

Public Reactions to Secret Negotiations in International Politics

Journal of Conflict Resolution
2023, Vol. 0(0) 1–27
© The Author(s) 2023
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/00220027231177592
journals.sagepub.com/home/jcr



Rachel Myrick¹ 

Abstract

Many international agreements, from routine trade deals to high-stakes nuclear agreements, are negotiated in secret. However, we have a limited understanding of how secrecy in a negotiation shapes attitudes towards the agreement. Public opinion matters because it informs government decisions about when to conceal or reveal information during a negotiation. In a survey experiment of U.S. adults, I first examine overall attitudes towards secrecy in security and economic agreements. I then randomize government justifications for negotiating in secret: improved success, protection of sensitive information, and anticipation of criticism from domestic and international opponents. I find that respondents are generally averse to secrecy in international negotiations, but there are justifications for its use that they perceive as more legitimate. Secrecy is more permissible when negotiations contain sensitive information or when it improves the likelihood that agreements are reached. It is less permissible when governments negotiate in secret to avoid domestic criticism.

Keywords

democratic institutions, diplomacy, foreign policy, international cooperation, international negotiation, public opinion, secrecy, survey experiment

How does the public react to secrecy in the negotiation of international agreements? In October 2015, representatives from the United States and eleven other countries

¹Duke University, Durham, NC, USA

Corresponding Author:

Rachel Myrick, Department of Political Science, Duke University, 140 Science Drive, Durham, NC 27708-0187, USA.

Email: rachel.myrick@duke.edu

announced that they had concluded negotiations of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an agreement designed to facilitate economic integration, trade, and investment across the Pacific Ocean. The agreement, which culminated after 19 rounds of confidential negotiations, was perceived as an effort to counter China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Yet by the time negotiations concluded, it was clear that U.S. ratification of the TPP would be a huge—and ultimately insurmountable—obstacle. One criticism of the negotiation process was that it had been “shrouded in secrecy” (Kasperkevic, 2015). Concerns about secrecy came to a head in March 2015, when *The New York Times* obtained a leaked draft chapter of the agreement. The chapter outlined a controversial investor-state dispute settlement clause that would allow foreign investors to file claims against governments. The leaks sparked concerns that the TPP would give multinational corporations excessive power and prompted questions about the lack of transparency around the negotiations (Weisman, 2015).

During the TPP negotiations, the Obama administration tried to justify the secretive nature of the process in various ways. However, many political officials, including members of the president's own party, still criticized the lack of transparency. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) wrote in a letter to the U.S. Trade Representative, “I have heard the argument that transparency would undermine the Administration's policy to complete the trade agreement because public opposition would be significant. This argument is exactly backwards. If transparency would lead to widespread public opposition to a trade agreement, then that trade agreement should not be the policy of the United States.”¹ By the time President Obama signed the TPP in early 2016, candidates in the upcoming presidential election from both the Republican and Democratic parties had voiced strong opposition to the agreement. The deal was never ratified by the Senate, and in 2017, President Donald Trump formally withdrew the United States from the TPP in the first month of his administration.

The TPP is just one of many recent agreements that highlight the difficulty of disentangling public reactions to the content of an agreement from reactions to the process by which it was negotiated. Such discussions raise important questions: To what extent is public opinion about an agreement shaped by perceptions of the negotiation process? How and when is secrecy viewed by the public as nefarious or deceptive? Is there something negotiating partners could do to better justify secrecy to their respective publics *ex ante*? Would more transparency during negotiations improve public support of an international agreement? Or are criticisms of a secretive process just instrumentalized by opponents of an agreement?

These questions relate to a growing literature on secrecy in international relations. Much research in this area focuses on why governments employ secrecy in various aspects of foreign policy (e.g., Carson, 2016, 2018; Carnegie and Carson, 2020, 2019; Carson and Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Cormac and Aldrich, 2018; Daugherty, 2006; Haas and Yarhi-Milo, 2020; Hafner-Burton, Steinert-Threlkeld and Victor, 2016; Johnson, 2022; Lester, 2015; McManus and Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Nutt and Pauly, 2021; O'Rourke, 2018; Otto and Spaniel, 2021; Pauly, 2022; Poznansky, 2019, 2020; Stasavage, 2004; Schuessler, 2015; Yoder and Spaniel, 2022) and how they navigate trade-offs between

the benefits of secrecy and the norms and institutions that facilitate transparency in democratic politics (e.g., Colaresi, 2014; Downes and Lilley, 2010; Forsythe, 1992; Poznansky, 2015; Smith, 2019; Spaniel and Poznansky, 2018). However, we know much less about how the public reacts to secrecy, especially in the context of international negotiations.

Understanding public opinion on these issues is important. Government officials weigh the costs and benefits of concealing information from their publics. When negotiating an international agreement, policymakers decide what, when, and how details of a negotiation should be revealed to the public and how to justify secretive aspects of the process. In democracies, where leaders are accountable to an electorate, these decisions are based in part on expectations about public demands for transparency.

Assumptions about how the public perceives secrecy also underlie theories about how states and their leaders behave in international politics. For example, if we assume that the revelation of covert activities will be met with public backlash, covert operations should credibly signal resolve to foreign adversaries (Carson and Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Smith, 2019). If we assume that democratic publics are more averse to secrecy than autocratic publics, democratic leaders should be less likely to engage in deception in foreign affairs relative to their autocratic counterparts (Reiter, 2012). Or if we assume that democratic publics do not really care about secrecy, lying, and deception as long as the foreign policy outcome is favorable, we should expect leaders to engage in this behavior when they perceive it to have strategic advantages (Mearsheimer, 2011). Such assumptions are testable. But in a review of secrecy in international relations, Carnegie (2021) emphasizes that public attitudes towards secrecy are poorly understood. Carnegie writes, “[M]any of the theories of secrecy reviewed previously rely on untested assumptions about the public’s views of certain actions, and of secrecy itself. Yet we know little about how the public actually thinks about these issues. Future research could do more to test the domestic conditions and beliefs that these theories assume” (p. 226).

To address this gap in the literature, this paper complements a handful of recent studies that use survey experiments to evaluate public attitudes about topics related to secrecy, such as covert action, lying, and deception in foreign affairs (Carnegie, Kertzer and Yarhi-Milo, 2023; Maxey, 2021; Myrick, 2020; Yarhi-Milo and Ribar, 2023). Most of these studies focus on public opinion about secrecy in the context of using military force. By contrast, this study analyzes secrecy around the negotiation of international agreements. Using an experimental design, I evaluate the impact of secrecy on attitudes towards an agreement while holding constant other features of the agreement. In a pre-registered² survey experiment fielded online to 2400 American adults, I present respondents with hypothetical scenarios in which the U.S. government engages in international negotiations of either economic or security agreements. I provide details of the agreement, randomizing whether the negotiation process occurred in public or in secret and asking respondents to evaluate actions taken by the U.S. government.

For secret negotiations, I then randomize the justification for secrecy provided by a U.S. government spokesperson and measure public approval of U.S. actions again.

Holding all else constant, I find that the American public is less likely to approve of international agreements that are negotiated in secret relative to those that are negotiated with greater public visibility. However, certain justifications for secrecy improve perceptions of secret negotiations. In particular, Americans view secrecy as more acceptable if it improves the chance that an agreement will be reached. Secrecy is also seen as more permissible when negotiations relate to national security or contain highly sensitive information. However, when the U.S. government negotiates in secret to avoid criticism—especially when that criticism comes from domestic actors—this justification increases skepticism of negotiations.

Negotiating in Secret

Why should we care about secret negotiations and how the public assesses them? Secrecy is a foundational part of international relations. As [Colaresi \(2014\)](#) summarizes, “keeping actions and information out of public view is utilized as part of nearly every overt military operation and diplomatic negotiation” (p. 36). Elements of virtually every major international negotiation process are secret or at least relatively hidden from the public. In most cases, this process takes one of three forms. In the first case, the public is aware that a negotiation is ongoing, but some details about what the agreement contains are revealed only once the negotiations conclude. Trade and other forms of economic negotiations often occur in this fashion, where bargaining between political stakeholders happens behind closed doors. However, agreements related to peace and security can also be negotiated this manner. For instance, secret negotiations between Egyptian and Israeli leaders across 13 days in September 1978 preceded the Camp David Accords and the subsequent 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty. The White House announced in advance that the leaders were meeting at Camp David, but the negotiations excluded outside observers until an agreement had been reached ([Wright, 2014](#)).

In the second case, the very existence of negotiations could be unknown to the public, but the agreement becomes visible once negotiations are completed. The AUKUS pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States was revealed to the public in September 2021 only after secret negotiations concluded ([Sanger, 2021](#)). Finally, in the third case, agreements may be truly secret. In these instances, neither the negotiation nor the final agreement is visible to the public unless it is leaked or later declassified. Among the most famous secret agreements are a set of secret treaties and military alliances in the early 20th century ([Bas and Schub, 2016](#); [Deeks, 2017](#); [Kuo, 2020](#)). For example, the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement between France and the United Kingdom established spheres of influence in the Ottoman provinces. The agreement, leaked by newly empowered Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917, indicated that the UK government intended to renege on its promises it made to Arab nations. While the legacy of Sykes-Picot is contested, the secret agreement is

characterized as a critical part of Middle East history (Anghie, 2016). Since truly secret agreements are by their nature difficult to quantify, it is hard to know how many of them exist. Estimates of the percentage of U.S. executive agreements that are secret range from roughly 10 to 15% (Hathaway, 2009) to over 40% (Goitein, 2016) of the total number of recent agreements.

Despite the pervasiveness of secrecy in international politics, we know little about how it is perceived by the public. Yet public perceptions of secrecy matter in two ways for democratic foreign policy making. For one, public attitudes shape how leaders weigh the costs and benefits of conducting aspects of foreign affairs in secret. When leaders are accountable to the public, they engage in activities in private or in secret based in part on domestic considerations. Reiter (2012) explains that public constraint is one reason why democratic leaders are deterred from taking secretive, deceptive actions in foreign policy. Democratic officials that secretly engage in activities that violate international norms or laws anticipate incurring “hypocrisy costs” or other forms of backlash from the public if their actions are revealed (Carson and Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Joseph and Poznansky, 2018; McManus and Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Nutt and Pauly, 2021; Poznansky, 2019; Reiter, 2012). In theory, anticipation of such reactions should inform government decision-making about when to conceal or reveal information.

In addition to shaping decisions about what to conceal and reveal, perceptions of public opinion inform how government officials prospectively or retrospectively justify secrecy. During international negotiations, officials use many tactics to justify why aspects of the process occur behind closed doors. For instance, during the TPP negotiations described at the outset of this paper, one argument from the Obama administration was that transparency would lead to poor outcomes for the U.S. A government spokesperson explained that releasing confidential documents would “undermine U.S. leverage in negotiations” (Lee, 2013). Other officials justified secrecy by arguing that it was needed “to build trust among the negotiating parties.”³ Still others noted that a lack of transparency was standard practice in trade negotiations, and the TPP was no exception (Dovere, 2015). And in some instances, President Obama simply pushed back on the notion that the TPP was a “secret deal” since “everybody is going to be able to see exactly what’s in it” (Obama, 2015). These strategies call into question whether the public views some justifications as more legitimate than others.

There is limited political science research concerning how the public perceives transparency and secrecy in foreign affairs. A small literature explores public attitudes towards secrecy and deception in the context of military action (e.g., Carnegie, Kertzer and Yarhi-Milo, 2023; Maxey, 2021; Myrick, 2020; Yarhi-Milo and Ribar, 2023) rather than international negotiations.⁴ It is not clear, however, whether we can extrapolate findings about military force to perceptions of secrecy in other areas of foreign policy, such as diplomatic negotiations. On the one hand, the public may have a larger aversion to secrecy when it comes to military matters, since the stakes of such issues are very high. On the other hand, the public may view secrecy as a necessary part of national security decision-making. This would lead us to expect greater demands for transparency, for example, during a trade negotiation relative to a military operation.

In short, more research is needed to understand how public perceptions of secrecy differ across other domains of foreign affairs.

Many scholars leverage survey experiments to assess public attitudes towards international agreements. However, the majority of these studies evaluate public opinion surrounding the content of agreements rather than the negotiation process. For example, researchers explore what features of environmental agreements (e.g., [Bechtel and Scheve, 2013](#); [Bechtel, Scheve and van Lieshout, 2020](#); [Tingley and Tomz, 2014](#)), trade agreements (e.g., [Brutger and Rathbun, 2021](#); [Brutger and Li, 2022](#); [Spilker, Bernauer and Umana, 2016](#); [Hahm et al., 2019](#)), and security agreements ([Kertzer, Rathbun and Rathbun, 2020](#)) make them more appealing to the public. A handful of studies examine how considerations about the negotiation process—including the style of negotiators ([Brutger and Rathbun, 2018](#)), who participates in negotiations ([Bernauer et al., 2016](#); [Bernauer, Mohrenberg and Koubi, 2020](#)), and the domestic ratification process ([Bernauer, Mohrenberg and Koubi, 2020](#); [Schraff, 2022](#))—shape public attitudes towards an international agreement. But more questions remain about the conditions under which secrecy in negotiations is viewed as more or less permissible.

Attitudes Towards Secrecy in International Negotiations

To explore public attitudes towards secrecy, this section outlines two sets of competing hypotheses, highlighting evidence from academic research and real-world examples. The first set of hypotheses (H0-H2) evaluates overarching attitudes towards secrecy in international negotiations. The second set of hypotheses (H3-H5) considers justifications that government officials provide that could shape public attitudes towards secret negotiations.

Baseline Attitudes Towards Secrecy and Transparency

A first possibility is that democratic norms about transparency are not strongly internalized by the American public. In this scenario, attitudes towards international negotiations should be more influenced by the content of the agreement rather than the procedure by which it was constructed. This logic is consistent with many findings in public opinion and foreign policy that the public evaluates policies based on “ends” rather than “means.” For instance, [Hurwitz and Peffley \(1987\)](#) argue that citizens heavily weigh retrospective outcomes when evaluating presidential performance in foreign affairs. Some research suggests that Americans are more willing to overlook violations of democratic process in order to see their preferred policy enacted or their preferred candidate elected ([Graham and Svobik, 2020](#); [Simonovits, McCoy and Littvay, 2022](#)). For example, [Christenson and Kriner \(2015, 2020\)](#) show that the American public is not intrinsically averse to the president bypassing Congress and instead taking unilateral action in foreign policy. In many cases, the public is willing to disregard process considerations if they share partisan identity with the president or support the underlying policy. Much research on audience costs also suggests that the

public cares more about the leader's underlying policy choice than whether or not they maintained consistency with prior commitments (Chaudoin, 2014; Casler and Clark, 2021; Kertzer and Brutger, 2016).

If a policy is successful in accomplishing its objectives, it can outweigh a host of other considerations about "means." In exploring how the public evaluates costly military conflict, Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler (2005/06) find that citizens are willing to tolerate high casualties if they anticipate the intervention will be successful. Likewise, in evaluations of military operations, secrecy and lack of transparency have a negligible effect on public opinion once the outcome of the operation is taken into account (Myrick, 2020). Carnegie, Kertzer and Yarhi-Milo (2023) also find that instrumental considerations can outweigh normative commitments to transparency in public attitudes towards covert military operations.

Since secrecy is common in the negotiation of international agreements, there are many examples of secret negotiations that were not ultimately criticized for their lack of transparency. Consider, for instance, a series of secret negotiations between the United States and China in 2013 and 2014 to work towards a deal that would reduce carbon emissions. In November 2014, the Obama administration surprised many Americans in announcing that it reached an agreement with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The U.S. pledged to reduce carbon emissions by 26–28% within 10 years, and China pledged that its emissions would peak by 2030 at the latest (Pace and Pickler, 2014). After the announcement, critics of the agreement raised concerns that it would not be enforceable and would reduce American competitiveness (O'Keefe, Nakamura and Mufson, 2014). However, there were few objections to the "means" by which the agreement was reached. This was likely because the deal was popular domestically: a large majority of Americans approve of cooperation between the U.S. and China on climate change (Asia Society, 2021). The logic follows that if "ends" tend to outweigh "means" in the context of international negotiation, then—holding all else constant—there should be little to no difference in attitudes towards negotiations conducted in secret relative to those that are visible to the public.

H0 (Null Hypothesis): The public is equally likely to approve of international negotiations conducted in secret relative to negotiations conducted in public view.

The primary alternative hypothesis is that democratic citizens have an aversion to secrecy (and/or a normative commitment to transparency) in international negotiations. There are a few reasons why this could be the case. First, a secrecy aversion may reflect an association between secrecy and nefarious activities like lying or deception. There are many legitimate reasons for officials to conduct government activities in secret or out of public view. But secrecy can have negative connotations because of its association with unsavory or unlawful activities.⁵ This is due to prominent scandals where leaders deceived their publics or concealed foreign policy decisions in anticipation of popular backlash (Schuessler, 2010, 2015). In the U.S., for example, the covert military operations most ingrained in popular memory range from distasteful to disastrous. These include the failed Bay of Pigs invasion to oust Cuban dictator Fidel Castro

(1961), the CIA's covert bombings of Laos during the Vietnam War, and the infamous Iran-Contra scandal during the Reagan administration (1985-1987).

It follows that during secret international negotiations, if the content of an agreement is not visible, some members of the public may infer—rightly or wrongly—that their government is concealing elements of the agreement that are unpalatable. This is one reason why, as [Deeks \(2017\)](#) explains, secret agreements tend to have a “bad reputation” (p. 714). Recent experimental work provides micro-level evidence that the public is less favorable towards leaders who lie, mislead, deceive, or conceal information from their publics in foreign affairs. [Yarhi-Milo and Ribar \(2023\)](#) show that the American public punishes leaders for lying in international politics, although there is variation in the extent to which individuals perceive lying as acceptable. Likewise, [Maxe \(2021\)](#) finds that U.S. presidents tend to incur political costs for misleading the public about military action.

Yet democratic publics could still exhibit a secrecy aversion without viewing secrecy as nefarious, *per se*. Instead, a preference for transparency over secrecy could reflect internalized liberal norms about the importance of visible policy making in democracies. Transparency advocates emphasize the public's “right to know” ([Florini, 2007](#)) what actions the government takes on their behalf. Demands for “openness,” “publicity,” and “transparency”—famously invoked by liberal thinkers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill ([Bentham, 1843](#); [Mill, 2015](#))—are central to democratic politics. As [Florini \(1998\)](#) summarizes, “A fundamental norm of democracy is, after all, consent of the governed, and consent is meaningless unless it is informed” (p. 52). In international relations, many experts argue that transparency in global governance is becoming a “global norm” ([Peters, 2013](#), p. 534).

Liberal norms internalized by democratic publics can shape attitudes towards foreign policy decisions. Survey experiments show that democratic publics have normative commitments to multilateralism ([Grieco et al., 2011](#); [Recchia and Chu, 2021](#); [Tago and Ikeda, 2015](#)) and adherence to rule of law ([Dill and Schubiger, 2021](#); [Wallace, 2013](#)) in foreign affairs. Aversions to excessive civilian casualties ([Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 2009](#); [Johns and Davies, 2019](#)), destructive and indiscriminate weapons ([Rathbun and Stein, 2020](#)), and the use of force against other democratic publics ([Tomz and Weeks, 2013](#)) suggest that internalized norms can influence public opinion.

Political officials and advocacy groups often invoke normative arguments when criticizing secretive negotiation processes. For example, in 2013, during the first negotiation round of the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), a proposed free trade agreement between the U.S. and the European Union, an open letter signed by over 80 civil society organizations criticized the secretive nature of the negotiations as antithetical to democratic values. The letter read: “We denounce the particularly opaque and exclusive nature of recent trade negotiations and insist that negotiating texts be released to the public. Given a prospective agreement would impact on a broad array of public interest policies, the process must be open to the public.”⁶ While the letter raised concerns about the content of the TTIP negotiations, its central focus was the anti-democratic nature of the process and its overall lack of transparency.

Finally, democratic publics may be averse to secrecy for instrumental reasons, expecting transparent governance to lead to better outcomes (Florini, 2007; Hood and Heald, 2006). Colaresi (2014) explains that the “robust marketplace of ideas” (p. 7) can give democracies advantages when making foreign policy. Excessive secrecy could undermine these advantages by not subjecting policies to public scrutiny *ex ante* or preventing engagement with all relevant stakeholders. An expert from the United Nations summarized this issue, stating, “I am concerned about the secrecy surrounding negotiations for trade treaties, which have excluded key stakeholder groups from the process, including labour unions, environmental protection groups, food-safety movements and health professionals” (Miles, 2015). Excluding relevant stakeholders could obstruct the formal ratification process of an international agreement or otherwise make it difficult to secure broad public buy-in.

H1 (Secrecy Aversion): The public is less likely to approve of international negotiations conducted in secret relative to negotiations conducted in public view.

A third hypothesis emphasizes that attitudes towards secrecy in international negotiations are conditional on prior beliefs about the content of the negotiation. Individuals who disapprove of the substance of an agreement—for example, advocates of protectionist policies who are skeptical of free trade agreements—will be more likely to criticize the process by which it is negotiated. In this respect, we could think about secrecy as activated or instrumentalized by groups who are opposed to ongoing negotiations in the first place. Analyses of secrecy and leaks in international negotiations provide some evidence to this effect. Castle and Pelc (2019) find that the majority of leaks during confidential trade negotiations are defensive: they intend to spoil the negotiations in order to preserve the status quo policy. Political opponents strategically leak portions of draft agreements in order to mobilize the public against the negotiations.

It may be unsurprising, therefore, that critics of a negotiation’s process are those most opposed to its substance. Following the negotiation of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the E.U. and Canada, for instance, the European Green Party adopted a resolution opposing CETA. In the resolution, the European Greens criticized the “secretive manner in which CETA was negotiated” on the grounds that “secrecy undercuts democratic values.”⁷ While the resolution was framed around objections to the procedure by which CETA was negotiated, the European Greens also opposed substantive aspects of the agreement. They raised concerns about the fact that CETA could undermine health and environmental regulations in European countries.

Similar dynamics occur with secretive negotiations of security agreements. In 2021, U.S. President Joe Biden sent a delegation to Vienna to resume talks with Iran about the prospect of renegotiating a nuclear agreement. Most objections to secrecy around the negotiations came from Republican legislators who opposed the initial nuclear agreement concluded in 2015. For example, a 2022 letter signed by Republican members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee requested that senior U.S.

negotiators “appear before a public hearing to provide crucial transparency ...[T]he American people have a right to know what their diplomats agreed to in Vienna...” (Office of US Representative Claudia Tenney, 2022). Such examples suggest that process concerns during an international negotiation are raised by domestic stakeholders that oppose the negotiation. By contrast, stakeholders that support an agreement overlook aspects of the negotiation process they find to be problematic.

H2 (Instrumentalized Secrecy): The public is less likely to approve of international negotiations conducted in secret relative to negotiations conducted in public view when they are unfavorable towards the content of the negotiation in the first place.

Conditions Making Secrecy More Permissible

If the public is averse to secrecy, what justifications provided by the government could mitigate concerns about a lack of transparency in international negotiations? This second set of hypotheses considers three justifications policymakers provide for secrecy during a negotiation process. First, governments justify secrecy on the grounds that it improves the likelihood of a successful outcome. Second, secrecy could be justified if the content of the negotiation contains sensitive information or state secrets. Third, governments could justify secrecy as a way to avoid criticism from domestic and international stakeholders. These justifications for secrecy are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive⁸, but all three are commonly used to legitimize negotiations that occur behind closed doors.

A first, common justification for secrecy is that it improves the likelihood that any agreement will be reached. This could happen for a few reasons. For one, international agreements are complex, linking a variety of issues. If negotiations occur in public view, domestic constituencies can lobby against tentative provisions of an agreement. This could derail negotiations before they conclude (Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal, 2001). Negotiating in public view can also give negotiators perverse incentives to take uncompromising positions. Stasavage (2004) argues that one downside of a transparent process is that negotiators are more likely to take unyielding stances to signal that they have their constituents’ interests in mind.

Another reason why secrecy improves the prospects of a successful agreement is that it builds trust between negotiating parties.⁹ This is relevant in cases where negotiating parties are adversaries or have limited formal diplomatic relations. The U.S. and Iran, for instance, maintained a secret “back channel” of communications that paralleled formal multilateral talks in Geneva prior to the creation of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Lead U.S. negotiator Ambassador Wendy Sherman wrote that secrecy “was principally based on our lack of trust in Iran.... By keeping it secret, we could insulate the UN-backed talks from the animosities and mistrust that made communication between our two nations so difficult” (Sherman, 2018, p. 65). Following from this logic, H3 anticipates that the public will be more likely to approve of secret negotiations when provided with a justification of practical necessity.

H3 (Improved Success): The public is more likely to approve of secret negotiations when they improve the likelihood that a deal could be reached.

A second justification for negotiating in secret is that the content of the negotiation itself could contain sensitive information. If the U.S. government explains that secrecy is necessary to protect confidential information, the public may be more likely to condone a lack of transparency around the negotiation process. It is often intuitive to observers why negotiations about topics related to national security—like nuclear agreements, intelligence sharing, and security cooperation—would be shrouded in secrecy. Deeks (2017) explains that in the 1970s, the United States and the Soviet Union negotiated nuclear agreements, but details about these agreements remained secret. During the negotiation process, the superpowers exchanged information about nuclear capabilities to enable both governments to hold one another accountable. Understandably, however, these details were kept from public view. In such cases, secrecy may not be objectionable.

But secrecy may be necessary to preserve sensitive information in economic agreements as well. The U.S. government often invokes state secrecy to justify why economic agreements are negotiated out of public view. One example is the secretive negotiation process between 2008 and 2010 around the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), a multilateral agreement designed to strengthen intellectual property protections to prevent piracy and counterfeiting. The Obama administration received much criticism for the lack of transparency around the ACTA negotiations (Levine, 2011). The official response from the White House was that the administration could not disclose sensitive information about the negotiations due to national security concerns (Kravets, 2009). Other domestic stakeholders objected to this justification. In a letter to the U.S. Trade Representative signed by Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT) and Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH), the legislators wrote that they were “unpersuaded by assertions that disclosures of basic information about the negotiation would present a risk to the national security of the United States....”¹⁰

While confidentiality in certain economic agreements may be necessary, it is likely that the public perceives secrecy as more legitimate in security negotiations because of a well-established association between state secrets and national security. Therefore, an additional implication of this argument is that the public should see secrecy in national security issues as *more* permissible than secrecy in economic agreements.

H4a (High Sensitivity): The public is more likely to approve of secret negotiations when the negotiation contains highly sensitive information.

H4b (High Threat): The public is more likely to approve of secret negotiations when they involve national security issues rather than economic issues.

A third justification that a government may provide for secrecy is that they anticipate opposition to the negotiations and wish to avoid such criticism. This opposition could arise from domestic political actors or from other international allies or adversaries. If this opposition is widely known, government secrecy may be perceived as an attempt to

conceal activities from potential critics. We may expect that the public will be *less* supportive of this justification relative to alternatives.

Much research on covert action, for example, explains that one reason that democratic leaders act covertly is because they anticipate domestic backlash if their activities were publicly revealed (Gibbs, 1995; Downes and Lilley, 2010; Carson and Yarhi-Milo, 2017). Leaders who endorse democratic values in principle but then support forceful regime change are likely to face domestic criticism (O'Rourke, 2018). Similarly, McManus and Yarhi-Milo (2017) explain that democratic leaders provide autocratic protégés with less publicly visible forms of support relative to their democratic protégés to avoid being seen as hypocritical. During international negotiations, negotiators may attempt to conceal either who they are negotiating with or the content of those negotiations if they expect public criticism.

Alternatively, secrecy could be shaped by international rather than domestic considerations. Brown (2013) argues that secret negotiations of security agreements tend to be “shaped principally by international strategic context” (p. 422). He tests this argument through an analysis of international negotiations around the construction of U.S. military bases abroad. Carson (2016, 2018)'s research also highlights the role of international audiences in a leader's decision about whether to undertake covert versus overt military activities. Carson argues that adversarial states “tacitly collude” to make their military confrontations a secret in order to avoid escalating conflict.

During the negotiation of international agreements, states may similarly justify secrecy as necessary to shield information from their allies or adversaries. A key component of the AUKUS pact was the U.S. and the U.K. would help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines. The announcement of the agreement angered China. A spokesperson for the Chinese foreign ministry described AUKUS as a “typical military bloc that smacks of obsolete Cold War zero-sum mentality” (Wenbin, 2021). But the pact also angered a close ally of the AUKUS members, France, because it resulted in cancellation of a French submarine contract with Australia. In such situations, negotiators have incentives to conceal information until a deal is finalized so that other actors—whether foreign or domestic—will not spoil a potential agreement. Therefore, the anticipation of criticism is another justification of secrecy during international negotiations. However, this justification is likely to be viewed less favorably by the public.

H5a (Domestic Criticism): The public is less likely to approve of secret negotiations when public negotiations would be criticized by domestic political opponents.

H5b (International Criticism): The public is less likely to approve of secret negotiations when public negotiations would be criticized by international opponents.

Research Design

To test both sets of hypotheses, I embedded an experiment in an online survey of roughly 2400 U.S. adults fielded in December 2021 through the survey platform Lucid

Theorem.¹¹ I used quota sampling based on target demographics of age, sex, ethnicity, race, and region in the United States. Consistent with best practices in the use of online panels, I added attention checks in the survey before the respondent read the experimental vignette (e.g., Aronow et al., 2020). Respondents who did not pass these simple attention checks were screened out of the survey before the experiment (see Appendix). The first two attention checks came at the beginning of the survey, while the third was displayed after the demographic questions but before the experimental vignette.

In the survey, respondents read two hypothetical scenarios about the U.S. government negotiating with other countries: one in which the U.S. negotiated a trade agreement and one in which the U.S. negotiated a security agreement. The main feature of the vignette was a description of whether the negotiations were conducted in view of the public or kept secret from the public. Following designs from covert action survey experiments (e.g., Myrick, 2020), this randomization was implemented in a cross-over design such that each respondent saw one agreement negotiated in secret and one agreement negotiated in public. To ensure vignettes were sufficiently distinct, the relevant partner was also randomized in a cross-over design as either “an ally in Europe” or “an ally in Asia.”

The text of the economic vignette read:

Consider the following scenario:

- *The U.S. government announced that it negotiated an economic agreement with [an ally in Europe] OR [an ally in Asia].*
- *The agreement would make trade and investment between the countries easier.*
- *[The U.S. government kept the American public informed about the agreement and what it contained while the negotiations were ongoing.] OR [The U.S. government conducted the negotiations in secret. They did not tell the American public that the negotiations were happening or what they were about until the agreement was finished.]*

The text of the security vignette read:

Consider the following scenario:

- *The U.S. government announced that it negotiated a security agreement with [an ally in Europe] OR [an ally in Asia].*
- *The agreement would make security cooperation and exchange of military technology between the countries easier.*
- *[The U.S. government kept the American public informed about the agreement and what it contained while the negotiations were ongoing.] OR [The U.S. government conducted the negotiations in secret. They did not tell the American public that the negotiations were happening or what they were about until the agreement was finished.]*

After each vignette, respondents were asked:

How much do you approve or disapprove of the actions taken by the U.S. government in this scenario?

- *Disapprove Strongly*
- *Disapprove Somewhat*
- *Neither Approve nor Disapprove*
- *Approve Somewhat*
- *Approve Strongly*

The second part of the experimental design probed the conditions under which secrecy in international negotiations would be perceived as more or less permissible. After the agreement described as secret, respondents received one of four (randomly assigned) justifications from a government official about why secrecy was necessary. The text read:

- *A U.S. official said that the government negotiated the [economic/security] agreement in secret rather than informing the American public because [it anticipated that Congress would criticize the negotiation] OR [it anticipated that other countries would criticize the negotiation] OR [secrecy improved the likelihood that a deal would be reached] OR [the negotiation contained highly sensitive information].*

After reading the justification, the dependent variable was asked again, consistent with a repeated measures experimental design. Respondents were asked:

Given this new information, how much do you approve or disapprove of the actions taken by the U.S. government in this scenario?

- *Disapprove Strongly*
- *Disapprove Somewhat*
- *Neither Approve nor Disapprove*
- *Approve Somewhat*
- *Approve Strongly*

The experiment was designed to assess two main quantities of interest. The first quantity of interest—which tests H0 and H1—is the difference in public approval of secret relative to non-secret agreements. The second quantity of interest—which tests H3, H4, and H5—is the difference in attitudes before and after justifications for secrecy are provided by the government.

H2 (Instrumentalized Secrecy) anticipates that secrecy will be seen as more unfavorable by respondents who disapprove of the content of the agreement *ex ante*. To evaluate this hypothesis, I collected responses to two moderator questions, asked pre-treatment, that measured attitudes towards the content of the economic and security agreements. The moderator question for the economic agreement read:

Which statement is closest to your view?

- *The U.S. will be better off if it reduces barriers to trade to allow its own industries to sell to foreign markets.*
- *The U.S. will be better off if it increases barriers to trade to give its own industries protection from foreign firms.*
- *I don't know*

The moderator question for the security agreement read:

Which statement is closest to your view?

- *The U.S. will be better off if it works with other allies to respond to security threats.*
- *The U.S. will be better off if it chooses how to respond to security threats on its own.*
- *I don't know*

For each moderator, respondents who chose the second option were coded as “Disapprove,” indicating that they were more likely to disapprove of the content of the economic or security agreement, respectively.

Overall Attitudes Towards Secrecy

To test the first two hypotheses, I consider the difference in public approval of international negotiations conducted in secret relative to those conducted in public.

Table 1. Evaluating H0-H1: Overall Attitudes Towards Secrecy.

		<i>DV: Approval of U.S. Gov Actions (1-5)</i>			
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Secret		-0.821*** (0.043)	-0.820*** (0.030)	-0.671*** (0.047)	-0.972*** (0.046)
Constant		5.410*** (0.021)	3.580*** (0.081)	3.492*** (0.106)	3.679*** (0.103)
Type of agreement	Both	Both	Security	Economic	
Respondent FEs	Yes	No	No	No	
Demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Observations	4744	4736	2368	2368	

*p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.

In Table 1, each observation is an evaluation of a negotiation process.¹² Every respondent evaluates two negotiations: one of an economic agreement and one of a security agreement. The dependent variable measures how much the respondent approves of the actions taken by the U.S. government in the negotiation process. This variable is measured on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from Disapprove Strongly (1) to Approve Strongly (5).

The models in Table 1 evaluate H0 and H1 using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression.¹³ H0 (Null Hypothesis) anticipates no relationship between the secrecy of an agreement and public attitudes towards the government's actions. By contrast, H1 (Secrecy Aversion) anticipates that the coefficient on *Secret* will be negative and statistically significant, since the public will be less favorable towards negotiations conducted in secret relative to those conducted in public.

Model 1 includes respondent fixed effects to show the within-subject difference in approval of secret and public international negotiations. Model 2 evaluates the between-subject difference in approval of secret versus public negotiations, controlling for pre-registered demographic covariates for age, sex, race, education, and partisan identity. The final two models also evaluate the between-subject difference in attitudes towards secrecy using the sub-sample of security agreements (Model 3) and economic agreements (Model 4), respectively. For both Model 1 and Model 2, where there are two observations per respondent, standard errors are clustered by respondent. Importantly, in all four models, the coefficient on *Secret* is negative and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), lending support to H1. The substantive effects are fairly sizeable; the magnitude of the estimated coefficients ranges from roughly 0.5 to 0.8 standard deviations of the dependent variable.

H2 (Instrumentalized Secrecy) anticipates that respondents who disapprove of the content of the agreement ex ante should be the most opposed to secrecy. Recall that I created indicators to proxy for ex ante disapproval (*Disapprove*) from the moderator questions which were asked pre-treatment. I assume that respondents who are skeptical of rather than supportive of free trade are more likely to disapprove of economic agreements. Respondents are classified as disapproving of the content of an economic agreement if they agree that: "The U.S. will be better off if it increases barriers to trade to give its own industries protection from foreign firms." I assume respondents who tend to favor unilateral over multilateral action in response to security threats are more likely to disapprove of security agreements. Therefore, participants are classified as disapproving of the content of a security agreement if they agreed that: "The U.S. will be better off if it chooses how to respond to security threats on its own."

Table 2 regresses approval of U.S. government actions on indicators for secrecy (*Secret*), disapproval of content (*Disapprove*), and the interaction of the two (*Secret x Disapprove*). The results are displayed without demographic controls (Model 1) and with controls (Model 2). In Models 1 and 2, standard errors are clustered by respondent. H2 anticipates that the coefficient on the interaction term, *Secret x Disapprove*, would be negative and statistically significant. In both models, however, the interaction effect is substantively small and statistically indistinguishable from zero, failing to support to

Table 2. Evaluating H2: Instrumentalized Secrecy.

	<i>DV: Approval of U.S. Gov Actions (1-5)</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Secret	-0.827*** (0.037)	-0.822*** (0.036)	-0.710*** (0.055)	-0.959*** (0.058)
Disapprove	-0.185*** (0.050)	-0.139*** (0.050)	-0.250*** (0.077)	-0.121* (0.067)
Secret x disapprove	0.017 (0.073)	0.005 (0.071)	0.148 (0.108)	-0.034 (0.094)
Constant	3.768*** (0.025)	3.635*** (0.082)	3.596*** (0.110)	3.716*** (0.105)
Type of agreement	Both	Both	Security	Economic
Demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	4744	4736	2368	2368

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

H2. The interaction effect remains statistically insignificant when subsetting the analysis to negotiations of security agreements (Model 3) and economic agreements (Model 4) independently.

Attitudes Towards Secrecy Justifications

After receiving and reacting to information about the negotiation that occurs in secret, survey respondents read a justification for secrecy provided by a U.S. government official. Each respondent reads one randomly assigned justification out of four potential options. The primary quantity of interest is the within-subject difference in approval of the U.S. government's actions before and after the justification for secrecy is provided. The justifications for secrecy correspond to H3-H5. I expect that the public will be more likely to approve of secret negotiations if they improve the prospects for successful negotiation (H3) or if the content of the negotiations is highly sensitive and necessary to keep out of public view (H4A). The two other justifications for negotiating in secret were the government's anticipation of criticism that would arise from domestic political opponents (H5A) or international opponents (H5B). I expected that these justifications would lead to a decrease in approval of government actions.

Figure 1 shows the average change in respondent attitudes before and after the justification for secrecy was provided.¹⁴ Positive (negative) values indicate that the respondent's approval of U.S. government actions increased (decreased) after a justification was given. The first row of Figure 1 supports H3: approval of government actions increased after respondents were told that negotiations would improve the likelihood that a deal

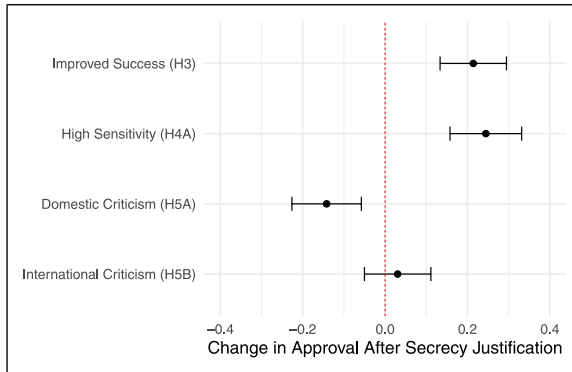


Figure 1. Difference in approval of U.S. government actions before and after justification for secrecy.

would be reached. The second row supports H4: characterizing secret negotiations as containing highly sensitive material boosts approval of U.S. actions.

A further implication of H4 is the public may view secrecy as more appropriate and acceptable in national security negotiations relative to economic negotiations given the perception of heightened stakes of the agreement. The results in [Table 1](#) support this hypothesis. Relative to a security negotiation conducted in public, the same negotiation conducted in secret reduced public approval of government actions by roughly 0.55 standard deviations of the dependent variable. For negotiations of an economic agreement, conducting the negotiations in secret reduced public approval of government by roughly 0.8 standard deviations of the dependent variable, suggesting that respondents are more critical of secrecy in economic negotiations.

The results for H5 are mixed. If the U.S. government justifies secrecy during the negotiation by explaining that negotiators anticipate criticism from domestic actors, this decreases approval of government actions and leads to support for H5A. However, a justification of secrecy that anticipates avoiding international actors has no significant effect on approval, failing to support H5B. One possibility for this null result is that attitudes depend on who survey respondents have in mind as the relevant international actor who would criticize a deal. For example, respondents may be more disapproving of secrecy in a negotiation process designed to avoid criticism from U.S. allies rather than criticism from adversaries. Overall, however, the results show that anticipation of criticism from domestic or international opponents is viewed by the American public as a less compelling reason for secrecy relative to other justifications.

Conclusion

There is growing interest in secrecy in international relations, but questions remain about how democratic publics evaluate secrecy in practice. This paper explores how the

American public reacts to secrecy in the context of negotiating international agreements. Results from a survey experiment of 2400 American adults show an overarching aversion to secrecy in international negotiations. However, certain justifications for a lack of transparency can mitigate these negative effects. Survey respondents were more likely to approve of secret negotiations when they involved highly sensitive material or increased the probability that an agreement would be concluded successfully. By contrast, secret negotiations were seen as less acceptable when the U.S. government acted in secret in order to avoid criticism from domestic audiences.

The findings in this survey have important practical implications. When government officials choose what aspects of a negotiation should occur behind closed doors, they make calculations about the costs and benefits of concealing information from their publics. The survey results suggest that government officials could provide clearer justifications for why it is necessary to keep certain information confidential. Much criticism in the U.S. about the TPP, for instance, stemmed from the belief that secrecy around the agreement was excessive and that aspects of the negotiation were over-classified. This contributed to the perception that powerful private stakeholders had an outsized influence on the TPP negotiation process.

Extensions of this experiment could further probe public attitudes towards secrecy in international negotiations. First, the experiment in this paper evaluates only one set of circumstances surrounding secret negotiations. In the secrecy condition, the public is neither aware of the existence of the negotiations nor what they contain until the agreement is finalized and revealed. Future work could explore a greater spectrum of secrecy and transparency in a negotiation process. For example, is the public less averse to secrecy in negotiations when they are aware that the negotiations are ongoing? Or does awareness that a negotiation is ongoing without access to the deliberations make the public more likely to agitate for increased transparency?

Second, it would also be important to replicate the survey experiment on other democratic publics outside of the United States to see if aversions to secrecy vary widely. Unique histories of covert action and secret agreements, as well as the salience of recent international negotiations could contribute to cross-national variation in public attitudes towards secrecy. For instance, democracies differ in the ability of their political institutions to retrospectively oversee government secrecy (Bell and Machain, 2018; Colaresi, 2012, 2014) and in the infrastructure that could expose covert activities (Joseph and Poznansky, 2018). In comparing institutional accountability for covert action across countries, Regan and Poole (2021) note that there is weaker legislative oversight of covert action in the United Kingdom relative to the United States. Unlike in the UK system, a U.S. president is required to notify Congress of covert operations in advance. Different systems of oversight and accountability may lead to different public expectations for transparency in foreign affairs. Democratic publics may also vary in terms of the political culture around secrecy and transparency. For example, in Israel, Riemer and Sobelman (2019) explain that secrecy is seen as an integral part of national security, and revealing intelligence “runs against its very DNA.” We therefore may expect Israeli citizens to be less averse to secrecy than citizens of countries where

normative commitments to transparency in foreign affairs have been more strongly internalized.

Third, how do the results change when negotiations occur with adversaries rather than allies? This experiment focused on attitudes towards agreements negotiated with foreign allies. However, it is possible that the public would be more skeptical of secrecy in negotiations with foreign adversaries. Democratic citizens may demand more buy-in to the process when there is controversy around the negotiating parties. Likewise, in exploring attitudes towards justifications for secrecy given by U.S. officials, extensions of this survey could distinguish between which international actors criticized the negotiation process.

Finally, are there dispositions of individuals that make them view secrecy as more or less permissible in foreign affairs? Existing work emphasizes that personality traits and moral values can shape foreign policy attitudes (e.g., [Kertzer et al., 2014](#); [Brutger and Kertzer, 2018](#)). Extensions of this paper could probe individual-level variation in attitudes towards secrecy. For example, a subset of the population could strongly internalize liberal norms related to transparency and therefore be particularly averse to secrecy. Attitudes towards secrecy may also be conditioned by partisanship and trust in government, with respondents from the same party as the current administration more willing to overlook secrecy in international negotiations. These and similar extensions could enrich the growing literature on government secrecy, with an emphasis on public reactions to secrecy and transparency in international politics.

Acknowledgements

I thank Alice Shih for research assistance. Jonathan Renshon, Kathleen Powers, and other participants at the 2022 International Studies Association Conference in Nashville, Tennessee provided helpful feedback on this paper.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by Duke University.

ORCID iD

Rachel Myrick  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9833-6041>

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Letter from Sen. Elizabeth Warren to Michael Froman. June 13, 2013. Accessed at: <https://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/EWFromanLetter.pdf>
2. This survey experiment is pre-registered with the Evidence for Governance and Politics (EGAP) registry hosted by the Center for Open Science's OSF platform: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/8THNS>.
3. As quoted in [DePillis \(2015\)](#).
4. A recent exception is [Juhl and Hilpert \(2021\)](#) who analyze how transparency shapes public perceptions of environmental and trade negotiations in Germany.
5. As [Reisman and Baker \(1992\)](#) explain, the term *covert* simply means that the action is unknown to some parties, but “[t]he normative conclusion conveyed by the word *covert* is that the action per se and the way it has been accomplished make it unlawful” (13).
6. Accessed from: <https://www.citizen.org/wp-content/uploads/public-citizen-letter-to-obama-alerting-to-tafta-concerns.pdf>
7. Text of resolution accessed from: <https://europeangreens.eu/zagreb2015/egp-opposes-ceta>.
8. For example, in a negotiation that contains sensitive information, secrecy may be necessary to build trust and improve the likelihood that a deal is reached.
9. Importantly, as [Abazi \(2016\)](#) notes, secrecy in a negotiation highlights a trade-off between building trust among negotiators and building trust between the government and the public.
10. Accessed from: https://www.keionline.org/sites/default/files/sanders_brown_acta.pdf
11. This survey was exempted from review by Duke University's Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB), protocol 2022-0135.
12. Regression tables omit coefficients on demographic variables for presentation. Full tables are in an [Online Appendix](#).
13. An [Online Appendix](#) shows that the results are similar using logistic regression with a binary dependent variable measured as “Approve” (1) or “Not Approve” (0).
14. An alternative experimental design may have treated these secrecy justifications as mediators, asking each respondent how likely a negotiation was to be successful (H3), contain sensitive information (H4), or be subject to domestic or international criticism (H5). However, it is likely that the assumptions necessary for mediation analysis ([Bullock and Ha, 2011](#)) are violated, in part because these secrecy justifications are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive.

References

- Abazi, Vigjilencja. 2016. “How Confidential Negotiations of the TTIP Affect Public Trust.” *European Journal of Risk Regulation* 7 (2): 247-251.
- Anghie, Antony T. 2016. “Introduction to Symposium on the Many Lives and Legacies of Sykes-Picot.” *American Journal of International Law* 110: 105-108.
- Aronow, Peter M., Josh Kalla, Lilla Orr, and John Ternovski. 2020. “Evidence of Rising Rates of Inattentiveness on Lucid in 2020.” Unpublished manuscript.
- Asia Society. 2021. “Understanding American Voter Attitudes Towards U.S.-China Climate Cooperation.” *Asia Society Policy Institute & Data for Progress*, February. URL: <https://>

[asiasociety.org/policy-institute/understanding-american-voter-attitudes-toward-us-china-climate-cooperation](https://www.asiasociety.org/policy-institute/understanding-american-voter-attitudes-toward-us-china-climate-cooperation)

- Bas, Muhammet, and Robert Schub. 2016. "Mutual Optimism as a Cause of Conflict: Secret alliances and Conflict Onset." *International Studies Quarterly* 60 (3): 552-564.
- Bechtel, Michael M., and Kenneth F. Scheve. 2013. "Mass Support for Global Climate Agreements Depends on Institutional Design." *Proceedings of the National Academic of Sciences* 110: 13763-13768.
- Bechtel, Michael M., Kenneth F. Scheve, and Elisabeth van Lieshout. 2020. "Constant Carbon Pricing Increases Support for Climate Action Compared to Ramping up Costs over Time." *Nature Climate Change* 10: 1004-1009.
- Bell, Sam R., and Carla Martinez Machain. 2018. "Democracy, Transparency, and Secrecy in Crisis." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 14(4): 592-602.
- Bentham, Jeremy. 1843. *The Works of Jeremy Bentham, Vol. 4*. Simpkin, Marshall, and Co.
- Bernauer, Thomas, Robert Gampfer, Tianguang Meng, and Yu-Sung Su. 2016. "Could More Civil Society Involvement Increase Public Support for Climate Policy-Making? Evidence from a Survey Experiment in China." *Global Environmental Change* 40: 1-12.
- Bernauer, Thomas, Steffen Mohrenberg, and Vally Koubi. 2020. "Do Citizens Evaluate International Cooperation Based on Information about Procedural and Outcome Quality?" *The Review of International Organizations* 15: 505-529.
- Brown, Jonathan N. 2013. "The Sound of Silence: Power, Secrecy, and International Audiences in US Military Basing Negotiations." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 31(4): 406-431.
- Brutger, Ryan, and Brian Rathbun. 2018. "Style over Substance: How Negotiation Process Affects Support for International Agreements in the Mass Public." Presented at the Political Economy of International Organization (PEIO) Conference, Madison, WI, February 8-10, 2018.
- Brutger, Ryan, and Brian Rathbun. 2021. "Fair Share? Equality and Equity in American Attitudes Toward Trade." *International Organization* 75 (3): 880-900.
- Brutger, Ryan, and Joshua D. Kertzer. 2018. "A Dispositional Theory of Audience Costs." *International Organization* 72 (3): 693-724.
- Brutger, Ryan, and Siyao Li. 2022. "Institutional Design, Information Transmission, and Public Opinion: Making the Case for Trade." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66 (10): 1881-1907.
- Bullock, John G., and Shang E. Ha. 2011. "Mediation Analysis is Harder than it Looks." In *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*, edited by James N. Druckman, Donald P. Green, James H. Kuklinski, and Lupia Arthur, 508-521. Cambridge University Press.
- Carnegie, Allison. 2021. "Secrecy in International Relations and Foreign Policy." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24: 213-233.
- Carnegie, Allison, and Austin Carson. 2019. "The Disclosure Dilemma: Nuclear Intelligence and International Organizations." *American Journal of Political Science* 63 (2): 269-285.
- Carnegie, Allison, and Austin Carson. 2020. *Secrets in Global Governance: Disclosure Dilemmas and the Challenge of International Cooperation*. Cambridge University Press.

- Carnegie, Allison, Joshua D. Kertzer, and Keren Yarhi-Milo. 2023. "Democratic Peace and Covert Military Force: An Experimental Test." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63 (2-3): 1881-1907.
- Carson, Austin. 2016. "Facing Off and Saving Face: Covert Intervention and Escalation Management in the Korean War." *International Organization* 70 (1): 103-131.
- Carson, Austin. 2018. *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics*. Princeton University Press.
- Carson, Austin, and Keren Yarhi-Milo. 2017. "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret." *Security Studies* 26 (1): 124-156.
- Casler, Don, and Richard Clark. 2021. "Trade Rage: Audience Costs and International Trade." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65 (6): 1098-1130.
- Castle, Matthew, and Krzysztof J. Pelc. 2019. "The Causes and Effects of Leaks in International Negotiations." *International Studies Quarterly* 63 (4): 1147-1162.
- Chaudoin, Stephen. 2014. "Promises or Policies? An Experimental Analysis of International Agreements and Audience Reactions." *International Organization* 68 (1): 235-236.
- Christenson, Dino P., and Douglas L. Kriner. 2015. "Constitutional Qualms or Politics as Usual? The Factors Shaping Public Support for Unilateral Action." *American Journal of Political Science* 61 (2): 335-349.
- Christenson, Dino P., and Douglas L. Kriner. 2020. *The Myth of the Imperial Presidency: How Public Opinion Checks the Unilateral Executive*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Colaresi, Michael. 2012. "A Boom with Review: How Retrospective Oversight Increases the Foreign Policy Ability of Democracies." *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (3): 671-689.
- Colaresi, Michael P. 2014. *Democracy Declassified: The Secrecy Dilemma in National Security*. Oxford Scholarship Online.
- Cormac, Rory, and Richard J. Aldrich. 2018. "Grey is the New Black: Covert Action and Implausible Deniability." *International Affairs* 94 (3): 477-494.
- Daugherty, William. 2006. *Executive Secrets: Covert Action and the Presidency*. University of Kentucky Press.
- Deeks, Ashley S. 2017. "A (Qualified) Defense of Secret Agreements." *Arizona State Law Journal* 49: 732-735.
- DePillis, Lydia. 2015. "The Catch-22 of Trade Deals Done in Secret." *The Washington Post*, May 15.
- Dill, Janina, and Livia I. Schubiger. 2021. "Attitudes Toward the Use of Force: Instrumental Imperative, Moral Principles, and International Law." *American Journal of Political Science* 65 (3): 612-633.
- Dovere, Edward-Isaac. 2015. "Extreme Secrecy Eroding Support for Obama's Trade Pact." *Politico*, May 4.
- Downes, Alexander B., and Mary Lauren Lilley. 2010. "Overt Peace, Covert War?: Covert Intervention and the Democratic Peace." *Security Studies* 19: 266-306.
- Florini, Ann. 1998. "The End of Secrecy." *Foreign Policy*.
- Florini, Ann. 2007. *The Right to Know: Transparency for an Open World*. Columbia University Press.

- Forsythe, David P. 1992. "Democracy, War, and Covert Action." *Journal of Peace Research* 29 (4): 385-395.
- Gelpi, Christopher, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler. 2005/06. "Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq." *International Security* 30 (3): 7-46.
- Gelpi, Christopher, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler. 2009. *Paying the Human Costs of War: American Public Opinion and Casualties in Military Conflicts*. Princeton University Press.
- Gibbs, David N. 1995. "Secrecy and International Relations." *Journal of Peace Research* 32 (2): 213-228.
- Goitein, Elizabeth. 2016. "The New Era of Secret Law." Report published by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law.
- Graham, Matthew H., and Milan W. Svobik. 2020. "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 114 (2): 392-409.
- Grieco, Joseph M., Christopher Gelpi, Jason Reifler, and Peter D. Feaver. 2011. "Let's Get a Second Opinion: International Institutions and American Public Support for War." *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (2): 563-583.
- Haas, Melina, and Keren Yarhi-Milo. 2020. "To Disclose or Deceive? Sharing Secret Information between Aligned States." *International Security* 45 (3): 122-161.
- Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Zachary C. Steinert-Threlkeld, and David G. Victor. 2016. "Predictability vs. Flexibility: Secrecy in International Investment Arbitration." *World Politics* 68 (3): 413-453.
- Hahn, Hyeonho, Thomas König, Moritz Osnabrügge, and Elena Frech. 2019. "Who Settles Disputes? Treaty Design and Trade Attitudes Toward the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)." *International Organization* 73 (4): 881-900.
- Hathaway, Oona A. 2009. "Presidential Power over International Law: Restoring the Balance." *The Yale Law Journal* 119: 140-268.
- Hood, Christopher, and David Heald. 2006. *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?* Oxford University Press.
- Hurwitz, Jon, and Mark Peffley. 1987. "The Means and Ends of Foreign Policy as a Determinant to Presidential Support." *American Journal of Political Science* 31 (2): 236-258.
- Johns, Robert, and Graeme A. M. Davies. 2019. "Civilian Casualties and Public Support for Military Action: Experimental Evidence." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63 (1): 251-281.
- Johnson, Loch K. 2022. *The Third Option: Covert Action and American Foreign Policy*. Oxford University Press.
- Joseph, Michael F., and Michael Poznansky. 2018. "Media Technology, Covert Action, and the Politics of Exposure." *Journal of Peace Research* 55: 320-335.
- Juhl, Sebastian, and David Hilpert. 2021. "Wheeling and Dealing Behind Closed Doors: Estimating the Causal Effect of Transparency on Policy Evaluations using a Survey Experiment." *Political Science Research and Methods* 9: 36-52.
- Kasperkevic, Jana. 2015. "Obama Defends Controversial TPP Deal and Dismisses Secrecy Concerns." *The Guardian*, October 10.

- Kertzer, Joshua D., Brian C. Rathbun, and Nina Srinivasan Rathbun. 2020. "The Price of Peace: Motivated Reasoning and Costly Signaling in International Relations." *International Organization* 74 (1): 95-118.
- Kertzer, Joshua D., E. Kathleen, Brian C. Rathbun Powers, and Ravi Iyer. 2014. "Moral Support: How Moral Values Shape Foreign Policy Attitudes." *Journal of Politics* 63 (3): 825-840.
- Kertzer, Joshua D., and Ryan Brutger. 2016. "Decomposing Audience Costs: Bringing the Audience Back into Audience Cost Theory." *American Journal of Political Science* 60 (1): 234-249.
- Koremenos, Barbara, Charles Lipson, and Snidal Duncan. 2001. "The Rational Design of International Institutions." *International Organization* 55 (4): 761-799.
- Kravets, David. 2009. "Obama Administration Declares Proposed IP Treaty a 'National Security' Secret." *WIRED Magazine*, March 12.
- Kuo, Raymond. 2020. "Secrecy among Friends: Covert Military Alliances and Portfolio Consistency." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64 (1): 63-89.
- Lee, Timothy B. 2013. "Obama Administration Sued Over Its Secretive Trade Negotiations." *The Washington Post*, December 18.
- Lester, Genevieve. 2015. *When Should State Secrets Stay Secret? Accountability, Democratic Governance, and Intelligence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levine, David S. 2011. "Transparency Soup: The ACTA Negotiating Process and "Black Box" Lawmaking." *American University Law Review* 26 (3): 811-837.
- Maxey, Sarah. 2021. "Limited Spin: When the Public Punishes Leaders Who Lie about Military Action." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65 (2-3): 283-312.
- McManus, Roseanne W., and Keren Yarhi-Milo. 2017. "The Logic of 'Offstage' Signaling: Domestic Politics, Regime Type, and Major Power-Protege Relations." *International Organization* 71 (4): 701-733.
- Mearsheimer, John. 2011. *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth About Lying in International Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Miles, Tom. 2015. "U.N. Expert Says Secret Trade Deals Threaten Human Rights." *Reuters*, April 23.
- Mill, John Stuart. 2015. *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*. Oxford University Press.
- Myrick, Rachel. 2020. "Why So Secretive? Unpacking Public Attitudes Towards Secrecy and Success in US Foreign Policy." *Journal of Politics* 82 (3): 828-843.
- Nutt, Cullen G., and Reid B. C. Pauly. 2021. "Caught Red-Handed: How States Wield Proof to Coerce Wrongdoers." *International Security* 46 (2): 7-50.
- Obama, Barack. 2015. "Statement by the President on the Trans-Pacific Partnership." The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, October 5.
- Office of US Representative Claudia Tenney. 2022. "Tenney Leads Letter to President Biden Calling for Senior Administration Officials to Testify Publicly on JCPOA 2.0 Negotiations." Press Release, April 23.
- O'Keefe, Ed, David Nakamura, and Steven Mufson. 2014. "GOP Congressional Leaders Denounce U.S.-China Deal on Climate Change." *The Washington Post*, November 12.
- O'Rourke, Lindsay. 2018. *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War*. Cornell University Press.

- Otto, Jacob, and William Spaniel. 2021. "Doubling Down: The Danger of Disclosing Secret Action." *International Studies Quarterly* 65 (2): 500-511.
- Pace, Julie, and Nedra Pickler. 2014. "Climate Deal Surprises after Secret Negotiations." *San Diego Union Tribune*, November 12.
- Pauly, Reid B. C. 2022. "Deniability in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime: The Upside of the Dual-Use Dilemma." *International Studies Quarterly* 66 (1): 1-13.
- Peters, Anne. 2013. Towards Transparency as a Global Norm. In *Transparency in International Law*, edited by Andrea Bianchi and Anne Peters, 534-607. Cambridge University Press.
- Poznansky, Michael. 2015. "Stasis or Decay? Reconciling Covert War and the Democratic Peace." *International Studies Quarterly* 59: 815-826.
- Poznansky, Michael. 2019. "Feigning Compliance: Covert Action and International Law." *International Studies Quarterly* 63: 72-84.
- Poznansky, Michael. 2020. *In the Shadow of International Law: Secrecy and Regime Change in the Postwar World*. Oxford University Press.
- Rathbun, Brian C., and Rachel Stein. 2020. "Great Goods: Morality and Attitudes toward the Use of Nuclear Weapons." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64 (5): 787-816.
- Recchia, Stefano, and Jonathan Chu. 2021. "Validating Threat: IO Approval and Public Support for Joining Military Counterterrorism Coalitions." *International Studies Quarterly* 65 (4): 919-928.
- Regan, Mitt, and Michele Poole. 2021. "Accountability for Covert Action in the United States and the United Kingdom." In *National Security Intelligence and Ethics*, edited by Seumas Miller, Mitt Regan, and Patrick F. Walsh, 232-248. Routledge.
- Reisman, W. Michael, and James E. Baker. 1992. *Regulating Covert Action: Practices, Contexts, and Policies of Covert Coercion Abroad in International and American Law*. Yale University Press.
- Reiter, Dan. 2012. "Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War." *Security Studies* 21 (4): 594-623.
- Riemer, Ofek, and Daniel Sobelman. 2019. "Coercive Disclosure: Israel's Weaponization of Intelligence." *War on the Rocks*, August 2019.
- Sanger, David E. 2021. "Secret Talks and a Hidden Agenda: Behind the U.S. Defense Deal That France Called a 'Betrayal'." *The New York Times*, September 17.
- Schraff, Dominik. 2022. "Asymmetric Ratification Standards and Popular Perceptions of Legitimacy." *Journal of European Public Policy* 3: 405-426.
- Schuessler, John M. 2010. "The Deception Divided: FDR's Undeclared War." *International Security* 34 (4): 133-165.
- Schuessler, John M. 2015. *Deceit on the Road to War: President, Politics, and Democracy*. Cornell University Press.
- Sherman, Wendy. 2018. *Not for the Faint of Heart: Lessons in Courage, Power, and Persistence*. PublicAffairs.
- Simonovits, Gabor, Jennifer McCoy, and Levente Littvay. 2022. "Democratic Hypocrisy and Out-Group Threat: Explaining Citizen Support for Democratic Erosion." *The Journal of Politics* 84 (3): 1806-1811.

- Smith, Gregory. 2019. "Secret but Constrained: The Impact of Elite Opposition on Covert Operations." *International Organization* 73 (3): 685-707.
- Spaniel, William, and Michael Poznansky. 2018. "Credible Commitment in Covert Affairs." *American Journal of Political Science* 62 (3): 668-681.
- Spilker, Gabrielle, Thomas Bernauer, and Victor Umama. 2016. "Selecting Partner Countries for Preferential Trade Agreements: Experimental Evidence from Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Vietnam." *International Studies Quarterly* 60 (4): 706-718.
- Stasavage, David. 2004. "Open-Door or Closed-Door? Transparency in Domestic and International Bargaining." *International Organization* 58 (4): 667-703.
- Tago, Atsushi, and Maki Ikeda. 2015. "An 'A' for Effort: Experimental Evidence on UN Security Council Engagement and Support for US Military Action in Japan." *British Journal of Political Science* 45: 391-410.
- Tingley, Dustin, and Michael Tomz. 2014. "Conditional Cooperation and Climate Change." *Comparative Political Studies* 47: 344-368.
- Tomz, Michael R., and Jessica L. P. Weeks. 2013. "Public Opinion and the Democratic Peace." *American Political Science Review* 107 (4): 849-865.
- Wallace, Geoffrey P. R. 2013. "International Law and Public Attitudes Towards Torture: An Experimental Study." *International Organization* 67 (1): 105-140.
- Weisman, Jonathan. 2015. "Trans-Pacific Partnership Seen as Door for Foreign Suits Against U.S." *The New York Times*, March 25.
- Wenbin, Wang. 2021. "Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Remarks on October 25, 2021." Accessed from: http://adelaide.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/zlgxw/202110/t20211025_9959019.htm
- Wright, Lawrence. 2014. *Thirteen Days in September: Carter, Begin, and Sadat at Camp David*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Yarhi-Milo, Keren, and David Ribar. 2023. "Who Punishes Leaders for Lying About the Use of Force? Evaluating The Microfoundations of Domestic Deception Costs." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 67 (4): 559-586.
- Yoder, Brandon K., and William Spaniel. 2022. "Costly Concealment: Secret Foreign Policy-making, Transparency, and Credible Reassurance." *International Organization* 76 (4): 868-900.