

Pre-Analysis Plan: Hypocrisy costs: experimental evidence on foreign public support for liberal international order

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1 Motivation

A critical question in the study of world politics is whether and how hypocrisy by major powers affects third-party support for international order. Hypocrisy occurs when a state's claims of moral virtue are inconsistent with its actual behavior and when alternative courses of action are available (Finnemore 2009). Given the outsized role of the United States in international affairs, scholarly work on hypocrisy has focused on the conduct of American foreign policy and how it might erode the U.S.-led international order (e.g., Finnemore 2009; Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021; Poznansky 2019; Lynch 2008). By and large, these literatures argue that hypocritical behavior undercuts the legitimacy of the liberal international order (LIO) – that is, the body of liberal international norms, institutions, and conceptions of order that underpin U.S. power and authority in the world (Lake et al. 2021). The rationale is that for LIO to survive and thrive, it needs to secure the resources, endorsement, and deference from third parties that hypocritical behavior may jeopardize. Undergirding these arguments is the assumption that relevant third parties can observe hypocrisy objectively and, as a result, hypocrisy can impinge upon the ordering the United States has built. While much has been written about the negative impact of hypocrisy on third-party willingness to cooperate with the United States and defer to the international ordering it leads, surprisingly little research has examined whether hypocritical behavior actually affects third-party preferences and why. Our project experimentally tests the idea that hypocrisy carries costs, identifies the causal

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mechanisms at play, and provides the first systematic empirical evidence at the individual-level of the relationship between hypocrisy, U.S. leadership, and liberal internationalism.

This pre-analysis plan lays out our puzzle, theoretical priors, hypotheses, and research strategy. Ultimately, we seek to clarify the conditions under which hypocritical behavior carries costs for the United States and for the international order it leads. To put it differently, we want to understand whether and why third parties might be predisposed to sacrifice the benefits derived from cooperation with the United States within LIO when American behavior is hypocritical. To address these issues, we will administer a series of novel survey experiments to adults in Brazil, a country from the Global South that has been procedurally instrumental to the globalization of the liberal international order and whose mass publics have over the years been exposed to U.S. hypocrisy and to elite-led pushback against such hypocrisy. More specifically, our experiments describe situations in which the United States proposes a cooperative deal to Brazil that will advance core liberal values and contribute to liberal internationalism. We randomly and independently vary information about U.S. hypocrisy and Brazil's stakes while holding other factors constant. We then ask whether respondents would support or oppose a cooperative deal with the United States. We pick four different thematic areas within LIO for our experiment: free trade, democracy, human rights, and nuclear nonproliferation. Together, these substantive issue areas have the twin advantage of constituting critical components of the recent evolution of the U.S.-led order and to have been the object of actual negotiations between the United States and Brazil.

We expect to find that Brazilian citizens are more willing to support pro-LIO deals with the United States in the absence of hypocrisy than in its presence. We also expect the effect of hypocrisy to be more intense in areas of high moral appeal (e.g. democracy promotion,) than in areas where the appeal is largely material in four areas: free trade, climate change, and nuclear nonproliferation. In order to disentangle whether individuals are reacting to U.S. behavior or identity, we hypothesize that our findings will hold in the experiments when substituting the United States for unnamed "Country A" to find out if there is an inherent aversion against the United States that is independent from its actions. After testing the conditions under which hypocrisy has an effect, we explore why it might be the case by shedding light on the causal mechanisms through which these effects are obtained. We expect to find that U.S. hypocrisy undermines public support for deals that advance

the cause of liberal internationalism by eroding trust in the United States. Additionally, we expect to find that hypocrisy depresses third-party support for pro-LIO cooperative endeavors with the U.S. by triggering moral outrage, and an attendant demand for pushback.

Our experiments seek to advance the literature in three ways. First, by shedding light onto the micro-foundations of hypocrisy in international relations, we add to an emerging body of literature that has to date focused on the impact of hypocrisy on domestic politics (e.g., Simonovits et al. forthcoming; McManus and Yarhi-Milo 2017). Second, by interviewing mass publics in the Global South we are expanding the growing literature on public opinion and the liberal international order that has in recent years explored citizen support and perceptions legitimacy in the developed world (e.g., Brutger and Li forthcoming; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2020). In so doing, we shift the focus from outcomes and procedural features such as impartiality, representativeness, and transparency to third-party reactions to the behavior of leading states within international order. Third, rigorously inspecting the refusal to cooperate with the United States in supporting LIO we hope to uncover some of the key mechanisms that could be driving its apparent decay. The use of randomized experiments to address problems of endogeneity and confounding will help us gain greater confidence that recent arguments about the erosion of and backlash against LIO among scholars and policymakers find correspondence in reality.

2 How Hypocrisy Could Affect Support for LIO

For the better part of the past two decades, scholars have come to embrace the notion that hypocrisy is a pervasive feature of the international system (Krasner 1999). On the one hand, hypocrisy can help states reconcile the inherent tension between ideals and interests in the everyday conduct of their foreign policies, making coexistence and cooperation possible in settings of profound disagreement (Lynch 2008). Hypocrisy can nudge states to admit the relevance of a norm, begin to comply with it, and then set the stage for states to be shamed into faster policy change when their failure to live up to their moral rhetoric is exposed (Risse 2000; Elster 2012; Crawford 2002). On the other hand, however, hypocrisy can erode the legitimacy of the values, ideas, and institutions that states seek to advance (Finnemore 2009). More specifically, hypocrisy can undermine third-party trust and sense of fairness, while also fueling the flames of moral

outrage. Furthermore, by eating away at the credibility of moral argument, hypocrisy undermines the possibility of a normative consensus among states (Lynch 2008). Charges of hypocrisy have been recurrently leveled at the United States by its own public, by other states, and by domestic publics in those states. Consistent with these ideas, scholars have argued that liberal international order hurts each time the United States engages in behavior that is widely perceived as hypocritical (Finnemore 2009). According to this view, hypocrisy undermines the legitimacy of the U.S.-led order by undercutting third-party willingness to grant it legitimate authority. The implication is that when U.S. hypocrisy runs high, the more liberal international order needs to rely on compliance rather than legitimacy.

[H1:] Other factors equal, information about U.S. hypocrisy reduces the disposition of mass publics in third parties to support pro-LIO bilateral deals with the United States.

As a first step toward developing this hypothesis, the section below clarifies how the concept of hypocrisy is logically and empirically distinct from resembling phenomena like lying and should, therefore, be investigated as a potentially independent contributor to the contestation of the liberal international order.

2.1 Hypocrisy, foreign public opinion, and liberal international order

Hypocrisy in world politics occurs when the deeds of an actor are inconsistent with her proclamations of value and virtue and more consistent, alternative courses of action are available. This mismatch between deeds and words of moral virtue breeds deceit: what is so despicable about hypocrites is that they pretend to be better than they are (Finnemore 2009). The hypocrite not only aims to deceive, but to “draw moral acclaim from a relevant audience.” (Lynch 2008, 170). Unlike lying, an intentional misrepresentation of preferences, hypocrisy is an intentional deceptive moral stance. When they lie, states are opportunistically misleading and distorting with the view to gain strategic advantage (Mearsheimer 2011; Bailey 1991; Schultz 2001). When they are hypocritical, states violate the principles they purport to defend all the while seeking recognition of their moral superiority (Dovi 2001). In this project we focus on the hypocrisy of states, but this is a behavior that can attach to international institutions as well (e.g., Weaver 2008).

Hypocrisy is compounded in the case of great powers. As the actors in the international system that most aspire to lead other states and to establish the basic institutions that form international orders (Gilpin 1981; Keohane 1989; Ikenberry 1999), more than any other actor they make ambitious claims about the public-interest character of their policies (Glaser 2006). By the same token, since they need third-party deference more than other states, they are more vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy than other actors in the international system. When such accusations proliferate, the moral arguments that undergird the international order of the day begin to crack, making it harder for great powers to build up the minimum consensus that is necessary for any ordering to succeed. Hypocrisy reveals information about the character and identity of the hypocrite, entailing reputation costs that interfere with the state's ability to make credible commitments and spawn in others a reluctance to defer (Finnemore 2009).

Liberal international order has from the outset rested on a set of moral arguments (Ikenberry 2001). Because the liberal elements of LIO are often presented by the United States as a superior alternative to any other conceptions of international order, they carry a particular moral burden which makes them an easy target for accusations of hypocrisy. For example, an iconic expression of hypocrisy in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy is the professed emphasis on protecting democracy worldwide when in reality so much of the time leaders choose to prop up friendly authoritarian rulers and turn a blind eye on their crimes when geopolitical interests are at stake (Glaser 2006; Owen IV and Poznansky 2014). In practical terms, this means that, irrespective of outcomes, democracy promotion has been a hard sell to both states and mass publics alike. Hypocrisy can be a problem for any actor seeking to exercise legitimate power in world politics.

Hypocrisy is highly consequential for the states that may benefit from liberal international order as well. One of the major tenets of LIO is that it provides public goods through a range of procedures that are relatively open to third-party influence, thereby creating powerful incentives for states to freely join in the shaping up of international order (Ikenberry 2001). The problem with hypocrisy is that the negative reactions it engenders among third parties may be so powerful as to trump cost-benefit reasoning. Hypocrisy can therefore undermine LIO in the one big comparative advantage it has vis-à-vis other types of international ordering. To be sure, hypocrisy is not the only source of affliction of the contemporary liberal international order.

Scholars have variously pointed to the breakdown of the social contract in the United States (Colgan and Keohane 2017), public alienation vis-à-vis distant and undemocratic international organizations (McNamara 2019), and the recent failures of democracy promotion (Mearsheimer 2021), among others. But as Ikenberry (2018) asks, even if the U.S. and its allies could recapture a progressive political orientation, can they expand a wider coalition of states to cooperate within a reformed liberal global order?

In the remainder of this section, we consider why precisely hypocrisy could affect domestic public support for cooperative engagement around pro-LIO deals with the United States. More specifically, we expect hypocrisy to sway foreign public support for the liberal internationalist project by affecting two key considerations in the minds of citizens: trust in the United States, and moral outrage against U.S. behavior.

2.2 Trust

Hypocrisy might affect public support for international cooperation by raising concerns about the hypocrite's reputation as a reliable partner. This occurs because hypocritical events affect expectations of whether the hypocrite will in the future act in good faith and in the best interest of its partners (e.g., Weiss et al. 2019), leading third parties to question not just the moral claims of the hypocritical actor but also its moral constitution and character (Finnemore 2009). In turn, a poor reputation could undermine the ability of the hypocrite to secure third-party resources, endorsement, and deference. Building on these arguments, we expect hypocrisy to affect foreign public perceptions of whether the United States is trustworthy. Citizens who perceive U.S. behavior to be hypocritical should view the United States as unreliable. While previous literatures have tested how the trust in the proponent of cooperation may be affected by the different features of international agreements and institutions (e.g., Brutger and Li forthcoming; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2020), nobody to our knowledge has yet explored whether foreign publics see hypocritical actors as unreliable or has assessed how those beliefs affect support for international cooperation. Our experimental approach fills this void in the literature by measuring individual perceptions of trust in the proponent and by tracing the links from hypocrisy to trust-perception and support for international cooperation.

[H2:] Hypocrisy will affect foreign public opinion perceptions of the trustworthiness of the proponent of the deal, decreasing public support for that deal.

2.3 Morality

Political psychology research has shown that when people's judgment is based on their sense of morality, they adopt uncompromising bargaining strategies, irrespective of what consequences such action might bring about (e.g., Deltan et al. 2020; Ryan 2019). Furthermore, the drive to punish is likely to be stronger the higher the deceit (e.g. Monin and Merrit 2012; Jordan 2017). The implication is that even when favorable outcomes are present, individuals could deem it morally wrong to support institutionalized cooperation with an actor they perceive to be hypocritical. This is all the more because situations of hypocrisy normally endow "the accusers with a false sense of moral superiority" (Lynch 2008, 194). Although morality is largely absent from the experimental literature on international cooperation, a growing body of scholarship asserts that moral concerns affect public preferences for foreign policy (e.g., Kertzer et al. 2014; Rathbun et al. 2016). Drawing on this literature, we argue that hypocrisy could shape foreign opinion by triggering perceptions of a moral obligation to punish such behavior. More specifically, we predict that when a country behaves in a hypocritical way, foreign public opinion might express moral outrage and demand retribution.

[H3:] Citizens have a greater moral aversion to supporting cooperative deals with countries that behave hypocritically than with countries that do not.

2.4 Context and the Effects of Hypocrisy

Our perspective thus far has advanced an overarching argument about the effects of hypocrisy on international order: when the major powers of the day behave hypocritically, foreign public opinion is less willing to sustain the cooperative engagement upon which international ordering depends. However, it may be the case that hypocrisy is punished by these external audiences only under certain circumstances. For instance, attitudes toward hypocrisy may vary depending on the stakes at play. To put it differently, publics may prefer to deny cooperation to a hypocritical counterpart in general, but tolerate hypocrisy when the expected gains of cooperation are high. Previous scholarship in social psychology suggests that mass publics are sensitive to self-serving bias and apply double standards when making judgments about hypocrisy. These studies highlight a dynamic

where individuals develop a positive attitude towards an actor or her actions because they are instrumental in goal attainment (e.g., Bocian and Wojciszke 2014; Monit and Merritt 2012). The idea that self-interest bias affects preferences for foreign affairs is pervasive in the IR literature as well. For example, Brutger and Rathbun (2021) show that mass publics apply fairness standards partially when assessing trade agreements, while Rathbun et al. (2022) argue that partiality is prevalent in assessments of a country's relative position in hierarchies of status. These findings highlight the importance of assessing whether stakes can moderate the effect of hypocrisy. Following this logic, we expect hypocrisy to matter more in situations where stakes are low compared to situations where stakes are high. In other words, we expect hypocrisy to have a smaller countervailing effect when high stakes are present. This is to say that we expect stakes to be a reliable predictor of support for institutionalized cooperation even in situations where hypocrisy is present.

[H4:] Hypocrisy matters more in situations where stakes are low compared to situations where stakes are high.

2.5 Heterogeneous Effects

We also plan to assess whether our hypotheses play out across our sample heterogeneously. More specifically, we hope to use a scale of liberal-conservative to gauge if more liberal individuals react to hypocrisy with the same intensity of their more conservative peers. This allows us to find out if political ideology interacts with information about hypocrisy and stakes to shape public support for international cooperation.

3 Research Design

In this project we focus on foreign public opinion rather than third party foreign-policy elites. Our choice of level of analysis is based on the notion that sitting regimes seeking to advance liberal internationalist ideas, values, and institutions through institutionalized cooperation with the United States need to package any deals in ways that appeal to their domestic publics. Because engaging the United States within LIO normally requires a degree of acquiescence and deference that governing elites are unlikely to shoulder without having at least a modicum of their domestic public's back, looking at publics directly has much potential to shed light onto the political effects of hypocrisy.

Future research will have to look at how these public preferences in turn shape elite behavior when hypocrisy occurs.

To study the existence of hypocrisy costs and their effects on international order, we will field a survey experiment to a national and diverse sample in Brazil. We will use Netquest, an internet-based polling firm, to program and field the experiment as well as to recruit the sample. We will use quota sampling (e.g., age, education, gender, income, and region) to reflect the official demographics of the Brazilian population. We expect to field the study to around 5000 respondents. We will require survey respondents to be residents of Brazil of at least 18 years of age. The survey will take 10-15 minutes to complete.

The experiment will proceed as follows. After completing a pre-treatment questionnaire, participants will read a hypothetical situation in which a proponent makes a cooperative overture to Brazil with the view to advance core liberal values in one of four areas: free trade, democracy promotion, climate change, and nuclear nonproliferation. To assess the importance of the causal factors described above, we will include three variables of interest that are randomly and independently manipulated for each respondent. For hypocrisy, we manipulate its presence/absence in the scenario described. For stakes, the scenario will describe how Brazil could benefit from the hypothetical deal (some respondents will read that the deal has high benefits to Brazil while other respondents will read text that minimizes the benefits to be accrued). In addition to these primary variables, we will also randomly manipulate the proponent of the deal (the United States vs Country A). Manipulating the proponent allows us to explore whether the identity of the actor affects respondents' reaction to hypocritical events (Brutger et al. forthcoming).

Table 1 below summarizes the main independent variables, along with their respective levels.

Table 1. *Independent Variables and Levels*

Variables	Level
Hypocrisy	0: Hypocrisy is present
	1: Hypocrisy is absent
Stakes	0: Positive outcome absent
	1: Positive outcome present
Proponent	0: United States
	1: Country A

After describing the scenario, we will measure support for an international agreement, our proxy of choice for pro-LIO deals. This choice is informed by the acknowledgement that reductions in deference to the U.S.-led order, refusal to share the burden of sustaining LIO with the United States, and withdrawal of endorsement for this type of ordering are difficult to measure. We will then ask all respondents to explain their reasoning for supporting or opposing international cooperation in at least 25 words. We will also include questions to measure perceptions of trust and morality with the goal of shedding light onto our hypothesized causal mechanisms. These post-treatment questions will be randomized to prevent their order from affecting mediation results (Chaudoin et al. 2021). Finally, respondents will receive an attention check asking them to recall whether the proposed deal in the scenario involves trade, democracy, climate change, or nuclear proliferation.

Our 2x2x2 factorial design offers several advantages. This approach allows us to estimate the effect of hypocrisy for each possible combination of contextual variables (stakes and country), including situations in which the presence of hypocrisy might be more or less likely to affect public support for international cooperation. For example, we can estimate the effect of hypocrisy on cooperation when stakes are high - a situation in which the presence of hypocrisy might have little effect. This is informative because it allows us to determine whether hypocrisy and stakes interact to produce effects on individuals above and beyond the separate effect of each variable. We can also calculate the influence of hypocrisy when we vary its source, namely the United States or Country A. This is informative because it allows us to find out whether hypocrisy costs are pervasive irrespective of the source of hypocrisy or whether the phenomenon is restricted to the United States.

3.1 Pre-Treatment Questionnaire

We include a short pre-treatment questionnaire to measure foreign policy orientations (e.g. international trust), and political ideology (e.g. left-right, liberal-conservative) of participants.

- Left-Right: On a scale ranging from 1 to 9, where 1 is the furthest to left, 9 is the furthest to right and 5 is in the center, where would you place yourself?
- Liberal-Conservative: How would you rate each of the following individuals and groups? [yourself]. (5-point scale from 'very liberal' to 'very conservative')
- International Trust: Some people say that Brazil can trust other nations, while others think that Israel can't be too careful in dealing with other nations. Where would you place yourself on this scale from 1 (Brazil can count on other countries) to 7 (Brazil cannot count on other countries)?
- National Attachment: [Q.1] When someone says something bad about the Brazilian people, how strongly do you feel it is as if they said something bad about you? (5-point scale from 'Extremely strongly' to 'Not strongly at all'). [Q.2] How much does being a Brazilian have to do with how you feel about yourself?. (5-point scale from 'A tremendous amount' to 'None at all'). [Q.3] How much do you feel that what happens to Brazil in general would be your fate as well?. (5-point scale from 'A tremendous amount' to 'None at all')

3.2 Experimental Vignette

We will randomly and independently assign participants to one of 8 treatment groups:

1. U.S/Hypocrisy present/High stakes;
2. Country A/Hypocrisy present/High stakes;
3. U.S/Hypocrisy absent /High stakes;
4. Country A/Hypocrisy absent/High stakes;
5. U.S/Hypocrisy present/Stakes absent;
6. Country A/Hypocrisy present/Stakes absent;
7. U.S./Hypocrisy absent/Stakes absent;
8. Country A/Hypocrisy absent/Stakes absent.

Vignette structures will be similar across hypothetical deals (that is, free trade, climate change, democracy promotion, and nuclear proliferation). Following best practice in the field, vignettes for all four deals will be pre-tested through pilot waves before we field the experiments. For purposes of illustration, the vignette for the free trade deal follows below.

3.3 Free Trade Vignette

The [United States **OR** Country A] has proposed Brazil a free trade agreement to reduce mutual tariffs and quotas, bolstering economic growth and helping build a more open global trading system. A panel of academic experts from Brazil published a report stating that [this trade agreement will strengthen Brazil’s economy by creating many jobs **OR** this trade agreement will not hurt Brazil’s economy or create unemployment].

According to panel experts:

- The [United States **OR** Country A] has historically championed the principle of free trade and it has nudged other countries to open their economies.
- However, [the United States **OR** Country A] has in recent years adopted protectionist measures to shield its own companies from international competition [even when the decision could have been taken to privilege free trade **OR** because there was no realistic viable option]
- Whenever critics point out the disconnect between rhetoric and behavior on the part of the [United States **OR** Country A], government officials [deny any wrongdoing and insist that they remain fully committed to championing free trade **OR** accept the criticism and commit to doing better in the future]¹.

3.4 Dependent Variables

[*Support for international cooperation*]

¹Importantly, these two sentences will not be randomized independently. If respondents receive the information that different decisions could have been taken to privilege free trade, they will also read about the attempt of the hypocritical actor to deceive the wider audience about the mismatch between its actions and values. The union of these sentences was designed to incorporate in the vignette the three main elements that Finnemore (2009, 75) shows as being associated with the presence of hypocrisy: a) “the actors’ actions are at odds with its proclaimed values”; b) “alternatives actions are available”; c) “the actor is likely trying to deceive other about the mismatch between its actions and values.” When these elements are not presented together in the vignette, we characterize the scenario with the absence of hypocrisy.

- Do you favor or oppose Brazil signing the agreement? (5-point scale from ‘strongly favor’ to ‘strongly oppose’).

[*Open-Ended*]

- What are the main factors that you took into account when deciding to [support/oppose] the signing of the agreement?

Mechanisms

[*Trust in the proponent*]

- On a scale of 1-5, how much do you trust [the U.S./Country A]? (5 point-scale from ‘do not trust at all’ to ‘trust completely’).

[*Moral obligation*]

Do you think it would be morally wrong for Brazil to sign this agreement?

- It would be morally wrong for Brazil to sign
- It would not be morally wrong for Brazil to sign

3.5 Attention Checks

The country that proposed the deal to Brazil was...

- The United States
- Country A

What is the topic of the proposed deal?

- Trade
- Democracy
- Nuclear Proliferation
- Human Rights

We said that if Brazil signs the agreement...

- It will strengthen Brazil's economy by creating many jobs
- It will not hurt Brazil's economy or create unemployment

3.6 Demographics

- What is your sex? (male, female, I identify as [open text box], prefer no to say)
- How old are you? [open text box]
- What is your level of education? (Illiterate/Incomplete elementary school, Complete elementary school/incomplete middle school, Complete middle school, Incomplete high school, Complete high school, Incomplete undergraduate school, Complete undergraduate school, Graduate school)
- Roughly, how much did you earn last month? (up to 1.045,00 reais, from 1.046,00 reais to 2.090,00 reais, from 2.091,00 reais to 3.135,00 reais, from 3.136,00 reais to 5.225,00 reais, from 5.226,00 reais to 10.450,00 reais; from 10.451,00 reais to 20.900,00 reais, from 20.901,00 reais to 52.250,00 reais, Not sure, I would rather not answer)
- What is your race or ethnic group? (White, Black, Brown, Asian, Other [open textbox])

4 Analysis

We will begin our analysis using OLS regression models and difference-of-means tests, which are consistent estimators of the causal effect of our randomized treatment conditions (Hypocrisy, Stakes, and Country) on our dependent variable of interest. After we estimate models that test the effects of treatment assignment on rates of support or opposition to international agreements, we will check that these results are robust to including pre-treatment covariates in the model. We will include demographic controls (age, gender, education, income, region), respondent political ideology (left-right, liberal-conservative), and dispositional measures (international trust, national attachment). Finally, we will include a model with an interaction between the hypocrisy and stakes treatments to evaluate whether these manipulations compound each other.

In terms of causal mechanisms, we will first test the direct effects of our treatments on the potential causal mechanisms using OLS regression models. We will then analyze to what extent the treatment effects of hypocrisy on support for institutionalized cooperation are mediated through these mechanisms. To evaluate the mediation, we will use the product-of-coefficient method such as suggested by the literature in experimental IR (e.g., Tomz and Weeks 2020).

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