

A Seat at the Table: How Serving on the Security Council shapes public opinion about the United Nations

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Abstract

As a consequence of its ever-changing membership composition, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) serves as a focal point for nations seeking enhanced global influence. This paper investigates the transformative impact of UNSC non-permanent membership on public attitudes and perceptions of the United Nations (UN). We argue that when countries accede to the UNSC, their citizens are more likely to develop favorable views of the UN. Three mechanisms may drive such attitude changes. First, citizens may prefer organizations where their country has more influence. Second, they may become more familiar with the organization. Third, elite discourse and media coverage may shift in tone to highlight more positive aspects of the IO. We test the link between membership and attitude changes through DID analyses of repeated cross-sectional Gallup and Pew survey data, which enable us to compare changes in UN attitudes over the course of 15 countries' UNSC terms to simultaneous changes in over 100 other countries that did not join the Council. Our results are consistent with our central proposition: on average, countries experience a 4 percent increase in UN approval when they serve as non-permanent members. We disentangle causal mechanisms through a case study of India, running a content analysis of news coverage before, during, and after India's 2011-2012 term on the UNSC. The results provide tentative support for the first and third causal mechanisms, as media coverage is more positive and less critical of India's lack of influence during India's term on the Council. Our findings shed light on the UNSC's role as a catalyst for reshaping public opinion of the UN.

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Introduction

Many contemporary international organizations (IOs) draw on the support of member state publics to accomplish their goals. Public confidence in such organizations bolsters their legitimacy, which helps keep member states engaged in active participation and encourages compliance with the IO's rules and norms (Hurd, 1999; Buchanan & Keohane, 2006; Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2015; Tallberg *et al.*, 2018). When IOs lack buy-in from mass audiences, countries may retrench from them, create alternative venues, or exit from them altogether (Gray, 2018; von Borzyskowski & Vabulas, 2019; Pratt, 2021). Displeased publics can also act subversively in many issue domains, threatening the success of multilateral development aid and peacekeeping missions (Woods, 2007; Gutner & Thompson, 2010; Autesserre, 2014; Tallberg *et al.*, 2016). It is no surprise, then, that IOs proactively work to improve their images amongst public audiences, such as by adopting policies that are in line with public preferences (Hagemann & Wratil, 2017; Schneider, 2019) and employing messaging espousing democratic narratives (Dingwerth *et al.*, 2020).¹

Elites, however, can turn the public against international institutions. Cues from political elites are often critical in shaping how publics view IOs (Brutger & Clark, 2022).² The contemporary backlash to globalization has featured politicians scapegoating IOs for domestic troubles, whether economic in nature (Vreeland, 1999, 2003; Brutger & Strezhnev, 2022; Kaya *et al.*, 2023), or related to the military and courts (Voeten, 2020, 2021).³ IOs are convenient targets for politicians with populist inclinations since these organizations are staffed by elites and constrain the sovereignty of member state governments (Copelovitch &

¹Such narratives seek to dispel claims that IOs suffer from democratic deficits (Dahl, 1999; Gartzke & Naoi, 2011).

²This is largely because most citizens assign relatively low weight to foreign policy issues, and so they are inclined to align themselves with trusted politicians on these issues (Guisinger & Saunders, 2017). Though see Dellmuth *et al.* (2022a,b) on elite-publics gaps in legitimacy perceptions of IOs.

³Political elites often also try to walk back or explain away violations of international law (Morse & Pratt, 2022).

Pevehouse, 2019; Carnegie *et al.*, 2023). Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán's disputes with the EU, Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta's criticism of the International Criminal Court, and U.S. president Donald Trump's attacks on the World Trade Organization and World Health Organization are high-profile examples of this pattern.

Critics of international organizations not only depict them as detached from the concerns of ordinary citizens and impinging on national sovereignty, but they also frequently allege that these institutions promote the interests of other, more powerful states. For instance, Uhuru Kenyatta portrayed the International Criminal Court as a toy of imperial powers in a widely publicized speech (Winsor, 2013), and Donald Trump invoked Germany's alleged dominance of the EU as the reason for his support of Brexit (Mance & Shotter, 2017). Such attacks, which focus on disparities in influence within IOs, appeal to public concerns about the costs and benefits of their country's participation in global governance (Brutger & Clark, 2022). This paper seeks to investigate whether an increase in a country's influence in an IO affects popular support for the organization.

We spell out three causal mechanisms through which increased IO influence may affect public support for the institution. First, citizens prefer for their country to have an impact on IO policies, and are therefore likely to place greater value on IOs where the government has more control over decision making. Second, as the country increases its involvement with an IO, news outlets may be more likely to cover the institution's work, reducing the number of uninformed or indifferent citizens. Third, news coverage and elite discourse may shift to highlight more positive aspects of the IO and may even highlight the country's important work within the institution. These three complementary causal mechanisms may translate rising influence in IOs into more favorable public attitudes about the organization.

To test our argument, we examine an institution where state influence varies in a system-

atic manner across time: the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).⁴ In the UNSC, all members except for the five permanent members serve non-renewable two-year terms. Even though the Council’s permanent members have disproportionate formal voting power in the Council (Voeten, 2001; Hosli & Little, 2011), these five great powers and other countries go to great lengths to make side payments and other concessions to the Council’s non-permanent members to sway their votes (Kuziemko & Werker, 2006; Vreeland & Dreher, 2014; Mikulaschek, 2018). Informal practices in the UNSC augment non-permanent members’ influence on the Council’s work far above what one would expect based on the bodies’ formal rules or the distribution of material capabilities between members (Mikulaschek, 2023). Thus, having a seat on the Council greatly increases a country’s influence in the UN. We argue that this temporary shift in institutional power increases public approval of the UN in the years after countries join the Council. We test this argument through DID analyses of repeated cross-sectional Gallup and Pew survey data, which enable us to compare changes in UN attitudes over the course of 15 countries’ UNSC terms to simultaneous changes in over 100 other countries that did not join the Council. We implement a DID estimation procedure with multiple time periods and variation in treatment timing (Callaway & Sant’Anna, 2021) to account for the staggered entry into treatment (i.e., UNSC membership).

We further probe our three hypothesized causal mechanisms with case study of Indian news media before, during, and after the country’s 2011-2012 Council term. Focusing on articles from *The Times of India*, we show that the content of news about the United Nations became more positive in sentiment during India’s term on the Council and that concerns about a lack of Indian influence in the UN were attenuated once they acceded to the UNSC. We find less evidence to support the familiarity mechanism. In turn, polling data suggests

⁴Other IOs exhibit similar variation in the distribution of influence between member states. At the IMF, while the most powerful countries appoint their own representatives, or Executive Directors, to the Executive Board (the Fund’s highest decision-making body), developing and middle-income states are arranged into multi-member constituencies, and leadership over constituencies rotates amongst member states. In the EU, the presidency of the Council of the EU rotates among member states.

public attitudes toward the UN shifted in a more positive direction during India’s Council term. We therefore conclude that positive messaging about the UN from the media, including cues of increased influence over the UNSC during a country’s term on the Council, boosted public support for the United Nations.

Our work makes an important contribution to the literature on IOs and public opinion. We find that domestic audiences are more supportive of an IO when their countries participate directly in the institution’s work. Existing scholarship finds mixed results on this dimension, with some individuals wanting to control IOs, and others fearing that control infringes on an IO’s impartiality (Brutger & Clark, 2022). This echoes other scholarship highlighting the tension between an IO’s legitimacy and member states wielding their power excessively (Stone, 2011). Previous studies of public opinion of IOs focus mostly on major developed democracies and especially the U.S. and Europe (Dellmuth, 2018; De Vries *et al.*, 2020; Kiratli, 2021; Mikulaschek, 2022), with the European Union an especially popular institution of inquiry (see, e.g., De Vries, 2018; Schneider, 2019; Mikulaschek, 2023).⁵ We innovate by utilizing survey data from Gallup and Pew covering more than 100 countries, including 15 countries that were surveyed before and during their Council membership. This large sample enables us to estimate the effect of UNSC membership on public opinion of the UN and to do so with confidence about the generalizability and broad applicability of the findings.

Our work also contributes to scholarship examining the domestic sources of support for international cooperation (Moravcsik, 1997; Bechtel & Scheve, 2013; Bearce & Scott, 2019). We outline three mechanisms through which increased clout in an IO may translate into public approval, all of which may work together to support attitude change. While we specify all three mechanisms in the context of the UNSC, our case study suggests that at least in India, the increase in positive sentiment of the news coverage about the UN is most

⁵Also see Heinrich *et al.* (2016); Brutger (2021); Brutger & Li (2022); Schlipphak *et al.* (2022).

likely to explain shifts in public opinion. This finding suggests the importance of elite frames in shaping how individuals view global governance writ large.

UNSC Membership and Individual-Level Attitude Shifts

We highlight three potential mechanisms through which public perceptions of the United Nations might improve after a country joins the UNSC. First, the public is likely to prefer IOs where their government has more influence and control over policy outcomes. Second when a country joins an IO, we expect that political leaders and the news media will be more likely to cover the IO's actions and policies. This boost in familiarity may improve public opinion by reducing the number of indifferent individuals. Third, news coverage may highlight the country's influence in the organization and portray the organization in a more positive light than before the country's accession. This shift in tone can drive a concomitant change in public opinion. We discuss each of these three channels in turn.

Desire for Influence

Domestic audiences are likely to prefer IOs where they perceive their countries as having influence on outcomes. At the most basic level, citizens are likely to assume that their country's influence on multilateral decisions results in policies that are more reflective of their national interests. Citizens, especially those high in dominance values (like Republicans in the U.S. context, see [Rathbun *et al.* 2016](#); [Brutger & Rathbun 2021](#)), often prefer their country win out at the expense of other countries in international negotiations ([Brutger & Clark, 2022](#)). A country may leverage its temporarily elevated influence in an IO to extract financial benefits, such as development assistance or loans; citizens are likely to view such material gains in a positive manner that may spillover into views of the IO. This may also be true for more nationalistic individuals who otherwise do not feel that their country benefits

from IO membership (Mansfield & Pevehouse, 2022).

If this mechanism is correct, the number of respondents who express positive views of the UN should again increase when a country joins the UNSC. Additionally, we might anticipate heterogeneous effects based on individuals' levels of nationalism, isolationism, dominance values, cooperative internationalism, or political ideology, although we do not test this proposition in this paper.

Familiarity

Public familiarity with an IO is likely to increase when a country gains influence in the organization. Increased knowledge could occur through two channels. First, government elites are more likely to talk about an organization where their government plays an important role. Second, national and local news outlets are more likely to cover an IO in which their country's government wields substantial influence, if only because news consumers tend to be interested in the government's work.

Increased elite and media messaging are likely to influence opinions because publics form their opinions about world politics at least partly based on cues from trusted and knowledgeable elites (Zaller, 1992; Berinsky, 2009; Guisinger & Saunders, 2017; Mikulaschek, 2023). This may be especially true for public opinion of international organizations. Polling done in the U.S. by Pew in the mid-2000s showed that less than half of the American public had even heard of several prominent IOs, including the IMF and World Bank.⁶ While awareness of the UN tends to be higher than for these organizations, it is still likely that in many countries, individuals are indifferent to the organization. They may not understand what the UN does, how much money their government contributes to it, or how it affects their daily lives. Increased press coverage of the UN once a country accedes to the UNSC will reduce this ignorance and indifference, thus enabling more citizens to form an opinion

⁶Polling accessed from Roper iPoll, keyword search "World Bank OR IMF."

about the UN. Some of these newly formed opinions will be positive.

Positive Messaging

If elites and media outlets are important sources of information about an IO, then not just quantity but the tone of their messages is also likely to influence domestic support for the organization. When elites' views about an IO become more positive, public opinion about the organization may shift in turn.⁷ We suggest that government elites are more likely to publicly support an IO when their country is a member because they have more influence on the organization's work and policy outcomes. Leaders may cue the public on an IO's performance in international affairs, including their country's ability to attract crucial public goods or win negotiations in prominent IOs and with powerful states. Because news media coverage heavily features the perspective of these elites (Baum & Groeling, 2010), news coverage may shift in tone to reflect these more positive views.

In the context of the UNSC, we expect non-permanent membership to generate significant changes in the way that elites talk about the organization. Temporary membership affords elites the ability to influence the UN's substantive work and to extract concessions on unrelated matters as a result of horse-trading and issue linkages (Kuziemko & Werker, 2006; Vreeland & Dreher, 2014; Mikulaschek, 2018). Moreover, in ordinary times (i.e., when a country is not party to the UNSC), the UN tends to appear in the news mostly when negative events occur (e.g., outbreaks of conflict, diplomatic disputes, vetoes of major proposals, or institutional performance failures). News content may become more positive when a country joins the Security Council as a result of discussions of the country's new-found agency as well as the foreign policy successes that may stem from UNSC membership. Or, previously negative stories might now include positive statements about the efforts made by

⁷Even if trends in elite and public opinion covary, members of the public tend to be more skeptical about IOs – including the UN – than elites in the same country (Dellmuth *et al.*, 2022b). Compositional differences can account for such discrepancies between elite and mass attitudes (Kertzer, 2022).

the home country’s diplomats in UN negotiations.⁸

In some cases, elite messaging and media coverage may closely align. During India’s term as a non-permanent Security Council member in 2011-2012, the *Hindustan Times* repeatedly highlighted the country’s growing influence and efforts to shake things up at the Council. In writing about India’s August 2011 presidency, the *Times* noted “A month is too little for history making, but it was long enough for India’s presidency of the UN Security Council to bequeath to the body a new way of doing business, denying the Permanent Five a monopoly over decision making.” This positive, efficacious tone was also reflected in comments from the Indian Permanent Representative, who noted his country’s successful effort to break a months-long stalemate in the Council.⁹ As elites send more positive messages about an IO, media coverage is likely to shift to reflect these views, and this shapes public opinion.

Quantitative Analysis

We probe the plausibility of the link between UNSC membership and public attitudes toward the UN with an analysis of cross-national data on change in public opinion about the UN after a country joined the UN Security Council. This repeated cross-sectional data was gathered by Gallup and Pew in 15 countries in the two years before they started a temporary term on the Council and during their Council membership. Nationally representative surveys were conducted in Argentina, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Denmark, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, Pakistan, Poland, Spain, and Turkey. Table 1 shows that the distribution of these countries by world region is similar to the distribution of UNSC seats between regions, except for Latin America’s and Asia’s overrepresentation and Africa’s absence from the sample.

⁸See Arias (2022).

⁹“India bridges old and new at UN,” 31 August 2011, *Hindustan Times*, retrieved from Nexis-Uni.

UN region	Number and share of seats on UNSC	Number and share of UNSC terms in sample
Western Europe & Others	5 UNSC seats (33%)	5 UNSC terms (31%)
Asia-Pacific	3 UNSC seats (20%)	6 UNSC terms (38%)
Africa	3 UNSC seats (20%)	0 UNSC terms (0%)
Eastern Europe	2 UNSC seats (13%)	2 UNSC terms (13%)
Latin America & Carribean	2 UNSC seats (13%)	3 UNSC terms (19%)

Table 1: **Composition of sample and underlying population of UNSC members.**

We analyze the Gallup and Pew data separately because the two sets of surveys pose different questions on UN support and rely on different scales to measure attitudes. Gallup conducted surveys in six countries in the year before they started a temporary term on the Council and at the end of the following year (Gallup International, 2012). Nationally representative surveys in Argentina, Denmark, Greece, and Japan were conducted in 2004 and 2005 and in Azerbaijan and in Pakistan in 2011 and 2012. Gallup also administered the same surveys in 84 other countries whose membership in the UNSC did not change during these years. Our DID estimation uses change in public attitudes between 2004 and 2005 and between 2011 and 2012 in these other countries as a basis of comparison. Specifically, we estimate the following model:

$$DV_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Post_i + \beta_2 E10_i + \beta_3 Post_i * E10_i + \beta_4 X_i + \beta_5 FE_i + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

The subscript i refers to the respondent. DV_i measures her support of the UN. $Post_i$ takes the value 1 if the respondent was interviewed in 2005 or 2012 and 0 if she took the survey in 2004 or 2011. $E10_i$ indicates whether the respondent was interviewed in a country that joined the UNSC in 2005 or 2012 and 0 otherwise. We interact both variables to estimate how much year-on-year change in public attitudes is due to a country’s accession to the UNSC. The variables contained in X_i describe individual-level socioeconomic characteristics. Country fixed-effects FE_i are included in the models.

Our analysis of Pew survey data also relies on DID estimation. Between 2006 and 2019, Pew fielded nationally representative surveys in ten countries during the two years before they joined the UNSC and again during their Council term (Pew Research Center, 2019). In chronological order of their UNSC terms (in parentheses), these countries are: Indonesia (2007-8), Japan (2009-10), Mexico (2009-10), Turkey (2009-10), Brazil (2010-11), Lebanon (2010-11), Germany (2011-12), India (2011-12), Spain (2015-16), Poland (2018-19). Due to the staggered entry into treatment (i.e., UNSC membership) of the ten Council members, we rely on a DID estimation procedure with multiple time periods and variation in treatment timing (Callaway & Sant’Anna, 2021).

To probe robustness of our results to different sets of assumptions, we estimate the effect of joining the UNSC with two alternative DID models that rely on different counterfactuals:¹⁰ First, we use contemporaneous change in UN attitudes in cross-sectional surveys in 38 other countries without temporary UNSC membership as a basis of comparison; these surveys were also fielded by Pew between 2006 and 2019. Second, we use simultaneous change in UN attitudes in pre-treatment surveys in some of the other nine temporary UNSC members as a basis of comparison. In both DID models, we estimate the effect of joining the UNSC by comparing change in UN attitudes from just before a country joins the Council to the time of its membership (treatment group) to change during the same years in a set of countries that did not join the Council in the same year (control group). We complement this DID

¹⁰The two approaches rest on different parallel trends assumptions conditional on covariates: The first estimate requires the assumption that change in UN attitudes at the time when countries joined the Security Council and simultaneous changes in UN attitudes in countries that did not join the Security Council between 2006 and 2019 would have followed parallel paths in the absence of the former group’s treatment. This assumption would be violated if trends in UN attitudes in countries is systematically different in countries that joined the Council between 2006 and 2019 and those that did not. The second estimate rests on the assumption that change in UN attitudes at the time when countries joined the Security Council and simultaneous change in UN attitudes in countries that joined the Council at a later point in time would have followed parallel paths during the latter group’s pre-accession period in the absence of the former group’s treatment. This assumption would be violated if the timing of states’ accession to the Council was systematically related to unobservables that affected trends in UN attitudes. The next version of the paper will include covariate balance tests and pre-tests of the two alternative parallel trends assumptions.

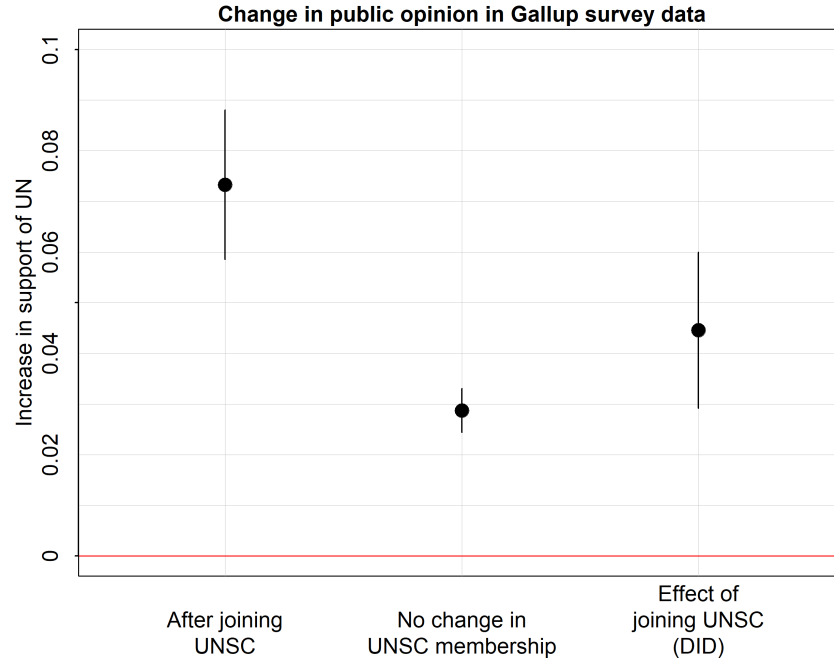


Figure 1: **Coefficient Plot (Effect of Joining UNSC on Public Opinion About UN Based on Gallup Survey Data)**. Estimations are based on Model 7 in Table 2.

analysis with a simple country fixed-effects model of Pew survey data from the ten countries that joined the Council that analyzes how UN attitudes changed after countries joined the UNSC; these models include data from each country’s last survey administered before it joined the Council, which was administered at most two years before accession, and the first survey fielded during their Council term.

After a country joined the UNSC, public opinion about the UN became more positive than it was in the same country a year earlier. Analyses of Gallup and Pew surveys yield remarkably similar results that support this finding. Table 2 and Figure 1 summarize the DID models of Gallup surveys. The coefficients of the interaction term in Models 6-7 in Table 2 show that the start of a term on the Council increased support of the UN by 4 percentage points during the first year on the Council, compared to year-on-year change in countries whose affiliation with the Council did not change during the same period. This effect is statistically significant (see Figure 1). Subsample analyses in models 8-9 in Table 2 show

	Change in public opinion					
	... in full sample	... after joining UNSC	... without change in UNSC affiliation (placebo effect)	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
(Intercept)	0.92*** (0.01)	0.90*** (0.01)	0.48*** (0.01)	0.45*** (0.02)	0.61*** (0.01)	0.59*** (0.01)
2nd year of survey	0.03*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)
Country joins UNSC	-0.44*** (0.02)	-0.46*** (0.02)				
2nd year of survey*Country joins UNSC	0.04*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)				
Age: 30-50 years		-0.02*** (0.00)		-0.02** (0.01)		-0.01*** (0.00)
Age: 51-65 years		-0.02*** (0.00)		-0.04** (0.01)		-0.02*** (0.00)
Age: >65 years		-0.01* (0.00)		0.03 (0.02)		-0.01 (0.01)
Female		0.02*** (0.00)		0.04*** (0.01)		0.02*** (0.00)
Income: medium/medium high		0.02*** (0.00)		0.01 (0.01)		0.02*** (0.00)
Income: high		0.02*** (0.00)		0.02 (0.01)		0.02*** (0.00)
Educ.: Secondary school		0.01*** (0.00)		-0.01 (0.01)		0.02*** (0.00)
Educ.: Tertiary education		0.03*** (0.00)		0.03* (0.01)		0.03*** (0.00)
Unemployed		0.00 (0.00)		0.01 (0.02)		0.00 (0.00)
Not seeking employment		0.01** (0.00)		0.02* (0.01)		0.01 (0.00)
Retired		-0.00 (0.00)		-0.04 (0.02)		-0.00 (0.00)
Country f.e.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R ²	0.08	0.09	0.11	0.12	0.06	0.07
Adj. R ²	0.08	0.09	0.11	0.12	0.06	0.07
Num. obs.	172,940	142,937	9,634	8,438	118,801	100,324

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 2: Change in public opinion about UN after start of UNSC term: OLS models with country fixed effects

that the share of respondents with an positive overall opinion about the UN increased by 6-7 percentage points during the first year on the Security Council. This increase is statistically significant. It is twice as large as the change in public attitudes about the UN in the 84 countries that Gallup also surveyed in 2004 and in 2005 or in 2011 and 2012 and whose membership in the UN Security Council did not change between these years (see Models 10-11 in Table 2). The increase in public support of the UN in the wake of their country’s accession to the UN Security Council is consistent with our argument on the effect of IO membership on individual attitudes.

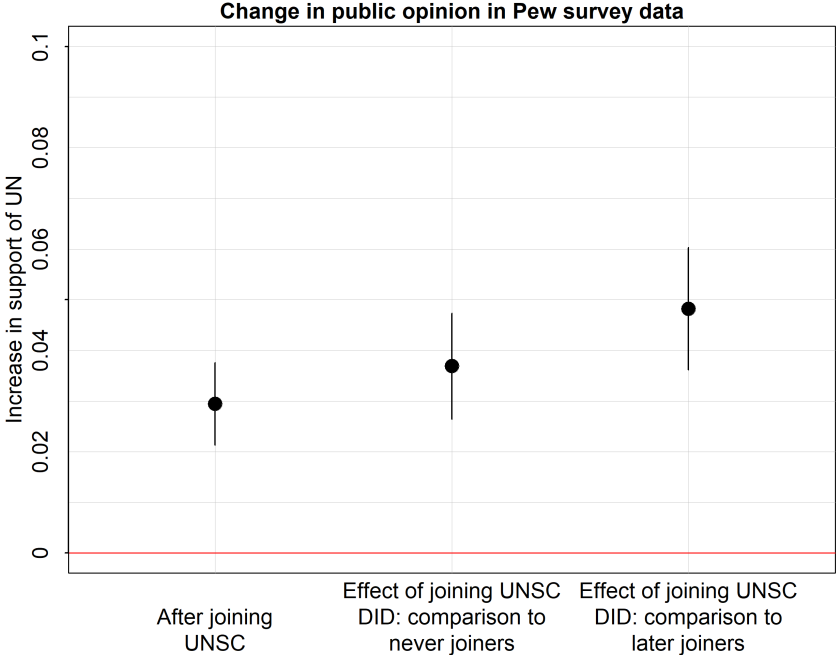


Figure 2: **Coefficient Plot (Effect of Joining UNSC on Public Opinion About UN Based On Pew Survey Data)**. Country fixed effects model of change in UN attitudes from before to during UNSC term and two DID models with staggered treatment adoption with alternative sets of simultaneous surveys as counterfactuals: ‘never joiners’ did not join UNSC between 2006 and 2019; ‘later joiners’ joined UNSC during that period but after the UNSC member for which their pre-accession survey data serves as counterfactual.

Analyses of Pew surveys corroborate these results. A simple comparison of within-country change in UN attitudes from the two-year period before joining the Security Council to the

following two-year period indicates that public support of the UN increased by 3 percentage points, on average, in the ten temporary Council members in the sample (see [2](#)). Two DID models with staggered treatment adoption estimate the effect of joining the Security Council. The first model indicates that joining the Council was associated with a four percentage point increase in favor of the UN, compared to simultaneous shifts in public attitudes in countries that did not join the Council between 2006 and 2019. According to the second model, the start of Security Council membership was associated with a five percentage-point increase in support of the UN relative to simultaneous changes in public opinion in countries that joined the Council at a later point in time before 2020. In conclusion, analyses of Gallup and Pew surveys fielded in 15 temporary Security Council member states and more than 100 other countries yield remarkably similar results, which are consistent with our argument about the individual-level attitudinal effects of UNSC membership.

Testing Causal Mechanisms

To help delineate between our three posited mechanisms — desire for influence, familiarity, and positive messaging — we conduct a case study of Indian news media in the years before, during, and after the country’s 2011-2012 Council term. India is a hard case for all three causal mechanisms. While India undoubtedly wants more influence on the Security Council, it has been vying for a permanent Council seat for several decades, and therefore the public and news media should be less responsive to an increase in influence that comes from temporary membership. Moreover, Indian familiarity with the UN is likely to be relatively high, as UN military observers have been deployed to observe the ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir since 1949. Finally, because India’s involvement with the UN is multi-faceted, the content of news coverage related to the UN varies widely, with topics ranging from UNSC sanctions, Indian blue helmets, UN agency programs in India, to UN reports on develop-

ment. This range of content makes it less likely we would observe a sentiment shift during UNSC membership.

To assemble our data, we use NexisUni to download the contents of articles from *The Times of India*, which is a daily English-language paper. It is the fourth most popular newspaper in India by circulation and the world’s largest English-language newspaper. *The Times of India* was also recently ranked as “the most trusted media news brand among English-speaking, online news users in India” by the Reuters Institute.¹¹ We therefore believe it to be a valid newspaper to test for changes in how the UNSC is discussed in popular media in India.

We specifically examine the contents of articles from *The Times of India* during the years 2010–2013 that mention discuss the United Nations.¹² India serves on the UNSC from 2011–2012. This sample thus enables us to examine news coverage of the UN before, during, and after India’s term on the Council.

Number of Articles

To start, we examine whether the number of articles written about the UN increases during the years that India serves on the Security Council. If so, this might drive improved familiarity with the United Nations and its operations which could, in turn, increase the number of individuals that view the Council favorably. We find limited evidence for this mechanism, as Figure 3 shows. While the number of articles discussing the UNSC increases in the first year of India’s Security Council membership from 283 to 465 articles, we do not observe a commensurate decrease in coverage after the UNSC leaves the Council.

¹¹ Reuters, 2021, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>.

¹²We search for mentions of “UNSC”, “United Nations”, and/or “Security Council.” While this yields articles that are not exclusively about the Security Council and may pertain to the UN more generally, we examine the UN for symmetry with our analysis of public opinion about the UN above.

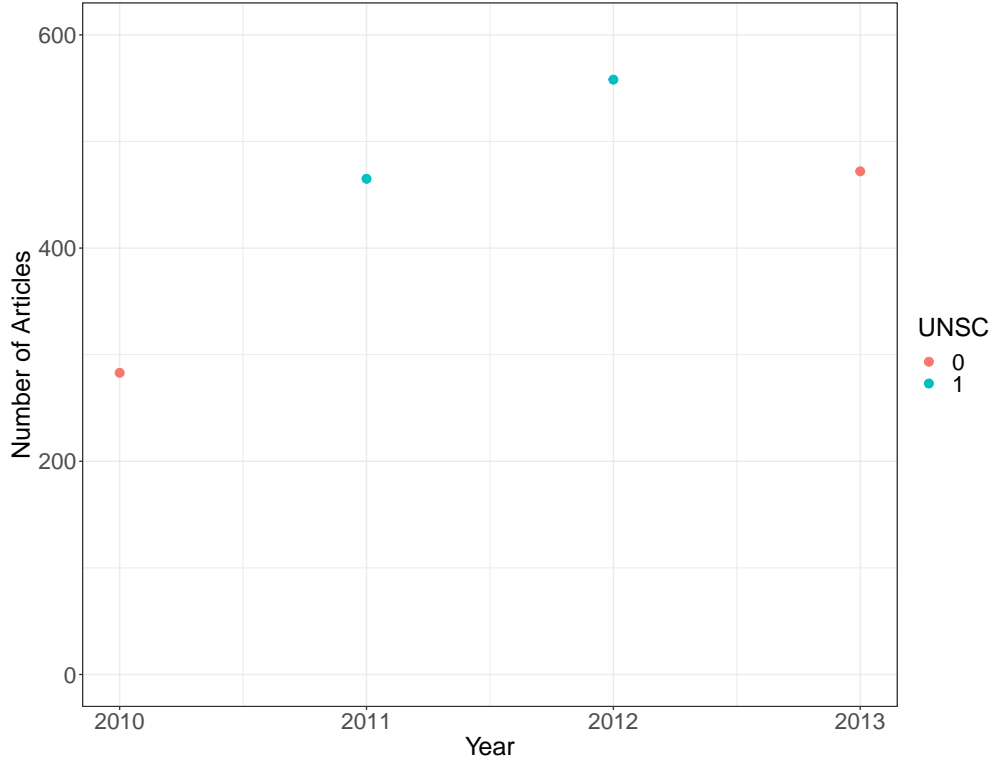


Figure 3: **Number of Articles on the United Nations Security Council in *The Times of India* 2010–2013.** The plot shows a modest increase in the number of articles discussing the UNSC between 2010 and 2011, but the number of articles remains steady from 2011 through 2013. India serves on the UNSC from 2011–2012.

Sentiment Analysis

Second, we examine changes in the sentiment of coverage about the UNSC. If positive messaging drives improved public opinion of the United Nations during a country’s Security Council term, we would expect to observe more positive sentiment in the media’s discussions of the Council during said term. To test this in the Indian case, we leverage the body of news articles from *The Times of India* between 2010–2013.¹³ To assess sentiment, we use

¹³We pre-process the text data in R with the `tm_map` function in order to remove white space, remove punctuation, convert all letters to lowercase, remove numbers, and remove English stopwords. We also manually remove words common to *TOI* that have to do with authors, copyright information, NexisUni material, and mentions of the name of the paper itself. These are as follows: "toi", "loaddate", "ltd", "copyright", "reserved", "rights reserved", "section", "length", "timescontentcom", "body", "coleman", "bennett", "times", "reprint", "page", "document." Each of these arose in examining the most common words across all articles.

the Bing sentiment dictionary, which simply codes words as positive, negative, or neither (Hu & Liu, 2004).¹⁴ Our primary dependent variable compares the prevalence of positive and negative terms and is coded as follows: $(\frac{Positive-Negative}{Positive+Negative})$.¹⁵ Higher values thus represent more positive sentiment in news media. Our independent variable is a binary equal to one if India belongs to the UNSC. Our dataset includes 1,771 articles from *The Times of India* overall, and the unit of analysis is the article.

	Sentiment score
(Intercept)	0.057** (0.019)
UNSC membership	0.050* (0.024)
N	1771
R ²	0.002
Adj. R ²	0.002

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Table 3: **Regression Results (Effect of UNSC on Sentiment in *The Times of India*)**. UNSC membership is associated with a positive and statistically significant increase in sentiment in news media compared to years in which India is not on the Council.

The sentiment results, presented in Table 3, offer support for the positive messaging mechanism. UNSC membership is associated with a positive and statistically significant increase in sentiment. Substantively, membership on the UNSC is associated with sentiment that is around ten percent of a standard deviation more positive than when India is not a Council member. Compared to familiarity, positive messaging may play a more important role in driving improved perceptions of the UN during a country’s term on the UNSC.

¹⁴The Bing dictionary is drawn from product reviews. It is one of the most widely-used sentiment dictionaries and includes over 5,000 words.

¹⁵See e.g., Carnegie *et al.* (2023) for use of this method.

Topic Modeling

Third, we leverage structural topic modeling (STM) to examine whether the topics discussed in media coverage about the United Nations shift when a country joins the UNSC. We again focus on India and make use of text data from articles in *The Times of India* during 2010–2013. We are especially interested in whether there is a change in how Indian influence in the United Nations, or a lack thereof, is discussed in these articles.

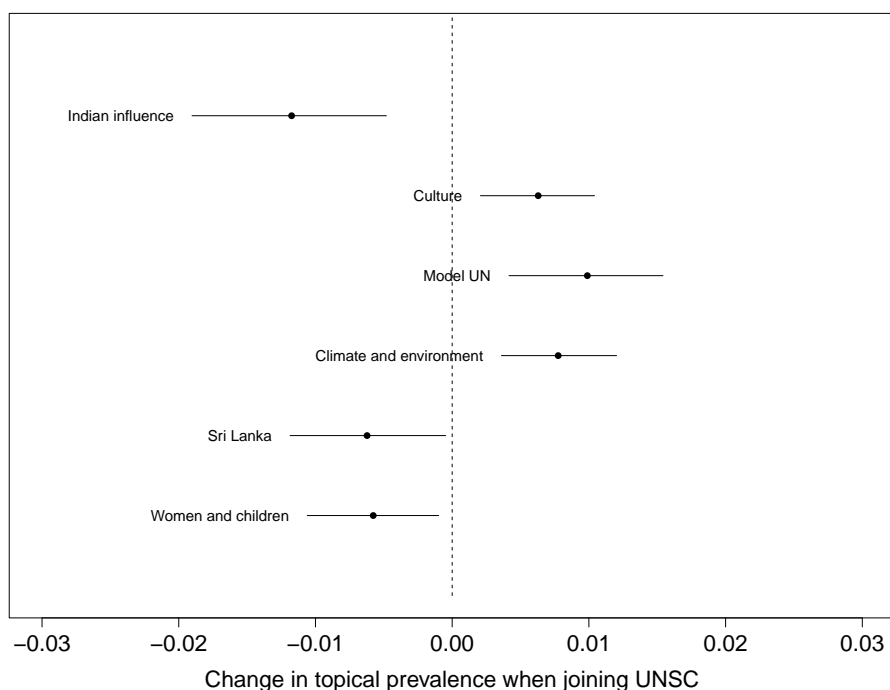


Figure 4: **STM Results (Effect of UNSC on Topical Prevalence in *The Times of India*.)** The plot shows a statistically significant reduction in content related to concerns about Indian influence in the UN during India’s Security Council term. Significance is plotted at the 0.05-level. Model is fit to 15 topics to maximize coherence and exclusivity.

The results from this analysis appear in Figure 4.¹⁶ For legibility, we only plot the topics for which there is a statistically significant shift in topical prevalence after India joins the

¹⁶We use the `stm` package in R. We tune the model to 15 topics and pre-process the text as described above. STM is an unsupervised method, meaning that it looks for words that tend to co-occur in the sample of articles without the guidance of any training data or human intervention.

UNSC.

First, we identify a reduced emphasis on Indian influence after India joins the Security Council. This provides evidence for the influence mechanism discussed previously — concerns about a lack of Indian influence in the UN – are attenuated once India holds a temporary position of power on the UNSC. In several of the articles identified as pertaining to this topic, Indian officials demand permanent membership on the UNSC and stress the Obama administration’s support for broader reforms to the Council. In others, Indian government actors discredit other countries, like Pakistan, that simultaneously vied for membership.

We detect other changes in how the Indian media covers the UN when India joins the UNSC. There is more discussion of cultural events involving actors like UNESCO, including the “Silent River Film Festival” and “Amritsar heritage walk.” Model UN competitions within India also receive greater attention, perhaps because of increased pride stemming from India’s involvement in the Security Council. Similarly, climate and environmental issues receive increased attention from the media; this may be the result of the Council’s increased attention to these issues during India’s term. We identify concomitant reductions in media devoted to Sri Lanka, especially Indian protests over the Sri Lankan civil war that ended in 2009. We also observe a reduction in media interest in issues affecting women and children, including vaccinations and domestic violence, many of which involve the UNDP.

On the whole, our media analysis offers support for influence frames and positive sentiment over familiarity. It is important to note that influence and positivity are not mutually exclusive and may reinforce one another in this observational analysis — a reduction in negative language about a lack of Indian influence in the UN feeds into increased positivity about the UN in media during India’s Security Council term.

Conclusion

This paper identifies a positive effect of UNSC membership on public attitudes towards the UN across a diverse set of countries. We theorize three potential mechanisms that may explain such results: increased familiarity with the UN, warmer statements from elites and in media about the organization, and citizens' desire to possess influence in international politics. DID analyses of repeated cross-sectional Gallup and Pew survey data from 15 countries with temporary seats on the UNSC and more than 100 other countries indicate that having a seat on the UNSC significantly improved attitudes toward the UN. A case study of Indian news media systematically examines the three causal mechanisms that link countries' influence in IOs to public attitudes about these IOs. We find evidence supporting the positive frames and influence mechanisms. We plan to supplement this analysis with an examination of news media in Pakistan and an original survey experiment in India to further disentangle which mechanisms are driving our main results.

Our findings carry important policy implications for global governance. They show that mass audiences are more likely to endorse cooperation through international organizations when they feel their country's voice has an impact. Publics may appreciate tangible results, including the extraction of material benefits from international negotiations. They may also respond to positive elite and media discourse about IOs and their state's place in the international hierarchy. These results support existing findings that IOs that award equal voice to countries of various economic and geopolitical clout may be more popular (Bechtel & Scheve, 2013), even if they are also more prone to stagnation (Koremenos *et al.*, 2001).

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