

# The Determinants of US Public Opinion Towards Democracy Promotion

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**Abstract** In this paper, I evaluate two competing perspectives regarding what underlies the public's support for democracy promotion—a democratic values-based perspective positing that the public's support for democracy promotion is based on a principled desire to spread American values, beliefs, and ideologies to other countries, and a national interests-based perspective claiming that it is based on a rational desire of Americans to advance the US' political and economic interests abroad. Using a survey experiment, I find that, in general, Americans are not driven by either democratic values or national interests to support democracy promotion even though they believe that democracy promotion is in the interests of both the recipient country and the United States. Only a subset of the population is motivated to support democracy promotion for the sake of democratic values. This subset of the population is driven by cosmopolitanism—that is, a sense of concern for the welfare of those living in other countries and a sense of moral responsibility to promote democracy abroad derived from the US' position as a world leader, not national pride.

**Keywords** Democracy promotion · Public opinion · Survey experiment

The United States has condemned dictators, spearheaded trade embargoes, funded opposition movements, and launched wars, all in the name of spreading democracy abroad. According to President Woodrow Wilson, democracy promotion is a cornerstone of US foreign policy because it is at the core of the American ideal and grounded in the principles on which the US was founded. As Wilson explained following the end of World War I, “We set this Nation up to make men free and we

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did not confine our conception and purpose to America.”<sup>1</sup> While other countries have also sought to export democracy abroad, there is arguably no other country in the world more active in this regard than the United States (McFaul 2004, p. 158).

The ability of the US to promote democracy in other countries depends in large part on the American public’s attitude toward democracy promotion. The public’s reluctance to support democracy promotion at all costs was an important reason behind the US’ disengagement from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Mueller 2005), the limited scope of the United States’ involvement in the Balkans in the 1990s and Libya in 2011 (Sobel 2000), and the unwillingness of the US to intervene militarily in other crisis situations including the Syrian civil war. In this paper, I examine what drives the public’s support for democracy promotion, as well as what undercuts this support given people’s different motivations for supporting democracy promotion in the first place.

I examine two competing perspectives in this paper regarding what underlies the public’s support for democracy promotion—a democratic values-based perspective and a national interests-based perspective. The democratic values-based perspective contends that the public’s support for democracy promotion is derived from a principled desire to extend American values, beliefs, and ideologies to other countries and is less sensitive to the human and financial costs of democracy promotion than the national interests-based approach. The national interest-based approach, in contrast, claims that the public’s support for democracy promotion is based on a rational desire to advance the US’ political and economic interests abroad and, thus, is very sensitive to these costs. An assumption that the US public is like the US government and is driven to support democracy promotion due to national pride and self-interest has provoked a backlash against US efforts to promote democracy abroad, and has evoked a sense of anti-Americanism around the world more generally (Carothers 2006; Kohut and Stokes 2006; Katzenstein and Keohane 2007). Previous research on this topic has focused on what is the public’s attitude toward democracy promotion, but not what drives it, and for this reason, has been based exclusively on public opinion surveys (Tures 2007; DeBartolo 2008).

To study the relative importance of these two perspectives, and to identify any causal link that exists between them and democracy promotion, I conducted a survey experiment on a nationally representative sample of the US population. In the experiment, respondents were asked to read a basic vignette depicting a situation in which democracy is at risk, and to indicate what course of action, if any, that they thought the government should take to support democracy in this case. Respondents in the control condition read only the basic vignette while respondents in the treatment condition read an extended vignette that also cued people’s democratic values or their national interests. Participants were also asked as part of the experiment a series of questions to examine the sensitivity of these results to different conditions, including the financial and human costs of democracy promotion and the probability of success.

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<sup>1</sup> Woodrow Wilson: Address at Boston, Massachusetts, February 24, 1919. Available from The Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and Museum.

The results of this study show that the public is generally supportive of democracy promotion, but that the public is not willing to support costly or risky strategies of promoting democracy abroad. The study also suggests that people are not more willing to support democracy promotion for the sake of either democratic values or national interests in general. Only a small subset of the population is moved to support democracy promotion for the sake of democratic values. This subset of the population is not motivated to support democracy promotion by national pride, but rather by cosmopolitanism—that is, a sense of concern for the welfare of those living in other countries and a sense of moral responsibility to promote democracy in other countries derived from the US' position as a world leader. People's support for democracy promotion is also highly sensitive to the costs of democracy promotion and the probability of success regardless of people's motivation for supporting democracy promotion in the first place.

### The State of the Opinion

Thus far, research on democracy promotion has focused on whether different strategies to promote democracy have been effective in ushering in democratic reforms, including international wars (Buono de Mesquita and Downs 2006; Pickering and Peceny 2006), foreign aid (Dunning 2004; Knack 2004; Finkel et al. 2008) and targeted democracy assistance (Scott and Steele 2011). An important, but implicit, factor behind the success of these strategies is the public's attitude toward these initiatives (Dunning 2004). In order for governments to embark on military action or pass legislation allocating funds toward democracy promotion, governments need the support of their electorates.

Our current understanding of the public's attitude toward democracy promotion is based on various public opinion surveys. These polls find that people support the idea of democracy promotion in general, but that they are not major proponents of it, believing that other foreign policies issues, including national security, should take precedent (Tures 2007; DeBartolo 2008). According to a 2002 poll by The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR), only 34 % of respondents said that democracy promotion should be a “very important” goal of the United States, 49 % said it should be a “somewhat important” goal, and 15 % said that it should not be important at all.<sup>2</sup> This placed democracy promotion 19th among 20 foreign policy goals ranked in the survey. A 2009 Pew Center and Council of Foreign Relations poll similarly found that Americans do not believe that democracy promotion should be a high priority for the US. Only 21 % of those polled thought the US should assign “top priority” to promoting democracy in other nations, while 54 % thought the US should give it “some priority”.<sup>3</sup> The public's opinion of democracy promotion does not seem to have

<sup>2</sup> The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund, *Worldviews 2002*, June 1–30, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center *America's Place in the World*, December 2009. A 2005 poll by The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) and the CCFR found that only 27 % of those polled said “helping to bring a democratic form of government to other nations,” was “very important” and 19 % said that it was “not at all important”. See: PIPA/CCFR “Americans on Promoting Democracy,” September 2005.

changed much following the Arab Spring. In a 2013 Pew Center poll related to the Syrian civil war, 53 % of those surveyed agreed that it is important for the US to support people who oppose authoritarian regimes while 36 % disagreed.<sup>4</sup>

These polls also show that people are reluctant to use military intervention to promote democracy in other countries, consistent with studies of war and military invention in general (Mueller 1971; Gelpi et al. 2005/2006; Berinsky 2009; Eckles and Schaffner 2011). According to a 2005 survey by the CCFR and the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), only 35 % of people surveyed were in favor of “using military force to overthrow a dictator” and 55 % were opposed to it.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, a 2006 German Marshall Fund poll found that only 34 % of those surveyed supported “sending military forces to remove authoritarian regimes” while 56 % opposed it.<sup>6</sup> These attitudes have not changed much either following the Arab Spring. According to a 2011 Pew Center Poll, 77 % of Americans opposed bombing Libyan air defenses (16 % favored) to aid anti-government forces in their battle against Muammar al-Gaddafi, and only 44 % favored enforcing the no-fly zone (45 % opposed it).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, 70 % of Americans polled opposed the U.S. and its allies sending arms and military supplies to anti-government groups in the Syrian civil war.<sup>8</sup>

These polls, though, do not offer much insight into what drives the public’s attitude toward democracy promotion in general. First, these polls are focused primarily on describing the state of public opinion on democracy promotion, and not on what underlies support for it. These polls, therefore, generally only ask questions about whether or not people support democracy promotion and do not ask further questions that would help explain why people hold these views.<sup>9</sup> Some polls do include questions that may help explain why people take certain positions regarding democracy promotion, like whether or not Americans think that promoting democracy in other countries will help win the war on terrorism, or whether or not Americans feel that the US has a moral responsibility to stop violence in other countries. Rarely, however, does a single survey offer a very comprehensive view of these issues.

Moreover, these polls have not been analyzed statistically in order to establish even a correlation between people’s responses to these questions and democracy promotion. Thus, we do not know if the fact that less than a majority of Americans believe that promoting democracy in other countries will help win the war on terrorism, or if the fact that only about a third of Americans believe that the US has a moral responsibility to stop violence in other countries, is related to Americans not thinking democracy promotion should be a top foreign policy goal of the US.<sup>10</sup> Without analyses of this kind, consumers of these polls are left to extrapolate for

<sup>4</sup> Pew Center Research, “Public Remains Opposed to Arming Syrian Rebels”, June 17, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> PIPA/CCFR “Americans on Promoting Democracy” September 2005.

<sup>6</sup> German Marshall Fund, “Transatlantic Trends”, June 6–24, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Pew Research Center, “Public Wary of Military Intervention in Libya,” March 14, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center, “Public Remains Opposed to Arming Syrian Rebels,” June 17, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> See: America’s Place in the World“; *Worldviews 2002*.

<sup>10</sup> PIPA/CCFR “Americans on Promoting Democracy,” September 2005; Pew Research Center “Public Wary of Military Intervention in Libya,” March 14, 2011; Megan Thee-Brenan, “Poll Shows Isolationist Streak in Americans,” *New York Times*, April 30, 2013.

themselves what they indicate about the American public's attitudes toward democracy promotion (Tures 2007; DeBartolo 2008). This can lead to misleading, ambiguous, and even perplexity conclusions.

Second, even if these surveys were analyzed statistically, they would still be limited in what they could demonstrate since public opinion surveys on democracy promotion can only establish a correlation between people's positions on certain issues and their attitude toward democracy promotion, not a causal relationship. This is problematic because people might have a certain opinion about some aspect of democracy promotion, but might not support or oppose democracy promotion for this reason. For example, even if people thought that their country was effective in fighting the war on terrorism, they might still oppose promoting democracy in other countries because they do not think it is appropriate for their country to interfere in the domestic affairs of another country.

Third, many surveys on this topic are either related to specific actions taken on behalf on democracy promotion, such as the US intervention in Haiti in 1994, the NATO bombing of Kosovo, and the no-fly zone over Libya in 2011, or have been conducted in response to these actions even if they are not directly about them.<sup>11</sup> People's attitudes towards these particular actions are not necessarily representative of their attitudes toward democracy promotion in general because these issues are complex, and because people's attitudes toward them are likely to be based on many different factors, some of which are unrelated to democracy promotion, like partisan affiliation. For example, the American public's opposition to military intervention in Libya may be reflective of its opposition toward democracy promotion in general, or to the fact that the US' military was overstretched at the time due to ongoing engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In order to make causal claims about what drives the public's attitude toward democracy promotion in general, I conducted a survey experiment in this study. In the experiment, I randomly assigned people to either a control condition or three different treatment conditions that cued either people's democratic values or their national interests. Since people are randomly assigned to these conditions, any differences observed between the treatment and control conditions would be due to the issues cued in the treatments and not other factors. Survey experiments have been used to study the public's attitude toward a host of other issues related to domestic and foreign policy, including: immigration (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010), international crises (Tomz 2007), racial tolerance (Peffley et al. 1997; Gibson 1998), trade openness (Hiscox 2006; Scheve et al. 2012), and the welfare state (Kuklinski et al. 2000). But, they have not yet been used to study the issue of democracy promotion. The experiment also enables us to understand people's attitudes toward democracy promotion in general since the vignettes used in the experiment are not related to a particular historical event.

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<sup>11</sup> Examples: (Haiti): Gallup, September 23–25, 1994; (Kosovo): Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, March 30–31, 1999; (Iraq): CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll, March 22–23, 2003 and Libya (2011) Gallup, March 21, 2011. (Syria): Pew, June 12–16, 1993.

## Democratic Values Versus National Interest

There are two contending perspectives as to what drives the public's support for democracy promotion. The first is based on democratic values and the second on national interests. Each perspective has different implications for the stability of public opinion over time and the sensitivity of public opinion to the financial and human costs of democracy promotion as well as the probability of success. Throughout history, US presidents have made appeals to the public based on both perspectives in hopes that one or the other issue would move public opinion more in favor of democracy promotion.

The democratic values approach posits that the public's support for democracy promotion is based on a principled desire to spread American values, beliefs, and ideologies, including democracy, to other countries because of a genuine belief in their benefit for other countries (McFaul 2004). Democracy is associated with a number of benefits for countries, including higher levels of economic development (Lipset 1959; Przeworski and Limongi 1997; Stokes and Boix 2003) and lower levels of internal violence (Hegre et al. 2001). It is also associated with lower levels of economic inequality (Ross 2006), as well as cleaner and healthier environments (Midlarsky 1998; Gore 1992, pp.179-180). The democratic values approach is based on the notion of American Exceptionalism, which is believed to guide US foreign policy behavior and to pervade US public opinion regarding it (Davis and Lynn-Jones 1987; Koh 2002/2003; Kohut and Stokes 2006; Pei 2003; Desch 2008). American Exceptionalism refers to the belief that the US is unique, having been founded through a revolution and having developed from this experience a distinct ideology based on liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism and laissez-faire, which forms the foundations of the US' worldview and its domestic and foreign policy (Lipset 1996).

Woodrow Wilson epitomized the democratic values approach in his presidency. When Wilson asked Congress to declare war against Germany during WWI, he declared the war necessary "to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power."<sup>12</sup> No other president has evoked Wilsonian idealism since more than George W. Bush. In his 2003 State of the Union address, Bush remarked that "Americans are a free people who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to humanity."<sup>13</sup>

According to this approach, spreading the values and ideals of US democracy to other countries also carries with it a sense of duty or moral responsibility towards people in other countries because the US is the most powerful democracy in the world. President Richard Nixon encapsulated the idea of moral responsibility in his presidency when he announced military action in Cambodia during the Vietnam War. According to Nixon, "If, when the chips are down, the world's most powerful

<sup>12</sup> Woodrow T. Wilson. "U.S. Declaration of War with Germany," April 2, 1917. See: <http://firstworldwar.com>. Date Accessed: September 13, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> George W. Bush. "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 28, 2003. See: *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>. Date Accessed: September 13, 2011.

nation acts like a pitiful, helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world. It is not our power, but our will and character that is [sic] being tested tonight.”<sup>14</sup>

In many places outside the United States, as well as some within it, the US' touting of democratic values in its foreign policy objectives is not seen as being driven by cosmopolitanism—that is, a concern for and sense of responsibility towards all people in the world regardless of national boundaries, but rather by a sense of national pride (Weber and Jentleson 2010). Accordingly, US democracy promotion is seen as being motivated by an acute sense of American pride and a grandiose desire to make other countries over in the image and likeness of the US without regard to and concern for the interests, needs, or desires of people in other countries. George W. Bush's policies in regards to the Middle East and the war on terrorism have been particularly derided as a form of US triumphalism (Weber and Jentleson 2010).

The democratic values-based approach to democracy promotion also implies that the public's support for democracy promotion is less sensitive to either the human or financial costs involved in promoting democracy abroad than the national interests-based approach, regardless of whether Americans are driven to promote democracy abroad out of a sense of cosmopolitanism or a sense of national pride, because these values do not fluctuate much over time and do not vary on a case-by-case basis. Those motivated to promote democracy abroad due to a concern for the welfare of those living in other countries may also be more likely to accept certain costs involved in doing so for the sake of the greater good than those who are motivated by a purely self-interested concern for their own material welfare. The democratic values-based approach further suggests that the public's support for democracy promotion is less sensitive to the probability of success than the national interests-based approach because Americans can be true to their democratic values by trying to support democracy abroad even if they are not able to successfully achieve their goals.

The national-interests based perspective, in contrast, suggests that the public's support for democracy promotion is driven by a rational desire to advance the political and economic interests of their country abroad (Drezner 2008; Wollack 2008). This perspective belongs to the realist tradition of international relations, which posits that countries behave according to a cost-benefit calculation of what is in their geopolitical interests (Waltz 1979). Scholars in this tradition have hypothesized that the US does not try to promote democracy militarily in other countries to spread democratic ideals, but only to promote its national interests, because the US public would not accept the former, only the latter (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2006; Pickering and Peceny 2006). National interests have been shown to affect the public's attitude towards a multitude of foreign policy issues, including immigration (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010), trade (Scheve et al. 2012), and international war (Mueller 1971; Gelpi et al. 2005/2006; Berinsky 2009; Eckles and Schaffner 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Richard M. Nixon. Cambodian Incursion Address, Washington DC, April 30, 1970. See: *The American Rhetoric*, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/richardnixoncambodia.html>. Date Accessed: September 13, 2011.

According to this perspective, in deciding whether or not to support democracy promotion, people weigh the benefits of democracy promotion against the potential dangers of it. Democracy promotion may be in the US' national interests for a number of reasons. Having more democratic neighbors can enhance the stability of the international system because democracies tend to go to war with each other less often than with authoritarian states (Doyle 1986; Russett 1993). It can also increase international trade since democracies tend to have more open economies than authoritarian states (Mansfield et al. 2000; Milner and Kubota 2005). It may even enhance cooperation between countries on key issues, like terrorism, since democracies tend to have more compatible political and economic interests (Farber and Gowa 1995).

However, democracy promotion can also have negative consequences for the United States. While democracies are more stable, democratizing countries tend to be more war prone (Mansfield and Snyder 1995; Snyder 2000; Narang and Nelson 2009). Financial investments in unstable states also tend to be less secure (Jensen and Young. 2008). Democratic elections, meanwhile, can bring foreign leaders to power that are antagonistic towards US interests, as was the case with the election of Hamas in Lebanon (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 2006). Democracies are also not necessarily better equipped to deal with terrorism than autocratic states, which have tighter grips on their populaces than democracies (Gause 2005).

Throughout history, US presidents have appealed to people's concerns about national interests in order to generate public support for democracy promotion. For example, President Clinton, when explaining why the US was going to intervene in Haiti in 1994, said that "[h]istory has taught us that preserving democracy in our own hemisphere strengthens America's security and prosperity."<sup>15</sup> Even, George W. Bush, who epitomized Wilsonian idealism, eventually came to frame democracy promotion in terms of the US' national interests. In his second inaugural address, Bush declared that "[t]he survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world."<sup>16</sup>

The national interests-based approach to democracy promotion further implies that the public's support for democracy promotion is very sensitive to the human and financial costs of promoting democracy in other countries, much more so than the democratic values-based approach. According to the national interests-based approach, people are unlikely to support democracy promotion unless they anticipate that there will be significant economic or political gains for their country in doing so. It also follows from this perspective that the public's support for democracy promotion fluctuates significantly over time since the costs and benefits of democracy promotion depend on the context, including the strategic value of the target country and the type of action required to democratize it. Those motivated by national interests to support democracy promotion are further likely to evaluate the

<sup>15</sup> William J. Clinton. "Address to the Nation on Haiti", Washington, DC. September 15, 1994. See: *The American Presidency Project* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/> Date Accessed: September 13, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> George W. Bush. *Inaugural Address*, Washington, DC, January 20, 2005. See: *The American Presidency Project* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/> Date Accessed: September 13, 2011.

potential benefits of democracy promotion for the United States based on past experiences. For example, those who believe the United States has benefited from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan should be more likely to see future efforts at democracy promotion as potentially beneficial to the United States than those who do not.

Many people inside and outside of the US believe that national interests are the primary reason why the US, and, therefore, by association Americans, support democracy promotion. Internationally, the United States' efforts at democracy promotion are often characterized as disingenuous and self-serving, and not carried out in a way truly supportive of democracy. In a 47-country *Pew Center* survey, more than three-quarters (77 %) of the people polled outside the US said that "the United States promotes democracy mostly where it serves its interests."<sup>17</sup> A slightly higher percentage of people living in democracies (78 %) than in non-democracies (75 %) characterized the US in this way.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, almost as many people within the US were of this view. Specifically, about two-thirds (67 %) of Americans in the survey said that the US promotes democracy mostly where it serves its interests. Many outside the US and within point to the US' willingness to support undemocratic leaders, like Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan or Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and to undertake undemocratic measures to ensure regimes friendly to the United States come to power, as evidence of the US' self-interested motivations.

The dichotomy between the democratic values and national interests approaches to democracy promotion is overly stark since people can be motivated by both. US presidents have also tried to elicit support for democracy promotion on both these grounds. President Obama, for example, justified the US action in Libya in 2011 in terms of the US' national interests, given the country's geo-strategic location in the Middle East, as well as democratic values. Explaining why the US supported the no-fly zone, Obama stated succinctly that "when our interests and values are at stake, we have a responsibility to act."<sup>19</sup> Obama went on further to say that "[t]o brush aside Americas responsibility as a leader and—more profoundly—our responsibilities to our fellow human beings under such circumstances would have been a betrayal of who we are." While people may be motivated by both democratic values and national interests, a virtue of the survey experiment in this study is that it allows these effects to be separated out, and the conditions under which people are likely to be motivated by each to be tested.

<sup>17</sup> *Pew Global Attitudes Project: Spring 2007*, June 27, 2007. Question 34: "And which comes closer to describing your view? The United States promotes democracy wherever it can, or the United States promotes democracy where it serves its interests."

<sup>18</sup> Democracy is defined here as countries scoring a five or above on the Polity II Index. See: Monty G. Marshall, Keith Jagers, and Ted Robert Gurr. 2011. *Polity IV Project: Dataset Users Manual*. Center for Systemic Peace: Polity IV Project.

<sup>19</sup> Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., March 28, 2011.

## Survey Experiment

The survey experiment was embedded in a nationally-representative survey of the US population known as *The American Panel Survey* (TAPS).<sup>20</sup> TAPS is a bi-monthly online survey based on a national probability sample of about 2,000 US adults. The original sample was recruited using an address-based sampling (ABS) frame. The survey was administered online March 2012 by Knowledge Networks. Of the 2,000 people in the TAPS panel, 1,602 people participated in the experiment, yielding a response rate of 80 %. At the time of the survey, democracy promotion was not a particularly salient issue in the United States. The largest of the Russian pro-democracy protests had occurred in December of the previous year. The Egyptian legislative elections ended in the same month and the presidential elections did not occur until May of 2012. Media attention surrounding Syria and the other Arab Spring countries was not prominent at the time either. As a result, I do not expect people to have had in mind any particular country or situation when reading the vignettes, or to have had any of the issues discussed in the vignettes at the forefront of their minds, something which would weaken the effects of the cues (Tversky and Kahneman 1973).

Table 1 depicts the setup of the experiment. Respondents were asked in the experiment to read a basic vignette depicting a situation in which democracy was at risk and then to indicate what course of action, if any, that they thought that the government should take to support democracy in this situation. Respondents in the control condition read only the basic vignette while respondents in the three treatment conditions read extended vignettes that appealed to either people's democratic values (e.g., recipient country benefit (RCB) and moral responsibility (MR) or their national interests (NI)). Participants in the study were divided roughly equally across the experimental conditions.<sup>21</sup> The population of each of the experimental conditions was balanced and mirrored the larger sample in terms of age, gender, race and education.

The basic vignette that all respondents read is as follows:

*Control:* Country X recently held democratic elections for the first time in its history. The president of the country lost these elections by a large margin, but has refused to hand over power. Instead, he has ordered the Army to crackdown on peaceful protests that have formed throughout the country. Hundreds have been killed and injured in the violence. In the United States, a group of senators from both political parties has urged Congress to support the protesters.

Participants in the *democratic values* treatment condition read either one of the following two extended vignettes. The first emphasizes the benefits of democracy to

<sup>20</sup> TAPS is administered by Knowledge Networks on behalf of Washington University in St. Louis. The American Panel Survey (TAPS). Washington University in St. Louis, One Brookings Drive, Campus Box 1027, St. Louis, MO 63130-4899. <http://taps.wustl.edu/>.

<sup>21</sup> The number of participants in each of the experimental conditions was as follows: treatment 1 (recipient country benefit) = 392; treatment 2 (moral responsibility) = 384; treatment 3 (national interests) = 434; control = 392. See below for a description of the experimental conditions.

**Table 1** Experimental setup

	Predispositions	Experimental conditions	Beliefs	Outcome
Cosmopolitanism	Welfare	RCB	Country X benefits	Support for democracy promotion
	US leadership	MR	US responsibility	
Nationalism	National pride	NI	US benefits	

*RCB* recipient country benefit treatment condition, *MR* moral responsibility treatment condition, *NI* national interests treatment condition

the recipient state while the second emphasizes the US’ moral responsibility to promote democracy in other countries.

*Treatment 1-Recipient Country Benefit (RCB):* [Basic Vignette + ] ... because the senators said, “In a democracy, the people of Country X would be free from violence and repression, have a higher standard of living, more rights, a better education, and a cleaner, healthier environment, among other things.”

*Treatment 2-Moral Responsibility (MR):* [Basic Vignette + ] ... The senators said that, “The United States must serve as a beacon for democracy because it is the most powerful country in the world and is better prepared and more capable than any other country in the world to help.”

Participants in the *national interests* treatment condition read the following vignette:

*Treatment 3-National Interests (NI):* [Basic Vignette + ] ... The senators urged the United States to respond because, “Democracies make for better neighbors. They are more stable and less war-prone. They are better allies in the war against terrorism, and better trading partners as well.”

The vignettes were designed to be as realistic as possible. The scenario depicted in this vignette is similar to many cases of democracy promotion that the US has faced recently where people have taken to the streets en masse to demand democratic reforms, including the Colored Revolutions in Eastern Europe, the protests in the Ivory Coast (2010), the anti-Putin protests in Russia (2011/2012), and the Arab Spring movement. While some of these protests involved allegations of electoral fraud, the scenario in the vignette does not to ensure that it is a clear-cut case of democracy promotion. If fraud had occurred, there might be ambiguity about this because people might question whether the fraud was genuine or whether the fraud would have made a difference to the outcome of the election. While the scenario depicted in the vignette resembles real world events, it is also devoid of any details that might evoke a particular case of democracy promotion. This is important since the goal of the study is to test people’s views toward democracy promotion in general rather than a specific case. Moreover, if people had a particular case of democracy promotion in mind while reading the vignette, this would confound the results.

The language used in the cues is also realistic. It is was based on actual speeches given by US presidents regarding democracy promotion. The cues were delivered

by a bi-partisan coalition of senators because research suggests that politicians can have a significant impact on public opinion regarding these issues when foreign policy issues are salient (Berinsky and Druckman 2007; Kaufmann 2004; Thrall and Cramer 2009). I refer to senators in the vignette rather than the president so that people did not associate the cues in the vignettes with the current president of the United States or the party he represents. I also made clear that the coalition of senators was bi-partisan so as not to evoke a partisan response to the vignettes.

The scenario depicted in the vignette not only resembles real world events (mundane realism), but it also engages with the major attitudinal issues surrounding democracy promotion related to democratic values and national interests (experimental realism). In this scenario, democracy has a clear and immediate benefit for Country X, namely an end to the government repression and violence. It also has a moral dimension to it because people's lives are at risk in this country and the protesters did not instigate or provoke the violence. Democracy promotion further benefits the US in this case because handing over power to the rightfully elected leader of Country X would end the protests and stabilize the country.

The experimental vignettes were also designed to create strong cases for both democratic values and national interests so that the results are not an artifact of imbalanced cues. To make sure that the cues were equal in strength, the cues are fairly equal in length (ranging from 35 to 40 words) and the language used in the cues is equally vivid. In the real world, people may be motivated to support democracy promotion by both democratic values and national interests while politicians may appeal to both at the same time. By separating them out in the experimental vignettes, though, I am able to discern the relative importance of each.

After reading the vignette, respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought that the US should support democracy in this case and what type of action they recommended. The question wordings and response categories of these questions are as follows:

*Support for Democracy Promotion:* "You will have an opportunity in the next question to indicate what type of action, if any, you think that the US should take in this situation. Right now, please just indicate whether or not you think the US should take any action to support democracy in Country X?" 1=definitely not, 2=probably not, 3=maybe, 4=probably, 5=definitely, 6=don't know, and 7=refused.

*Support for Type of Strategy:* "What type of action do you think the US should take to support democracy in Country X?" 1=diplomatic pressure, 2=economic sanctions, 3=foreign aid, 4=military force, 5=other, 6=don't know, and 7=refused. (In the analysis, I have transformed this variable into four dichotomous measures representing people's support for each strategy of democracy promotion, 0=no; 1=yes.) They are *Support for Diplomatic Pressure*, *Support for Economic Sanctions*, *Support for Foreign Aid*, and *Support for Military Force*.)

To examine how sensitive people's support for each of these actions is to the probability of success, the respondents were also asked the following question:

*Odds of Success:* “Would you be willing to support [diplomatic pressure/economic sanctions/foreign aid/military force/other] against Country X if the US had a 50/50 chance of being successful in getting the president to turn over power?” 1=no, 2=maybe, 3=yes, 4=don’t know, and 5=refused. (In the analysis, I have transformed these variable(s) into 8 dichotomous measures of support for each strategy given a 50/50 chance of success and less than a 50/50 chance of success, 0=no; 1=yes.)

After the experiment, participants were also asked a series of questions to measure the extent to which they believed the treatments since cueing either democratic values or national interests is only likely to generate support for democratic promotion among those who believe that democracy promotion is beneficial to either the recipient or donor country, or is the moral responsibility of the United States. The question wordings and response categories of these questions are as follows:

*Country X Benefits:* “In your opinion, is Country X likely to be better off as a democracy?” 1=very unlikely, 2=somewhat unlikely, 3=neither likely nor unlikely, 4=somewhat likely, 5=very likely, 6=don’t know, and 7=refused.

*US Responsibility:* “In your opinion, how much responsibility, if any at all, does the US have to support democracy in Country X?” 1=no responsibility at all, 2=a little responsibility, 3=some responsibility, 4=a lot of responsibility, 5=don’t know, and 6=refused.

*US Benefits:* “In your opinion, is the United States likely to be better off if Country X is a democracy?” 1=very unlikely, 2=somewhat unlikely, 3=neither likely nor unlikely, 4=somewhat likely, 5=very likely, 6=don’t know, and 7=refused.

Prior to the experiment, people were asked a series of questions to identify which segments of the population are most likely to support democracy promotion for the sake of democratic values and which are more likely to support it for the sake of national interests based on their predispositions. The questions were asked prior to the experiment so that the experiment did not influence people’s responses to these questions.<sup>22</sup> The first two of these questions relate to democratic values—either to the concept of cosmopolitanism or national pride—while the third relates to national interests and the past benefits of democracy promotion for the US.

### Cosmopolitanism

*Welfare:* “The US should only be concerned with the welfare of its own citizens and not the welfare of those living in other countries.” 1=strongly agree, 2=somewhat agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=somewhat disagree, 5=strongly disagree, 6=don’t know, and 7=refused.

<sup>22</sup> People’s responses to these questions were not significantly different across experimental conditions according to  $\chi^2$  tests.

*US Leadership*: “The US is by far the single, most powerful country in the world today.” 1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree, 6=don’t know, and 7=refused.

### National Pride

*National Pride*: “I am proud to be an American.” 1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree, 6=don’t know, and 7=refused.

### Past Successes/Failures

*US Safer*: “The U.S. is safer now thanks to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.” 1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree, 6=don’t know, and 7=refused.

*US Debt*: “The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are responsible for our ballooning national debt.” 1=strongly agree, 2=somewhat agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=somewhat disagree, 5=strongly disagree, 6=don’t know, and 7=refused.

## Descriptive Statistics

Overall support for democracy promotion is modest in the study. While 69 % of the people in the experiment sympathized with the idea of democracy promotion, only 13 % of these people said that the US should “definitely” support democracy in Country X, while 31 % thought that the US “probably” should support it. An additional 25 % of these people thought “maybe” the US should. The remaining 22 % of the people in the study thought that the United States should either “definitely not” (6 %) or “probably not” (16 %) support democracy in Country X. Support for democracy promotion varies across demographic groups (See Table 2). These differences are statistically significant for certain demographic groups, namely gender, income, and ideology (liberal/conservative), according to  $\chi^2$  tests.<sup>23</sup> The finding on gender is consistent with research that shows that women are less supportive of foreign engagement in general and the use of military force in particular (Fite et al. 1990; Eichenberg 2003). Differences among racial groups are also noteworthy, but not significant according to  $\chi^2$  tests. For other demographic groups, including age, education, and partisan affiliation, the differences are not substantively or statistically significant.

<sup>23</sup> A chi-square test is a goodness-of-fit test, which compares observed frequency distributions with the theoretical or expected frequency distribution to determine whether the deviations between the observed and the expected counts are too large to be attributed to chance. It generalizes the Z test, which is appropriate when only two proportions are being compared in the data.

**Table 2** Support democracy promotion

	Definitely (%)	Probably (%)	Maybe (%)	Probably not (%)	Definitely not (%)
<b>Gender</b>					
Women	10.89	26.85	39.43	17.38	5.45
Men	14.42	35.18	29.78	14.96	5.66
<b>Race</b>					
Whites	11.79	30.63	34.56	17.28	5.73
Non-whites	15.86	32.41	35.52	11.38	4.83
<b>Age</b>					
65-above	12.89	32.08	31.45	17.61	5.97
35–64	12.53	30.52	35.65	16.06	5.24
18–34	12.20	30.31	36.24	15.33	5.92
<b>Income</b>					
Below 50 K	13.54	32.28	33.93	13.68	6.57
50–150 K	12.85	29.17	36.98	17.19	3.82
150 K or above	10.19	31.48	29.63	24.07	4.63
<b>Education</b>					
High school only	13.87	27.74	35.04	14.60	8.76
College	13.33	31.19	35.37	15.37	4.75
Graduate/professional	9.91	32.94	32.65	19.53	4.96
<b>Partisanship</b>					
Republican	13.38	32.07	33.84	17.17	3.54
Democrat	14.21	30.91	35.70	14.39	4.80
Independent	11.06	30.59	34.49	16.92	6.94
<b>Ideology</b>					
Liberal	13.35	32.85	38.19	11.50	4.11
Moderates	11.80	29.76	34.32	19.30	4.83
Conservatives	12.97	31.53	30.45	18.56	6.49

Question: Do you think the United States should take any action to support democracy in Country X?

## Methodology

The data on *support for democracy promotion* are analyzed using ordered logit models since the response categories for this variable are not equally spaced and are ordered. For models where the dependent variable is *support for a type of strategy* of democracy promotion, the data are analyzed using logistic regression models since the response categories for these variables are dichotomous. Many of the models in the analysis involve interaction effects. Throughout this paper, conclusions about the statistical significance of the interaction effects are based on the joint significance of the main effects and the interaction terms because interaction terms introduce collinearity into models making the significance of individual coefficients unreliable. The joint significance is based on Wald tests. In

this context, a Wald test indicates whether the variables are jointly equal to zero. Rejecting the null hypothesis indicates that the variables are jointly significant. Relying on the joint significance of the main effects and interaction terms is not sufficient to understand the results, however, because in non-linear models one variable might have a significant effect on another variable in a given direction for certain values of the modifying variable and an insignificant effect on this variable in a different direction for other values (Brambor et al. 2006). Thus, I also interpret the substantive and statistical significance of the results of the interaction effects based on certain relevant values of the main effects and interaction terms. To facilitate the interpretation of these results, I have presented them graphically.

## Results

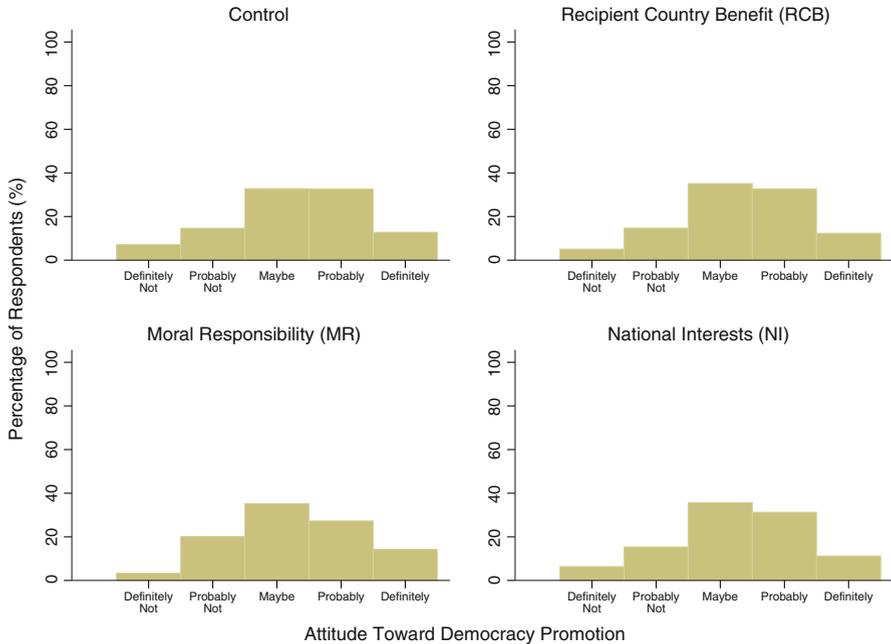
In brief, the analysis shows that *neither* democratic values *nor* national interests in general lead people to support democracy promotion, nor do they affect how sensitive people are to the costs of democracy promotion and the probability of success. However, democratic values do motivate a subset of the population to support democracy promotion with a more cosmopolitan perspective of foreign affairs. This subset includes individuals who see democracy as beneficial to the recipient country and are concerned for the welfare of those living in other countries, as well as individuals who believe that the US is a world leader and has a moral responsibility to promote democracy in other countries. This subset of the US population is also more likely to support certain types of strategies to promote democracy than others, including those with a lower probability of success.

### Support for Democracy Promotion

In general, neither people in the two democratic values treatment conditions nor those in the national interests treatment conditions are more likely to support democracy promotion than those in the control condition according to a  $\chi^2$  test. The two democratic values treatment conditions are: the RCB treatment condition and the MR treatment condition, which cue the political, social, and environmental benefits of democracy for the target country in the case of the former and the responsibility of the US as a world leader to promote democracy in the case of the latter. The NI treatment condition cues the political, security and financial benefits of democracy promotion for the United States. Although the cues are strong, one cannot rule out the possibility that these nulling findings are a result of the experimental setup and to the cues not being sufficiently strong.

Figure 1 illustrates these results.

Even though the basic differences across the experimental conditions are not significant, large majorities of participants do believe that democracy promotion is beneficial to the recipient country and to the United States. About three-quarters of the respondents in this study believe that Country X is “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to be better off as a democracy and about two-thirds of the respondents believe that the US is either “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to be better off if

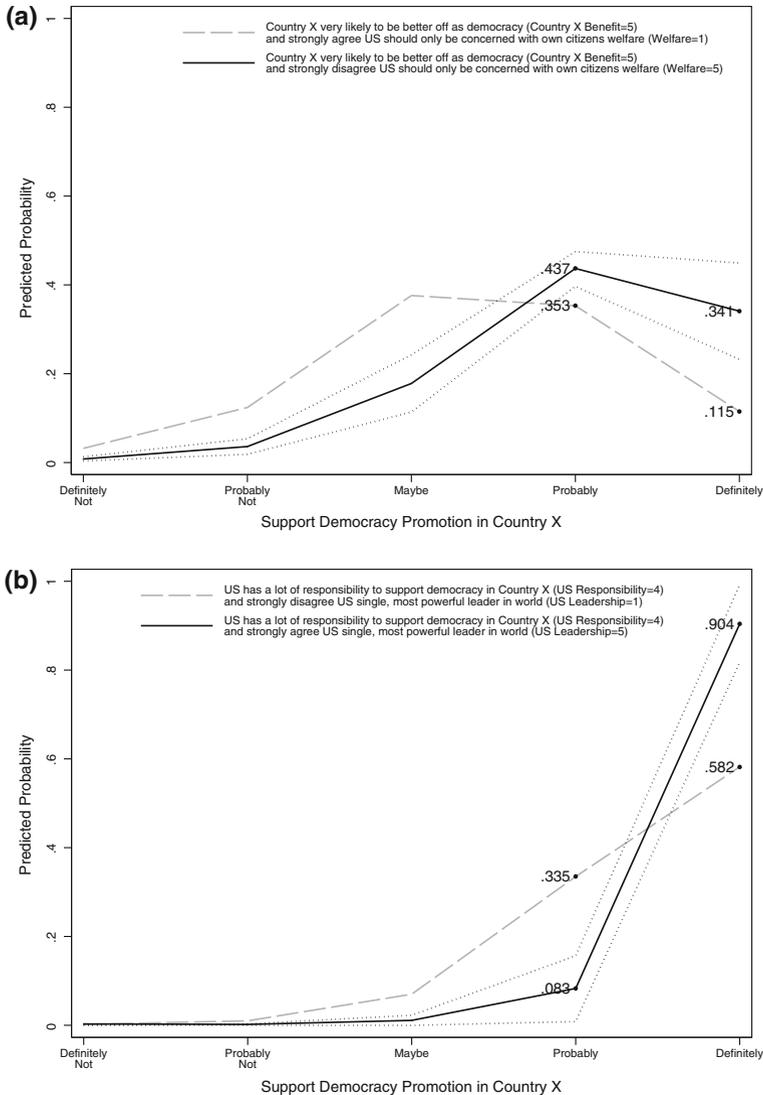


**Fig. 1** Support for democracy promotion across treatment and control conditions

Country X is a democracy. Only about a third of respondents, though, believe that the US has either “some” or “a lot of” responsibility to support democracy in Country X. People’s responses to these questions are not significantly different across the experimental conditions according to  $\chi^2$  tests, indicating importantly that the experimental conditions did not change people’s beliefs about each of these issues, but simply cued them.

To investigate the relationship between people’s responses to these questions and the relevant treatment conditions, I looked at a series of different interaction effects. Specifically, I interacted the *Country X Benefits* variable with the RCB treatment condition; the *US Responsibility* variable with the MR treatment condition; and the *US Benefits* variable with the NI treatment condition. None of these interactions increased support for democracy promotion over that of the control group. In other words, people who believe that democracy is beneficial to the recipient country and those who believe that the US has a moral responsibility to promote democracy internationally are not more likely to favor democracy promotion for the sake of democratic values over those in the control group who are of this view. Likewise, those who believe that democracy promotion is beneficial to the US are not significantly more likely to support democracy promotion for the sake of national interests over those in the control group who share this view.

However, the effect of the democratic values treatment conditions on support for democracy promotion is significantly greater than that of the control group if I take into account the extent to which people have a cosmopolitan perspective of foreign affairs. Figure 2 illustrates these findings. The interaction effects depicted in



**Fig. 2** Support for democracy promotion: interaction effects for democratic values treatment condition. **a** Recipient country benefit (RCB) treatment, **b** Moral responsibility (MR) treatment

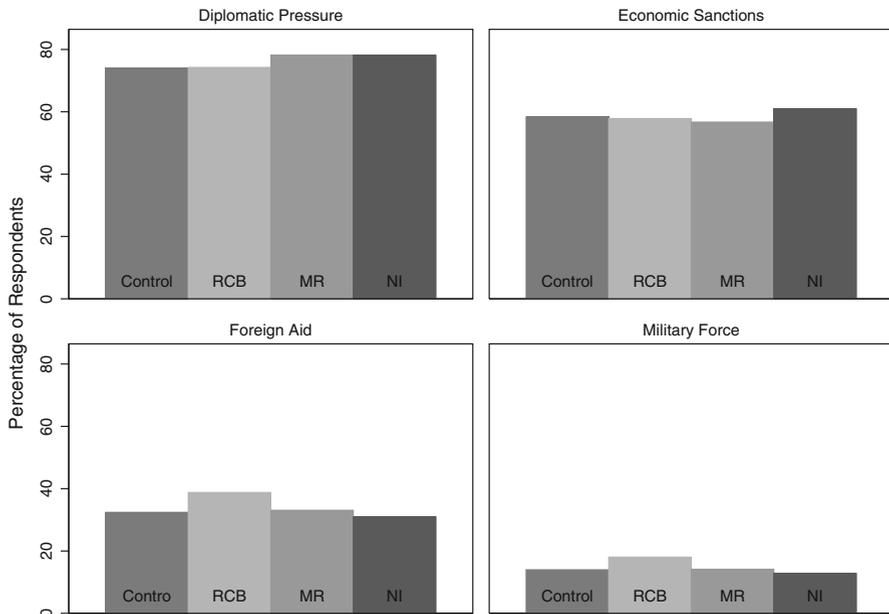
Figure 2a, b are both significant at the  $p \leq 0.01$  level according to Wald tests. National pride (not shown) does not significantly increase the effect of democratic values on support for democracy promotion. In other words, those who say that they have a lot of pride in being American are not more likely to support democracy promotion when democratic values are cued through either of the two democratic values treatment conditions than those in the control group who are of this view.

Figure 2a depicts the results of an ordered logit model in which the RCB treatment condition is interacted with two variables—the *Country X Benefits* variable held at its maximum value and the *Welfare* variable held at its minimum and maximum values (log pseudolikelihood =  $-1748.26$ ). As Figure 2a illustrates, the predicted probability of “definitely” supporting democracy promotion for those who believe that Country X is “very likely” to benefit from democracy and who “strongly agree” with the idea that “the US should only be concerned with the welfare of its own citizens and not the welfare of those living in other countries” is 0.115. For those who believe that Country X is “very likely” to benefit from democracy and who “strongly disagree” with this idea, the predicted probability of “definitely” supporting democracy promotion in Country X is 0.341. This is significantly higher than the control group.

The effect of the MR treatment condition is larger. Figure 2b depicts the interaction between the MR treatment condition and two variables—the *US Responsibility* variable held at its maximum value, and the *US Leadership* variable held at its minimum and maximum values—on support for democracy promotion (log pseudolikelihood =  $-1775.88$ ). As Figure 2b illustrates, the predicted probability of “definitely” supporting democracy promotion for those who “strongly disagree” that the US has a moral responsibility to promote democracy in Country X and who “strongly disagree” that “the US is the most powerful leader in the world” is 0.582. For those who “strongly agree” with these two statements, the predicted probability of “definitely” supporting democracy promotion in Country X is 0.904. This is significantly higher than the control group.

People who share these views do not comprise a large segment of the US population, which may help explain why so few Americans support democracy promotion in general. Less than 10 % of participants in the study who believe that Country X is “very likely” to be better off as a democracy and “strongly disagree” with the idea that the US should only be concerned with the welfare of those living in other countries. Less than 5 % of the people in the study who believe that the US has “a lot” of responsibility to promote democracy in Country X also “strongly agree” that the US is the single, most powerful country in the world today.

If I interact the NI treatment condition with the variables on Afghanistan and Iraq, I find that the effect of the NI treatment condition on support for democracy promotion is also significantly greater the more people think that the US is safer as a result of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and is weaker the extent to which they believe that the wars are responsible for the US’ ballooning national debt, according to Wald Tests (not shown). For example, the probability of saying that the US should “definitely” promote democracy in Country X is 0.12 points higher for a person in the NI treatment condition who “strongly agrees” that the US is safer now thanks to these wars than for a person who “strongly disagrees” with this statement (log pseudolikelihood =  $-2069.76$ ). Concerns about the national debt also have an effect but the substantive impact is trivial. The probability of saying that the US should “definitely” promote democracy in Country X is 0.01 points lower for a person in the NI treatment condition who “strongly agrees” that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are responsible for the US’ ballooning national debt than it is for someone who “strongly disagrees” with this statement (log



**Fig. 3** Support for democracy promotion across treatment and control conditions. *RCB* Recipient country benefit treatment condition, *MR* moral responsibility treatment condition, *NI* national interests treatment condition

pseudolikelihood =  $-2097.13$ ). People's evaluations of Afghanistan and Iraq significantly affect the extent to which people are willing to support democracy promotion in the other treatment conditions as well.

With the exception of gender, the effects of democratic values and national interests on democracy promotion are not significantly greater than the control group for certain demographic characteristics, such as age, race, education, and income. Nor, do they vary based on political ideology or partisan affiliation.<sup>24</sup> This is surprising since some recent research on US attitudes towards foreign policy has found significant discrepancies between Republicans and Democrats and between conservatives and liberals for a host of other issues, including foreign aid, defense spending, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Yankelovich 2005; Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon 2005). For women, the two democratic values conditions significantly decrease support for democracy promotion over the control group (not shown).

### Sensitivity to Cost Analysis

In general, people are also less likely to support more costly strategies of democracy promotion. Of those in the experiment who say that the US should take some sort of action to support the protesters in Country X, 76 % of the people in the experiment

<sup>24</sup> If I interact these demographic characteristics with each of the treatment conditions, the interaction effects do not have statistically significant effects on support for democracy promotion.

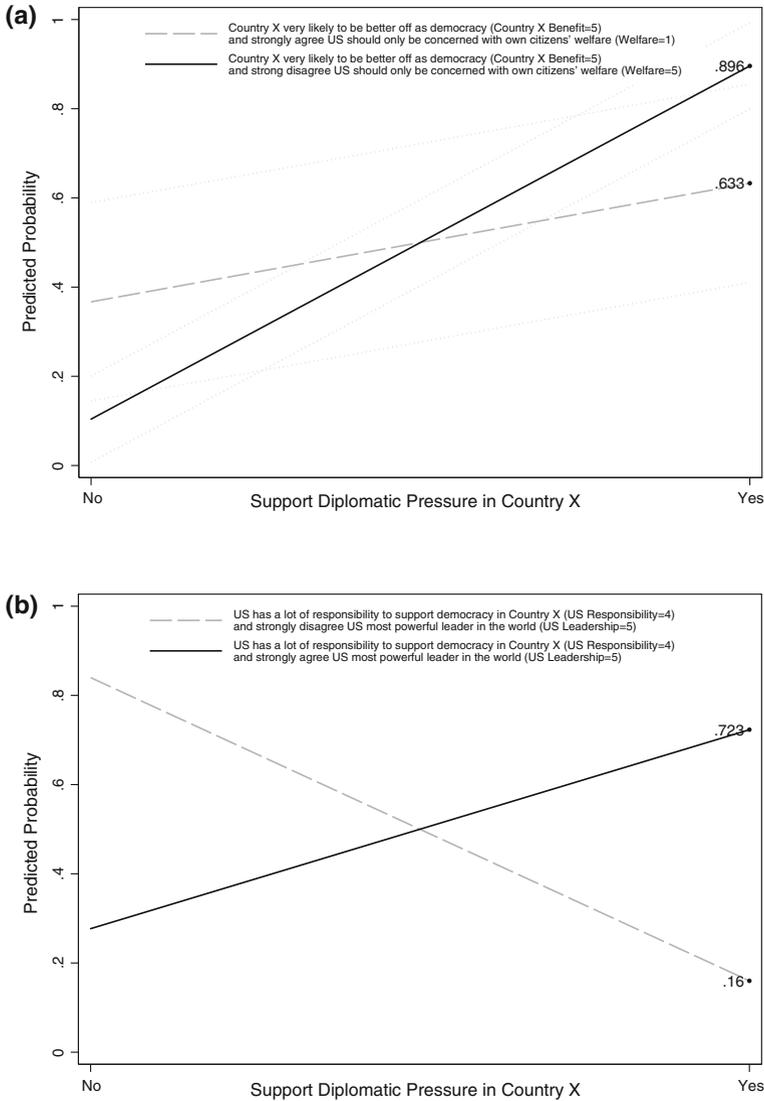
recommended diplomatic pressure, 59 % recommended economic sanctions, 34 % recommended foreign aid (includes economic, technical, or military aid), and only 15 % recommended military force.<sup>25</sup> Although there is significant variation in people's support for different types of strategies of democracy promotion, people in the two democratic values conditions and those in the one national interests treatment condition are not more likely to support particular types of democracy promotion than those in the control group according to  $\chi^2$  tests. Figure 3 illustrates these results.

However, the same subset of the population identified above with a more cosmopolitan perspective of foreign affairs is more likely to support particular types of strategies for the sake of democratic values than those in the control group. More specifically, I find that individuals in the RCB treatment condition who believe that Country X will be better off as a democracy and believe that the US should be concerned for the welfare of those living in other countries are more likely to support all types of strategies, except economic sanctions, than those in the control condition who share these views. National pride does not significantly increase the effect of either democratic values or national interests over the control group on people's support for particular types of democracy promotion (not shown). The interaction effects depicted in Figure 4a, b are both significant at the  $p \leq 0.01$  level according to Wald tests.

Figure 4a depicts the interaction between the RCB treatment condition and two variables—the *Country X Benefits* variable held at its maximum value and the *Welfare* variable held at its minimum and maximum values—on support for one of these strategies—diplomatic pressure (log pseudolikelihood=−535.46). As Figure 4a illustrates, the predicted probability of supporting diplomatic pressure for those who believe that Country X is “very likely” to be better off as a democracy and who “strongly agree” that the US should only be concerned with the welfare of its own citizens is 0.633. For those who believe that Country X is “very likely” to be better off as a democracy and who “strongly disagree” with this statement, it is 0.896. This is significantly higher than the control group.

Meanwhile, those in the MR treatment condition who see the US as a world leader and who also believe the US has a moral responsibility to promote democracy in other countries are more likely to support the most costly form of democracy promotion—military force—than those in the control condition. Figure 4b depicts the interaction between the MR treatment condition and two variables—the *US Responsibility* variable held at its maximum value and the *US Leadership* variable held at its minimum and maximum values—on support for military force (log pseudolikelihood = −439.87). As Figure 4b illustrates, the predicted probability of supporting military force for those who “strongly agree” that the US has a moral responsibility to promote democracy and who “strongly disagree” that the US is the most powerful leader in the world is 0.160. For those who “strongly agree” with these two statements, the predicted probability of supporting the use of military force in Country X is 0.723. This is significantly higher than the control group.

<sup>25</sup> People can recommend more than one type of action.



**Fig. 4** Support for types of strategies of democracy promotion: interaction effects for the democratic values treatment conditions. **a** Recipient country benefit (RCB) treatment, **b** Moral responsibility (MR) treatment

Both democratic values and national interests also make certain demographic groups significantly more likely to support democracy promotion than those in the control group (not shown). Women in the two democratic values treatment conditions, for example, are significantly more likely to support low and high cost strategies of democracy promotion over women in the control group, while women in the national interests treatment condition are significantly more likely to support

high cost strategies of democracy promotion. When democratic values are cued, liberals are also significantly more likely to support both low and high cost forms of democracy promotion, while wealthy individuals are significantly more likely to support all types of democracy promotion, except military force, when either democratic values or national interests are cued.

### Sensitivity to the Probability of Success

Finally, in general, everyone is more reluctant to support any type of strategy to promote democracy in other countries the less likely that strategy is to succeed. Not surprisingly, people are least likely to support the most costly forms of democracy promotion with the lowest odds of success. In the case of domestic pressure and economic sanctions, only about one-tenth of the people who support these strategies to promote democracy in Country X are no longer willing to support them if these strategies only have a 50/50 chance of succeeding, and about one-third are no longer willing to support them if they have less than a 50/50 chance of succeeding. In the case of foreign aid and military pressure, more than one-third of the people in the experiment who say that they support these strategies to promote democracy in Country X are no longer willing to support them if they only have a 50/50 chance of succeeding, and two-thirds are no longer willing to support them if they have less than a 50/50 chance of succeeding.

In general, the likelihood of people supporting each of these types of democracy promotion given a lower probability of success is not significantly different for either the democratic values or the national interests treatment conditions than for the control condition, according to  $\chi^2$  tests. Not even for the subset of the population identified above do these issues affect the willingness of people to support particular types of strategies of democracy promotion with a lower probability of success. Some of the same demographic patterns observed in terms of the costs of democracy promotion, though, also exist in terms of the probability of success. Both democratic values and national interests increase the support of women for low cost forms of democracy promotion with a lower probability of success. They also increase the effect of education, which is inversely related to support for democracy promotion, on the likelihood of supporting low cost forms of democracy promotion with lower odds of success.

### Conclusion

Overall, the analysis suggests that support for democracy promotion among the US public is modest. While a majority of the public supports democracy promotion in general, the public is less willing to support more costly strategies of democracy promotion, like foreign aid and military force, than they are less costly actions, like diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions. The public's support for these strategies also drops precipitously as the odds of success decline. The extent to which Americans support democracy promotion varies significantly across certain demographic groups: men are more supportive of democracy promotion than women; lower income classes

are more supportive of it than upper income classes; and liberals are more supportive of democracy promotion than conservatives and moderates.

This analysis sheds light, though, not only on what is the public's attitude toward democracy promotion, but also what drives it. By using an experiment to analyze the public's attitudes towards democracy promotion, this study is able to make causal inferences about what motivates the public to support democracy promotion in general, and to separate out these factors from each other and from other potential confounders. The study finds in this regard that neither democratic values nor national interests lead people to support democracy promotion in general, and that only a subset of the population is driven to support democracy promotion due to democratic values. This subset of the population is motivated by cosmopolitan attitudes—that is, a sense of concern for the welfare of those living in other countries and a sense of moral responsibility for the United States as a world leader to promote democracy in other countries, not national pride.

These findings challenge international perceptions of Americans as either uncritical nationalists seeking to impose the American ideal of democracy on other countries regardless of the costs, or self-interested hypocrites who claim to promote democracy abroad out of concern for those living in other countries but who are only willing to support democracy in so much as it benefits the United States.<sup>26</sup> Public opinion polls on democracy promotion have similar implications. These polls find that a majority of Americans believe that US foreign policy should promote America's national interests, which at times may involve promoting democracy in other countries and at other times may involve supporting non-democratic countries, and that a majority of Americans are not willing to support democracy in another country if it would result in a leader in that country coming to power that is antagonistic to US interests.<sup>27</sup>

The extent to which people are willing to support democracy promotion for the sake of either democratic values or national interests is likely to vary over time. At present, the US' recent experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq has dampened the public's enthusiasm for promoting democracy abroad for both these reasons. Nevertheless, the framework established in this paper for understanding the factors behind the public's attitudes toward democracy promotion can help explain how this support is likely to vary over time, and what types of political appeals are more or less likely to generate support for democracy promotion among the US public.

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<sup>26</sup> Pew Center Polls. *Pew Global Attitudes Project: Spring 2007*, June 27, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> The public opinion polls on which this statement is based are as follows: (1) "As a rule US foreign policy should pursue US interests, which sometimes means promoting democracy and sometimes means supporting non-democratic governments." Responses: 54 % agree, 38 % disagree and 8 % no answer; (2) "Do you think the US should or should not support a country becoming a democracy if there is a high likelihood that the people will elect an Islamic fundamentalist leader?" Responses: 54 % should not; 32 % should; 15 % no answer. See: PIPA/Chicago Council Polls, September 15–21, 2005.

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