When International Organizations Help Domestic Leaders Avoid Blame for Unpopular Policies[*]

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Abstract

Recent studies on the influence of international organizations (IOs) on state behavior have explored their ability to shape public opinion, a key mechanism for policy change. This paper explores an important extension of this mechanism: whether domestic leaders can proactively leverage IO endorsements to bolster support for controversial policies and deflect political blame. Using a survey experiment in Japan, we explore how this strategy's effectiveness depends on the perceived traits of IOs, measured on multiple dimensions including favorability, neutrality, and expertise. Our findings demonstrate that citing IO endorsements reduces public opposition to a tax increase—a contentious, high-salience policy that many experts nevertheless deem critical for sustaining social insurance programs. Notably, the influence of IO endorsements is strongest when the IO is perceived as aligned with national interests, while perceptions of impartiality and expertise, emphasized in prior research, play a lesser role. These results offer new insights into the conditions under which IOs can influence public opinion and call attention to the potential advantages of perceived IO biases for domestic elites.

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1 Introduction

A central theme in the international organizations (IOs) literature is whether IOs can influence state behavior despite their lack of enforcement mechanisms. One active research agenda is whether IOs can shape public opinion and intervene in domestic political processes by criticizing or endorsing state policies. Recent studies have shown that informing citizens of international law violations can decrease their support for various controversial practices, including import restrictions (Chaudoin, 2014), torture (Wallace, 2013), the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers (Strezhnev, Simmons and Kim, 2019), border closures during pandemics (Kobayashi et al., 2023), and commercial whaling (Kuzushima, McElwain and Shiraito, 2023). IOs seem to be particularly influential on multinational security initiatives. For example, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorizations can mobilize public opinion for the use of force (Chapman, 2009, 2012; Grieco et al., 2011; Tingley and Tomz, 2012; Matsumura and Tago, 2019), counterterrorism activities (Recchia and Chu, 2021), and humanitarian interventions (Wallace, 2019). According to these studies, IOs can nudge the public to support policies that are consistent with international norms and standards but oppose policies that violate them. While domestic elites may prefer to ignore IO pressure that runs counter to their own goals, they may have the incentive to heed criticisms that are echoed by the public.

That said, the generalizability of these findings remains unclear on two dimensions. First, how does the effectiveness of IO messages vary with the *perceived traits of the messenger*? There are some clues from existing research. Fang and Stone (2012) develop a formal model in which IOs need to have moderately different preferences than a domestic government to persuade it to implement policy reforms. Greenhill (2020), who examines the effect of IO endorsements on environmental and refugee issues, shows that message effectiveness depends on the legitimacy of IOs, which is assumed to correlate with features such as inclusive membership and technical expertise. However, Dellmuth et al. (2022) show that elites and the masses do not necessarily evaluate IOs the same way. At the policy level, understanding *why* citizens are persuaded by IOs is particularly relevant to cases where multiple IOs with overlapping mandates send conflicting endorsements and criticisms. Conceptually, the persuasiveness of new information is likely to depend on the perceived traits of the messenger, such as the expertise to produce accurate information, political bias or the lack thereof, and in-group versus out-group status. That said, even if elites and scholars agree on which IOs objectively possess these traits, absent explicit measurement, we do not know if the public perceives and values IOs and their messages similarly.

Second, how strong are nudges by IOs, particularly when they endorse policies that are

against most citizens' particularistic interests? The policy domains that previous studies have examined are ones where the public has weak prior knowledge or opinion, such as human rights protections of non-citizens, wildlife protection, or military actions abroad. For instance, the reason why cues from the UNSC are effective may be because citizens do not pay much attention to security issues except in rare circumstances where relevant policies affect them individually. It is unclear whether similar mechanisms apply to policy areas that have greater domestic visibility and incur direct economic costs.

This paper lays out theoretical answers to these questions and tests them empirically by examining a scenario where IOs are *less* likely to be effective: an endorsement of an unpopular government proposal to increase tax rates. Domestic leaders frequently face countervailing pressure when the provision of public goods with long-term benefits entail immediate economic costs, such as reducing government debt or combating climate changes. Even if citizens agree with such policies in principle, they may not be convinced of their urgency, especially if the payoffs accrue gradually or manifest far off in the future. However, IO endorsements may buttress the initiative's merits and assuage concerns about the competence and motives of their leaders. If IO messages increase public support for the tax increase and reduce electoral backlash against the government, then it adds credence to the general effectiveness of IO interventions across domains. It is also a scenario that we believe is realistic, insofar as governments are more likely to cite IO endorsements when they need third-party justification, making both the message and the messenger more visible to voters.

We hypothesize that two features of IOs influence their effectiveness, reflecting different views of IOs in the international relations literature. Specifically, we expect that an IO should be more persuasive when it is perceived to be capable of providing expert knowledge and to be unbiased towards a particular country or political actor. We term the first feature *capacity* and the second *interests*.

We test these theoretical expectations through a survey experiment conducted in Japan, a case selected for three key reasons. First, Japan is a longstanding member of numerous international organizations (IOs), providing a broad range of realistic IO endorsements for analysis. Second, Japan's status as a net contributor to most IOs, rather than a recipient of development or military aid, minimizes concerns that public opinion might be influenced by fears of economic penalties for disregarding IO endorsements. Instead, responses are more likely to reflect the informational value of these endorsements. Third, as a consolidated democracy, Japan offers a context where public opinion influences governance directly. Politicians are incentivized to align with public preferences to avoid electoral repercussions, while citizens can freely express their opinions without fear of reprisal, reducing the risk of social desirability bias in survey responses. We believe the combination of these traits makes

Japan an ideal setting for testing our hypotheses.

Our research design differs from existing studies in terms of its policy area, treatment configuration, and how IO perceptions are measured. Respondents are shown a vignette wherein the government hypothetically proposes an increase in the consumption tax rate, after which they are asked about their support for both the government and the policy. The consumption tax is an ideal scenario because of its tension between unpopularity and necessity. While tax hikes are generally contentious, consumption taxes, which are analogous to value-added taxes, are particularly disliked by the public because they are more regressive and immediate than other taxes, such as on inheritances or capital gains. However, there is broad agreement among experts that some type of tax increase is unavoidable due to high public debt and the rising costs of pension and healthcare programs. Economists tend to see the consumption tax more positively, because it is difficult to evade and applied universally, ensuring stable tax revenue. In short, despite strong public opposition, experts view it as a necessary evil to maintain the social insurance system without further strain on the national debt.

The randomized treatments are the identity of the IOs. In the vignette, treatment-group respondents are informed that the government is citing support from one of three IOs for the tax hike: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Group of Seven (G7), and the UN. We chose these organizations because their actual degrees of formality and policy relevance vary, which should also influence their perceived capacity and interests. One uniqueness of our experimental design is that the endorsement is not conveyed directly to the public by the IO itself. Rather, the IO's support is explicitly referenced by the government as a justification for the policy proposal. This design allows us to test the effectiveness of the IO's endorsement as a persuasive tool for the government, which may believe in the tax hike's long-term merits but is also wary of the short-term electoral costs. As such, as outcome variables, we test not only whether the IO's seal of approval increases support for the policy, but also whether it reduces blame on the government for proposing it.

To assess *why* some IOs are persuasive and others are not, we explicitly ask respondents for their views on the three IOs and test how they moderate the endorsement effect. We measure how respondents evaluate each IO's policy expertise, independence from member states' interests generally, and independence from the Japanese government's interest specifically. While the importance of these traits has been noted by Fang and Stone (2012) and Greenhill (2020), the perception of IOs are often assumed rather than measured. Our design thus enables more careful empirical tests and provides a novel approach to assessing when IO endorsements are effective and why.

The results of our experiment confirm that IO endorsements can reduce backlash against

unpopular policies, but the conditions under which they are persuasive are more nuanced than what we had hypothesized. First, the endorsement is most effective if from the G7, followed by the IMF. The UN's endorsement does not have a significant effect on public opinion. Second, this variation is primarily a function of respondents' evaluations of the IO's bias. We expected that the message would be most persuasive when people saw the endorser as an expert, politically neutral actor. Instead, endorsements were most influential on those who believed that the pertinent IO reflected the Japanese government's interests. Descriptively, the G7 and IMF did not differ significantly in their perceived expertise, but the former was seen as more biased in favor of Japan. This suggests that IO endorsements are most useful to domestic policymakers when people perceive the IOs to be sympathetic to national interests, rather than detached from it.

Our study contributes to the literature on IOs' influence on public opinion and the functions of IOs more broadly. First, we provide empirical evidence that IOs can influence public opinion even in policy areas where citizens have strong priors. IOs' endorsements can help policymakers alleviate voter backlash against economic policies that are unpopular, complementing earlier studies that examine the mobilizing use of IOs on security matters. Second, and more importantly, our results indicate the need for research on additional dimensions of IOs that may be important for their effectiveness. According to conventional wisdom in international political economy, IOs' credibility as providers of global public goods is damaged if they are manipulated by self-interested member states. Yet, our experimental results suggest that citizens may be more likely to accept IOs' recommendations when they perceive the IOs as reflecting their own state's goals. While one experiment alone cannot give a definitive answer, the political bias of IOs may be a virtue, not a vice, under certain conditions.

2 Theory

2.1 IOs as Endorsers: A Review

Government leaders must occasionally make controversial decisions. For instance, a policy may be unpopular because it imposes steep short-term costs on consumers, even though it promises significant long-term benefits. Typical cases include carbon taxes to reduce greenhouse emissions or toll roads to alleviate traffic congestion. Even when the policy itself is not contentious, mistrust in the leaders' intentions or abilities—whether real or driven by partisan biases—can erode public support. When facing such headwinds, one strategic option is to seek endorsements from external actors whom voters perceive as credible and use their support to marshal support or at least deflect blame.

One notable example of this strategy is the Japanese government's decision to discharge treated radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2023. This policy, necessitated by the damage caused by the 2011 earthquake, was highly controversial both domestically and internationally due to concerns about potential risks to public health and regional aquaculture. To justify its policy, the Japanese government repeatedly cited endorsements from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which affirmed that the treated water was safe for release into the Pacific Ocean (Nikkei Asia, 2023a). International organizations (IOs) like the IAEA provide one source of credibility that governments can leverage to validate contentious decisions.

That said, evidence supporting the general effectiveness of such third-party endorsements in pacifying public opposition remains limited. Related research on blame-shifting suggests that governments can shift citizens' ire onto domestic actors, such as former leaders (Shea and Poast, 2020), subnational governments (Beazer and Reuter, 2019), or courts (Whittington, 2005). Some studies also show that international actors, such as the European Union (Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl, 2020; Heinkelmann-Wild et al., 2023) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Vreeland, 2003; Fujita, 2023), can serve this purpose. However, relatively few studies provide micro-level empirical evidence that IO endorsements can persuade the public or mitigate backlash for the policy itself. One exception is Aytaç (2021), which examines blame-avoidance strategies in Turkey, but such research remains rare, underscoring the need for further exploration of how IO endorsements influence public opinion.

In this section, we elaborate on the conditions under which IO endorsements may be trusted, and thus be used as governments to justify contentious policies. We are not the first to emphasize the importance of domestic leaders' incentives in shaping public responses to IO endorsements. For example, Strezhnev, Simmons and Kim (2019) find that IO criticisms of international law violations can erode public support for domestic leaders, even when those leaders attempt to legitimize their actions. Other studies show that UN endorsements can increase public support for military interventions (Chapman, 2009, 2012; Grieco et al., 2011; Tingley and Tomz, 2012) and military coalitions (Recchia and Chu, 2021).

Yet these findings are not broadly generalizable. First, foreign and security policies are domains where citizens tend to be less informed or hold weaker prior opinions, making them more susceptible to external endorsements. Second, few studies have explicitly measured how the public perceives IOs as information sources or assessed how the effectiveness of IO endorsements varies based on such perceptions. Both points warrant careful consideration, as the effectiveness of leaders proactively and strategically citing IO endorsements may depend on whether citizens perceive such references as self-serving. In the next section, we elaborate on the conditions under which IO endorsements are likely to be trusted and, consequently,

when they can be leveraged to mitigate blowback against contentious policies.

2.2 When IO Endorsements May Work

When examining whether information from IOs help persuade the public, a natural question arises: under what circumstances does the nudge prove effective? One dimension is priors about the policy intervention itself. It may be easier to nudge public opinion on a low-salience issue that many citizens are neutral about than on one that most stringently oppose. A second dimension is attributes of the endorser that lead citizens to believe the information presented. Intuitively, individuals are more inclined to believe information originating from sources they trust. But what determines that trust?

We examine two factors: is the source seen as having the capacity to provide accurate information and the incentive to provide impartial endorsements? The former depends on whether the information source has enough expertise to evaluate the policy effectively, while the latter depends on the degree to which that information is impervious to political interests. We label these two factors as *capacity* and *interests*, and elaborate on them below.

2.2.1 Capacity: Does the Endorser Have Enough Expertise?

First, beliefs about the endorser's expertise is an important factor in successful persuasion. As documented in the political communication literature, whether the endorser is seen as knowing more about the policy than the recipient is a necessary condition for persuasion (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998). If the recipient is skeptical about the ability of endorsers to accurately evaluate the policies, any endorsements or criticisms are unlikely to be convincing.

Do IOs satisfy this requirement? Many constructivists would answer yes, insofar as the authority of IOs lies in their expertise (Haas, 1992). In particular, economic IOs, such as the IMF and the World Bank, are staffed by professional economists who share a set of common frameworks to provide solutions to common problems (Broome and Seabrooke, 2017; Littoz-Monnet, 2017). Even in the absence of enforcement mechanisms, IOs' knowledge and expertise can be important assets in influencing states' behavior.

Nevertheless, the public may not believe in the capacity of IOs. Various empirical studies have demonstrated that the public's perception of expertise does not necessarily mirror that of the experts themselves (Dellmuth et al., 2022). For example, public beliefs about economic policies are not easily changed by professional economists' advice (Sapienza and Zingales, 2013). Likewise, public health professionals' recommendations do not matter to respondents who do not acknowledge their expertise (Heinzel and Liese, 2021). The distinction between subjective and objective degrees of expertise is particularly relevant in our context, because ordinary citizens are unlikely to be familiar with IOs. In short, despite scholarly agreement about the high degree of IOs' expertise, whether the public agree remains an open question.

2.2.2 Interests: Does the Endorser Have an Incentive to Convey Sincere Information?

Even if the endorser is seen as having the expertise to evaluate the policy, the recipient may not be persuaded if they suspect that the information is distorted by political interests. In other words, the recipient may believe that the endorser knows what is best, but not that the endorser is telling the truth. We highlight two possibilities where the public suspects that IOs are not providing the true information: 1) IOs are controlled by the political interests of major powers, and 2) IOs are colluding with the government being endorsed.

First, many IO scholars have noted that IOs are biased in favor of major states. Davis and Wilf (2017) argue that accession to the WTO is determined by diplomatic ties rather than the degree of trade liberalization, suggesting that these IOs are discriminatory clubs. The politicization of IOs is often blamed as a cause of inefficiencies in the decision-making process and resultant policy outcomes. Ample empirical evidence demonstrates that IMF lending tends to be more generous toward countries with strong ties to the United States (Stone, 2002, 2004; Lipscy and Lee, 2019). Moreover, lending driven by the political interests of lenders fails to enhance the credibility of reform commitments in the eyes of capital market actors (Chapman et al., 2017). In short, IOs may be less collections of impartial experts than political organizations whose decisions are biased in favor of major powers. If these views are shared by the public, citizens may be skeptical about any IO endorsements, even if they do not doubt the IOs' capacity to produce accurate information.

The second consideration is the potential for collusion between the IO and the target government. When the political interests of the endorser and the endorsed are deeply entwined, citizens may suspect collusion aimed at manipulating public opinion. Conversely, the endorsement may look more credible when the interests of the endorser and the government are not strongly aligned, as the public can infer that the endorsement is motivated by objective policy advice rather than political gain. This reasoning is in line with previous findings in the IO literature. Chapman (2009) shows that UNSC authorization of the use of force can boost U.S. presidential approval when the UNSC members are ideologically distant from the U.S. government. Relatedly, Fang and Stone (2012) find that the Brazilian and Argentine governments valued IMF policy recommendation only when domestic economists held more extreme policy positions than the IMF. These findings underscore the importance of maintaining a reasonable distance between the international endorser and the domestic endorsee to ensure the endorsement is perceived as truthful. Analogous cases are found in research on bureaucratic delegation in domestic politics. When the government cannot credibly commit to a policy, regulatory agencies whose actions are legally shielded from the government can provide additional credibility (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016). Likewise, the independence of

central banks ensures that monetary policy is not subject to political business cycle manipulation (Alesina and Stella, 2010). In summary, even if the public acknowledges that IOs have the capacity to provide high-quality policy recommendations, concerns about the politicization of IOs and potential collusion between IOs and the government may disqualify them as a trustworthy information source.

3   Research Design

To examine whether—and when—IOs can help leaders persuade domestic publics or avoid political backlash, we conduct a survey experiment to test the conditions under which IOs are seen as credible interlocutors. In practice, it is unlikely that multiple IOs make identical policy recommendations at the same time, making it difficult to estimate endorsement effects using observational data. To overcome this limitation, we design an experiment that randomly assigns policy endorsements from different IOs, and then test whether these improve support for the government's proposal for a highly controversial policy: raising taxes. Our research plan, including the survey instrument and methodology, were pre-registered with Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP, ID: 20230618AA).

3.1   Case Context

Japan, like many advanced-industrialized societies, faces a linked demographic and fiscal crunch. Lengthening life expectancies have steadily increased healthcare and pension costs, even as declining fertility rates have caused the labor force to shrink. In addition, sluggish economic growth since the mid-1990s has caused poverty rates to rise (Shirahase, 2021), generating more stress on automatic fiscal stabilizers such as unemployment insurance and pension costs. The share of social security contributions in GDP has risen from 7.5% in 1990 to 13.3% in 2021, ranking it well above the OECD average of 9.0% (OECD, 2023a). This fiscal expansion has been financed by ever-expanding government debt, which sat at 254% of GDP in 2022, far outstripping the OECD average of 89% (OECD, 2023b).

Given growing budget constraints, the Japanese government has repeatedly floated the need to raise tax rates. Specifically, it has targeted increases to the consumption tax, which is akin to value-added taxes (VAT) in Europe and goods and services taxes (GST) in Canada and Australia. A 3 % consumption tax was first adopted in 1989, but its rate has steadily risen over the course of three decades, reaching 10 % in 2019.[1] Consumption taxes have a number of desirable properties compared to other revenue mechanisms. Because it is assessed on every transaction, whether for final or intermediate products, it is difficult to evade and

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[1] A lower rate of 8 % is set for medical products, as well as food and drink consumed at home. See Tanaka (2022) for a comprehensive discussion of the politics underlying the consumption tax.

does not discriminate across economic activities, thus minimizing market distortions. Revenues also tend to be more stable across the business cycle and applies relatively uniformly across age groups, unlike corporate or personal income taxes. Furthermore, the current consumption tax rate in Japan is still significantly lower than that in European countries, making further increases justifiable. In fact, the consumption tax has become the backbone of the Japanese budget, with its revenue share increasing from 4.6% in 1990 to 23.4% in 2023 (Ministry of Finance, 2023).

The public, however, does not share this ardor. Newspaper opinion polls have consistently shown that a majority disfavors not only a consumption tax increase, but also the consumption tax itself (McElwain and Noble, 2016). For one, consumption tax hikes directly increase the prices paid by consumers, and so have properties similar to inflation. For another, because the poor consume a higher share of their income, the consumption tax is criticized as being more regressive than capital gains or inheritance taxes. At the same time, there are disagreements about *how* added tax revenue should be spent, with more support for expanding social insurance programs than on the redemption of government bonds (Kawata, McElwain and Nakabayashi, 2023).

Despite possible public opinion headwinds, further consumption tax rate increases are very much on the political agenda. They have long been backed by the Ministry of Finance (Kato, 2003), and they enjoy the support of major business federations, who prefer it to increases in corporate or payroll taxes (Tanaka, 2022). The government also may not have the luxury to defer or delay taxes indefinitely. For one, the Bank of Japan began to loosen its cap on yields on Japanese government bonds in August 2023, and as a result, the cost of borrowing has begun to rise (Nikkei Asia, 2023b). For another, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's administration pledged to boost defense expenditure and childcare budgets significantly.

These factors combine to make the consumption tax hike a good case for testing the effect of IO endorsements. First, its issue salience was high in October 2023, when we conducted our experiment. Respondents were thus making evaluations with some awareness of the pros and cons. Second, domestic elites believe the policy is necessary but also know it is unpopular. As such, their reliance on external support to make their case is reasonably realistic.

Concretely, our survey instrument is designed as follows.[2] Respondents are first informed that the Japanese government is considering an increase in the consumption tax rate, through the following prompt:

> "The Japanese government raised the consumption tax from 8% to 10% starting
> from October 1, 2019, with the aim of supporting the existing social security

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[2]Please refer to Appendix Section A for the full survey instrument.

system. Additionally, there are plans to further increase the consumption tax to 12% in the future. The government has explained that the purpose of this tax hike is to decrease the ratio of public debt (government borrowing) in the overall fiscal landscape."

Next, they are asked to evaluate the government as well as the proposed tax raise on a seven-point Likert scale, using the following questions, which serve as the dependent variables:

DV1: "If the government made such an announcement, how would your support for the current administration change?"

DV2: "Do you support this consumption tax increase?"

Baseline support to both questions was low, which is not surprising given general public antipathy to tax increases. Among respondents in the control group, 66.2% opposed and 15.5% favored the tax increase, while 64.7% opposed and 7.4% favored the proposing government (average means of 2.7 and 2.6 on the original 7-point scale, respectively). Please refer to Appendix Section B for the full distributions.

3.2   Treatment

Prior to asking respondents' opinions about the two outcomes, we randomly assign endorsements of the tax increase from various IOs. By comparing the control group with the treatment groups, we test the effect of IO endorsements on support for the policy and the government. Our underlying hypotheses are as follows.

H1.1: People are more likely to *support an increase in the consumption tax rate* when it is endorsed by international organizations than when it is not endorsed.

H1.2: People are more likely to *support the government* when the policy is endorsed by international organizations than when it is not endorsed.

We chose three IOs as endorsers: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Group of Seven (G7), and the United Nations (UN). Differences between these three IOs and the control group allow us to assess whether and why their persuasiveness varies.

First, we believe that the IMF is the most relevant IO in our context. Among all IOs, the IMF is the most realistic endorser of tax policies, having commented on Japan's consumption tax policies in the past. Notably, when Japan raised the consumption tax from 8% to 10%

in 2019, the IMF recommended further increases to 15% by 2030 and 20% by 2050.[3] The IMF's endorsement is likely to be the most effective among the IOs we consider. In terms of capacity, the IMF is widely perceived as most qualified to comment on fiscal policies, given its expertise in fiscal and economic matters. This perception is reinforced by its frequent publication of global economic reports, which are closely monitored by financial markets. In terms of interests, it is reasonable to assume that the Japanese government's interests are reflected in IMF decisions, as Japan is the second-largest financial contributor to the IMF, following the United States, in terms of member quotas as of 2024.[4] However, the extent to which the public is aware of Japan's involvement in the IMF and how they perceive this relationship remains an empirical question.

Second, the G7 was included as another potential endorser of tax increases. Although the G7 is an informal platform rather than a formal organization like the IMF, it wields significant influence in addressing global issues, particularly in fiscal policies. For example, during the Global Financial Crisis, European finance chiefs emphasis of the severity of the Greek debt crisis during G8 and G20 meetings in Canada made a great impression on the Japanese prime minister.[5] However, we believe the G7 endorsement is less likely to be effective compared to the IMF. This is because the G7 consists of political leaders rather than macroeconomic experts, making it less likely to be perceived as an objective authority on fiscal matters. Furthermore, the political nature of the G7 may invite suspicion about the motivations behind its recommendations, with the public potentially viewing them as political statements rather than expert advice, especially when compared to the IMF.

Having said that, the strong visibility of the G7 in Japan at the time may make the G7 endorsement more effective. Japan hosted a high-profile G7 meeting in May 2023, just two months before our survey, and the summit received extensive coverage in domestic news media. This heightened visibility could make the G7 endorsement more influential than initially anticipated.

Finally, we included the UN as a de facto placebo to assess whether endorsements from *any* IO have an effect. On the one hand, UN endorsements have been shown to be effective in various areas of transnational policy coordination, such as the use of force (Chapman, 2009, 2012; Grieco et al., 2011; Tingley and Tomz, 2012; Matsumura and Tago, 2019) and refugee and deforestation policies (Greenhill, 2020). The UN is also arguably the best known IO, although we will confirm this empirically in later sections. On the other hand, the UN rarely issues opinions on domestic economic matters such as tax reforms, particularly in developed

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[3] https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2019/11/24/mcs-japan-staff-concluding-statement-of-the-2019-ar

[4] https://www.imf.org/en/About/executive-board/members-quotas

[5] The Japan Times. "Kan's diplomatic debut in Canada a chance to show leadership skills." Published on June 30, 2010.

nations. As such, respondents are less likely to take its endorsements seriously, especially on matters in which they have strong prior preferences. In short, while we expect the UN endorsement to be a less effective stimulus, its inclusion as a treatment option allows us to more robustly test the relative impact of endorsements from more relevant IOs, namely the IMF and G7.

> H2.1: Endorsements from the *IMF* have a stronger effect than endorsements from the G7 or the UN.

Respondents in the treatment groups read the following sentences after reading the prompt. Those in the control group did not see such information.

> "Furthermore, the Japanese government has highlighted that the [*IMF (International Monetary Fund) / United Nations (UN) / Group of Seven (G7)*] has expressed praise for the consumption tax increase, recognizing its contribution to Japan's fiscal reconstruction."

We should note that these three IOs are reasonably familiar to Japanese citizens. Our survey included an instrument that asked respondents to evaluate their knowledge of the IMF, the G7, and the UN. More than 80% answered that they had at least heard of or knew some details about these organizations. While self-reported answers undoubtedly have some bias, we believe that there is no prima facie reason to assume that these IOs are obscure institutions to our sample population. The full distribution of responses can be found in Appendix Section D.

3.3 Moderators

Comparing treatment effects across different IOs allows us to examine whose endorsements are more persuasive. However, to test our hypotheses about the perceived expertise and interests of IOs directly, it is necessary to measure those subjective beliefs explicitly. Therefore, our survey instrument asked respondents to evaluate their perceptions of the three IOs prior to treatment assignment.

To estimate whether respondents believe that the endorsing IOs have sufficient capacity to evaluate the proposed policy, we use the following question: "*Do you think the following international organizations have expertise in finance and economics (have detailed knowledge and can provide effective advice)?*" Using this question, we test the following hypothesis:

> H2.2: Endorsements from international organizations that are *perceived to be more expert* have a stronger, positive effect.

We also measure the extent to which respondents believe that information from IOs is distorted by political interests in two ways: (1) whether a given IO is viewed as a group of experts or as political actors, and (2) whether IOs' decisions are seen to reflect the interests of the Japanese government. First, we examine where respondents stand on two conflicting views of the IMF, the G7, and the UN. For each, the first statement read, "*[The IMF/G7/UN] is a group of independent experts separate from the interests of each country*", and the second statement read these are "*a group of politicians representing the interests of each country.*" Respondents were asked to evaluate how close their opinion is to these statements using a 7-point discrete scale.[6] This question will be used to test the following hypothesis:

> H2.3a: Endorsements from international organizations that are *perceived to be politically independent from member states' interests* have a stronger, positive effect.

Second, we measure the extent to which respondents believe that the IOs' decisions reflect the interests of the Japanese government. If they believe that the IOs and the Japanese government share the same interests, they may doubt the impartiality of IO endorsements. We asked respondents to rate the extent to which they think the intentions of the Japanese government are reflected in the decisions of the endorsing IOs. In our analyses below, we collapse the 7-point scale into three categories: "(Japanese Government's Interests) Reflected," "Neither," and "Not reflected." This question is used to test the following hypothesis:

> H2.3b: Endorsements from international organizations that are *perceived to be politically independent from the Japanese government' interests* have stronger, positive effects.[7]

3.4   Sampling

Our survey experiment was conducted on July 3rd–6th, 2023. Respondents were recruited through *Cross Marketing*, one of the largest survey vendors in Japan. We employed quota sampling by age (19-70), gender, and prefecture to match the most recent national census distribution. 7871 respondents participated in the survey, and the final sample size in our

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[6]The 7-point scale is: "*Very close to the first,*" "*Close to the first,*" "*Somewhat close to the first,*" "*Neither close to the first nor the second,*" "*Somewhat close to the second,*" "*Close to the second,*" and "*Very close to the second.*"

[7]In the pre-registration document, we hypothesized a combination of H2.3a and H2.3b that wrote, 'Endorsements from international organizations that are *perceived to be politically independent from government interests* has a stronger effect," and used the two questions to test this single hypothesis. However, we decided to separate these into two sub-hypotheses to make it clearer that we are testing two different aspects of political independence, one from the member states in general, and one from the Japanese government in particular.

analysis, after excluding incomplete or irregular responses, was 6391. Each treatment and control condition has an equal probability of assignment, and the randomization was blocked based on the respondents' party identification (supporters of the LDP, of other parties, or independents) to ensure that the treatment assignment was balanced in terms of political orientation. All conditioning variables used in our analysis were asked prior to the treatment assignment.

4 Results

The results of our survey experiment can be summarized as follows. First, we find that endorsements from the IMF and the G7, but not from the UN, had positive effects on both government approval and support for the consumption tax increase. However, our hypotheses regarding the perceived capacity and independence of IOs were not supported. We originally expected that the endorsement effect would be stronger among those who perceive endorsing IOs as independent experts insulated from political influence. Instead, our results indicate that the endorsement effect is greater among those who perceive the endorsing IOs as actors aligned with the Japanese government's interests. Exploratory analyses further reveal that the endorsement effect is stronger among respondents who hold favorable attitudes towards the endorsing IOs and support the government parties. These results suggest that, contrary to our expectations, perceived interest alignment may play a more significant role in shaping the effectiveness of IOs endorsements.

4.1 Average Treatment Effect

We present the estimated average treatment effect of endorsements from IOs on two outcome variables: support for the government and for the proposed policy. The raw distributions of the outcome variables for each treatment group is presented in Appendix Section B. Figure 1 shows the average treatment effect (ATE) estimates of the endorsement from the G7, the IMF, and the UN. The x-axis shows the estimated size of treatment effects, computed by difference-in-means with block-randomization adjustment. The square symbols are point estimates of the effect on government support, and the triangle symbols are those of policy support. The horizontal lines represent the 95% confidence intervals, with black denoting statistical significance and gray indicating no significance at the 95% confidence level. "BH ✓" indicates that the null hypotheses are rejected even after multiple testing correction by the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure (Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995).

We find that endorsement from the G7 has a positive and statistically significant effect on both outcomes. It has the largest estimated effect size (0.173 on government support, and 0.178 on the policy) and is distinguishable from zero at the 95% confidence level. The IMF's
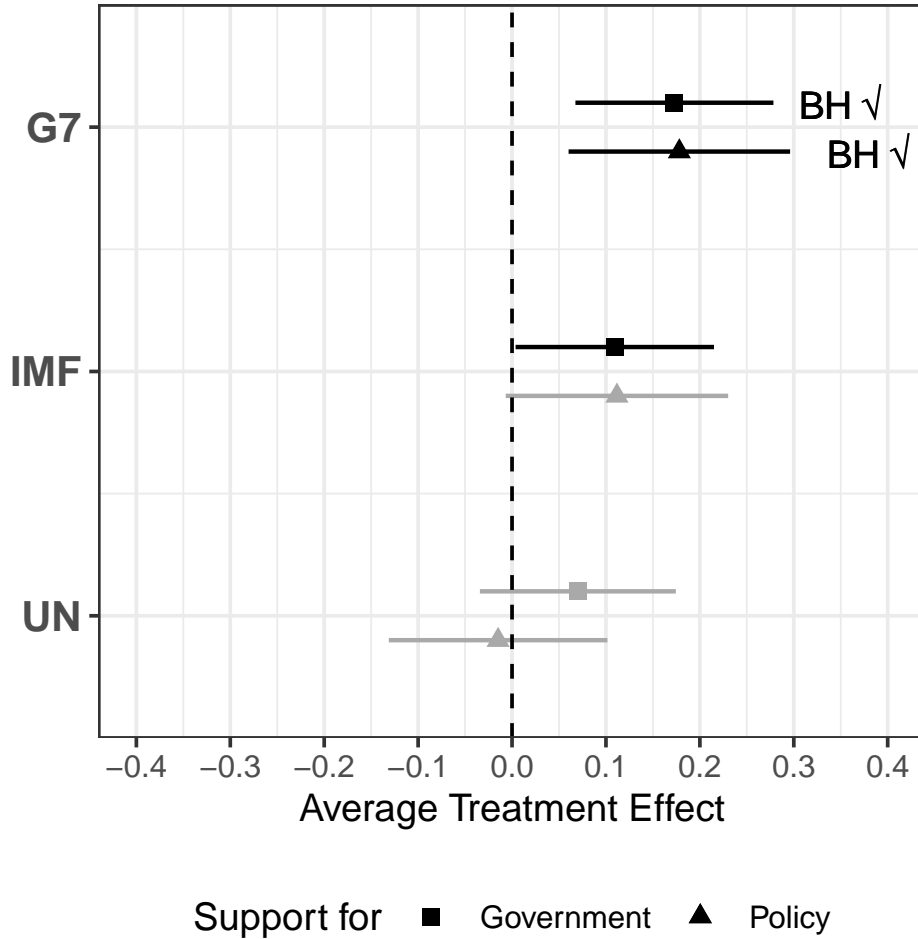
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Figure 1: **Average Treatment Effect**
This figure shows the treatment effect estimates of endorsements from three international organizations: the G7, the IMF, and the UN. The effects are estimated by difference-in-means between those who were shown that the tax increase is endorsed by these IOs (treated groups) compared to those who were not shown any endorsement (control group). Randomization is blocked by party identification. The outcome variables are government approval (square symbol) and support for the proposed policy to increase consumption tax (triangle symbol). The x-axis shows the size of the treatment effect estimates, and the y-axis specifies the name of the international organization for each treatment group. Horizontal lines represent the 95% confidence intervals, with black lines indicating statistical significance and gray lines indicating no significance.

endorsement also has a positive and statistically significant effect on government approval but not on policy approval, although the difference between the two is marginal. The effect estimates for the IMF are the second largest among the three treatment arms (0.109 on government support, and 0.112 on the policy). While whether to reject the null hypotheses of zero effect is ambiguous since the p-value is 0.04 for the government support outcome

and 0.06 for the policy outcome, we interpret them as weak but positive evidence of the effectiveness of IMF endorsements. By contrast, the UN's endorsement does not appear to impact either outcome. The effect estimates of the UN endorsement are the smallest (0.07 on the government support, -0.01 on the policy), and it is clear that we cannot reject the null hypothesis of zero effect. Overall, our results suggest that endorsements from the G7 and the IMF have positive effects while those from the UN do not.

These results partially confirm our hypotheses but not completely. The positive effects of the G7 and the IMF treatment are consistent with our expectation that endorsements from IOs have a positive effect on public opinion about the tax hike (H1.1), as well as approval for the proposing government (H1.2). However, we had originally predicted that the IMF's endorsement would be most effective, not the G7 (H2.1). We explore reasons for this disconnect in the next subsection. By contrast, the null effect of the UN treatment is consistent with our prior expectations that not all IOs can sway public opinion in the same way. While existing studies show that UN endorsements can change public opinion on military, human rights, and environmental issues (Grieco et al., 2011; Tingley and Tomz, 2012; Recchia and Chu, 2021; Greenhill, 2020), our finding implies that it may not be as effective when it comes to high-salience, economic issues. Since we fail to observe any significant effects from the UN treatment, we focus on the IMF and the G7 treatments in the following sections.

4.2 Heterogeneous Effects by the Perceived Capacity and Interests of IOs

We move on to examining how respondents' subjective *perceptions* of IOs influence the variability in treatment effects. We first examine how the effects vary across the two hypothesized dimensions: the perceived capacity and interests of the endorsing IOs.

Figure 2 shows the treatment effect estimates conditional on how much expertise respondents perceive the endorsing IOs possess. We collapse the original 7-point scale into three categories, where 1-3 is labeled as "No expertise," 4 is "Neither," and 5-7 is "Expertise." We compute the treatment effect estimates for each subgroup by difference-in-means with block randomization adjustments, and the number of observations for each is specified in parentheses.

Contrary to our expectations, the degree of perceived expertise did not explain variations in the treatment effect. The effect estimates do not vary much across subgroups for all treatment arms and outcomes. While we expected the endorsement effect to be stronger among those who perceive the endorsing IOs to be experts (H2.2), we did not find any evidence to confirm this hypothesis.

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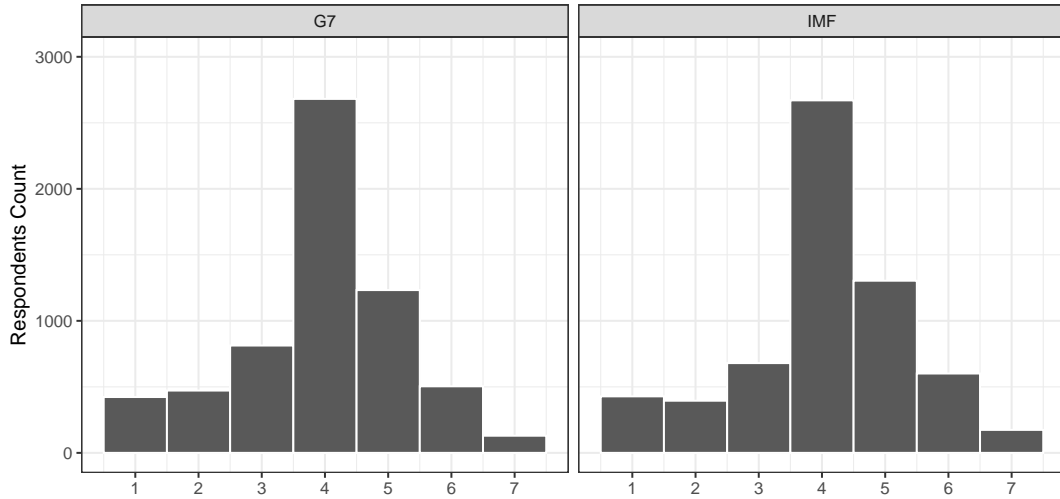
(a) **Distribution of Perceived Levels of Expertise**
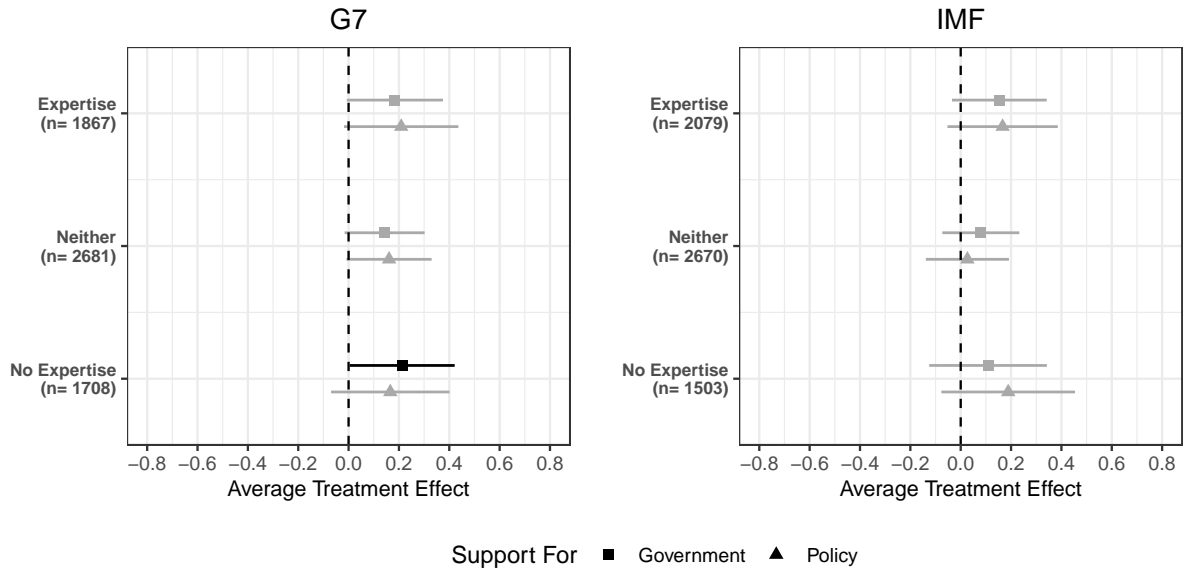
(b) **Treatment Effect Estimates by Perceived Levels of Expertise**

Figure 2: The top panels show the baseline distributions of perceived levels of expertise for the G7 and the IMF. The bottom panels show the treatment effect estimates based on the perceived expertise of the endorsing international organizations. The left panels are for the G7, and the right panels are for the IMF. Perceived expertise is measured by the question, "Do you think the following international organizations have expertise in finance and economics (have detailed knowledge and can provide effective advice)?" Responses are recorded on a 7-point scale, where 1 means "Strongly Disagree," 4 means "Neither Agree nor Disagree," and 7 means "Strongly Agree." Respondents are divided into three groups: "Expertise" if their answer is above 4, "Neither" if their answer is equal to 4, and "No Expertise" if their answer is below 4. The number of observations in each subgroup is specified under the y-axis labels.

Figure 3 shows the treatment effect estimates conditional on the perceived independence of the IOs from their member states' interests. As with our analysis on perceived expertise, we also collapse the original 7-point scale into three categories: "Independent from States' Interests", "Neither", and "Subject to States' Interests."

We do not find supportive evidence for our hypothesis that the endorsement effect is stronger among those who believe the endorsing IOs are groups of experts rather than groups of politicians (H2.3a). In fact, the effect estimates appear stronger among those who do *not* perceive the IOs to be impartial. The G7 endorsement is positive and statistically significant among those who believe that the decisions of the G7 are controlled by members' interests, while the effect estimates among the other two subgroups are not statistically significant.
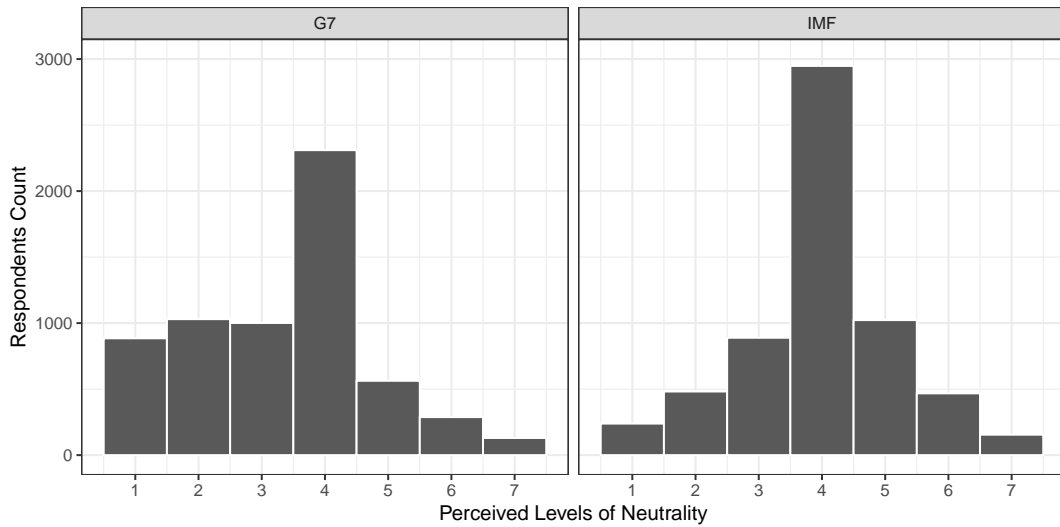
Figure 4 shows the treatment effect estimates conditional on respondents' views about the interest alignment between IOs and the Japanese government specifically, rather than member states generally. To measure this, we asked respondents to rate the extent to which they think the intentions of the Japanese government are reflected in the decisions of the endorsing IOs. We collapse the 7-point scale into three categories: "(Japanese Government's Interests) Reflected," "Neither," and "Not reflected."

Interestingly, our results show the opposite pattern from our expectation (H2.3b) that endorsements would be more persuasive to those who perceive the IOs to be independent. The treatment effects are stronger among those who believe that the endorsing IOs reflect the Japanese governments' interests. In short, our results imply that, contrary to our expectations, citizens trust IOs more when their interests are perceived to be aligned with their government.

Overall, our results fail to confirm our initial hypotheses regarding the capacity and interest of IOs. Our original expectation was that IO endorsements would be more persuasive when IOs are perceived to be politically independent experts. Instead, our findings suggest that perceived interest alignment between the endorsing IOs and the endorsed government is a key determinant of successful persuasion. This result is surprising, as we had anticipated that such interest alignment might be interpreted as collusion, potentially impairing the integrity of the endorsement. We explore this issue further in the following section.

4.3 Heterogenous Effect by Perceived Favorable Attitudes to IOs and Partisanship

Why do we fail to observe supportive evidence for our hypotheses about IOs' policy capacity and interests? One possibility is that impartial expertise may not be enough for the public to trust IOs, because they are seen more fundamentally as unknown, distant, and unaccountable actors. Instead, as Figure 4 suggests, IOs may need to be perceived as actors who share
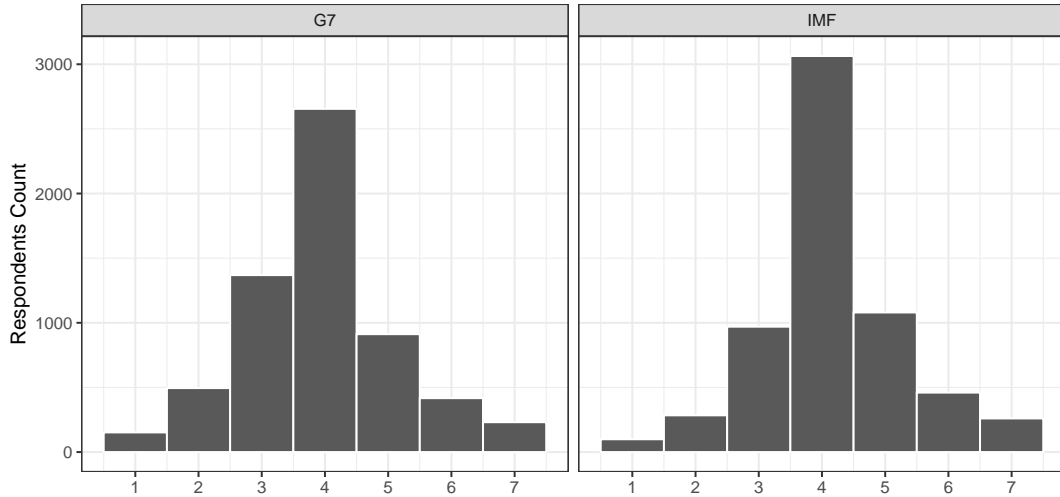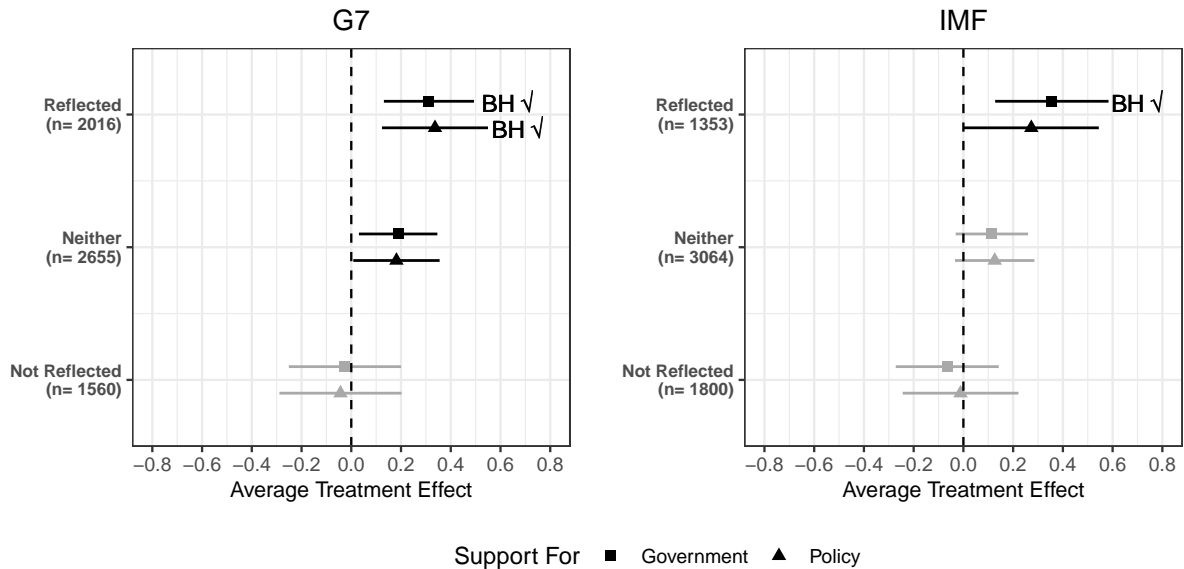
(a) **Distribution of Perceived Levels of Neutrality**
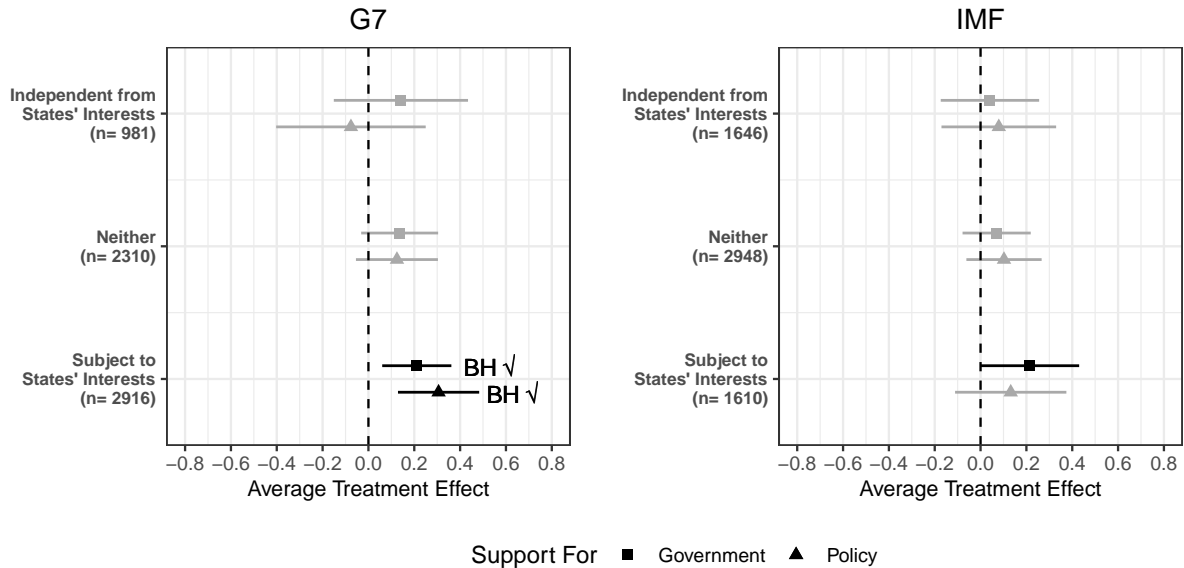
(b) **Treatment Effect Estimates by Perceived Levels of Neutrality**

Figure 3: The top panels show the baseline distributions of perceived levels of neutrality for the G7 and the IMF. Larger numbers indicate that respondents perceived a greater level of neutrality in the corresponding IOs. The bottom panels show the treatment effect estimates based on the perceived levels of neutrality of the endorsing international organizations. The left panels are for the G7, and the right panels are for the IMF. In the bottom panels, the top row shows the effect estimates for respondents who perceive the G7 (IMF) is "a group of independent experts separate from the interests of each country." The bottom row shows the effect estimates for those who perceive the G7 (IMF) is "a group of politicians representing the interests of each country." The middle row shows the effect estimates for those who neither agree nor disagree with these statements.

(a) **Distribution of the Perceived Reflection of Japanese Government's Interests**

(b) **Treatment Effect Estimates by the Perceived Reflection of Japanese Government's interests**

Figure 4: The top panels show the baseline distributions of perceived levels of reflection of the Japanese government's interests in the G7 and the IMF. Larger numbers indicate that respondents perceived a greater level of reflection of the Japanese government's interests in the corresponding IOs. The bottom panels show the treatment effect estimates based on the perceived reflection of the Japanese government's interests on the endorsing international organizations. The left panels are for the G7, and the right panels are for the IMF. Respondents are divided into three groups based on their perceived degree of reflection of Japanese government's interests in these international organizations: "Reflected" (presented at the top), "Neither" (middle), and "Not Reflected" (bottom). The number of observations in each subgroup is specified under the y-axis labels.

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common interests with one's own country to be convincing. In other words, IOs may have to be seen as an ally or an in-group actor to win public trust and effectively influence public opinion.

Scholars have long observed how people use mental shortcuts to understand complex issues, such as relying on various "cues" from trusted sources. In many cases, the public interprets political information through the lens of their partisanship (Zaller, 1992; Berinsky, 2019, 2007), including on foreign policy (Hayes and Guardino, 2011) and endorsements (Bush and Jamal, 2015).

Of course, greater trust is not limited to domestic actors. At times, people also turn for information to foreign sources that they consider to be in-group, like-minded allies. For example, during the 2003 Iraq War, many Democrats relied on information sources from European allies and UN officials, whom they perceived as trustworthy (Murray, 2014). Dragojlovic (2015) generalizes this specific case, arguing that foreign messages from friendly countries are often more persuasive than those from domestic advocates. Similarly, numerous studies suggest that trade preferences can be attributed to in-group favoritism (Brutger and Rathbun, 2021; Mansfield and Mutz, 2009; Mutz and Kim, 2017). In addition, public support for the Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanism decreased when disputes against their country were filed, likely due to the stimulation of in-group versus out-group dynamics in media coverage (Berinsky, 2007). These studies suggest that, for the public to trust IOs, they must be seen as allies, or at least share common interests with one's country.

To examine this possibility, we present additional results regarding the following two factors: general favorability towards the endorsing IOs and respondents' partisanship. While the perceived shared interest between IOs and Japan, discussed in the preceding section, measures the closeness between the endorsing IOs and the Japanese government, these new factors measure two additional dimensions. The first (favorability) is shared interests between the endorsing IOs and the respondents themselves, and the second (partisanship) is between the Japanese government and the respondents.

Figure 5 presents the treatment effect estimates conditional on favorability toward the endorsing IOs. As with other conditioning variables, respondents rated their attitudes on a 7-point scale, which we collapsed into three categories for analysis. The results indicate that the treatment effect is greater among respondents who favor the IOs. For those with favorable views, endorsements from both the G7 and IMF positively influenced support for the policy. Among neutral respondents (neither favorable nor unfavorable), the G7's endorsement still has a positive effect, but the IMF's endorsement loses significance. In contrast, the treatment effect estimates were negligible among those with unfavorable views of the IOs. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of endorsements is contingent on
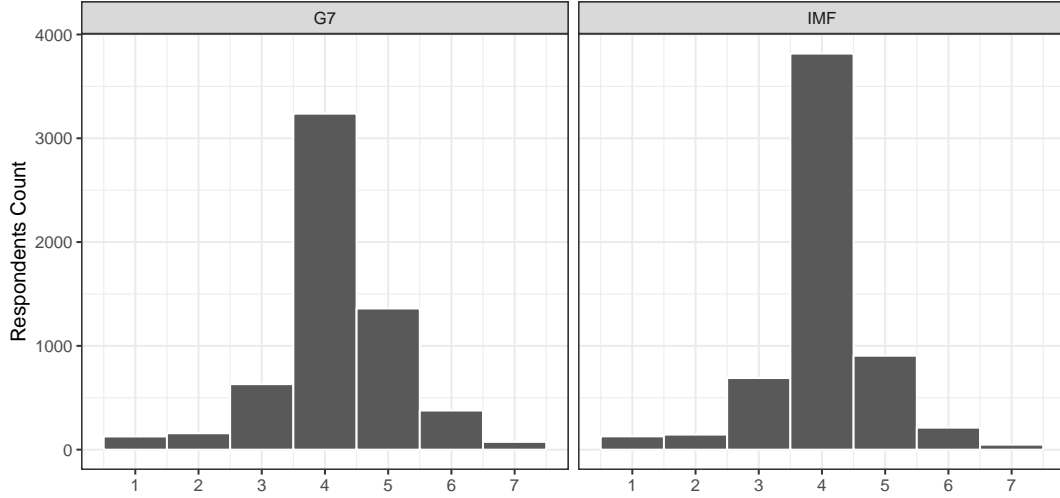
(a) **Distribution of Favorability**
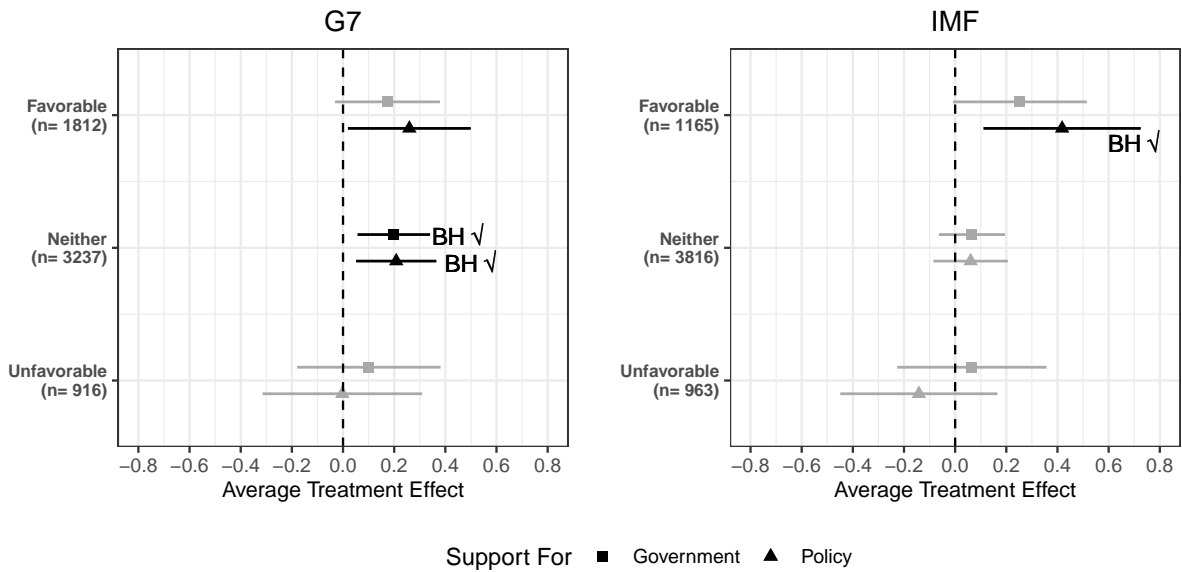
(b) **Treatment Effect Estimates by Favorability**

Figure 5: The top panel shows the baseline distributions of favorability towards the G7 and the IMF. Larger numbers indicate that respondents perceived a greater level of favorability to the corresponding IOs. The bottom panel show the treatment effect estimates based on favorability towards the endorsing international organizations. The left panel is for the G7, and the right panel is for the IMF. Respondents are divided into three groups: "Favorable" if their answer is above 4, "Neither" if their answer is equal to 4, and "Unfavorable" if their answer is below 4. The number of observations in each subgroup is specified under the y-axis labels.

general favorability towards the endorsers.[8]

Figure 6 shows the treatment effect estimates conditional on party identification. The raw distribution of the proportion of supporters for the governing coalition (LDP and Komeito), opposition parties (other parties), and independents is presented in Appendix Section E. We find that the treatment effect is strongest among respondents who back the ruling parties, but we do not find any significant results among opposition supporters or independents. One possibility is that respondents may have inferred that the endorsement implies that the IOs are supporting the ruling parties. Therefore, government supporters are willing to listen to the advice from the IOs while pro-opposition respondents are not.

In summary, our results suggest that the perceived interest alignment may be more important in predicting the success of the endorsements than the perception of the endorsers being impartial experts. Specifically, we find that the treatment effect is stronger among respondents who perceive that the endorsing IOs reflect Japanese government's interests, have favorable attitudes towards those IOs, and support the ruling parties. Theoretically, these findings match the affective partisanship literature, extrapolated to the international dimension. Contrary to our initial expectation that for IOs to be successful policy advisors, they need to be seen as independent and knowledgeable experts, our results reveal that the public may be more sensitive to whether the IOs are trustworthy allies or intermediaries to their own country, as well as to themselves.

4.4   Discussion

Two counter-intuitive findings in our experiment require elaboration. The first is that endorsements are more effective when from the G7 than the IMF, despite the latter being more relevant in the policy domain and better studied in the IPE literature. The other is that an IO's endorsement is most effective when it is perceived to share or reflect the interests of the target country's government, rather than when it is seen as an impartial, expert arbiter. Here, we discuss the implications of these results, including whether they are specific to the case context.

The most surprising outcome was that endorsements from the G7 were consistently more influential on respondents' attitudes than those from the IMF. The IMF is often discussed as the primary IO on political economy matters (Simmons, 2000; Mansfield and Milner, 2012), but there is little research on the G7, at least in the context of domestic public opinion. After all, it is a much narrower club of wealthy nations that primarily serves as a forum to discuss global issues relating to trade, security, and climate change. It is not based on

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[8]This is consistent with the assumption in other endorsement experiments, where the treatment effect of endorsement is equivalent to the support level of the endorsers (Bullock, Imai and Shapiro, 2011).
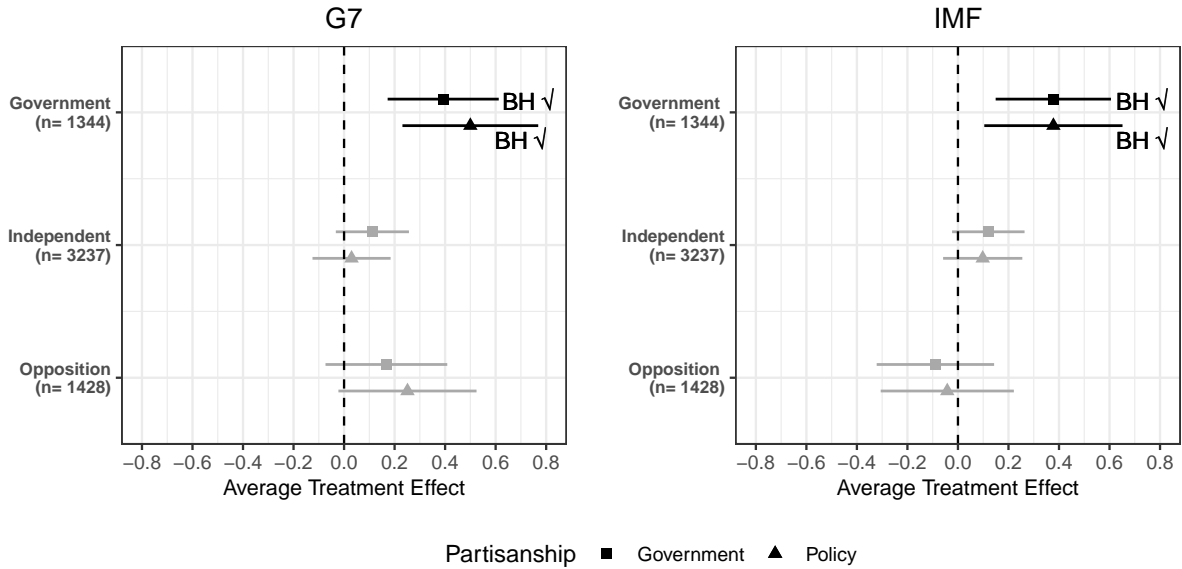
Figure 6: **Heterogenous Treatment Effect by Party Identification**
These figures show the treatment effect estimates conditional on party identification. The
left panel displays the effect of endorsement from the G7, and the right panel shows the effect
of endorsement from the IMF. Respondents are divided into three groups: "Government"
if they support the ruling parties (LDP or Komeito), "Opposition" if they support parties
other than the LDP or Komeito, and "Independent" if they do not support any of these
parties in this survey. The number of observations in each subgroup is specified under the
y-axis labels.

a treaty or international convention, and it lacks a permanent secretariat to administer or
enforce agreements.

One possibility is that this finding is a function of the experimental setting. Japanese
citizens in July 2023 may simply have had more affinity for the G7, because the Japanese
government had hosted the annual G7 summit in Hiroshima in May of that year. In our
survey item on favorable attitude towards the three treatment IOs, used in Figure 5, the
mean ratings for the G7 were marginally higher (4.17) than for the IMF (4.02) or the UN
(3.98). However, it is not necessarily obvious why affinity should matter more than expertise
or impartiality, which other studies of public opinion in Japan have found to matter more
for persuasiveness (McElwain, Eshima and Winkler, 2021).

Another interpretation, which we believe is most aligned with recent research in inter-
national relations, is that many citizens do not believe any IO is actually impartial. Thus,
whether the direction of bias is in favor of one's own country matters more than whether IOs
are seen as neutral or expert. Davis (2023), for example, describes international organiza-
tion as "discriminatory clubs" for like-minded states with common security interests that use

vague membership criteria for inclusion and exclusion as carrots and sticks to advance goals on other policy domains. Even within IOs, member states have sought to increase its representation and voice to push forward competing economic and security visions (Lipscy, 2017). While many of these studies focus primarily on national- or elite-level policy negotiations, this belief in IO biases may have filtered into the mass public's consciousness as well. That our respondents are more persuaded by IOs that share common interests with the Japanese government reflects this point. If all IOs are "discriminatory clubs," then citizens may trust those in which their nation has greater influence and will discriminate in their favor. In other words, IOs are more likely to be judged on the in-group or out-group dimension, rather than on impartiality or expertise.

In addition to measuring the respondents' perception of multiple IOs, an important feature of our experiment is that we use a policy issue on which citizens are likely to have pre-existing opinions. Persuasiveness might be a function of prior preferences about the subject matter. The treatment sought to encourage acceptance of tax increases as a solution to mounting fiscal debt. We chose this subject matter precisely because such policies are unpopular (Kawata, McElwain and Nakabayashi, 2023). If IO endorsements are substantively weak and opposition to tax hikes are deeply ingrained, then the former may only have reinforced support among those who were more prone to accept the latter in the first place. However, we find the opposite result. As shown in Figure C.1 in Appendix C, the G7's endorsement had the largest positive effect among those who were *not* worried about the Japan's mounting debt. In other words, IO endorsements appear to have changed the minds of respondents who were less inclined to believe the relevant policy was necessary. This suggests that endorsements may be even more effective on issues that are less controversial, although further research is obviously necessary to confirm the generalizability of our findings.

5 Conclusion

A central question in the international relations literature is whether IOs can change the behavior of nation-states. Recent studies have focused on the ability of IOs to shift the electoral calculus of domestic leaders by influencing public opinion through policy endorsements or criticisms. A key limitation, however, is that these rarely test *why* voters may trust information from IOs, especially on issues in which they are reasonably well informed.

This paper investigated which traits of IOs make them more persuasive on a highly politicized and contentious issue in Japan: raising the consumption tax. Using a novel survey experiment, we provide evidence that IO endorsements can increase support for this unpopular policy, but only under specific conditions. Our main finding is that endorsements

from the IMF and the G7 bolstered support for the tax hike, whereas those from the UN did not. More interesting was the underlying mechanism, which contradicted our initial expectations drawn from the IPE literature. The endorsement was more persuasive among respondents who perceived the IO as being under the influence of their country's government, as was generally true of the G7, than among those who saw the endorser as impartial or possessing more expertise. These findings suggest that IOs can shape public opinion even for deeply unpopular policies, but their effectiveness hinges on how citizens interpret the endorsers' motives.

We advance the literature on the influence of IOs in two ways. First, we show a new strategic benefit of IO membership to domestic governments. The IPE literature has theorized that IOs can provide a political cover for governments facing a risk of popularity loss during economic downturns (Mansfield and Milner, 2012). However, micro-level evidence on this mechanism has been scarce, partly because it has been unclear whether IOs' nudges can overcome pre-existing opinions. By focusing on public responses to IO endorsements of a tax increase, we provide experimental evidence that IO endorsements can increase support for an unpopular policy.

Second, we suggest the need to recalibrate the "value" of political bias in international organizations. Studies have noted that IOs can suffer from a credibility gap when they prioritize the interests of powerful nations (Lipscy, 2017; Davis, 2023), both in member selection and internal decision-making processes. However, our experiment indicates that impartiality may be less critical, at least in the context of nudging public sentiment. Of course, Japan is a relatively influential member of many IOs, and its citizens have the luxury to be less concerned about material backlash for ignoring IO recommendations. We do not mean to imply that the politicization of IOs is necessarily beneficial. Rather, their ability to persuade voters does not depend on perceived neutrality or expertise, but rather on the perception that they share common interests with the target state. In other words, IOs aiming to persuade domestic publics should focus on signaling that they are not antagonistic to the target governments and are sympathetic to domestic concerns.

That said, further research is necessary to tease out these psychological mechanisms. Specifically, we need a more holistic understanding of how IOs intervene in domestic affairs and how the public perceives these interventions. Most citizens likely do not spend much time thinking about international institutions, except when IOs take leadership in global crises, such as the WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic and the UN when one state imperils the security of another. These contexts often involve conflicts of interest between IOs and domestic governments, likely leading to negative public sentiment toward IOs. However, much of what IOs do involves praising governments for "good" behavior, such as anti-corruption

initiatives or sound macroeconomic management. The balance of endorsements versus criticisms likely varies across states, domains, and IOs. For example, Japan may be in good standing with many IOs, but it has been criticized by the EU for retaining the death penalty and by the International Whaling Commission for permitting commercial whaling. Russia has faced sanctions from various IOs, including the UN, for its invasion of Ukraine, and many Asian nations retain negative sentiments towards the IMF for its punitive policies during the Asian Financial Crisis.

Further generalization across policy domains should be explored in future research. We chose the case of a tax increase precisely because it is a controversial issue. Even if higher taxes are necessary for long-term fiscal health, citizens may have strong negative reactions to further strains on their short-term economic well-being. That IO endorsements can change opinions even in this case suggests they may be even more persuasive in policy areas with lower salience, such as climate change conventions. However, low-salience policies may also be domains where the public lacks knowledge of or attachment to the relevant IOs. As our paper shows, the G7 is an interesting case: it comments on a wide range of issues, including climate change, geopolitical security, and trade, allowing its endorsement to be used strategically across domains. However, it may have minimal salience to the vast majority of states, which are non-members. These are empirical questions best answered through further research.

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A Survey Instrument

Prompt

> In the following questions, we will present the policies of the Japanese government and the international reactions to them. There are no right or wrong answers, so please provide your honest opinion.

Treatment

> The Japanese government raised the consumption tax from 8% to 10% starting from October 1, 2019, with the aim of supporting the existing social security system. Additionally, there are plans to further increase the consumption tax to 12% in the future. The government has explained that the purpose of this tax hike is to decrease the ratio of public debt (government borrowing) in the overall fiscal landscape. **They also emphasized that the [IMF/G7/UN] has endorsed this consumption tax increase plan, stating that it would help reconstruct Japanese fiscal conditions.** (For respondents in the Control group, the texts in bold letters were not shown.)

Questions

> 1: If the government made such an announcement, how would your support for the current administration change? **(Outcome Government)**
>
> 2: Do you support this consumption tax increase? **(Outcome Tax)**

. . . .

Moderators

Expertise

> Do you think the following international organizations [IMF/G7/UN/WHO/OECD] have expertise in finance and economics (have detailed knowledge and can provide effective advice)?

Neutrality

> Which of the following international organizations [IMF/G7/UN/WHO/OECD] do you think is closer to statement A or statement B? Please select the statement that is closer to your impression.
>
> A: A group of independent experts separate from the interests of each country.
>
> B: A group of politicians representing the interests of each country.

Japan's Interests

How much do you think the intentions of the Japanese government are reflected in the decisions of the following international organizations [IMF/G7/UN/WHO/OECD]?

*Note: We measured attitudes towards the WHO and OECD for descriptive reference. Unlike the IMF, G7, and UN, these IOs were not part of our pre-registered experiment and were not included as treatment options.

B   Distribution of the Outcome Variables across Treatment Groups
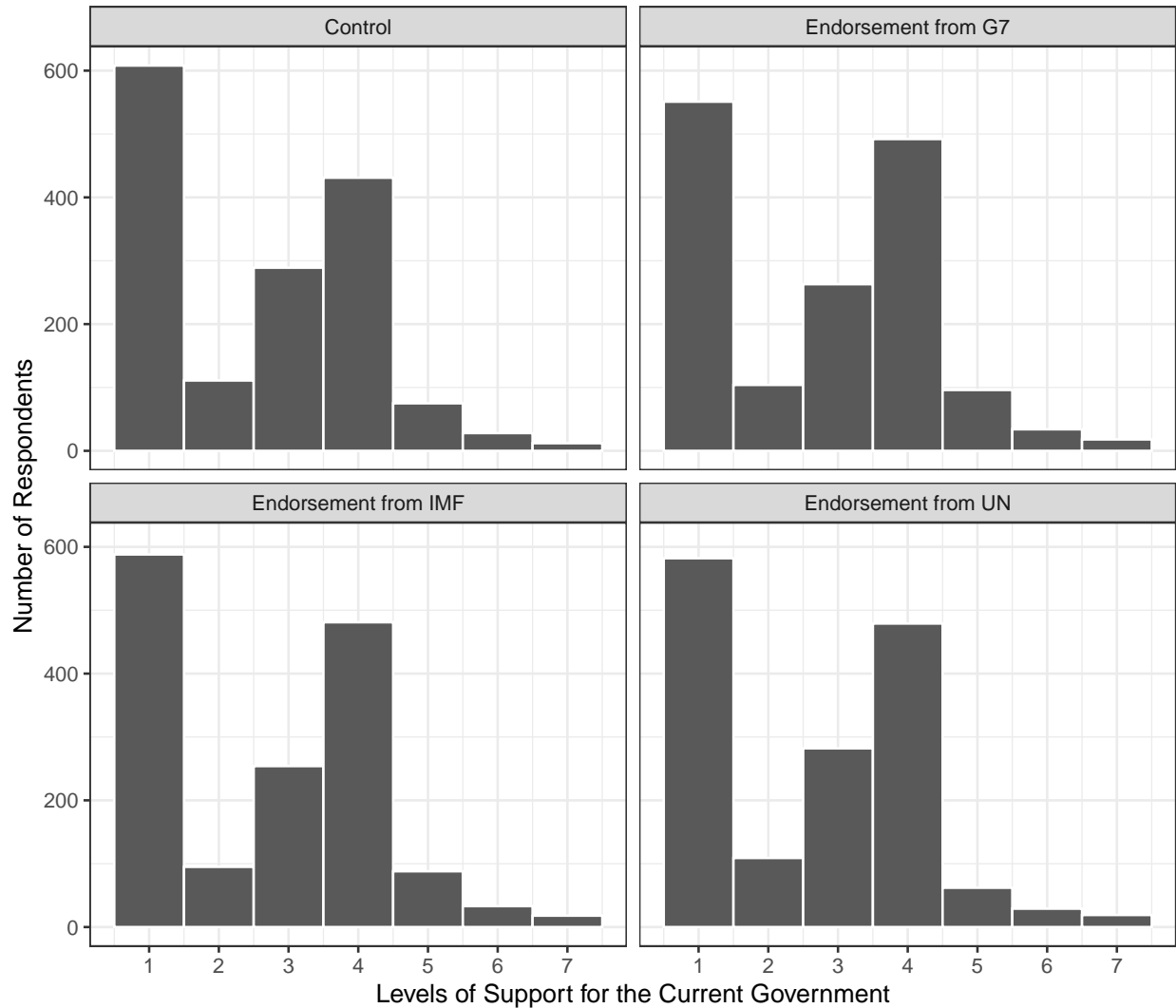

Figure B.1: **Distribution of the Outcome Variable: Government Support**
These graphs show the distributions of respondents' levels of support for the current administration. The answers were measured on a 7-point scale, with larger numbers indicating more support (the x-axis): Support (7), Somewhat support (6), Leaning towards support (5), Neither support nor oppose (4), Leaning towards not supporting (3), Somewhat not support (2), Do not support (1). Distributions are calculated for each treatment arm (G7, IMF, UN) and the control group. Those who preferred not to answer this question are excluded from this calculation.
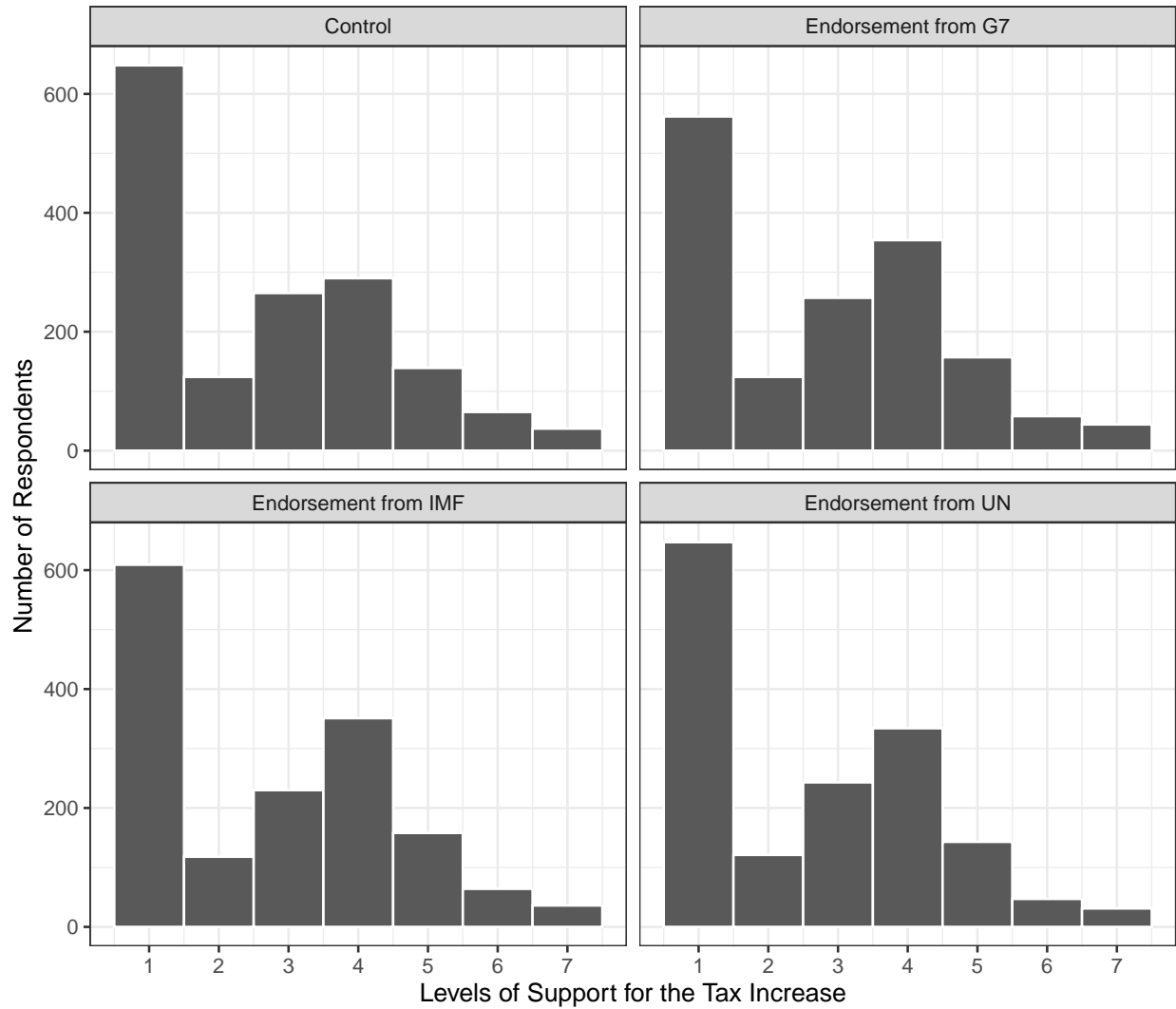
Figure B.2: **Distribution of the Outcome Variable: Policy Support**
These graphs show the baseline distributions of respondents' levels of support for the proposed policy to increase tax. The answers were measured on a 7-point scale, with larger numbers indicating more support (the x-axis): Support (7), Somewhat support (6), Leaning towards support (5), Neither support nor oppose (4), Leaning towards not supporting (3), Somewhat not support (2), Do not support (1). Distributions are calculated for each treatment arm (G7, IMF, UN) and the control group. Those who preferred not to answer this question are excluded from this calculation.

C Heterogeneous Treatment Effect by the Perceived Severity of Japan's Fiscal Deficits
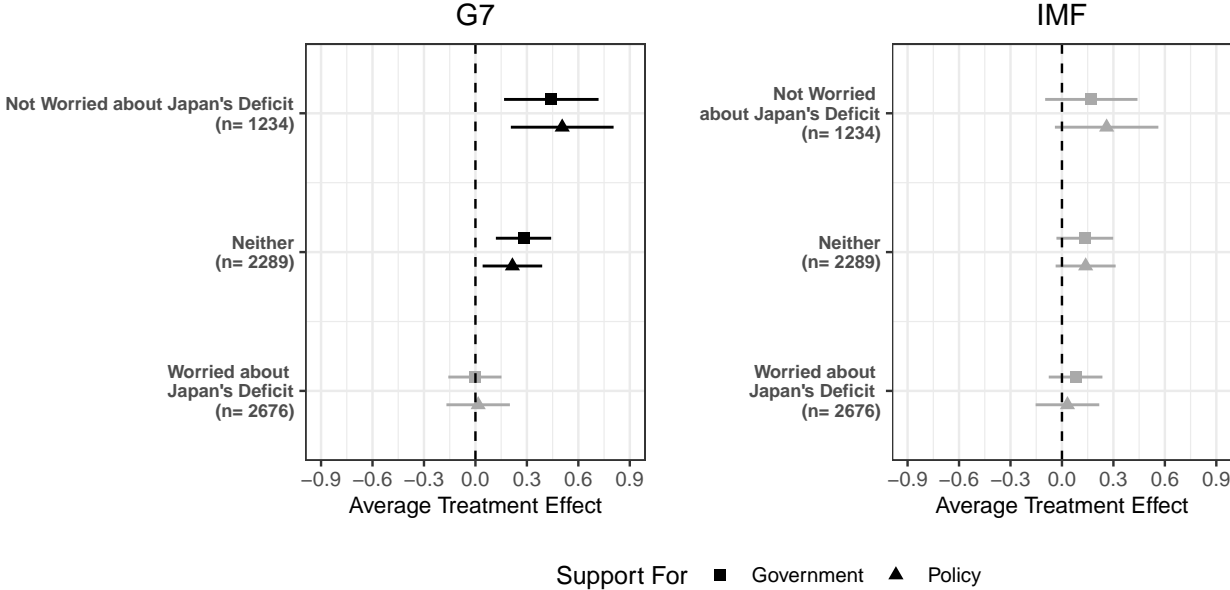

Figure C.1: **Heterogenous Treatment Effect by Respondents' Perceived Severity of Japan's Fiscal Deficits (the G7 and the IMF endorsement)**
These figures show the treatment effect estimates conditional on the degree of respondents' concern regarding Japan's fiscal deficits. The left panel shows the effect of endorsement from the G7, and the right panel shows the effect of endorsement from the IMF. Respondents' concern about Japan's fiscal deficits is measured by asking them to select the statement closest to their opinion: A) "Government bonds are being steadily absorbed, so there is no need to worry about fiscal deficits," or B) "Since the fiscal deficit is at a critical level, the issuance of government bonds should be restrained," rated on a 7-point scale. Based on their responses, respondents are divided into three groups: "Worried about Japan's Deficit" if they chose statement B, "Neither" if they chose 4, and "Not Worried about Japan's Deficit" if they chose statement A. The number of observations in each subgroup is specified beneath the y-axis labels. Please note that the x-axis scale is larger in these figures than in others, which may indicate that the perceived smaller size of the effect is larger than in other figures.

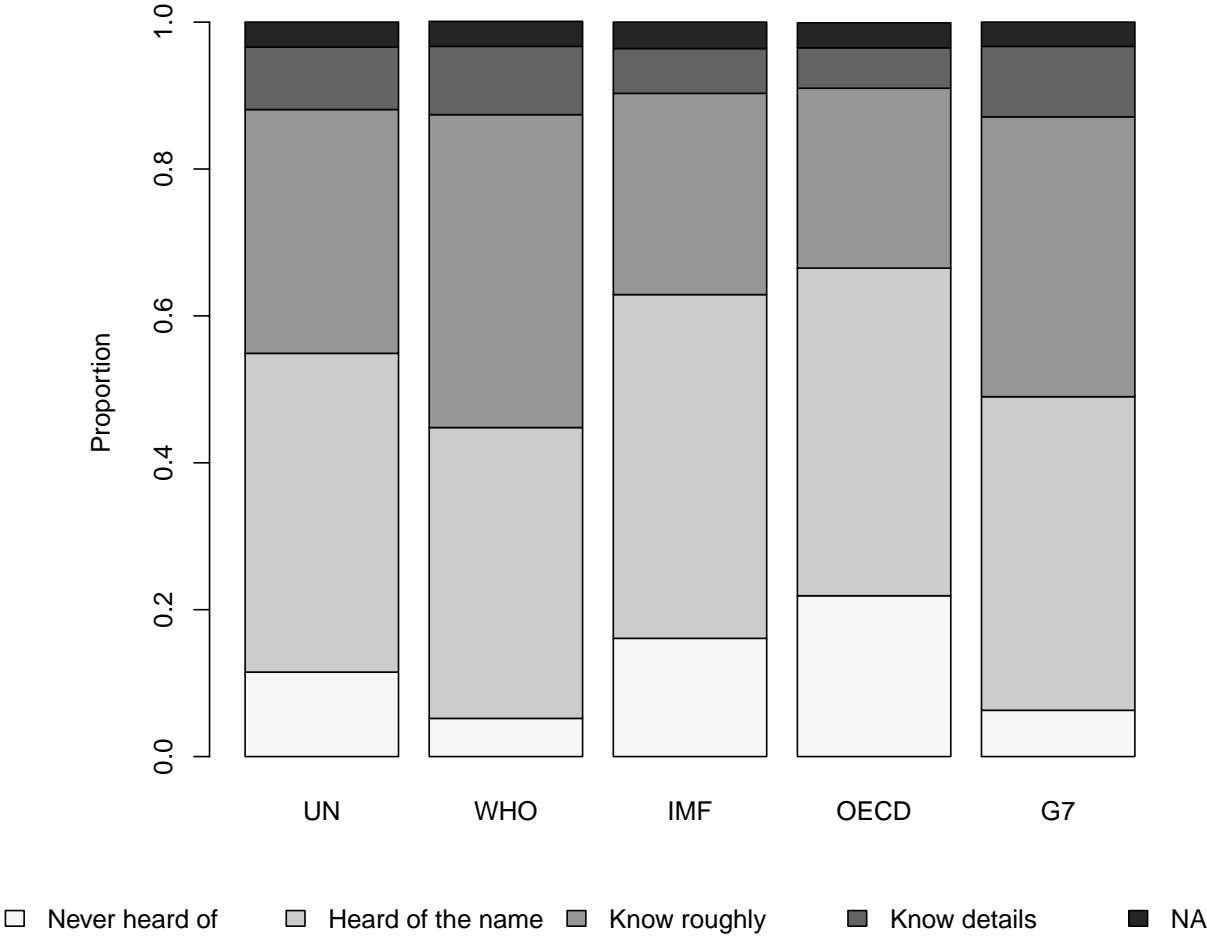# D Distribution of the Self-Reported Knowledge of IOs

Figure D.1: **Distribution of the Self-Reported Knowledge of IOs**
This shows the distributions of the self-reported knowledge of IOs. In addition to the three IOs we used in the experiment, the IMF, G7 and the UN, we added two additional IOs, the OECD and the WHO, to compare if the IOs we used are particularly well-known or not. It makes sense that the WHO is the most well-known IO among the five due to its publicity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to the WHO, the three IOs we used in the experiments, the IMF, G7, and the UN, are less well-known, but the difference is not substantial. In particular, we find that the public awareness of the G7 is similar to that of the WHO.

E   Summary Statistics of Demographic Variables

Variable	Levels	n	%
Gender	Male	3197	50.0
	Female	3116	48.8
	Other	21	0.3
	NA	57	1.0
Age	19-30	1308	20.5
	30-40	1274	19.9
	40-50	1260	19.7
	50-60	1280	20.2
	60-70	1269	19.9
Education	College	3024	47.3
	Not College	3367	52.7
Income(yen)	< 2M	802	15.7
	2M-4M	1266	24.8
	4M-6M	1167	22.9
	6M-8M	771	15.1
	8M-10M	532	10.4
	10M-12M	409	8.1
	> 12M	155	3.0
Partisanship	Government	1344	22.4
	Independent	3237	53.9
	Opposition	1428	23.8

Table E.1: Table of summary statistics about the respondents. The column n shows the number of respondents with the corresponding Levels of the Variable. The column % shows the proportion of such respondents. "Education" question asks the academic record and "Income" question asks the annual income (before tax) of the respondents. "Partisanship" question inquires whether they support the current government (LDP and Komeito) or are independent. NA means "No Answer."