

Duke URS Office Independent Study Grant Application

1. Project Title:

The Interpretation To End All Wars? U.S. Public Perceptions of International Organizations and the American Use Of Force

2. Project Proposal:

Do international organizations (IOs), such as the UN and NATO, truly have the power to influence how states behave? This question has been one of the central themes in international relations literature throughout the past century. One new and significant branch of this scholarship argues that IOs *indirectly* constrain state behavior, because IOs shape public opinion(s), and public opinion(s) determine the foreign policy strategy adopted by democratic state leaders. When it comes to going to war, therefore, previous works on this “indirect channel” theory have demonstrated that the public is more likely to support a proposed military intervention if it has been endorsed by one or more IOs than if it has not. However, these works disagree on what *aspect* of IO endorsement(s) leads the public to follow them when forming opinions on proposed military interventions.

In other words, within this branch there are different interpretations of what the public primarily understands an IO endorsement (i.e. NATO support or UNSC authorization for the use of force) to signify, three of which are relevant to this project: (1) the “legality interpretation,” (which argues that the public perceives IO endorsement for a military intervention mainly as a cue that the intervention is *legal*), (2) the “prudence interpretation,” (which claims that the public perceives IO endorsement for a military intervention mostly as a cue that the intervention is *likely to succeed* and therefore *a good idea*), and (3) the “material burden-sharing interpretation,” (which asserts that the public perceives IO endorsement for a military intervention first and foremost as a guarantee of *material aid from member states* for said intervention and therefore an *alleviation of the costs and burdens* that the intervention

would inflict on the average citizen). Though the three interpretations are by no means exclusive, the contextual background just described reveals a particularly significant point: IO support for a military intervention in a foreign state can be interpreted in several different ways. In turn, this brings us to the specific research question that this project seeks to answer, namely: when it comes to going to war, is the capacity of international organizations to influence public opinion (and by extension influence state behavior) constrained by how individuals in a particular state interpret IO endorsements for wars?

The research approach devised to adequately answer this question is an original survey-based experiment that asks a simple random sample of 1000 subjects their opinion on a hypothetical US military intervention in a foreign country. There are four slightly different versions of the survey (A, B, C and D), which will each be randomly administered via the internet by GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks) to 250 respondents, thereby dividing them into one control group and three treatment groups (C1, T1, T2, and T3, respectively). However, respondents will not be aware that there are other versions of the survey aside from theirs. All four groups will receive the same initial prompt, setting the scene of a hypothetical situation where the respondent discovers that the President of the United States (who is no longer Barack Obama in this scenario) has decided to intervene militarily in a foreign country (called “country X”). However, the respondent is instructed to assume that (s)he knows nothing about the geopolitical context of said country, nor does (s)he know anything about the President’s motive for the intervention.

The surveys then contain a manipulation of the positive institutional endorsement involved: survey A (group C1) does not mention anything about authorization from any IOs, survey B (group T1) tells respondents that there is UNSC authorization for the intervention whereby the UNSC authorization strictly and exclusively implies the legality interpretation (i.e. that the intervention is legal), survey C (group T2) tells respondents that there is UNSC authorization for the intervention, whereby the UNSC

authorization strictly and exclusively implies the prudence interpretation (i.e. that the intervention is likely to succeed), and survey D (group T3) tells respondents that there is NATO support for the intervention, whereby the NATO support strictly and exclusively implies the material burden-sharing interpretation (i.e. that other member states of NATO will provide material aid for the war). Once these scenes have been set, each respondent is asked whether they would support the intervention or not, with five possible answer choices to select from (strongly support; support; indifferent/unsure; oppose; strongly oppose), and the number of respondents who select each answer will be recorded for every group. Finally, GfK will collect and record certain demographic characteristics of each respondent, so as to control for these when testing the results. The specific statistical methods employed in this analysis will be determined upon completion of the data collection activities, so as to select the optimal statistical test for the particular characteristics of the data distribution(s).

The findings of this study will be of value both in the field of international relations and across other disciplines, regardless of whether they answer the research question affirmatively or negatively. Within international relations, it is one of the only studies in the “indirect channels” approach that will be able to make a definitive, provable conclusion. The vast majority of this literature is based on observational studies with macro-level data, and therefore cannot go beyond conclusions of mere theoretical speculation. My investigation, however, uses an experimental design with micro-level data, allowing it not only to answer the causal research question proposed, but also to test the validity of existing works by seeing if my results corroborate or disprove the theoretical conclusions of these. In short, this study will begin to fill the gap in the causal explanations of how IOs use the mechanism of domestic politics to influence state behavior, which has been identified by many scholars as a significant shortcoming of the “indirect channels” argument. It will also offer an indication of what individuals value most when making decisions of large scale and importance, such as going to war against another country or not. Said insights will be of particular benefit for individuals in the disciplines of psychology and sociology,

since they will deepen existing understandings of the reasoning processes and institutional structures that govern individual decision-making and social behavior.

3. Expenses and Budget:

The only itemized expense involved in this research project is hiring a reliable online data collection service to administer the experiment surveys. It is worth highlighting that the survey questions concern US military interventions and international institutions, and that the research question seeks to obtain data results generalizable to the US population at large. Thus, the primary concern when selecting a data collection service was that the respondent pool had to accurately represent the political ideology distributions of all Americans, because political views can influence how individuals respond to the survey questions, and if support for one party is overrepresented or underrepresented in the pool, the validity of any results obtained will be compromised by bias.

Unfortunately, the more affordable data collection services, such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk, all exhibited said problem of having a non-representative respondent pool in terms of their political ideologies, and therefore were necessarily dismissed as viable options. Instead, the company selected to carry out the project's research design is GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks), since it was the only service that could guarantee that the sample would be demographically representative of the US public. The total cost for this high-quality service is of \$2000, which is the minimum fee that GfK charges customers, and therefore cannot be reduced even if I were to decrease the number of treatments or the sample size. To confirm that there was no other feasible option, I met with multiple political science professors and research experts, who told me that GfK was the only legitimate data collection service for projects of this kind, and also added that using a cheaper, less representative service would compromise my project's eligibility for department honors.

The total budget of this project, then, is \$2000, which will be covered through the combined contributions of several different sources of funding, can be broken down as follows: \$1200 provided by Federal Work/Study to be carried out throughout the semester; \$400 provided by the allocated research budget of Professor Grieco, who is the faculty advisor for this project; and \$400 provided by this independent study research grant, assuming it is approved. All the funds contributed by this grant, therefore, would be used to acquire the GfK data survey administration service, which is the most important component of this independent study project and of the honors thesis that it will be turned into. None of the money received would be used for any of the following kinds of expenses: purchasing of personal items, purchasing of textbooks, payment for training classes, and payment of salaries.

4. Student Information:

Name: Beatriz Hayes-Meizoso

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Graduation date: 05/15/2015

5. Faculty Advisor Information:

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6. Independent Study Course Subject and Number:

POLSCI 493-3 – 02: Senior Research Independent Study in Security, Peace and Conflict.

7. Semester of Support Requested:

Fall Semester 2015

8. Have you completed the CITI Research Misconduct Tutorial?

Yes, and IRB has confirmed receipt of my certification of completion.

9. Does your project involve research with human subjects?

Yes, it involves surveying 1000 randomly sampled US citizens.

10. Status of IRB application:

Protocol has been submitted to IRB and is pending approval. IRB estimates the review process to be completed by the first week of October 2015.