracies lacking such affinities should display lower sensitivities toward democratic targets of military interventions. Subsequently, the finding that respondents in an advanced democracy, the US, are on average indifferent against democratic targets, whereas respondents in a non-consolidated democracy, Turkey, are disapproving—albeit slightly—implies that the dyadic affinity plays a weaker role in individual attitudes than previously assumed. This finding also conforms

<sup>1</sup> A similar information equivalence could be present for the religion treatment of our experiment. Specifically, the treatment of religion might have also cued the respondents about the region of the target country (i.e. Muslim - Middle East) and particular country profiles. Hence, caution is warranted against over-interpretation of the religion treatment effects, as these effects may also entail the effects of other background characteristics.

<sup>2</sup> Similar to these cited works, our data for the US sample is suggestive of an interaction between regime type and religion. The pairwise comparison in the US sample shows that Americans are less likely to approve of military operations against a Christian democracy than an authoritarian Muslim country by 4.4% ( $p$ -value 0.007). While they do not differentiate between Muslim democracies and Muslim autocracies ( $p$ -value 0.733), they are moderately more pacifists toward Christian democracies compared to Christian autocracies (2.9%,  $p$ -value 0.081).

with Bell and Quek (2018), who having replicated the nuclear proliferation experiment in authoritarian China, demonstrated the same reluctance to use force against democracies. Hence, other mechanisms that operate regardless of the regime type at home might drive mass skepticism in non-democracies that seek to use force against democracies: One explanation, as discussed, is that democracies are seen as more formidable adversaries, and the likelihood of the success of such intervention might be considered lower. Alternatively, although democracies do not shy away from using force against non-democracies, the public in non-democracies might in fact trust democracies and perceive lower levels of threats from them, despite the regime differences. Yet, due to the possibility of confounding factors, reaching conclusive inferences on the samples drawn from convenience samples in only two countries would be fallacious. Hence, further research explicitly designed to uncover the underlying mechanisms of democratic peace in driving mass preferences in non-democracies would be warranted.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The author does not report any conflict of interest.

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