Rising Authoritarian Influence and Democratic Backlash against International Organizations

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Abstract

Authoritarian states have emerged as central players in major international organizations (IOs). We argue that this structural shift at least partially explains the recent public backlash against IOs in democratic countries. As more authoritarian states gain influence within IOs, democratic citizens become more skeptical of the IOs' decision-making procedures and their capacity to uphold liberal values. Across four survey experiments in two democracies–the United States and South Korea—focusing on two major IOs—the UN Security Council and the IMF—we find that democratic publics are less willing to comply with or remain in IOs that grant more institutional authority to authoritarian member states. This pattern holds across both countries for the UNSC and in the U.S. for the IMF, including among individuals that prior studies expect to be supportive of multilateralism. These findings have important implications for the future of institutionalized multilateralism amid the rise of authoritarian states.

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1 Introduction

International organizations (IOs) are undergoing a profound transformation. With the rise of China, Russia, and regional powers including Saudi Arabia, authoritarian regimes have gained growing leverage in institutions long dominated by liberal democracies. At the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), for example, authoritarian states have gained greater formal voting power. At the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), they have exercised informal influence to weaken Western-backed initiatives, including efforts to investigate repression in Xinjiang.[1] These changes in power dynamics have provided grounds for politicians to exploit when they blame IOs. U.S. President Trump mobilized American voters on an anti-IO platform and signed executive orders withdrawing the U.S. from the World Health Organization (WHO), accusing the organization of the "inability to demonstrate independence from the inappropriate political influence of WHO member states" (White House, 2025). Civil society actors and developing country echo similar concerns: Amnesty described the UNHRC's voting against investigations in Xinjiang as "a dismaying result" (Amnesty International, 2022), while Argentina, once eager to join the BRICS, withdrew its application, citing the institution's growing authoritarian dominance (Plummer, 2023).

This study investigates how the growing influence of authoritarian states in IOs affects democratic public support for institutionalized multilateralism. To explain the recent backlash against IOs in democracies, the literature has identified a range of drivers from economic dislocation (Colantone and Stanig, 2018; Autor, Dorn and Hanson, 2013; Broz, Frieden and Weymouth, 2021) to socio-cultural threats (Mutz, 2018; Norris and Inglehart, 2019), as well as politicization of IOs (Walter, 2021). However, one important factor that has received relatively scant attention is shifting power balance within IOs, with nondemocratic regimes

[1]The growing influence of authoritarian regimes within international organizations also reflects autocratization of member states. Debre and Sommerer (2023) finds that the membership composition of prominent IOs, including the United Nations, became increasingly autocratic, coming close to losing a democratic majority by 2020 compared to 2010.

becoming "central players in IOs" (Cottiero et al., 2024).

Drawing from scholarship linking IO legitimacy to public perceptions of member composition and institutional design (Chapman, 2009; Gutner and Thompson, 2010; Chu, 2025), we argue that such a pro-authoritarian power shift has important yet under-studied consequences for world politics: when authoritarian member states gain greater decision-making power, democratic publics withdraw their support for institutionalized cooperation. This withdrawal of support likely stems from heightened concerns about compromised democratic norms, including the IOs' capacity to make fair decisions and uphold liberal, cooperative values. These concerns, in turn, lead democratic publics to question the legitimacy and value of IO membership.

We conduct four survey experiments in two democratic states—the United States and South Korea—to provide causal evidence that public support for IOs depends, at least partly, on the regime type of influential member states.[2] We situate our experiments in two major IOs: the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the IMF, which differ in policy domain and decision-making processes, increasing the generalizability of our findings. We leverage both hypothetical and actual governance reform scenarios that vary whether democratic or authoritarian states gain decision-making power within the organizations. We find that democratic publics are less willing to comply with and more willing to withdraw from IOs when authoritarian states become more powerful, with stronger reactions in the context of UNSC than the IMF. We also provide evidence that democratic publics view authoritarian states negatively and perceive IOs with powerful authoritarian members as less legitimate across several dimensions. Finally, our exploratory analyses suggest that learning about rising authoritarian influence may have far-reaching consequences, as it can reduce enthusiasm for multilateral cooperation in general and increases approval for an anti-IO incumbent.

Our study makes three contributions. First, it shows that IO governance dynamics are

[2]Anonymized pre-analysis plan (PAP) is available in Appendix.

an under-appreciated yet important driver of recent anti-IO sentiments in democracies. Existing studies emphasize individual-level attributes to explain attitudes toward IOs. Drawing on insights from works on IO membership's effect on reputations and perceptions (Johnson, 2011; Gray, 2013; Gray and Hicks, 2014; Davis, 2023), we show that IO-level shifts in the internal power balance, particularly authoritarian empowerment, reduce democratic public support for IOs. The effect is visible not only among globalization skeptics but also among groups that the literature expects to favor international institutions, including liberals and highly educated individuals, globalists, and multiculturalists. This suggests that even traditional globalization supporters may not defend the liberal international order when they perceive growing authoritarian states' influence.

Second, our findings challenge the assumption that increasing representation and equity enhances public support for IOs. It is widely believed that IOs derive public support from their ability and willingness to provide public goods in a technocratic, non-politicized manner. According to this perspective, embracing rising powers bolsters public support through improved representation (Parizek and Stephen, 2021; Steinberg and McDowell, 2024; Weaver et al., 2022; Dingwerth, Schmidtke and Weise, 2020). Consistent with this logic, for instance, former managing director of the IMF Christine Lagarde advocated the 2016 governance reforms to make the Fund's governance "more representative of our dynamic membership," arguing that such reforms would enhance the Fund's legitimacy (Intenational Monetary Fund, 2014). Our findings demonstrate, however, that increasing the representation of rising powers does not uniformly increase IO legitimacy among democratic publics. Rather, *whose* power is enhanced matters.

Beyond the literature on public opinion about IOs, this study engages with the growing literature that examines how illiberal regimes in IOs change global governance by shaping IOs' policy outputs (Tallberg and Vikberg, 2025; Cottiero and Haggard, 2023; Leeds et al., 2025; Debre, 2022). Our study extends this line of research by demonstrating that another important channel through which illiberal regimes shape multilateral cooperation is by in-

fluencing other member states' perceptions of who exercises authority within them.

2 Authoritarian Power Shifts and Backlash against international organizations

Most IOs require strong popular support to remain relevant as forums for cooperation (Morse and Keohane, 2014). Because IOs have limited enforcement power, they rely on favorable public legitimacy to secure state compliance, especially when the costs of policy adjustments are high (Zürn and Joerges, 2005; Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2023). When public support for IO erodes, leaders face greater difficulty when delegating authority. Brexit was decided through a national referendum. Popular backlash against the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Burundi and the Philippines led both to withdraw, limiting the ICC's jurisdiction over them. Experimental evidence from European countries that experienced financial crisis also shows that public skepticism toward the IMF lowers support for IMF-mandated economic reforms (Hübscher, Sattler and Wagner, 2024).

IOs appear to be cognizant of the importance of public support, as illustrated by investments in public relations initiatives. For instance, the IMF and the World Bank maintain dedicated communications units and regularly review outreach based on the rationale that "reaching a wider audience of policy influencers and the general public will be essential to achieving the Fund's institutional objectives" (Intenational Monetary Fund, 2024).

However, significant scholarship on the crisis of multilateralism documents increasing popular backlash against IOs (Copelovitch and Pevehouse, 2019). One major puzzle in this literature is explaining broad anti-IO attitudes "when the mass public appears to know relatively little about specific international institutions," especially in the advanced industrial democracies that are thought to be the main beneficiaries of the liberal order (Bearce and Jolliff Scott, 2019). A rich body of work attributes this backlash to "globalization losers" who experienced economic and social decline due to economic integration (Baccini and Sattler,

2023; Colantone and Stanig, 2018; Broz, Frieden and Weymouth, 2021). Other studies focus on socio-political threat, highlighting that individuals who perceived decline in their social status and political voice tend to turn against IOs, a process fostered by populist elite rhetoric (Mutz, 2018; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Bearce and Jolliff Scott (2019) argue that these negative attitudes can arise even when citizens are uninformed about specific IOs because they heuristically associate IOs with liberal globalization.

Another group of scholars approaches the question from the perspective of what IOs can do to improve public support. This line of work suggests that great-power competition within IOs erodes public legitimacy, likely because IOs are believed to be institutions that should remain neutral (Johnson, 2011). Recent experimental evidence shows that rising influence of great powers—China and the U.S.—and their competition over leadership roles within the UN reduce the UN's legitimacy (Arias and Hulvey, 2025; Han, Han and Zhang, 2025). One key implication is that IOs can bolster legitimacy by moving in the opposite direction, expanding representation of under-represented groups within their bureaucratic institutions, including civil societies and racial minorities (Steinberg and McDowell, 2024; Weaver et al., 2022; Chow and Han, 2023; Ghassim, Koenig-Archibugi and Cabrera, 2022). Similarly, McDowell et al. (2024) show that IMF governance reforms that transfer decision-making power from advanced industrialized countries to developing countries improve legitimacy of the Fund among the public in developing countries.

Despite their invaluable insights, there is reason to believe that neither account is complete. Skepticism toward IOs observed in public opinion data tends to be broader than what the "loser"-based account would predict. For example, recent surveys indicate that while only 28% of Americans oppose leaving the WTO and only 46% of American (and Canadian) adults trust it (Kim and Durkin, 2020; Rockefeller Foundation, 2025), most Americans (79%) continue to view international trade as beneficial (Chicago Council, 2025). If the distributional consequences of global integration are the primary driver of IO non-support, we would expect a closer alignment between the level of skepticism toward the WTO and attitudes

toward international trade. This pattern is not specific to the U.S. or the WTO. Surveys across 34 countries document overall strong support for international cooperation but much lower trust in multilateral institutions that deliver it (Rockefeller Foundation, 2025).

Second, theories linking representation with IO support overlook the fact that as authoritarian states increasingly assert their presence in the international order, efforts to better represent traditionally underrepresented states within IOs often coincide with accommodating rising authoritarian influence (Cottiero et al., 2024). Because expanding representation necessarily shifts the balance of power between member states, accommodating rising authoritarian powers reduces the relative influence of democracies within IOs.

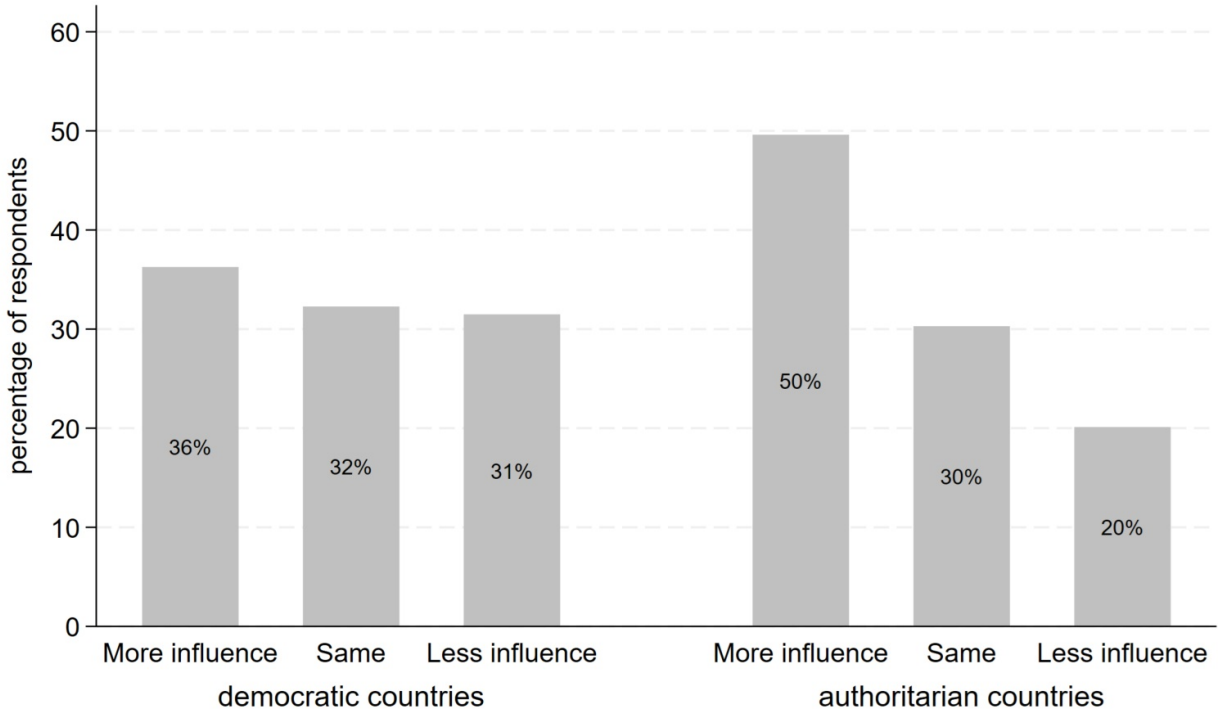

Figure 1: Americans' perceptions of change in regime influence in major IOs over the past two decades.[3]

The U.S. public appears to have some awareness of these power shifts. In our descriptive survey fielded to a sample of 502 American adults in December 2025, we asked how much

[3]Respondents answered two separate questions about changes in influence of democratic and authoritarian countries in major IOs. We referred to the UN, the World Bank, the WHO, the WTO, and the IMF as major IOs. Question order was randomized. See Appendix A for details of the survey.

more power they think democracies and autocracies have in major IOs now compared to two decades ago. The results, shown in Figure 1, indicate that Americans perceive a decline in democratic influence within major IOs. About 50 percent of respondents believed that nondemocracies have become more powerful than they were 20 years ago, while only 36 percent reported that democracies have gained power. Overall, respondents tended to see democratic influence as having stagnated or declined rather than increased. Even those who do not see democracies as losing power tended to see rising authoritarian influence, implying a sense of shifting relative power within major IOs.

We argue that these perceptions can explain broad negative public attitudes toward IOs. Prior studies indicate that observers tend to heuristically evaluate an IO by "the company it keeps" (Gray, 2013). Analyzing public opinion data across 23 countries, Johnson (2011) argues that publics assess an IO's legitimacy by looking at the states that seem to wield influence within it. Similarly, Chu (2025) shows that Americans view foreign policy endorsements from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a community of liberal democracies, as more legitimate than endorsements from the Security Council, whose membership is more diffuse. We extend this line of argument to democratic publics' general judgments of traditional IOs, arguing that citizens become less supportive of IOs when they perceive rising authoritarian influence within them.

This claim is consistent with research on illiberal regimes in IOs, which considers regime type as a salient predictor of a state's preferences as a member of an IO (Tallberg and Vikberg, 2025; Hafner-Burton and Schneider, 2019*b*). More broadly, international relations scholars have long established that nondemocracies behave systematically differently than democracies across various domains of foreign policy, often in more normatively less desirable ways (Russet, 1994; Schultz, 2001; Milner and Kubota, 2005). These normative expectations might be particularly detrimental to public opinion toward major IOs, whose authority is justified as champions of liberal democratic values.

In the following section, we present a theory explaining how rising nondemocratic mem-

bers could cause backlash against IOs among democratic publics. Such shifts in influence may shape public opinion not only among individuals disadvantaged by globalization, but also among those whom existing theories would otherwise predict to be supportive of international institutions.

3 Regime Type and Public Support for International Organizations

We propose that democratic citizens withdraw support for IOs when authoritarian members wield substantial influence because such influence undermines the IOs' perceived legitimacy. In essence, we apply the inverse of the democratic advantage theory to the study of IOs: just like democracies' institutions and liberal preferences make them attractive cooperation partners, nondemocratic institutions and illiberal preferences make authoritarian regimes less attractive. Our autocratic disadvantage theory predicts that democratic publics perceive authoritarian states negatively and view IOs in which they hold significant influence as less fair, less beneficial, and less competent.

Democratic publics become aware of rising authoritarian influence in IOs through multiple channels. Most prominently, political elites running on anti-IO platforms frequently frame their rhetoric around the struggle between democracies and nondemocracies. For instance, Trump claimed that the "the United Nations is not a friend of democracy" (Merica, 2017), while Brazil's President Lula Da Silva warned that "throughout the world, anti-democratic forces are trying to subjugate institutions and stifle freedoms" (Brazilian Government, 2025). Media outlets also cover politicization of IOs, as seen with the scrutiny of China's influence within the WHO and WTO. Furthermore, IOs themselves engage directly with the public. For example, former IMF executive director Paulo Nogueira published articles and gave talks about IMF governance reforms. High-profile IO programs such as World Bank projects and UN peacekeeping missions often publicly acknowledge large contributors—including non-

democratic regimes—to increase public visibility.[4]

Information about influential members' regime type shapes how the public evaluates an IO's legitimacy. Following the sociological approach to legitimacy (Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2021), we conceptualize legitimacy as a subjective belief held by an audience about an organization's right to rule. IO legitimacy depends on a wide range of institutional attributes, which can be broadly grouped into two categories: input (procedural) and output (performance and purposes) (Dellmuth, Scholte and Tallberg, 2019; Hurd, 2008). Input legitimacy concerns the fairness of the decision-making process, and output legitimacy is related to the ability to fulfill an organization's mandates. We suggest that growing influence of authoritarian states in IOs could hurt both input and output legitimacy. We will discuss each dynamic in turn.

3.1 Input legitimacy: Authoritarian institutions and IO decision-making procedures

Authoritarian domestic institutions create expectations that a state will be less constrained and transparent in its cooperative commitment. Compared to democracies, the relative absence of institutional constraints and accountability on executive power in authoritarian regimes makes their policy decisions more susceptible to the whims of political elites and parochial interests (Cox, 2016; North and Weingast, 1989). The overall closedness of policy processes, including lack of free media and transparent information sharing, further leads to higher levels of perceived and real corruption than in democracies (Treisman, 2007; Mansfield, Milner and Rosendorff, 2002).

These expectations directly carry over to evaluations of IOs, particularly when IOs accommodate new nondemocratic members or grant existing ones greater influence through governance reforms. Citizens who believe that authoritarian states disregard liberal norms of

[4]For example, see UN Peacekeeper's public acknowledgment of China's services in Sudan. Available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/china

governance may worry that, once empowered, such states will undermine fair and transparent decision-making procedures within IOs. These concerns could be particularly damaging given that IOs often highlight technocratic procedures to legitimize their authority, and that audiences, including political elites, respond to such governance attributes when evaluating IO legitimacy (Steffek, 2015; Hurd, 2018; Zürn, 2018; Dingwerth, Schmidtke and Weise, 2020; Tallberg and Verhaegen, 2020). Indeed, since 1990, major IOs have pursued public legitimacy strategies that emphasize democratic qualities such as inclusiveness, participation, transparency, and equality (Dingwerth, Schmidtke and Weise, 2020), which helped to create the perception that IOs are fundamentally democratic institutions. U.S. critiques over the China-initiated Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) provide an example of the regime-based concerns. U.S. officials consistently raised concerns regarding transparency and accountability, reflecting apprehension that an IO led by an authoritarian state might not adhere to liberal governance norms. In particular, the U.S. cited doubt about commitments to anti-corruption enforcement, genuine multilateral decision making, and workers' rights — principles closely associated with democratic rules and widely seen as lacking enforcement in authoritarian societies (Asia Society, 2015).

This is not to suggest that authoritarian states are the only members that can undermine IO fairness and transparency. All powerful states face incentives to exercise control over IO decision-making, and ample evidence exists on how powerful democracies engage in nondemocratic practices such as vote buying (Johnson, 2011; Stone, 2011; Kuziemko and Werker, 2006; Dreher, Sturm and Vreeland, 2009). Rather, our argument is that democratic publics may expect nondemocratic governance norms to spill over into IOs, and to see such spillovers as more likely when authoritarian member states become key decision makers (Cottiero et al., 2024).

3.2 Output legitimacy: Authoritarian preferences and IO's performance and purposes

Authoritarian regimes may be viewed as likely to promote illiberal interests in IOs, undermining their output legitimacy related to performance and purposes. Authoritarian states are less cooperative in international trade and human rights protection compared to democracies (Bliss and Russett, 1998; Mansfield, Milner and Rosendorff, 2002; Milner and Kubota, 2005; Vreeland, 2008). They are often viewed as more belligerent than democracies, where the mass public constrains leaders from using force (Tomz and Weeks, 2013; Dixon, 1994; Maoz and Russett, 1993; Russet, 1994; Schultz, 2001; De Mesquita et al., 1999). This line of works emphasizes that authoritarian domestic institutions, especially weak political constraints on executives, enable leaders to pursue parochial self-interests.[5]

Democratic citizens may worry that these illiberal preferences will compromise IOs' cooperation mandates. Traditional IOs have portrayed themselves as engines of international cooperation and globalization that generate mutual benefits (Dingwerth, Schmidtke and Weise, 2020). Yet Hafner-Burton, Pevehouse and Schneider (2024) find that IOs led by authoritarian regimes are more likely to adopt nominal liberal agendas without deep commitments because such states are especially sensitive to the sovereignty costs of good governance mandates. Authoritarian regimes have also been quite explicit about their institutional preferences. They publicly emphasize sovereignty over cooperation and contest liberal norms of economic openness (Flonk, Jachtenfuchs and Obendiek, 2020; Weiss and Wallace, 2021). They have also sought to lessen the UNSC's focus on civil and political rights as a source of human protection (Foot, 2020), framed certain liberal rights, including women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights, as contrary to traditional values (Ayoub and Stoeckl, 2024; Sanders and Jenkins, 2022), and attempted to reshape human rights norms accordingly (Inboden, 2022; Dukalskis, 2023). Likewise, China and Russia have reshaped the norms of UN peacekeep-

[5]When authoritarian leaders face substantial institutional constraints, their behavior is often as cooperative as their democratic counterparts across issues of trade, foreign direct investment and security (Hankla and Kuthy, 2013; Li, 2009; Weeks, 2012).

ing toward "sovereignty-first approach" at the expense of human rights monitoring, election administration, and judicial reform, an institutional drift facilitated by the erosion of US financial, political, and normative leadership in the UNSC (Reeder, 2025).

When authoritarian members come to exercise greater influence in IOs, then, democratic publics may expect those IOs to become less capable of fulfilling their liberal mandates. This perception will arise even when the rising authoritarian influence means a better representation of the changing global power distribution and developing countries. Newly empowered authoritarian members may be seen as undermining liberal procedures and mandates, negating any benefits from better representation. Moreover, growing authoritarian power in IOs likely has greater implications for IOs' collective performance than simply having a few "bad apples." Recent studies show that IOs with significant authoritarian membership can socialize other member states into negative norms and gradually turn the IOs into "Clubs of Autocrats" (Hafner-Burton and Schneider, 2019*a*; Debre, 2021; Cottiero and Haggard, 2023).

The two mechanisms we proposed—procedural and performance concerns—lead to the same expectation: when IOs allow greater influence from authoritarian member states, democratic citizens would withdraw their support for the IOs.[6] The public may reason that engagement with such IOs is no longer beneficial as they are less able to deliver the cooperation benefits they once provided. In more cynical terms, they may interpret the IO's accommodation of authoritarian regimes as a signal that the IO has been co-opted. These concerns exacerbate democratic deficits: because IOs exercise authority without direct electoral accountability, IOs are often perceived as falling short of democratic standards. Rising influence of nondemocratic members further weakens confidence that IO decision-making reflects democratic values or serves broadly shared cooperative mandates, making existing legitimacy gap more visible and politically salient.

Finally, these legitimacy concerns arise through heuristic reasoning as well as a detailed

[6]These predictions should hold for IOs with at least one nondemocratic member; therefore, our theory does not speak to public attitudes toward fully democratic IOs such as the contemporary NATO. It should, however, apply to a broad range of major IOs, including the UN with its universal membership, and newer China-led IOs such as the AIIB.

understanding of nondemocratic institutions or IO operations. All that is required for our theory to hold is that citizens maintain negative perceptions of authoritarian members, whether those views are rooted in reputation, expectations, or even stereotype. This perspective dovetails with findings that observers tend to form opinions about IOs "by evaluating the states most likely to wield institutionalized or ideational influence" (Johnson, 2011). The following hypotheses summarize our expectations:

Hypothesis 1: *The public will be less supportive of IOs that increase the decision-making power of nondemocracies compared to those that increase the decision-making power of democracies.*

Hypothesis 2a: *The public will view an IO as less legitimate when the IO increases the decision-making power of nondemocracies compared to when the IO increases the decision-making power of democracies.*

Hypothesis 2b: *The public will have more negative perceptions of nondemocratic IO members than democratic IO members.*

4 Evidence from Four Survey Experiments

To test our hypotheses, we conducted four pre-registered survey experiments – two in the context of the UNSC and two in the context of the IMF – in two democracies, the U.S. and South Korea. The UNSC and the IMF are highly relevant: the UNSC has faced mounting pressure for governance reforms in recent years, and the IMF underwent a historic governance reform in 2016. In both institutions, public support is crucial for sustaining their authority. For the UNSC, legitimacy underpins its ability to identify threats to international peace, authorize sanctions and military force, and deploy peacekeeping operations. States seek UNSC authorization precisely because it enhances the perceived legitimacy and domestic popularity of their actions (Grieco et al., 2011; Matsumura and Tago, 2019; Chapman and

Reiter, 2004; Tago and Ikeda, 2015). Similarly, the IMF's effectiveness depends in part on public support. When the public is supportive and trusts the institution, governments are more willing to implement IMF-mandated austerity measures, and more likely to elicit favorable market reactions (Shim, 2022; Hübscher, Sattler and Wagner, 2024).

At the same time, the UNSC and the IMF differ along three key dimensions that allow us to test our arguments across distinct contexts. First, the UNSC is a UN institution whose primary mission involves maintaining international security, while the IMF's mandate is to ensure international financial stability. By examining these two IOs, we can assess whether the theory of key states' regime type has explanatory power across domains where different concerns dominate: in the security realm, where relative gains are salient, and in the economic realm, where technocratic expertise and absolute gains are emphasized. Second, the two IOs differ in decision-making structures: the UNSC operates on a one-member, one-vote system with veto powers for the five permanent members, whereas the IMF allocates its voting power based on a country' economic size and financial contributions. Third, the UNSC and the IMF have different public images, and therefore, potentially different 'baseline support'. Democratic public views the UN as a 'left-wing, GAL (green, alternative, liberal)' organization, while they view the IMF as a 'a right-wing, TAN (traditional–authoritarian–nationalist)' organization (Ecker-Ehrhardt, Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2024), with the IMF emphasizing its image as a technocratic institution (Nelson, 2014).

The parallel structure of our experiments in the U.S. and South Korea enhances the external validity of our findings and helps to address the reliance on U.S.-centric data in experiential work in IR (Bassan-Nygate et al., 2025). The choice of the U.S. and South Korea is appropriate because they differ in three key dimensions. The first is power. The U.S. is a permanent member of the Security Council, whereas South Korea is a rotating member. Therefore, the U.S. public might have different levels of sensitivity to rising authoritarian influence and the resulting power shifts within the UNSC than their South Korean counterpart. Our design ensures that our results generalize to both major powers (e.g. other democratic

permanent members) and middle powers. The second is member states' interactions and experiences with IOs. The U.S. has sought UNSC approval multiple times for its use of force in abroad, while South Korea has never sought one. The two countries have different interactions with the IMF as well: The U.S. is the IMF's largest financial contributor, while South Korea transitioned from a borrower under one of the IMF's most demanding programs (1997 IMF program) to a creditor country. Although more than 20 years have passed, the 1997 IMF program remains salient among Koreans: 57.5% of Korean adults still rank the crisis as the most severe in the past 50 years, and 60% report it had a negative impact on their lives (Lim and Jeong, 2017). The third is race and ethnicity. In light of recent finding that the treatment effect of democracy in important IR experiments may have been motivated by ethnocentrism and racialization in U.S. public samples (Rathbun, Parker and Pomeroy, 2025), testing our theory of regime type in a non-white, non-Western democracy helps guard against such concerns.

5 Study 1: UNSC Governance Reform

5.1 Research Design

In our UNSC studies, we utilize a scenario describing a hypothetical governance reform. We empirically focus on the UNSC for several reasons. First, although the prospect for an actual governance reform at the UNSC may be low, the UNSC is an IO in which a reform would likely be most consequential if such a reform takes place, both in terms of the rearrangement of political power and the normative consequences for international security. Second, public is relatively well informed of the UNSC, making it more likely that information about a reform will be politically salient. Third, there are a number of reform proposals involving diverse countries from different regions. This context provides an excellent setting that allows us to plausibly manipulate country features in a hypothetical scenario.

Our experiments were conducted in the summer of 2025 on nationally representative sam-

ples of the U.S. and South Korean publics, using online survey firms Prolific and Embrain, respectively. All respondents completed a pre-treatment questionnaire eliciting pre-existing attitudes toward IOs and domestic political institutions, perceived benefits of economic globalization, partisanship, and a variety of foreign policy dispositions. We also included simple attention checks and retained only those who passed them. The final effective samples were 898 for the U.S. and 695 for South Korea.[7]

After the pre-treatment questionnaire, all respondents read the same background information about the UNSC and its governance structure.[8] Respondents were told:

> *The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is an organization within the United Nations whose mission is to maintain international peace and security. The UNSC issues resolutions against acts of aggression, imposes sanctions, and deploys military forces for peacekeeping.*
>
> *The UNSC has five permanent members with the power to block any Security Council resolution: the United States, France, China, Russia, and the United Kingdom. The UNSC also includes ten rotating members that serve two-year terms without such veto power.*

Then, we presented respondents with a hypothetical governance reform scenario introducing new permanent members with veto powers. Our treatment manipulated the regime type of the new permanent members, representing a shift in the power balance between democracies and authoritarian states within the Security Council. Half of the respondents were

[7]Initially, 900 respondents in the U.S. and 800 respondents in South Korea selected into our survey.

[8]We report the vignette used in the U.S. study, but the experimental design differs in three ways between the U.S. and South Korea. First, the U.S. experiment uses abridged background information about the UNSC to reduce the risk of information overload. Second, the treatment in the U.S. is likely stronger, as U.S. respondents read about a reform that brought in "multiple new permanent members" and Korean respondents read that the reform added one new permanent member. Third, the South Korean experiment randomly varies whether the new member is culturally similar to South Korea and averages over it in the analysis, while the U.S. experiment holds it constant by specifying that new members are from diverse regions. For a detailed discussion of the difference, see Appendix E, and for survey instruments, see Appendix I.

randomly assigned to a condition where the beneficiaries are mostly authoritarian states, while the other half were told that democratic states are the beneficiaries. To mitigate concerns that our regime type treatment unintentionally primes respondents to assume certain country attributes, our scenario held constant beneficiaries' economic and security ties to respondents' home countries, and specified that the beneficiaries come from different regions of the world. The exact treatment wording is as follows:

> *In response to growing global pressure to better represent rising powers, the UNSC carries out a historic reform in 2030. The reform brings in multiple new permanent members from different regions, giving them the same veto power as the original five. This has shifted the balance of power within the Security Council substantially.*
>
> *Most of the new members are [democratic/authoritarian] countries with large economies and strong militaries. They trade with the US but are not US allies.*

Our main outcome is public support for the UNSC, operationalized as compliance and withdrawal. Because the U.S. and South Korea interact with the UNSC in different ways, we tailored the measurement to each context. For American respondents, compliance referred to willingness to seek UNSC endorsement for U.S. foreign policy. For South Korean respondents, it referred to willingness to comply with UNSC decisions. Withdrawal, for both countries, captured preferences for exiting the UNSC, arguably a stronger indicator of non-support (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2024). For the U.S., withdrawal would mean relinquishing its permanent member status, while in the South Korean context, it would mean stepping down from its temporary seat or choosing not to seek election in future cycles.[9] Both compliance and withdrawal were measured on a 7-point Likert scale for assessing agreement with the statements shown in Table 1.

[9]The vignette specifies that South Korea is a rotating member in 2030. South Korea was an actual rotating member in 2025.

Concept	Variable	Question
Main outcomes	Compliance	(U.S.): The U.S. must seek UN Security Council support in pursuing its international interests. (S. Korea): In general, South Korea must comply with UN Security Council decisions.
	Withdrawal	It is worth considering pulling [the U.S./South Korea] out of the UN Security Council.
Mechanism	Legitimacy	Being a member of the UN Security Council will benefit my country. The UN Security Council's decisions will be fair and transparent. The UN Security Council will make important contributions to international security.
	State attributes	Corrupt; respectful of human rights; cooperative with other UNSC members; aggressive toward other countries; likely to honor international agreements; promoting free elections abroad; efficient at making policy decisions; friendly to [the U.S./South Korea]; trustworthy.
Exploratory analysis	Multilateralism	Generally speaking, [the U.S./South Korea] should get involved in international organizations to cooperate with other countries.
	Approval	Imagine that in 2030, events happened just as described, and the new [U.S./Korean] President, who is a [Republican/Democrat], promises to withdraw [the U.S./South Korea] from the UN Security Council. How much would you approve or disapprove of this policy?

Table 1: Outcome variables for Study 1. All responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale indicating agreement or approval. They were then binarized for analysis, coded as 1 if the respondent at least somewhat agreed or somewhat approved, and 0 otherwise.

To understand mechanisms, we measured respondents' perceptions of the UNSC's legitimacy. Based on prior findings that institutional qualities shape public legitimacy of IOs (Dellmuth, Scholte and Tallberg, 2019; Hurd, 2008), we focused on perceived efficacy (benefit), procedural legitimacy (fairness), and output legitimacy (competence) of the UNSC given the governance reform. We also measured beliefs about the new permanent member on a variety of country-level attributes that could impact how people evaluate them as cooperative partners.

Finally, we included two outcomes to explore broader implications of our argument. First, we measured general support for multilateral cooperation in order to investigate whether the treatment effect extends beyond the context of the UNSC (Engagement). Second, public opinion should influence policy outcomes the most when tied to specific proposals. We therefore asked respondent to report how much they would approve or disapprove of a president's proposal to withdraw from the UNSC (Approval).[10] After answering these questions, respondents filled out a demographic questionnaire.

5.2 Results

First, manipulation checks validate our treatments. In the U.S., we measured perceptions of the power balance between democracies and nondemocracies in the UNSC, and our treatment significantly increased beliefs about nondemocracies' influence ($b = 0.579$, $p < 0.01$). In South Korea, we used a factual manipulation check, and the treatment successfully increased beliefs about the new member's regime type ($b = 0.426$, $p < 0.01$).

We find strong support for our hypotheses in both the U.S. and South Korea. Figure 2 illustrates the effects of pro-authoritarian versus pro-democracy reforms on compliance and withdrawal (H1). What stands out from the results is the high level of support under a pro-democratic governance reform. About 72% of American respondents and 53% of South

[10]Because partisanship in the U.S. can prime the president's policy stance toward IOs, we randomize the president's party and analyze the aggregated average across partisanship conditions. This randomization only appears in the U.S. experiment. In South Korea, participation in IOs is much less politicized, and the president's party is not a reliable predictor of support for multilateralism (Saxer, 2013; Kwon, 2011).

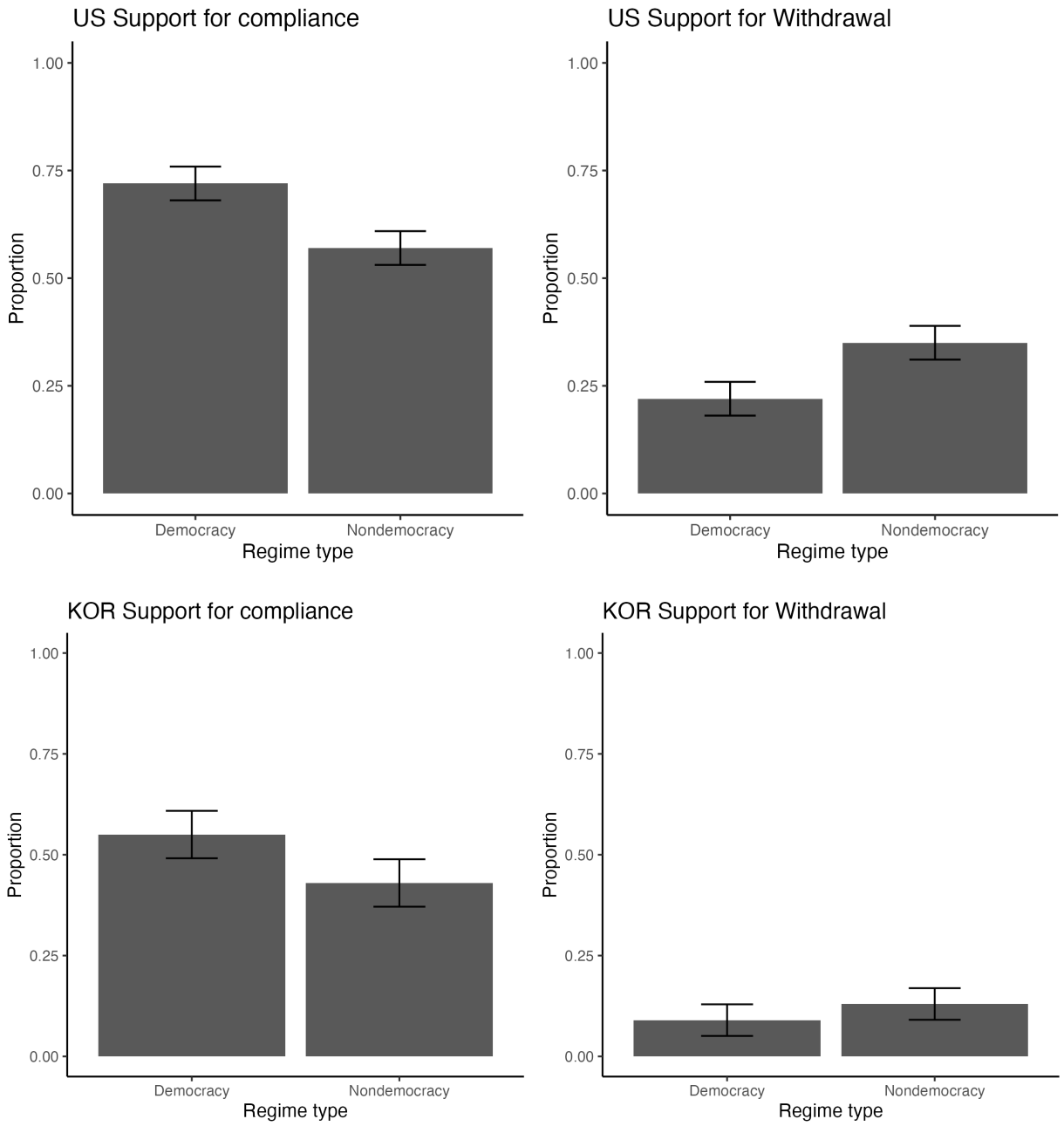

Figure 2: Average public support for the UNSC by treatment group with 95% confidence intervals, for the U.S. sample (top) and the South Korean sample (bottom). The estimates are derived from bivariate OLS regressions.

Korean respondents believed that their countries must either seek the Council's endorsement for foreign policy or follow the Council's decisions. However, willingness to comply drops by 15 percentage points in the U.S. ($p < 0.01$) and by 11 percentage points in South Korea

($p < 0.01$) when authoritarian decision-making power increases within the UNSC. This is a substantively large negative effect; its magnitude is comparable to that of the UN's refusal to authorize the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, when American support for the UN fell by 14 percentage points to an all-time low (Holyk, 2010).

Support for withdrawal draws a starker picture. When the UNSC adds authoritarian member states as new permanent members, about 35% of U.S. respondents support withdrawal, representing a 13-percentage points increase ($p < 0.01$). The treatment also raised withdrawal support for South Korean public by 4.8 percentage points ($p < 0.05$), representing a 55.3% increase. Considering the diplomatic and security consequences associated with leaving the UNSC, as well as the UNSC's role during the Korean War, it is surprising to see a large treatment effect in South Korea, a middle power confronting existential threats from North Korea.

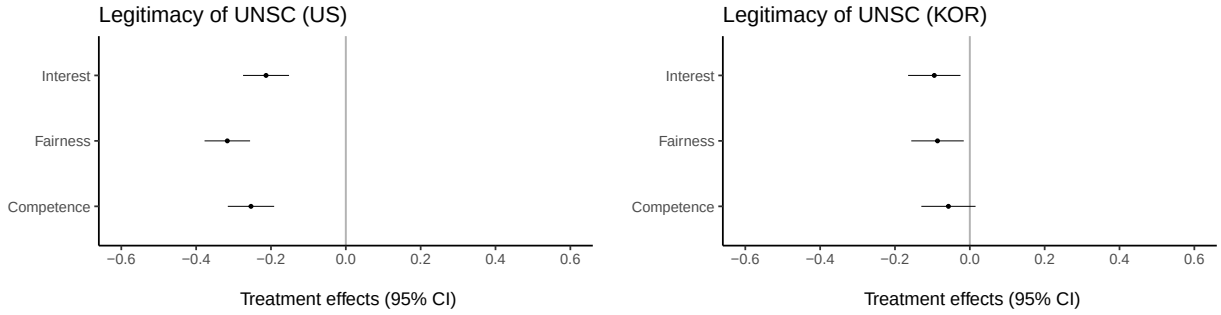

Figure 3: Treatment effects on the perceived legitimacy of the UNSC with 95% confidence intervals. Left: U.S. sample. Right: South Korean sample. The estimates are derived from bivariate OLS regressions.

Why does a pro-authoritarian reform cause the public to withdraw support for the UNSC? We argue that democratic publics view IOs that grant authoritarian members greater decision-making power as less legitimate (H2a) because they hold negative attitudes toward authoritarian states (H2b). To provide evidence for these steps in our causal chain, we estimate the treatment effect on perceptions of the UNSC's legitimacy.[11] We find strong

[11]We acknowledge that finding the effect of the treatment on mediators and the main outcomes does not provide sufficient evidence for causal mechanism without strong assumptions (Blackwell, Ma and Opacic, 2024). However, such inference could nonetheless be a starting point, informing us that perceived legitimacy

support for our expectations, even after controlling for the false discovery rate using the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure. First, Figure 3 shows that both American and Korean respondents view the UNSC as less likely to promote their countries' interests and less likely to make fair decisions when when authoritarian decision-making power increases, indicating lower input and output legitimacy. The South Korean public does not regard the UNSC as less competent under a pro-authoritarian reform ($b = -0.57$, $p = 0.12$), while the American public does.

Second, as depicted in Figure 4, both Americans and South Koreans consistently evaluated new authoritarian permanent members more negatively when they learned about the states' regime type. Across every attribute we measured, respondents judged authoritarian members to be significantly less desirable partners for cooperation: they are seen as more corrupt, more aggressive, less cooperative, less respectful of human rights, less compliant, less reliable, less likely to promote free elections, less efficient, less friendly, and less trustworthy. This finding is consistent with evidence that democratic citizens hold biased perceptions against autocracies (Barceló and Sheen, 2024), and that an IO's membership composition may serve as a heuristic shaping attitudes toward the IO (Gray, 2013; Gray and Hicks, 2014). It also suggests that authoritarian regimes may face inherent "legitimacy discount" when initiating international institutions.

We address two related alternative explanations. First, respondents might have used regime type as a proxy for security relationship (e.g. assuming a democracy is an ally). Second, the results might have been driven by respondents associating nondemocracies generally with specific countries that have a negative public image, such as China. To address these concerns, we asked respondents at the end of the survey which countries they had in mind as potential beneficiaries of the UNSC reform, and reported the results in Appendix B. A qualitative reading of the responses indicates that respondents thought of a diverse set of countries: American respondents often mentioned India, Brazil, Germany, Japan, Turkey,

may be a mechanism. In addition, understanding democratic public's views on authoritarian IO members and IO legitimacy is important in its own right.

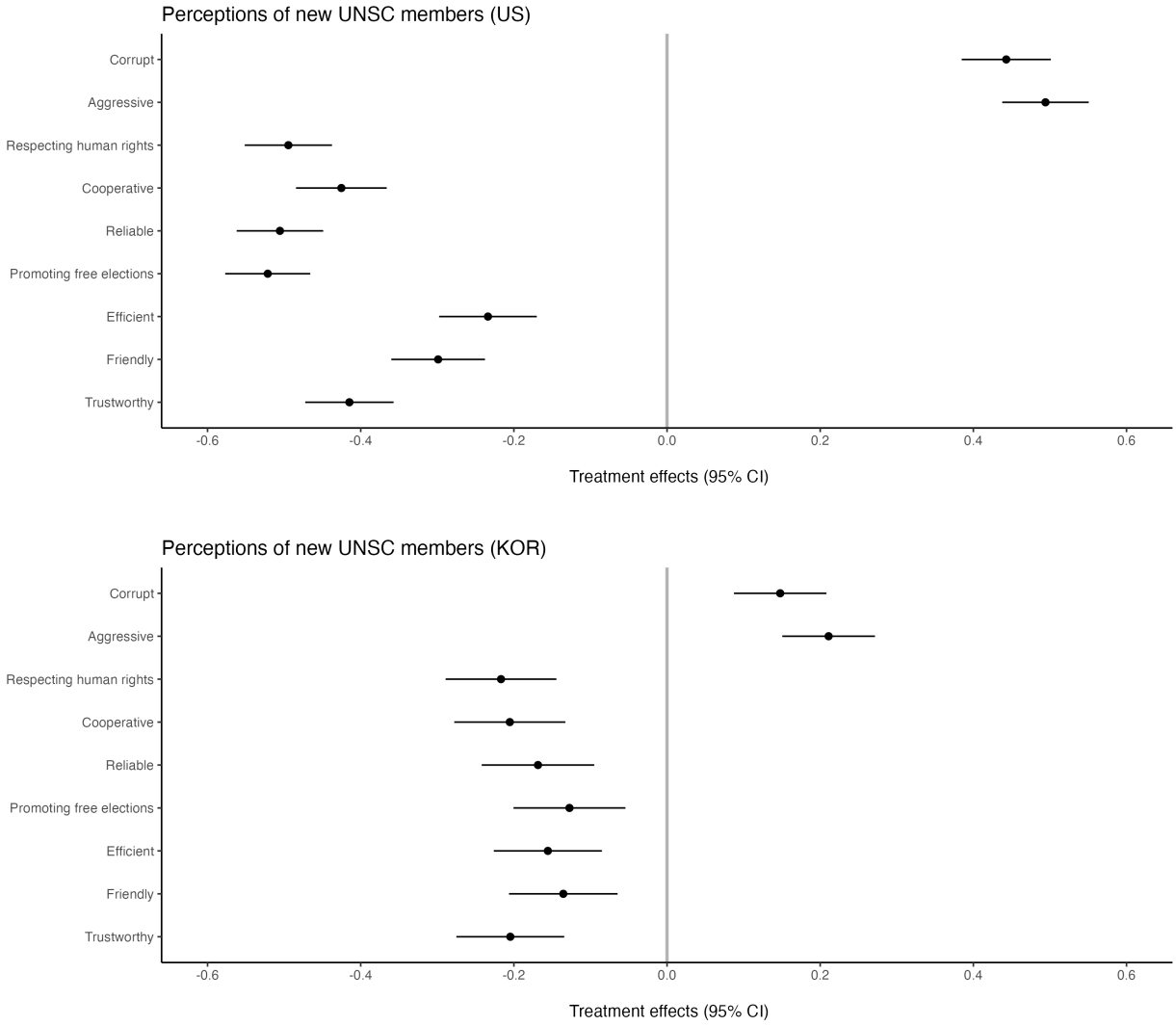

Figure 4: Treatment effects on the perceptions of the new UNSC member with 95% confidence intervals. Top: U.S. sample. Bottom: South Korean sample. The estimates are derived from bivariate OLS regressions.

North Korea, and Iran, while South Koreans commonly cited Japan, China, and South Korea. Notably, the responses often included nondemocracies with strong security ties (e.g. Saudi Arabia and Turkey for the U.S.) and a democratic adversary (e.g. Japan for South Korea), suggesting that respondents did not automatically assume democracies as allies.

Finally, we note two broader implications of our findings (See Appendix D for full estimates). First, the treatment significantly reduced the American public's ($b = -0.12$, $p < 0.01$), but not the South Korean public's ($b = -0.02$, $p = 0.54$), support for general

engagement with other IOs and other countries. While our theory does not generate predictions about why this might be the case, prior research indicates that citizens tend not to differentiate among specific IOs and rather perceive them as a unitary group (Kaya and Walker, 2014; Bearce and Jolliff Scott, 2019). We thus speculate that empowering authoritarian states in one institution can erode public support for institutionalized multilateralism more broadly. Second, in both the U.S. ($b = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$) and South Korea ($b = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$), respondents were more likely to approve of a hypothetical incumbent's proposal to withdraw from the UNSC when they learned that authoritarian states had gained more power. This finding suggests that growing authoritarian influence in IOs may incentivize politicians to adopt anti-IO platforms.

6 Study 2: IMF Governance Reform

Our first study exploited a hypothetical scenario in the context of the UNSC. Yet, a hypothetical UNSC reform may raise concerns about external validity. To complement Study 1, we turned to the IMF, where an actual governance reform took place.

The IMF's 2016 governance reform provides an important real-world context to test our hypotheses because the IMF's leadership explicitly promoted it as an "important milestone reached to reinforce IMF Legitimacy" (International Monetary Fund, 2011) and a response to longstanding calls for greater equitability. The reform reallocated over 6% of the quota shares from the traditionally dominant Western states to previously under-represented emerging market economies (EMEs), thereby placing China, Brazil, India and Russia, among the top ten most influential members. China and Brazil were the largest beneficiaries, with each experiencing roughly a 60% increase in its vote shares (China's from 3.81% to 6.08%, and Brazil's from 1.4% to 2.22%).

6.1 Research Design

We fielded Study 2 in October 2025 to effective samples of 1,086 U.S. and 1,150 South Korean adult respondents. The overall structure of the experiment remained similar to Study 1, with two improvements. First, we specified that the reform beneficiaries were "neither adversaries nor formal allies" to rule out the possibility that information about regime type could prime security relations. Second, we added a control condition that described the same governance reform without any regime type information to examine respondents' assumptions about the type of states likely to gain influence in major IO governance reforms.

After completing the pre-treatment questionnaire, all respondents read the following background information about the IMF and their home country's voting power within the IMF:

> *The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is a major international financial organization that helps countries dealing with economic difficulties.*
>
> *In the IMF, each country's voting power is determined by its financial contributions. Countries with larger contributions can exert influence over important decisions, such as loan recipients and loan sizes. [The United States holds 17.4% of the total decision-making power, making it the most influential member among the IMF's 190 member states. / South Korea holds about 1.8% of the voting power, making it the 16th most influential member among the IMF's 190 member states.]*

We then provided information about the 2016 reform, randomly varying the main beneficiaries' regime type.[12] One third of respondents were told that many authoritarian member states benefited from the reform, another third that democratic member states benefited, and the remaining third (control group) received information about the reform without any

[12]Our manipulation check suggests that the treatment successfully moved respondents' average beliefs about the power balance between nondemocracies and democracies within the IMF both in the U.S. ($b = 0.663$, $p < 0.01$) and South Korea ($b = 0.429$, $p < 0.01$).

reference to regime type. We held constant the beneficiaries' trade and security ties with the respondents' home country to prevent regime type from working through a causal pathway unrelated to our mechanism. The specific wording is as follows:

> *In 2016, the IMF reformed its decision making process to better reflect the interests of rising economic powers.*
>
> *This reform has allowed many [democratic/authoritarian/blank] countries from different regions to gain substantial voting power within the IMF. One [democratic/authoritarian/blank] country saw its voting share increase by as much as 60%. These beneficiary countries trade with [the US/South Korea]. They are neither adversaries nor allies.*
>
> *These changes remain in effect as of 2025.*

After the vignette, we asked respondents to what extent they support compliance and withdrawal from the IMF. Given the U.S.'s role as the largest shareholder of the IMF, we measured compliance by asking American respondents whether they believe "the U.S. must support the IMF's overall operations." In South Korea, which was a borrowing country in the past, we asked whether respondents believe "South Korea must follow the IMF's economic policy recommendations." We also asked preferences for withdrawing from the IMF. The responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

Similar to Study 1, we measured the perceived legitimacy of the IMF and beliefs about the newly empowered member states on a variety of state attributes associated with reliability and cooperation. We also measured the same exploratory outcomes: general preferences for engagement with other IOs and approval for a president's proposal to withdraw from the IMF.

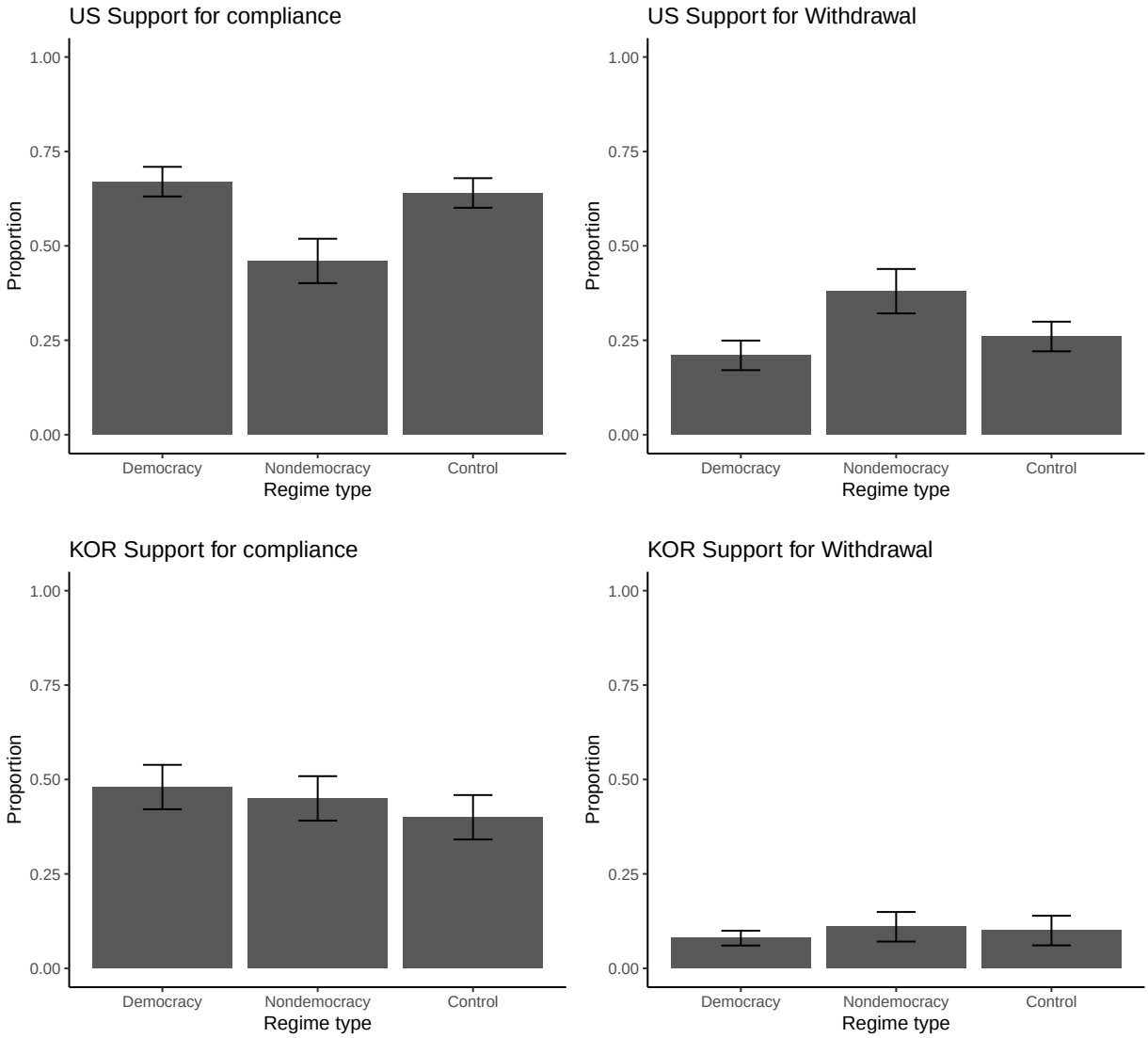

Figure 5: Average public support for the IMF by treatment group with 95% confidence intervals, for the U.S. sample (top) and the South Korean sample (bottom). The estimates are derived from bivariate OLS regressions.

6.2 Results

The results are described in Figure 5. Comparing the authoritarian and democracy conditions, we find a significant effect of regime type on support for the IMF, but only among the U.S. public. In the U.S. sample (top panel), pro-authoritarian reform resulted in a 21.9 percentage points decrease in willingness to comply ($p < 0.01$) and a 17.2 percentage points increase in willingness to withdraw ($p < 0.01$). These effects are substantively large, representing 32.4% and 82.4% changes. However, neither coefficient reached statistical significance in South Korean sample (bottom panel), suggesting that the South Korean public may weigh information about regime type less heavily than their American counterparts in the IMF context.

The control condition lets us examine what democratic citizens assume about the beneficiaries' regime type. As illustrated in the top panel of Figure 5, the American public appears to have premised their support for IMF governance reform on the assumption that the reform benefits democracies. For both compliance ($p = 0.305$) and withdrawal ($p = 0.091$), respondents told only that "many countries" gained influence supported the IMF at degrees statistically indistinguishable from those specifically informed that democracies gained influence. By contrast, those who learned that it was authoritarian states that benefited most expressed significantly lower support compared to the control condition (compliance: $b = -0.182$, $p < 0.01$, withdrawal: $b = 0.117$, $p < 0.01$). In South Korea, as shown in the bottom panel, respondents in the control group expressed support for compliance that is eight percentage point lower than those in the democracy condition ($p < 0.05$), although we observed no statistically significant difference for willingness to withdraw, or when comparing the control and nondemocracy conditions.

The results for IMF legitimacy show a similar pattern. Figure 6 presents the effect of the authoritarian treatment relative to the democracy condition. Among American respondents, we observe consistently negative treatment effects on beliefs about national interest, fairness, and competence (all $p < 0.01$). Among South Korean respondents, however, only beliefs

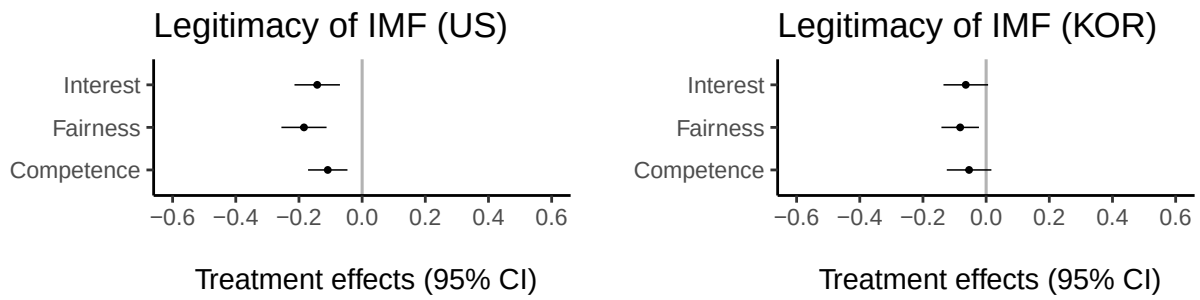

Figure 6: Treatment effects on the perceived legitimacy of the IMF with 95% confidence intervals. The plot compares the nondemocracy condition and the democracy condition. Left: U.S. sample. Right: South Korean sample. The estimates are derived from bivariate OLS regressions.

about fairness were significantly moved after adjusting the alpha level for multiple hypothesis testing.

We also observe a divergence in perceptions of beneficiaries, as shown in Figure 7.[13] U.S. respondents attributed markedly more negative traits to nondemocratic beneficiaries relative to democratic ones (all $p < 0.01$). South Korean respondents offered largely similar assessments; however, they also viewed nondemocratic member states as *less* aggressive, *more* efficient in policymaking, and no less friendly toward South Korea.

These mixed findings on the mechanism help us explain the overall null effects on main outcomes from the Korean sample: Koreans do not view authoritarian states as less desirable in the IMF context; and thus, empowerment of such states does not decrease legitimacy of the IMF. This, in turn, means that Koreans' support for the IMF—measured as willingness to comply and withdraw—does not depend on power shifts between democracies and nondemocracies within the institution. A couple of factors may explain the unexpected findings in South Korea. First, we speculate that the country's rapid economic growth under authoritarian rules in the 1960s–1980s may have fostered uniquely positive associations between authoritarian rules and economic performance among Koreans. Studies find that after two decades of democracy, Koreans begin to miss the former dictator looking for a charismatic leader who can perform another economic miracle (Kang, 2016, 2017). This resonates with

[13]We adjusted the alpha level for multiple comparisons.

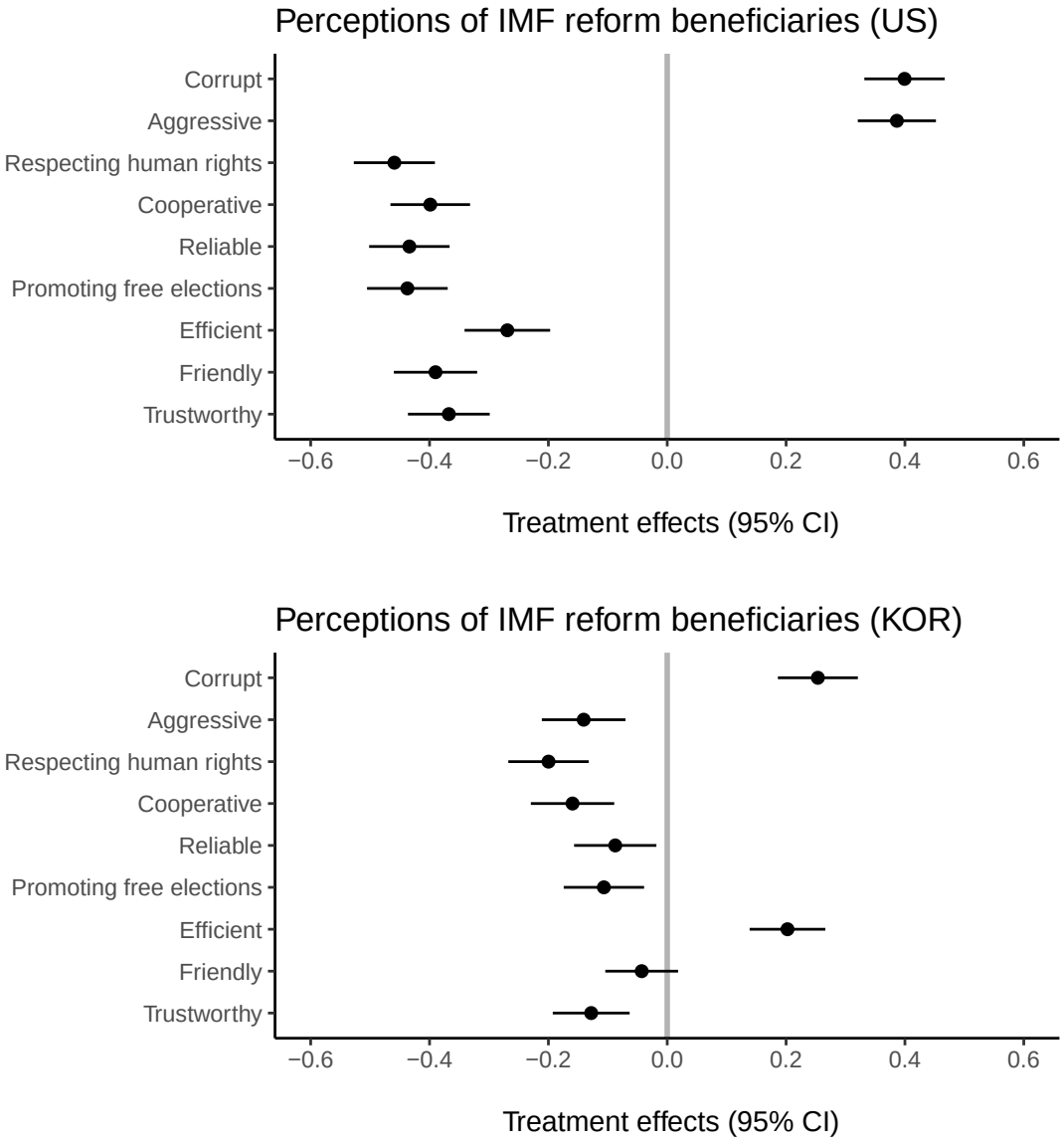

Figure 7: Treatment effects on the perceptions of beneficiaries in IMF with 95% confidence intervals. The plot compares the nondemocracy condition and the democracy condition. Top: U.S. sample. Bottom: South Korean sample. The estimates are derived from bivariate OLS regressions.

our finding that South Koreans view authoritarian states as *more* efficient in the IMF context (See Figure 7) but not in the UNSC context. Second, Koreans' borrower experiences with the IMF may have prompted the division between traditional wealthy states (creditors) and the rest, making them sympathetic to the latter; and therefore, reforms that better represent rising power is seen as desirable, despite the growing influence of authoritarian states.[14]

Finally, our exploratory analysis suggests that a pro-authoritarian reform in the IMF has broader consequences for multilateralism and presidential approval among the U.S. public (See Appendix D). The percentage of American respondents who supported overall engagement with IOs decreased from 72.4% to 61.6% ($p < 0.01$), and approval of a hypothetical president's proposal to withdraw from the IMF increased from 17.8% to 31.5% ($p < 0.01$), when they learned about growing influence of authoritarian influence in the Fund. However, neither effects were statistically significant in South Korea.

7 Exploring Treatment Effect Heterogeneity

Lastly, to substantiate our argument that growing authoritarian influence within IOs has a broad impact on public opinion, we explore heterogeneous treatment effects across three clusters of individual-level predictors of IO support (Bearce and Jolliff Scott, 2019; Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2020; Brutger and Clark, 2023). First, we consider material conditions by examining respondents' employment sector and perceived personal economic benefits from globalization. Second, we consider two political factors, specifically partisanship and ideology. Third, we evaluate dispositional and demographic factors, including isolationism, general trust in institutions, egalitarianism, ethnocentrism, and college education. We estimate a series of regressions modeling IO support as a function of the interaction between the regime-type treatment and each moderator.

Overall, we find little evidence of treatment effect heterogeneity. Out of 72 interaction coefficients across both studies, only four (all from Study 1) reach statistical significance at

[14]See Appendix C for the discussion on Koreans' thoughts on the IMF 2016 reform.

the 95% level (See Appendix F). In the American sample, respondents low in ethnocentrism are more supportive of withdrawal from the UNSC following a pro-nondemocracy reform ($b = 0.24, p < 0.05$). In South Korea, respondents who report benefiting from global trade and finance are less willing to comply upon empowerment of nondemocracies in IOs ($b = -0.15, p < 0.05$). Interestingly, education appears to have opposite effects in the U.S. and South Korea on willingness to withdraw. Having a college degree negatively moderates the effect of our nondemocracy treatment among Americans ($b = -0.13, p < 0.05$), but positively moderates the treatment effect in South Korea ($b = 0.13, p < 0.05$).

The overall null heterogeneous results provide suggestive yet compelling evidence that increased nondemocratic influence within IOs leads to a broad-based backlash from democratic publics. Given the polarized nature of globalization in U.S. politics, the lack of moderation by party ID or ideology is particularly illuminating. Moreover, the results point in the opposite direction of the conventional account, in which backlash against IOs is driven primarily by the losers of globalization. In fact, the limited heterogeneity we detect indicates that those expected to be most supportive of globalization and multilateralism may sometimes be more likely to withdraw support when an IO favors nondemocracies, at least in the context of the Security Council.

8 Conclusion

Authoritarian states have never exercised greater influence in IOs than today. As rising nondemocracies gain power, IOs face mounting pressure to adapt their governance structures in ways that reflect contemporary global power. This paper demonstrates that democratic citizens are sensitive to such governance reforms. Through four survey experiments, it finds that Americans and South Koreans generally reduce their support for IOs when these organizations grant greater authority to authoritarian states. The effect is more consistent and pronounced in the U.S. than in South Korea, suggesting that citizens vary in how strongly

they prioritize democratic procedures and values when evaluating IOs. Moreover, in South Korea, we find larger effect of growing authoritarian influence for a security IO than for an economic IO. This withdrawal of support often extends beyond the IOs in question – democratic citizens reduce support for engagement with *overall* international institutions and are more likely to support incumbent politicians with anti-IO platforms.

These reactions seem to be driven by democratic citizens' perceptions around authoritarian states: despite given the identical information about economic and security ties, democratic citizens view authoritarian states to be more corrupt, aggressive, unreliable, untrustworthy, rights-violating, and normatively illiberal. These views make IOs with influential authoritarian states look less fair, less beneficial, and less competent.

More broadly, this study suggests that public discontent toward multilateralism can emerge not only from domestic grievances but also from shifts in the internal distribution of power within IOs themselves. Public concerns about authoritarian influence in IOs are not limited to nationalists or populists, but they resonate strongly among globalization supporters. Additionally, our results challenge the widely held assumption that expanding representation in IOs automatically enhances legitimacy. Governance reforms are often justified as updating representation to reflect shifts in global power, yet in practice this frequently means granting greater authority to authoritarian states. Our findings suggest that such representation comes with real political costs—eroded democratic public support for IOs—especially in security-focused bodies like the UNSC.

Future work may address some of the limitations of our study. First, while we focus on democratic publics, we leave open the question of how citizens in nondemocratic regimes perceive pro-authoritarian policies within IOs. Thus, one avenue for future research may to be survey authoritarian public opinion toward IOs. In addition, given that we observed differences in both effect size and direction across the United States and South Korea, it would be useful to replicate the experiment in additional countries that vary in international status and in their relationships with major IOs. Third, our experimental vignette holds

constant several important country attributes, most notably power. This choice is justified, especially in the UNSC study, because new permanent members are realistically likely to be powerful. Nonetheless, this raises questions about generalizability. Future work could examine whether our findings extend to less powerful states in other IO contexts.

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