

# **Effects of Party Cues on the Perceived Legitimacy of International Organizations: Pre-Analysis Plan**

Lisa M. Dellmuth, Associate Professor, Department of Economic History and International Relations, Stockholm University. Email: [lisa.dellmuth@ekohist.su.se](mailto:lisa.dellmuth@ekohist.su.se)

Jonas Tallberg, Professor, Department of Political Science, Stockholm University. Email: [jonas.tallberg@statsvet.su.se](mailto:jonas.tallberg@statsvet.su.se)

## **Rationale for the study**

This study explores when and to what extent party cues impact the perceived legitimacy of international organizations (IOs). It builds on and extends a stream of research interested in effects of elite communication on public opinion toward international issues and organizations (Maier et al. 2012; Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Torcal et al. 2018; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2019). This stream in turn relates to a broader literature on the effects of elite cueing and framing on public opinion (for overviews, see Druckman and Lupia 2000; Chong and Druckman 2007; Busby et al. 2018).

In our earlier research, we have assessed the effects of communication by three types of elites on the popular legitimacy of IOs: national governments, civil society organizations, and IOs themselves (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2019). We found that both national governments and civil society organizations are capable of swaying people's opinions of IOs, particularly through negative messages, while communication by IOs themselves tends to be less effective. In this study, we take our research one step further by focusing specifically on the effects of party cues on the perceived legitimacy of IOs. This is based on the intuition that party cues may function as a heuristic for citizens, not only in domestic politics (Levendusky 2010; Druckman et al. 2013; Leeper and Slothuus 2010; Brookman and Butler 2017), but also in opinion formation regarding IOs. For this purpose, we have designed two vignette experiments that tests the effects of party cues, party polarization, and partisan identity on citizen perceptions of IO legitimacy.

## **Survey implementation**

The vignette experiments are embedded in an online survey with nationally representative samples of German and American respondents (N = 2000 per country), to be implemented by YouGov during the month of May 2019.

YouGov uses an opt-in panel together with matched sampling to approximate a random sample of the adult population. Matched sampling involves taking a stratified random sample of the target population and then matching available internet respondents to the target sample. As a result, the samples of German and American respondents are nationally representative with regard to age (18+), gender, and region.

## **Outcome of interest**

We operationalize legitimacy beliefs using the measure of confidence in IOs. Contemporary survey research in comparative politics and international relations commonly uses “confidence” (along with “trust”) as a measurement for the perceived legitimacy of political institutions (e.g., Caldeira and Gibson 1995; Inglehart 1997; Norris, 2009; Bühlmann and Kunz 2011; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015). Both respondents in the control group and in the treatment groups received the question “How much confidence do you have in [IO] on a scale from 0 (no confidence) to 10 (complete confidence)?”

## **Hypotheses and operationalization**

The experiments test three hypotheses about effects of party cues, party polarization, and partisan identity on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs vis-à-vis IOs, building on the work of Druckman et al. (2013).

H1 Party cues: When partisans receive a frame sponsored by their party and a conflicting frame sponsored by another party, they will be more likely to move in the direction of their party’s frame than in the direction of the other party’s frame.

H2 Party polarization: In a polarized environment, when partisans receive a frame sponsored by their own party and a conflicting frame sponsored by another party, they will be more likely to move in the direction of their party’s frame than in the direction of the other party’s frame to a greater extent than they do in a non-polarized environment.

H3 Partisan identity: The strength of the effect of party cues (H1) and party polarization (H2) will be stronger among citizens with a stronger partisan identity.

## **Experimental design**

We devised two identically designed vignette experiments, which appear in the same survey. The order of the experiments is block randomized for each respondent to reduce the likelihood of spillover effects from one experiment to another.

One experiment focuses on party cues regarding military spending on NATO, and the other experiment on party cues regarding reductions in the number of refugees accepted under the UN’s refugee convention. These two issues share several features that make them well suited to test our hypotheses (Druckman et al. 2013). First, both issues received attention in public debates in Germany and the US prior to our study. Second, while both issues are topically relevant, we can suspect that the public’s attention on them is not crystallized and instead somewhat conflicted, due to multiple considerations on each issue. Third, both issues are such that the main parties in Germany and the US tended to hold different positions, but not persistently dramatically opposed positions, which allowed our treatments to vary the level of party polarization.

In each experiment, 2000 respondents are randomized into four treatment groups of 400 respondents each and a control group of 400 respondents. Respondents are assigned the same condition in both experiments, since we worry that the degree of party polarization will

otherwise be confusing and since this design makes it easier to assess any potential spillover effects (Transue et al. 2009; Druckman et al. 2013).

The five groups were assigned the following types of information, followed by the question about confidence in an IO:

- Control group: only factual information on the issue
- Treatment group 1: factual information on the issue + balanced frames about the main arguments on each side
- Treatment group 2: factual information on the issue + balanced frames about the main arguments on each side + party endorsements
- Treatment group 3: factual information on the issue + balanced frames about the main arguments on each side + party endorsements + low polarization environment
- Treatment group 4: factual information on the issue + balanced frames about the main arguments on each side + party endorsements + high polarization environment

It should be observed that treatment group 1 offers an alternative baseline for comparison next to the control group, since it allows us to test how respondents react to frames in the absence of party endorsements.

In the US, we focused on the Democrats and the Republicans as the two main opposing parties. In Germany, we focused on the CDU/CSU and the SPD as the two main opposing parties.

Table 1 offers an example of the experimental conditions, using the NATO experiment in the US as illustration.

*Table 1. Experimental conditions (example: NATO experiment in the US)*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Vignettes</b>
Control group (400): - only factual information on the issue	“There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2% of its GDP.”
Treatment group 1 (400): - factual information on the issue - balanced frames about the main arguments on each side	“There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2% of its GDP.  The main argument of those in favor of continuing current funding arrangements is that NATO is too important for peace to be weakened by financial disputes between the US and European states. The main argument of those opposed to continuing current funding arrangements is the lack of fairness in financial contributions to NATO by the US compared to European states.”
Treatment group 2 (400): - factual information on the issue	“There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- balanced frames about the main arguments on each side</li> <li>- party endorsements</li> </ul>	<p>Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2% of its GDP.</p> <p>The main argument of those in favor of continuing current funding arrangements is that NATO is too important for peace to be weakened by financial disputes between the US and European states. The main argument of those opposed to continuing current funding arrangements is the lack of fairness in financial contributions to NATO by the US compared to European states.</p> <p>Republicans in Congress tend to oppose continuing current funding arrangements in NATO, while Democrats tend to favor continuing current funding arrangements in NATO.”</p>
<p>Treatment group 3 (400):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- factual information on the issue</li> <li>- balanced frames about the main arguments on each side</li> <li>- party endorsements</li> <li>- lowly polarization environment</li> </ul>	<p>“There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2% of its GDP.</p> <p>The main argument of those in favor of continuing current funding arrangements is that NATO is too important for peace to be weakened by financial disputes between the US and European states. The main argument of those opposed to continuing current funding arrangements is the lack of fairness in financial contributions to NATO by the US compared to European states.</p> <p>Republicans in Congress tend to oppose continuing current funding arrangements in NATO, while Democrats tend to favor continuing current funding arrangements in NATO.</p> <p>However, the partisan divide is not stark, as the parties are not far apart. Also, while Republicans tend to be opposed to a continuation and Democrats in favor, members of each party can be found on both sides of the issue.”</p>
<p>Treatment group 4 (400):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- factual information on the issue</li> <li>- balanced frames about the main arguments on each side</li> <li>- party endorsements</li> <li>- high polarization environment</li> </ul>	<p>“There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2% of its GDP.</p> <p>The main argument of those in favor of continuing current funding arrangements is that NATO is too important for peace to be weakened by financial disputes between the US and European states. The main argument of those opposed to continuing current funding arrangements is the lack of fairness in financial contributions to NATO by the US compared to European states.</p> <p>Republicans in Congress tend to oppose continuing current funding arrangements in NATO, while Democrats tend to favor continuing current funding arrangements in NATO.</p>

	Moreover, the partisan divide is stark, as the parties are far apart. Also, not only do Republicans tend to be opposed to a continuation and Democrats in favor, but most members of each party are on the same side as the rest of their party.”
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In the survey, the two experiments are preceded by a measurement of the respondent’s pre-treatment opinions regarding the two IOs. In both cases, the respondent is asked to rate the extent to which he/she believes the IO works effectively and democratically.

In addition, each experiment is followed by manipulation or comprehension checks. Respondents in treatment groups 2-4 are asked to identify the main argument of the two parties on the issue in question. In addition, respondents in treatment groups 3-4 are asked to identify the degree of party polarization on the issue in question.

### **Other survey items**

Next to the experimental part of the survey and related questions measuring pre-treatment opinion and post-treatment comprehension, the survey includes indicators to measure the following co-variates:

- Intentional media consumption
- Cognitive mobilization
- Generalized trust
- Knowledge about global governance (three items)
- Confidence in domestic government
- Left-right ideology
- Party identification

In addition, YouGov provides demographic and political data on the respondents as background information:

- Region
- Gender
- Age
- Education
- Income
- Voting in the last election
- Voting intention in the next election (only the US)
- Ideological self-description (only the US)

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