

Things You Can See From There You Can't See From Here: Blind Spots in the American Perspective in IR and their Effects

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“From Plymouth Bay in 1620... to Woodrow Wilson’s White House in 1917, to the invasion route through southern Iraq in 2003, there has been an abiding assumption [among Americans] that American culture—American principles and practices—are not only the best ever created by human beings, but are also closely aligned with the very essence of human nature.” (Borstelmann 2016:1-2)

Introduction

Scholars of international relations and international security have examined many facets of the relationship between domestic politics and international affairs. Within American IR scholarship, however, they have almost always done so by generalizing from the U.S. case to the rest of the world. In ways that fundamentally influence the accuracy of prominent theories, these generalizations (or assumptions) are unwarranted.

Such assumptions also sometimes hinder American policymakers who discover, to their great disappointment, that some countries do not share American cultural values and therefore behave in unexpected ways. In one recent example, former Secretary of State John Kerry complained in a private, but subsequently leaked, conversation with members of Syrian NGOs and western diplomats in September 2016 that, “The problem is [that] the Russians don't care about international law and we do. And we don't have a basis [to intervene in Syria against Assad]... unless we have a UN Security Council resolution” (Labott and Browne 2016). The differing U.S. and Russian attitudes towards international law are likely rooted in part in the contrasting roles that institutions like the UN play in conferring legitimacy to international actions in the domestic political discourses of each country. Yet, alongside American policymakers, American scholarship on international affairs often ignores these distinctions.

In this article, we examine the accuracy of three such U.S.-centric assumptions about the relationship between domestic and international politics that underlie significant segments of American IR scholarship. First, publics around the world do not respond to UN and other IGO decisions or criticism regarding their governments in the same way that Americans do. As a

result, the capacities of international institutions to influence events vary by country and region. Second, many publics hold different views on the value of using force to resolve disputes with other states. Thus, publics do not serve to restrain their governments from engaging in conflict in the same way around the world. This calls into question the universalizing tendency of some prominent arguments for the democratic peace (e.g. Russett 1993). Third, in contrast to the American public, the citizens of other states are sometimes well informed about their countries' foreign policies and the international events of day. Therefore, the methods which publics can use to hold governments accountable in international affairs vary by country. These findings influence our understanding of fundamental topics in the field, including the role of intergovernmental organizations (IGO) in shaping outcomes, the determinants of conflict, and the nature of public signaling.¹

To demonstrate the limited applicability of these three assumptions about the relationship between domestic and international politics, we use new cross-national survey data derived from four survey experiments fielded in mid-2016 in the United States (n=2,005) and three Middle Eastern countries: Egypt (n=1,029), Israel (n=1,382), and Turkey (n=1,141). The survey methodology is described in the online appendix alongside demographic comparisons of the three samples and robustness checks of the findings presented below. We supplement this data with other recent cross-national surveys conducted in 67 countries. The following three sections demonstrate these three claims and explain how these assumptions influence international relations theories. We then conclude with brief remarks on how American scholars can avoid these problems in the future.

Assumption 1: The UN and Other IGOs Confer Legitimacy

Over the past two decades a new and growing field of research within American IR on international organizations in general, and the UN in particular, has focused on how IGOs can indirectly influence states and/or enforce their decisions by affecting the domestic conditions in

¹ A closely related question- regarding the exact causes for the cross-national differences found here- is beyond the scope of this article (beyond some suggestive notes), given the nature of this special issue, of the available survey data, and of the rather preliminary nature of research on this topic in IR. See the conclusions for some proposals on the most fruitful ways in which this question can be investigated as well. For an examination of American biases regarding nuclear weapons and nuclear weapon programs see [Special Issue Paper #4]. For an overview of the diplomatic signaling literature, see Trager (2016).

which leaders operate (Goldstein et.al 2001; Mansfield, Milner, and Rosendorff 2002; Vreeland 2003; Simmons and Danner 2010). According to this literature, one major domestic condition that IGO's can sometimes affect is the views of domestic publics regarding a certain policy desired by their leaders (or foreign leaders) – even without the use of any carrots or sticks. These scholars argue that significant shares of domestic publics in states around the world care greatly about the decisions made in IGOs for non-instrumental reasons, that is, not due to the direct benefits (or costs) that IGOs can provide or impose on their country.

Two major explanations exist for why domestic publics respond to IGO judgments. According to the first, identified with constructivism, some IGOs such as the UN are imbued with international legitimacy due to their claim to represent the 'international community' through their membership and decision-making processes and as a result of the respect for these institutions shown by high-status states. Accordingly, domestic publics believe that submitting certain acts to the consideration of a relevant IGO is important because that is what 'moral' states are supposed to do in the modern international system. As a result, failing to at least try to gain approval for certain acts from the relevant IGO (such as, in the case of the use of force, the UN Security Council) is seen as improper by domestic publics, leading them to oppose such acts. (Barnett 1997; Hurd 1999, 2007; see also Claude 1966).

The other variant, the rationalist one, argues that domestic publics see IGOs, especially ones like the UN that are not dominated by a single power, as trusted outside providers of information about the quality and motives of state actions. Failing to receive approval for actions signals to the domestic public in question that either their leaders have an undesirable 'hidden agenda', or are proposing a very flawed policy, or that a state is over-stepping its proper bounds. As a result, a large share of the domestic publics in question will oppose the state's action (Chapman and Reiter 2004; Thompson 2006, 2009; Chapman 2009, 2011; Greico et.al 2011).

However, all of the empirical research done by American scholars on this particular domestic pathway has analyzed, with one partial exception,² only one possible target country in

² In his analysis of the 2003 Iraq war case, Thompson (2009:Chp.5) analyzes a Gallup poll in 37 countries around the world about this war and finds that respondents were significantly more likely to support a U.S. attack if it was approved by the UN. However, by the time the survey Thompson analyzes was conducted (January 2003), it was already widely known that the U.S. was very unlikely to get the desired UNSC resolution unless it made major compromises to other UNSC members regarding the planned operation (such as a major delay giving the inspectors more time to work). Accordingly, the respondents' answers in many cases to this question may have assumed a

this regard – the United States. It has also largely focused on the UN Security Council, repeatedly finding strong support for this effect within the U.S.³ However the United States, in this particular aspect, is a ‘most likely’ case of a country to be influenced by the UN in this particular manner. The United States, after all, played the key role in creating the UN and its predecessor the League of Nations – both acts strongly and widely supported by the American public at the time.⁴ Multiple American presidents from Truman onwards have tried to get UN approval (and approval from other IGOs) for significant military operations that they planned to launch and, when received, justified these operations to the American public utilizing, among other things, these approvals. As the leak from Kerry’s recent private remarks noted in the introduction indicates, even some American policymakers at the highest levels have “internalized” the importance of receiving such UN approval. Although American attitudes toward the UN became somewhat more mixed in recent decades,⁵ multiple recent surveys show that the American public still cares greatly about what the UN decides. Before the 1991 Gulf war, for example, 59% of the American public favored using military force only with UN Security Council approval. Similar results within the American public were found even in the run-up to the 2003 War in Iraq (Chapman & Reiter 2004:893-894).

However, other publics around the world do not respond in the same ways to IGO judgments. The signaling and legitimacy conferring effects of IGOs are refracted through national experiences and domestic political discourses. Generalizing from the highly exceptional American case, therefore, is misleading.

This can be seen by comparing American and Middle Eastern attitudes toward U.N. approval of the use of force. As can be seen in Figure 1.1, Middle Eastern publics expressed much lower levels of agreement with the statement: “countries should not have the right to use military force for political purposes without UN approval.” This speaks most directly to the

different U.S. policy regarding Iraq under such a scenario rather than merely also getting UNSC approval. Furthermore this question can’t examine, of course, how binding they see the IGOs resolutions regarding their own country. Accordingly, Thompson’s ability to examine whether these IGO effects are applicable to countries other than the United States is limited in practice.

³ For a study on the effects of WTO rulings on the American public (by a non-American scholar) see Pelc (2013).

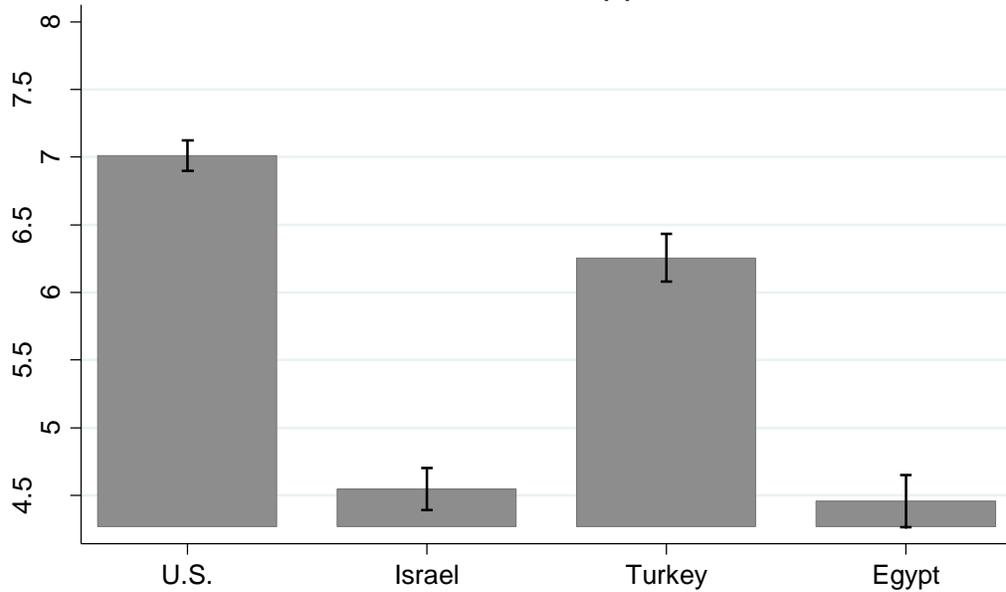
⁴ For example, in 1944, 72% of Americans supported the creation of the UN and entry of the United States into it (Holsti 2004:20). From the available evidence the League of Nations was initially also very popular within the American public- the eventual failure of the U.S. to join was, instead, largely due to Wilson’s mismanagement of the ratification process in the Senate (Ikenberry 2001:Chp.5).

⁵ For the way in which the American media (and policymakers) overstate recent anti-UN sentiments among the American public, sentiments which are a minority position, see Kull and Destler (1999:Chp.3).

claim that U.N. approval drives domestic opinion through the signal of the legitimacy of the use of force (e.g. Hurd 1999, 2007), as opposed to the information provided about leader intentions and competence, and the likely availability of allies (e.g. Chapman 2009, 2011). The figure highlights a major difference both statistically and substantively as to the need for UN approval, with most American respondents seeing such approval as necessary while the Middle Eastern respondents expressing a mildly negative or blasé attitude in this regard. Egypt and Israel have the most negative attitudes, while Turkey's negative attitude, although also significant, is milder—perhaps due to the past influence of the EU to which Turkey (unlike the two other Middle Eastern countries) was a candidate member for many years. Although the role of the UN Security Council in authorizing the use of force has become far more common and prominent after the end of the Cold War (Malone in Thompson 2006:2), we do not see a generational shift in this regard. Among respondents under the age of 40, in other words people who first became politically aware in the Post-Cold War era, the gap between Americans and Middle Easterners is even a bit larger.⁶

⁶ See the appendix part 2 section 2.1. Indeed for the older segment of the Middle Eastern respondents below age 40, the first major international conflict most probably recall is the (UN approved) 1991 Gulf War— a conflict which all three countries were deeply involved in or affected by.

Figure 1.1: We shouldn't use military force for political purposes without U.N. approval



Note: Significant at the $p < 0.001$ level

Thus, there is a spectrum of responses to the UN; scholars should not generalize from the U.S. case. Recent cross-national surveys which asked both Western European and American respondents questions on this topic have found that some Western European publics respond even more strongly to UN approval than Americans do (see, for example, Pew 2011:3). Likewise two (non-American) scholars have recently found results in support of this effect in a survey experiment conducted in Japan (Tago and Ikeda 2013). In the Middle East, however, and perhaps in other non-OECD countries, the response to the UN is different. The exact sources of these differences are important topics for future research.

Assumption 2: Democratic Publics Are Skeptical of the Value of Using Force

This assumption has deep roots in one major strand of American political culture. Woodrow Wilson famously claimed in his declaration of war on Imperial Germany in 1917 that the German people, had they had the democratic choice to do so, would not have started the first world war. This war, he said, was not done “upon their impulse... or previous knowledge or

approval”.⁷ John F. Kennedy in his 1940 book analyzing why Britain and France failed to stop Hitler argued that “when the decision must be whether it will be peace or war, the fundamental instinct of man against war binds the hands of democratic leaders” (Kennedy 1940:228). Likewise Senator Robert Taft, known to his contemporaries as “Mr. Republican,” argued in 1951 that “history shows that when the people have an opportunity to speak they as a rule choose for peace if possible” (in Waltz 1959:8- but cf. Mead 1999).

This assumption also seems to conform quite well with much of the American political experience during the 20th and 21st centuries when major American uses of forces were debated. Witness, for example, the long and drawn out debate over the American entry into WW2, the difficulties encountered by George H. W. Bush in generating support within Congress and the American public for the first Gulf War, or the near defeat in Congress which Barack Obama faced when he proposed bombing Syria over its use of chemical weapons in 2013. As Secretary of State John Kerry, a proponent of the use of U.S. military force against the Assad regime put it, a major reason why the Obama Administration hadn’t intervened then or afterwards in this manner was that “A lot of Americans don’t believe that we should be fighting and sending young Americans over to die in another country.” (Labott and Browne 2016).

In the American international relations literature, this assumption has affected and become ingrained especially within the scholarship on the democratic peace. More specifically, it underlies the two most prominent explanations for this phenomenon- the normative explanation and the institutional constraints explanation.⁸ Indeed, even some American scholars critical of the democratic peace accept this assumption about domestic publics in democracies and integrate it into their counter-arguments (see, for example, Mansfield & Snyder 1995:7).

The main variant of the institutional constraints argument claims that the democratic peace is the result of the presumed fact that in democracies the mobilization of the domestic public for war is a long, difficult and public process for the executive. That, in turn, provides ample time for peaceful negotiations with the other country, reduces the fears of a surprise attack and the uncertainties about red lines that can result in conflict, and creates an incentive for executives in democracies to avoid war, namely avoiding the need of going through such an

⁷ <https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=402> accessed December 28,2016.

⁸Indeed the first chapter of Russett’s heavily cited book on the democratic peace starts with an extended quote from the abovenoted speech by Woodrow Wilson (1993:3).

arduous political process (Doyle 1997; Morgan and Campbell 1991; Morgan and Swanbach 1992; Russett 1993:38-39; Siverson 1995; Schultz 2001). The main variant of the normative argument claims that democracies externalize their domestic peaceful conflict resolution norms to the international sphere— at least towards other democracies, which are perceived as willing and able to follow such peaceful norms towards them as well. (Dixon 1994; Doyle 1997; Russett 1993:31-32; Chan 1997; Weart 1998:77-78,87-92).

However, if the public in some democracies sees the use of force abroad as an acceptable and usually effective tool, then the executive should find the process of mobilizing their country for war to be relatively quick and easy- the leader will be effectively preaching to an already largely converted choir. Furthermore, in democracies where that is legally possible,⁹ starting a major military operation unilaterally or in complete secrecy and only asking for wider approval once it is ongoing or complete is a far more feasible political strategy for leaders whose polities have such opinions. The existence of checks and balances on the executive after all only means that the public can restrain (or punish) an excessively war-prone leader- not that they will actually do so in practice (for a similar point see Braumoeller 1997:379-380). Furthermore, if these facts are known to the leaders of other democracies, then they would not presume, for example, that that country could not mount a surprise attack in case of a serious dispute.

As for the normative argument, the more acceptable and effective warfare with other countries is perceived to be within a certain democratic public, the less likely is that public to externalize peaceful domestic conflict resolution norms. Externalization of domestic norms towards others, even towards others who share certain important similarities, is by no means an automatic process (Schwartz and Skinner 2002:169). As a result, when democratic domestic norms conflict with beliefs about the appropriate modes of dealing with the outside world, the latter, more directly relevant beliefs, may have the greater influence on actions. Leaders chosen by a certain public are also likely to share many of its views, including regarding the use of force

⁹ In many democracies it is constitutionally or legally feasible for the executive to start a major military operation unilaterally or in complete secrecy and only asking for wider approval once it is ongoing or complete. For example, in many established democracies (such as Australia, Canada, Israel, Post-1978 Spain among others) the executive can legally start or join a major armed conflict without first seeking the approval of the legislature. Indeed, that is how some armed conflicts have started in practice in these democracies- such as Israel's surprise attacks that begun the 1956 and 1967 wars or the Spanish government's decision to send thousands of soldiers to fight in Iraq in 2003 (alongside the United States). Even in the recent famous case of the UK and the 2013 vote over intervening in Syria, the belief that British military operations should receive first parliamentary approval is merely a custom of very recent vintage (2003). Accordingly it is still perfectly legal for the British Prime Minister to start/enter a war without any such vote and/or to completely ignore its results (UK government 2007).

abroad. Likewise, the beliefs of the public can determine what is politically feasible and thereby influence outcomes (Stein 2015). Thus, the foundations of the most prominent explanations for the democratic peace rest on the assumption that democratic publics restrain their leaders largely to the same degree and in the same ways.

This critical assumption has rarely been studied in a comparative context, however.¹⁰ In one partial exception, Braumoeller (1997) analyzes surveys conducted in the early and mid-1990s, finding significant variation between some of the then newly-democratic post-Soviet countries in how much the more liberal segments of their general populations supported the use of force. The liberal segments in some of these countries (such as the Ukraine) were found to have significantly higher support for the use of force in certain situations than the more illiberal segments in their countries.¹¹

When we examine this assumption more directly in our surveys, significant differences emerge between democratic polities as to their views regarding the baseline acceptability of the use of force as well as the appropriate occasions for its employment. For that purpose we compare the two democratic Middle East publics at the time of our survey (Israel and Turkey)¹² with the U.S. and include non-democratic Egypt for general comparison. Compared to the American public, the two democratic Middle Eastern publics at the time of our survey see the avoidance of a bloody war with another country as less essential and see the use of force abroad as a significantly more acceptable option (see Figures 2.1 & 2.2).¹³ Interestingly in the case of

¹⁰For American (and non-American) scholars who have studied assumptions underlying some explanations for the democratic peace in a comparative context (usually in surveys comparing the U.S. to the UK), see Johns and Davies 2012; Mintz and Geva 1993; Tomz and Weeks 2013.

¹¹In a second partial exception, Baum and Potter (2015:chp. 5), analyze the results of opinion polls in 63 and 62 countries regarding public support for the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq respectively. They find in support of this assumption, among other things, that the vast majority of publics surveyed opposed both conflicts- but a far larger share of leaders of those countries choosing to nevertheless join one or both U.S. led coalitions and send troops for this purpose. However, these surveys asked about support for two conflicts seen as being primarily due to the interests of or in response to an attack on the leader of these coalitions (the U.S.)- rather than in the direct interests of or due to an attack on their own countries. Such contexts would naturally be expected to lead to significantly less support for the use of force by their own countries (the famous “Ohne mich!/Leave me out” tendency) than situations in which their own countries direct interests were at stake or their own country was attacked (as in the contexts of the questions asked here).

¹²See the appendix for a discussion of Turkey’s democratic status during the survey period.

¹³In the first question respondents hailing from non-democratic Egypt are significantly more willing than both Middle Eastern democracies to fight a bloody war ($p < 0.001$). In the two other questions however, Egyptian respondents are in between Israeli and Turkish respondents. The overall similarity of Egyptian respondents to Israeli and Turkish respondents in the second and third questions is a preliminary indication that the differences between the U.S. and the two Middle Eastern democracies are due to some common regional effect- perhaps derived

Turkey the differences between it and the U.S. are insignificant on the use of force question (unlike the other two questions). However this is due to a generational shift **within the U.S. itself in this regard**- i.e. the tendency of American respondents under age 40 to be far more accepting of the general use of force than older American cohorts- perhaps due to the near constant use of force by the U.S. for various goals since the end of the Cold War.¹⁴ Accordingly when Turks above age 40 are compared to Americans of this age group the results are similar to those of the comparison between the U.S. and Israel.¹⁵

Furthermore, there is some evidence that these Middle Eastern publics are more open than the American public in regard to the types of goals for which the use of force would be justifiable. For example, Middle Eastern publics were much more supportive than the American public of fighting a bloody conflict with another country for economic interests (Figure 2.3).¹⁶ “No blood for oil” is, it seems, a far less persuasive anti-war argument in the Middle East.

Interestingly, Americans seem from recent cross-national surveys to share quite similar preferences to those of European publics in regard to such economic motives for war. When respondents in the U.S., Turkey, and nine European countries were asked a closely related question in 2004 about using their country’s military force in order to ensure the supply of oil, European respondents supported the use of force for this purpose at similarly low rates to the U.S.. In contrast, Turkish respondents, who were also included in this survey due to Turkey’s membership in NATO, were strongly supportive of fighting for this purpose (German Marshal Fund 2004:23).¹⁷

from the very frequent experience most Middle Eastern states have (including these three states) with fighting domestic and international conflicts of various kinds in or near their homeland regardless of their regime type.

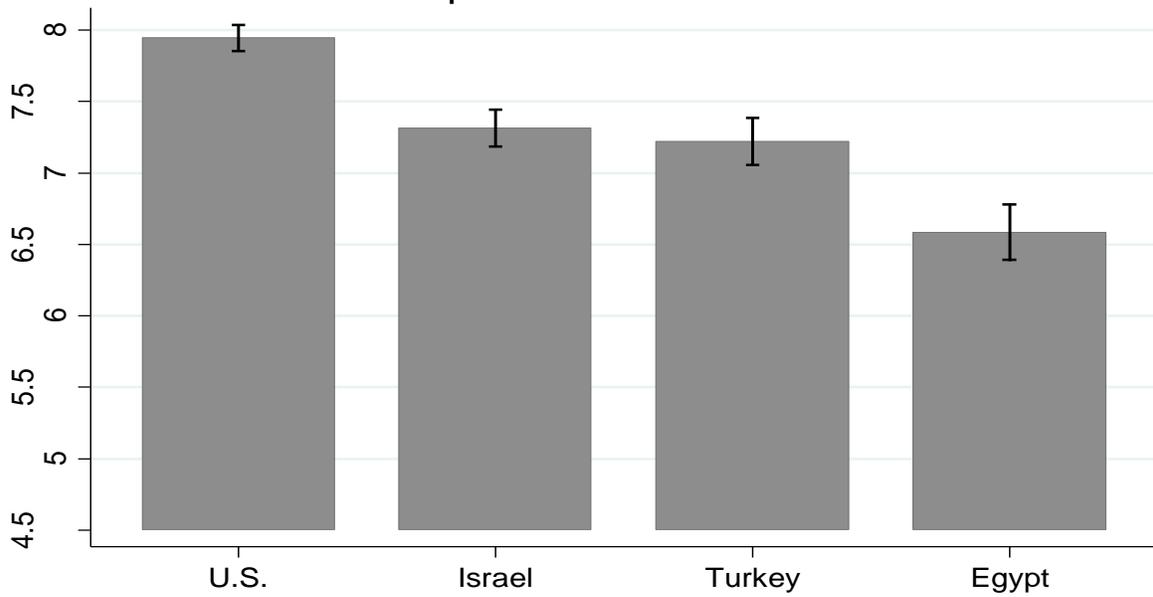
¹⁴ Even in the 1990s the U.S. began a new significant military operation once every eighteen months on average.

¹⁵ See the appendix part 2 section 3. Likewise the gap between Israeli and American respondents becomes even larger when only the above 40 age groups are compared. In the two other questions however, no age effects are observed.

¹⁶The scenario described to the respondents prior to the asking of this particular question (but not the two other questions noted here) described a conflict over an area rich in natural resources that led to the death of 1,100 soldiers on each side. In the Middle Eastern political/domestic context that would be considered a major, quiet deadly conflict.

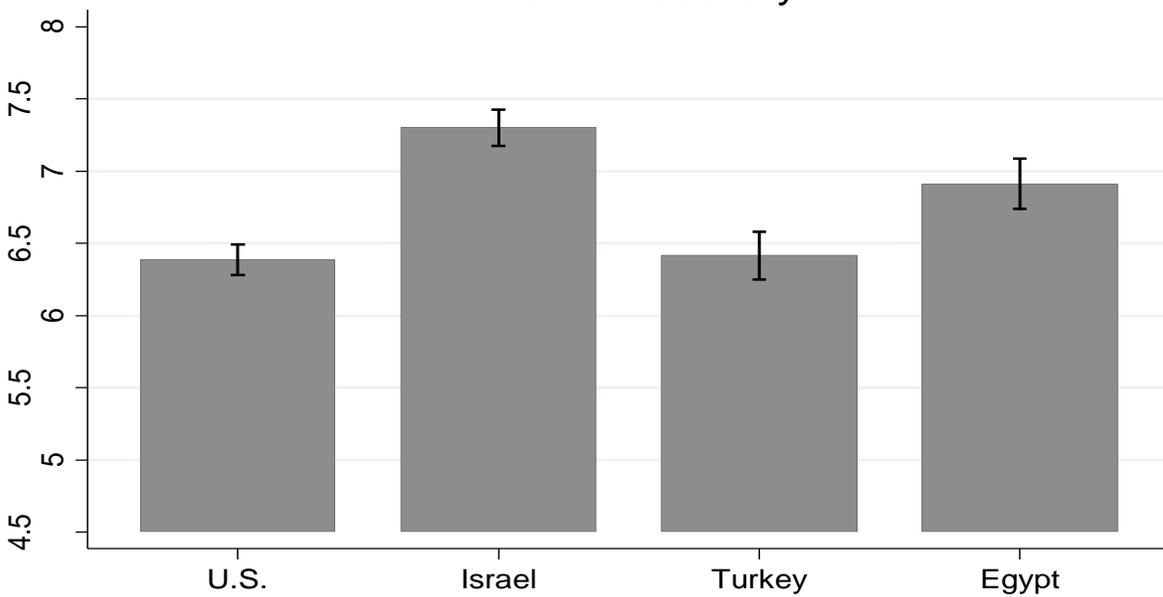
¹⁷ Of the three major western European powers, the German public was a bit less supportive of the use of force for this purpose than the American public was, while the French and British publics were a bit more supportive.

Figure 2.1: Avoiding a bloody war is the most important consideration



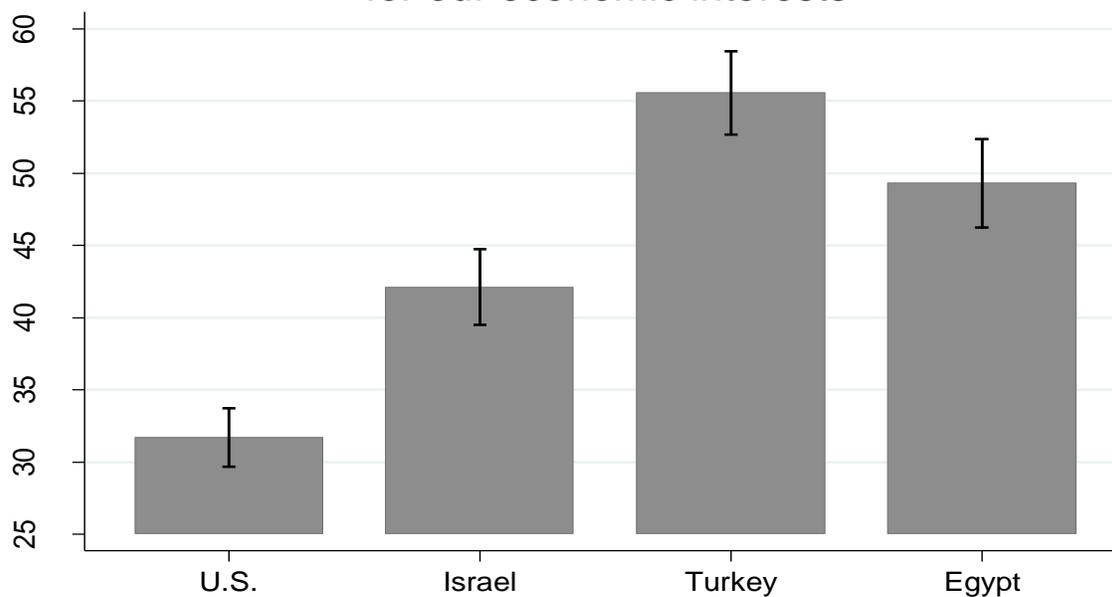
Note: Significant at the $p < 0.001$ level

Figure 2.2: Approve the use of force by my country when necessary



Note: Significant at the $p < 0.001$ level except for the case of Turkey where difference is insignificant

Figure 2.3: Use of force by our country is appropriate for our economic interests



Note: Significant at the $p < 0.001$ level

These findings demonstrate the heterogeneity of democratic publics on questions of war and peace.¹⁸ The normative and institutional explanations for the democratic peace, therefore, do not have the same force outside of a U.S. context.¹⁹ Further research is needed to determine the extent to which inappropriate generalizations from the American and Western European cases have skewed our understanding of the likely causes of the peace among democratic countries.

Assumption 3: Domestic Publics Are Poorly Informed about Foreign Affairs

This widespread assumption among American IR scholars is derived from their knowledge of American politics and research on American public opinion. Scholars in American politics regularly and consistently find low levels of knowledge on domestic politics among large shares of the American public (Zaller 1992). Americans are regularly found to be even less

¹⁸ We are not claiming of course here that there may not be major differences on average in the relevant attitudes in this regard between publics in authoritarian countries and publics in democratic countries- a separate question which is mostly beyond the scope of the survey data available to us.

¹⁹ Certainly, this finding does not settle the debate on the many interesting, potential sources of the democratic peace. It may be that other explanations are more convincing (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita et. al. 2003) or that certain sorts of democracies participate in it more than others.

knowledgeable on average about foreign affairs. One scholar studying American knowledge on this issue area in the late 1940s described it as “dark areas of ignorance” (Kriegsberg in Holsti 2004:26). Scholars who have studied this question since then have consistently found, as one review of the literature describes it, “overwhelming evidence” that “the American public is generally poorly informed about international affairs” (Holsti 2004:48-49,54). This lack of knowledge frequently even extends to correctly identifying the foreign policy positions taken by parties or presidential candidates on the main issues. For example, despite the prominence of foreign policy issues in these three primaries, in the 1968 Democratic primaries and in the 2008 Republican and Democratic primaries, a majority of the voters didn’t accurately identify the foreign policy positions of the main candidates on the ongoing Vietnam and Iraq wars respectively (Norpoth and Perkins 2011). Accordingly, although most recent scholarship on this topic argues that the American public is usually willing and able to hold decision-makers accountable on foreign policy issues, it nevertheless claims that it frequently lacks the foreign policy knowledge needed in order to do that in practice on many issues, particularly those which are less visible, such as those that do not involve international crises or wars (Baum & Potter 2008:44; Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1996:218-220).²⁰

This assumption about the relationship between public preferences and foreign policy influences American international relations scholarship in a number of ways. It affects, for instance, how scholars view public signaling. Much of what leaders can publicly say and do in regard to issues in dispute with another country, even in a democracy with a fully free press, is assumed to be either largely unknown to their general public and/or politically costless to the leader. The public signaling literature has therefore focused on highly visible and dramatic speech acts that generate such domestic knowledge (and political costs), or avoided the ignorant public problem entirely by examining other ways that states impose costs on themselves, such as through building arms.²¹ Accordingly, if a leader wants their public messages to be taken seriously by foreign countries, they must make clear and unambiguous threats during a special oval office speech with high ratings, thereby generating audience costs to backing down (Fearon 1994; Tomz 2007; Trager and Vavreck 2011; Weeks 2008). Alternatively, they must accompany

²⁰ For an overview of the literature on how the American public sometimes tries to ‘compensate’ for its ignorance on this issue area by employing heuristics and other methods see Aldrich et.al 2006.

²¹ Another increasingly studied route has been signaling behind closed doors. See for example Trager 2017; Yarhi-Milo 2013.

their current speech acts with a military show of force, such as large military maneuvers or a military mobilization (Fearon 1997; Slanchev 2005), or carefully cultivate a reputation for honesty by repeatedly following through on promises or threats made in the past (Sartori 2005).

While this assumption of public ignorance is largely accurate in the case of the U.S. it is often incorrect elsewhere. For example, in a recent survey, scholars have found that the vast majority of the Israeli public were able to accurately identify the foreign policy positions of the eight major parties in the Israeli Parliament on a left-right scale (Tomz, Weeks and Yarhi-Milo 2016).²² When cross-national surveys directly compare American and non-American respondents on their foreign policy knowledge, some publics repeatedly and consistently show higher levels of knowledge in this regard. When a 1994 cross-national survey of seven Northern American and Western European states asked respondents open-ended questions on various major foreign policy issues and figures in that year, Americans scored lower on average than all other respondents except for the Spanish ones (Dimonk and Popkin 1996:219-221). A more recent study comparing Americans' knowledge of "hard" foreign news in 2007 to that of the British, Finnish, and Danish publics has similarly found all three Western European countries to be better informed on a battery of eight multiple choice questions on contemporary international news items. American respondents were able to respond correctly to only 40% of these questions compared to an average correct response rate of 59% to 67% among respondents in the three Western European countries (Curran et.al 2009:14).

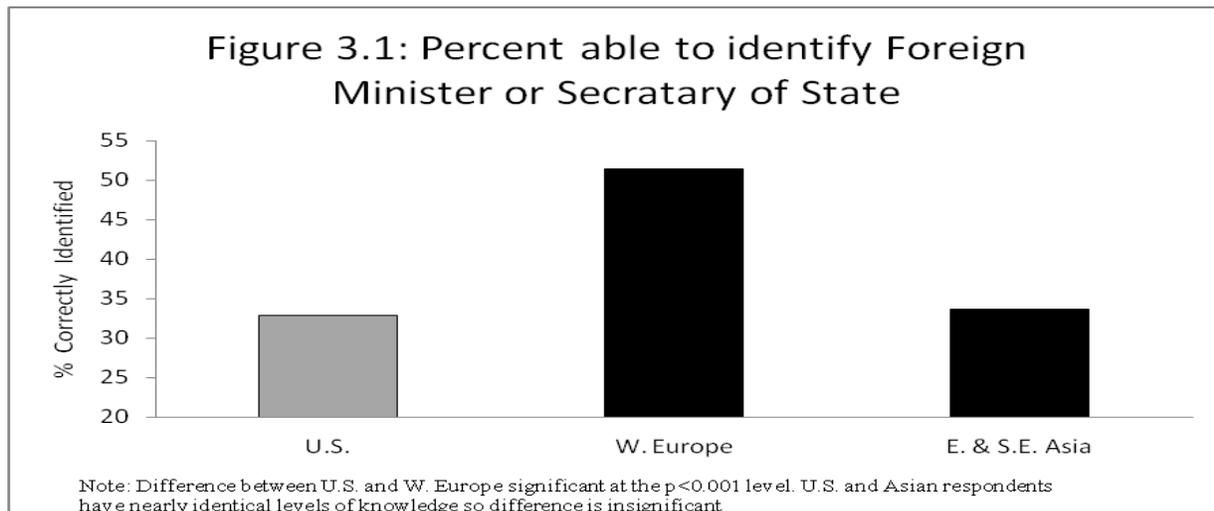
When we analyze some large multi-regional surveys with questions that examine foreign policy knowledge, we again find substantial heterogeneity with respondents in some countries and regions having relatively good knowledge of the foreign affairs issues that relate to their countries. For example, a survey conducted in 18 West European and Asian countries in 2000 (ASES) (Inoguchi 2001) asked respondents to identify, in an open-ended question, their countries' foreign minister, this being a key political knowledge question and a good indicator of wider FP knowledge.²³ During the survey period, a nearly identical open-ended question was asked by Gallup (2000) in the United States.²⁴ When we compare the responses by region

²² In a bivariate regression, the party platforms on this topic predicted fully 98% of the public perception of the parties' positions.

²³ This question is frequently used as one political knowledge question in many academic pre-election surveys (see for example the CSES module 1, 1996-2001).

²⁴ The ASES question asked, "Can you tell me the name of the current Foreign Minister of [country of respondent]?" The Gallup question asked "Do you happen to know the name of the US Secretary of State?"

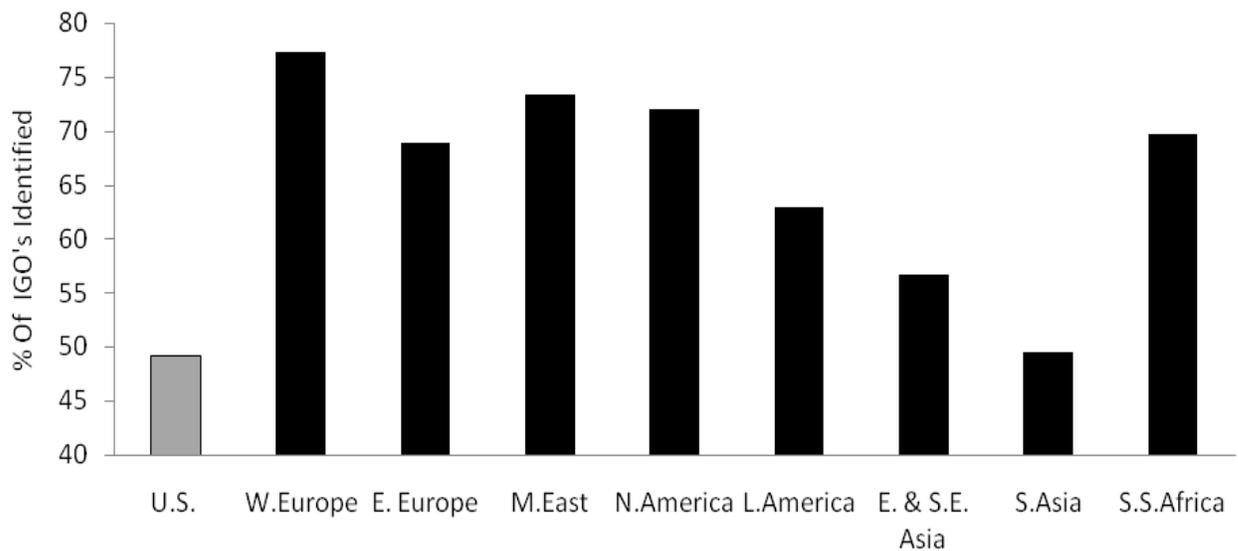
(Figure 3.1), respondents in Asian countries had, on average, similar FP knowledge levels to those of Americans. However, Western European respondents had a far better level of foreign policy knowledge with a 19% higher correct response rate on average. Likewise, even among the surveyed Asian countries there was a high information exception: Japanese respondents were nearly twice as knowledgeable as Americans (60% vs. 33%).



In a 2005 multi-region survey conducted by Gallup International in the United States and 65 other countries around the world (Gallup International Association 2005), respondents were asked a battery of yes/no questions as to whether they have heard of six major international organizations (the UN, EU, IMF, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the International Criminal Court). We then transformed their responses on these questions into a 0 to 100 foreign affairs knowledge scale with 100 signifying a respondent who had heard of all six IGOs and 0 of one who had heard of none of them. As can be seen in Figure 3.2, respondents in five world regions, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, North America (other than the U.S.), and Sub-Saharan Africa all show significantly higher levels of foreign affairs knowledge (20% to 28% more correctly identified IGOs) than American respondents do.²⁵

²⁵ Differences are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Results remain essentially the same if the EU recognition question is excluded (see the appendix part 2, section 2.3). Some countries in these high knowledge regions nevertheless exhibited levels of Foreign Affairs knowledge as low as, or even lower than, the U.S. (49% identified). In Western Europe, for example, Austria had slightly lower levels of FA knowledge than the U.S. (47%), and Spain's level of knowledge was only slightly higher (57%), on par with Asia's. Likewise in Africa, South African respondents exhibited levels of FA knowledge (44%) lower than those in the U.S..

Figure 3.2: Foreign Affairs Knowledge Scale-
percent of IGO's identified



Note: Differences between the U.S. and other regions are significant at the $p < 0.001$ level for all regions except South Asia, which has identical foreign affairs knowledge to the U.S.

Thus, the common generalization about political knowledge of foreign affairs from the American case is not applicable to many countries and world regions.²⁶ Scholars in the signaling literature may be ignoring other potentially important ways in which leaders can publicly convey credible messages. For example, in countries where a large share of their public is relatively well informed about foreign affairs and has firm preferences in regards to some of the main foreign policy issues of the day, leaders can generate significant political costs to themselves by publicly stating policy positions, or taking a variety of public non-military or monetarily costless actions, which contrast with the preferences of many voters or with those of their domestic political bases.²⁷ These political costs are often well-understood abroad and therefore can serve as an informative signal about the intentions of the leader.

²⁶ For some of the factors that may determine the level of foreign affairs knowledge in democracies, such as the number of political parties and the public's access to the media, see Baum and Potter (2015:chp.2).

²⁷ In other words this is equivalent to how, in domestic politics, leaders can suffer a major hit to their popularity (and to their eventual reelection chances) if they publicly stated a domestic policy position strongly disliked by many voters and/or their political base or did purely symbolic acts that expressed such attitudes. For example, in the

An example of this variety of signaling likely occurred during the funeral of former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres in September 2016. Despite Peres's intensive peacemaking efforts over many years, much of the Palestinian public expressed no sorrow when he died. The decision of the leader of the Palestinian Authority Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) to attend Peres's funeral was accordingly greeted with anger among a large share of the Palestinian public, harming his popularity at home (Haaretz 2016; Baker & Nazal 2016; Yishashcharof 2016). Because of their knowledge of these costs, this act seems to have renewed the trust among some Israeli political elites and opinion-makers in Abbas's interest in eventually reaching a peace agreement with Israel (Berger 2016; Hertzog 2016; Yishashcharof 2016). Studying such signaling pathways that are available among better informed publics will likely enrich the literature on how states come to trust each other and develop their beliefs about other states' intentions.²⁸

Conclusions

This article has examined the accuracy of three major assumptions shared by many American IR and security studies scholars regarding the relationship between domestic and international politics. We have subjected these assumptions about popular preferences and knowledge that underlie prominent IR theories to basic tests in non-U.S. contexts. In each case, we found wide variation across countries demonstrating that generalizing from the U.S. case would lead to inaccurate understandings of international dynamics. Each of these assumptions was either incorrect or had a far more limited purview than IR scholars often assume. Many domestic publics care little about decisions made by the UN or other IGOs when those decisions do not impose costs or provide benefits. Some democracies have publics that are less skeptical of using force in order to resolve interstate disputes. The publics of the two democratic Middle Eastern countries that we surveyed showed a significantly greater willingness to use force in a wider set of circumstances than the American public. Finally, while the publics of some countries and

contemporary American case, any American politician expressing say the view that income tax rates on the middle class should be raised, or any Republican politician who decided to attend the opening ceremony for a new abortion clinic would suffer a major hit to their popularity among the general public and/or within their party.

²⁸ Taking into account such variability may also enrich research on signaling methods such as the one described in Potter and Baum (2015:chp.4) and those that operate through the effect of foreign leaders through local populations (Gottfried and Trager 2016).

regions (principally in Asia) do exhibit low levels of foreign affairs knowledge similar to those of the American public, the publics of some countries and regions (such as in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and North America) show a far higher level of knowledge of foreign affairs.

These findings about critical assumptions behind some IR literatures indicate, in turn, certain limitations or ignored research opportunities for American IR scholarship. Some research on the ways that IGOs, such as the UN Security Council, influence state behavior through ‘costless’ decisions and messages to the target countries’ publics, seems to be studying casual pathways that are only applicable to a restricted set of countries, including the U.S. UN sanction does not have the same influence around the world. Two prominent explanations for the democratic peace, the normative and the institutional, are significantly weakened. Finally, the possibilities for public signaling are greatly expanded in better-informed domestic publics.²⁹

To improve the accuracy of theories of international politics, political scientists must take steps to improve the empirical and theoretical treatment of the relationship between popular preferences and international affairs in non-U.S. and non-OECD contexts. Currently, regional specialists are often thought of as atheoretical, or as a class of scholars who do not much interact with the producers of international relations theory. We suspect that is in part because prominent IR theories cannot be applied to the regions they study. Theorists and regional specialists should initiate dialogues that investigate the geographic and cultural scope conditions of theories. The subfield of comparative politics serves as a model.³⁰

A growing number of experimental studies conducted by IR scholars investigate differences in popular preferences and political cultures (e.g. Weiss and Dafoe 2018; Giddings and Trager 2018; Cohen and Jung 2018). The field has barely begun to integrate theories that attempt to understand the bases of these differences with these empirical tests, however. Do differences derive from particular sorts of histories, cultural constructs, levels of development or other factors? Here, political scientists should place themselves in dialog with other fields, such as anthropology, history, and sociology, in developing answers. Scholars need to be sensitive to avoiding cultural essentialism. Mapping and theorizing differences in political preferences will

²⁹ For other such missed research opportunities due to American biases see [Special Issue Paper #1] in this issue.

³⁰ On the limitations of graduate syllabi in IR, see [Special Issue Paper #3].

aid in the development and testing of new theories because scholars will have more developed priors about which important political culture assumptions hold where.³¹

IR scholarship will benefit from being more open to empirical research on the cultural or behavioral attributes of countries whose political norms differ greatly from those common in the contemporary United States. Such openness will help to improve and enrich IR literature and increase its ability to reflect the true complexities of international affairs.

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³¹ Another potentially fruitful direction for future research would be on the exact causes for the adoption of these mistaken U.S.-centric assumptions by American political scientists— a separate question which requires an in-depth treatment far beyond what could be provided in an article of this type (beyond some suggestive notes). For one such attempt see [Special Issue Paper #6] in this issue.

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