

Historical Ownership and Territorial Indivisibility*

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Abstract

Some of the most enduring and dangerous territorial disputes seem to display the characteristic of so-called issue indivisibility, with at least one side of a dispute taking a position of all-or-nothing. Moreover, historical ownership is frequently invoked in such disputes to justify uncompromising policy stances. We investigate these phenomena by developing a theoretical argument for how historical ownership can be a source of a perception of territorial indivisibility, which then can cause bargaining failure and war. We implement a survey experiment in China to test the hypotheses derived from the theory. We find that historical ownership plays a significant role in the respondents' perception of territory indivisibility compared with the alternative scenario of no such ownership. Furthermore, those who perceive a territory to be indivisible are more likely to favor economic sanctions and military solutions to the dispute, and much less likely to support bilateral negotiation and IO arbitration. These findings are broadly consistent with our theoretical expectations and have significant policy implications.

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1. Introduction

Territorial disputes can last for decades, even over a century. Moreover, some territorial disputes do not end even after a decisive war; the side that lost a territory in a military defeat may simply refuse to relinquish its claim. Nor are states always willing to accept side payments to settle such disputes. Taiwan, Jerusalem, and Kashmir are just a few territorial disputes that have defied a bargaining solution, and are under a constant threat of war. What causes the stalemate on these disputes? All of them exhibit the characteristic of so-called issue indivisibility: In each of the disputes, at least one side has consistently claimed territorial indivisibility and taken a policy position of all-or-nothing.¹ Given the consistency of the claims and the endurance of these disputes, it is at least plausible that such claims are not mere rhetoric to gain an advantage at the bargaining table; the parties may indeed believe in their claims, or are compelled to take the hardline position due to the belief of other powerful domestic actors. If this is the case, then the phenomenon presents a challenge to a widely shared theoretical understanding of the causes of conflict (Fearon 1995), which suggests that issue indivisibility in and of itself does not constitute a compelling explanation for war.²

Notably, often in such disputes historical ownership is invoked to support the rightfulness of a country's claim and its resolve to protect or reclaim the ownership.³ In several ongoing maritime disputes in Asia, for instance, virtually all the countries involved have claimed historical ownership over the territories, regardless of their size and value.⁴ The pattern has been observed in other parts of the world, particularly in the post-WWII era (Murphy 1990). When these empirical observations are put together, two natural questions arise:

¹Chinese government considers Taiwan a renegade province of China and has never wavered on the One-China policy; India considers Kashmir, despite being a Muslim-majority state, as an integral part of secular India; Israel's 1980 Basic Law refers to Jerusalem as the country's undivided capital.

²There are two kinds of territorial disputes: (1) claims to a specified unit of territory, and (2) the exact location of territorial boundaries where there are not conflicting claims to a specified space. Our study refers to the first type, not to the second.

³A historical claim of a territory would typically be based on priority or duration (Burghardt 1973, 230-231). Priority means being the first to discover a territory, and duration means some form of presence on a territory over a long period of time.

⁴For instance, China and Japan each claims a historical ownership of Diaoyu/Senkakus Island; Japan and South Korea both claim a historical ownership of Liancourt Rocks. The Spratly Islands are claimed by multiple countries on various grounds, among which the claims made by China and Vietnam are based on respective historical accounts.

Does historical ownership give rise to a perception of territorial indivisibility? If it does, does the perception lead to more aggressive foreign policy positions toward such disputes, making compromises difficult to achieve? We investigate these questions in this study using a theoretically informed survey experiment.

Theoretically, we develop a causal argument for how a historical ownership of a territory may give rise to a perception of indivisibility over the territory for the citizens of a country.⁵ Such a perception then can lead the citizens to prefer uncompromising policy stances toward the dispute involving the territory because of the value that they attach to possessing the entirety of the territory. We develop the argument in detail in the subsequent sections, however, two points worth noting at the outset. First, while there may exist other sources of territorial indivisibility, we chose historical ownership as the point of departure in our theory because it has been perhaps the most frequently invoked justification for territorial claims (Murphy 1990). If a historical ownership can lead to a perception of territorial indivisibility, and therefore a public's unwillingness to compromise on a territorial dispute, then we need to take such claims more seriously and also caution politicians of the consequences of invoking such claims. Second, we examine individual citizens' perceptions of a disputed territory, even though state leaders are the ones making foreign policy decisions. Leaders can certainly choose foreign policies based on their own beliefs over matters involved, however, they are also constrained by the beliefs and policy preferences of other domestic actors if they wish to stay in power. On territorial disputes, public sentiment seems particularly relevant: it is found that territorial disputes, especially those that are deemed "intangibles" and "indivisible," often trigger strong nationalistic reactions from individual citizens and are more likely to escalate, suggesting that even in authoritarian regimes leaders' decisions on such disputes may be influenced by public sentiment (Gibler, Hutchison and Miller 2012, Roy 1997, Vasquez 1993, 2009). If leaders share the sentiment with the public, then we have little to lose from analyzing individuals' beliefs and policy preferences over territorial issues, but even if they do not, our analysis sheds insight on the constraints that leaders face domestically on such matters.⁶

⁵While our focus in the study is the perceptions of the citizens of a state, similar dynamics outlined in our theory may apply to aboriginal peoples and other peoples without a state.

⁶Skepticisms are often expressed toward the relevance of public opinion on foreign policy in China. The typical argument is that the authoritarian nature of the government does not compel leaders to be responsive

We use an experiment embedded in a public opinion survey to test the causal link outlined in our theory. Through random assignments of different hypothetical dispute scenarios to respondents, our survey experiment allows us to assess the effect of historical ownership on the respondents' perceptions of territorial indivisibility and their subsequent policy preferences. Our survey was implemented in China as it provides an excellent testing ground for the theory. China is one of the countries in the world with the largest number of neighboring countries, sharing land borders with fourteen countries and territorial waters with another six. China also has several ongoing territorial disputes, all of which have been based on a claim of historical ownership (Dupuy and Dupuy 2013, Upton 1973). With these conditions present, we believe that our study can shed important insights on the sources and the effects of territorial indivisibility on conflict.

Our main findings are as follows. First, we find that historical ownership plays a significant role in the respondents' perceptions of territory indivisibility compared with the alternative scenario of no such ownership. No other contextual variables that we examined have a similar effect, including military strength of the opponent, the economic value of the territory, and whether the disputed territory is an island or a land. Second, those who perceive a territory to be indivisible are more likely to favor economic sanctions and military solutions to the dispute, and much less likely to support bilateral negotiation and IO arbitration – the alternative less conflictual solutions. These findings are broadly consistent with our theoretical expectations and have significant policy implications. Third, we also find that regardless of historical ownership, the respondents find IO arbitration to be a less desirable solution than bilateral negotiation.

Our research contributes to a better theoretical and empirical understanding of territorial public opinion. This narrow focus on the electoral mechanism for the link between public opinion and foreign policy is misplaced, however – even in democracies it has not been well established that voters know enough about foreign affairs to base their voting decisions on such issues. In recent years, a significant literature has emerged to identify alternative channels, both direct and indirect, through which the foreign policy making may be influenced by public opinion in China. Directly, public opinion matters because the government cares about public sentiment on territorial or other foreign policy issues out of its concerns for regime legitimacy and survival. Indirectly, public opinion may make its way into the media and think tank reports, which then catch the attention of the policy makers, both for the purpose of making sound policies and again, out of concerns for regime and social stability (Hao and Su 2005, Lorentzen 2013, Reilly 2012, Christensen 2015). The findings do not contradict the argument that the government sometimes may drive public opinion to strengthen its bargaining position (Weiss 2014); it does suggest that public opinion may have an independent causal effect on foreign policy in China.

torial disputes by taking into account the historical experience of a country. Qualitative international relations literature has long made causal claims about history on state conflict behavior, however, there are few systematic empirical studies that rigorously examine the link, despite a vast quantitative literature on the causes of conflict. Such a gap is hardly an oversight; there are practical challenges in separating genuine beliefs rooted in history and culture and strategic incentives to claim their relevance. Yet, we cannot rule out that such genuine beliefs do play a role in the most enduring, and potentially most deadly, conflicts in the world today. What is needed, then, is an empirical approach that allows us to assess cultural beliefs and their impact on individuals' foreign policy preferences. We believe survey experiments are a useful tool in this regard, and our study is a first-cut effort to understand the impact of history in an important foreign policy issue area. Finally, while our investigation focuses on territorial disputes where claims of historical ownership are most commonplace, the logic of our theoretical argument can be applied to other issue areas where historical ownership is a relevant dimension to a dispute.

2. Indivisible Territory: Real or Imagined

Any claim of issue indivisibility during a territorial dispute and an uncompromising policy stance attributed to the claim by a side confront two kinds of skepticism. The first is whether such a claim represents a genuine belief, and the second, even if the belief is genuine, whether there is truly no bargaining solution to the dispute. We therefore need to investigate two separate questions: First, how may a genuine belief of indivisibility, if at all possible, arise over a territory for a people? Second, if such a belief exists, can it preclude a bargaining solution?

Scholars have addressed the second question first. In an influential study, Fearon (1995) argues that even for what appears to be an indivisible issue, side payments or some allocation mechanism can help create a bargaining space; moreover, such methods are not difficult to come by due to the richness of matters over which states negotiate. Therefore, “the real question in the case of an indivisible issue is what prevents leaders from creating intermediate settlements” (Fearon 1995, 390). Powell (2006) further argues that if indivisibility causes a bargaining failure, it is ultimately due to a commitment problem; in principle, states can

find a way to allocate even an indivisible good, but they may not be able to commit to honoring the agreement once they are in possession of the good. In general, international relations scholars, particularly those who work in the rationalist tradition, have expressed a healthy dose of skepticism toward both claims of issue indivisibility and their causal effect on bargaining failure and resulting conflict (Powell 2006, Frieden, Lake, and Schultz 2012, 115-117, Wiegand 2011).

Despite a clear theoretical understanding of how issue indivisibility should *not* be a major cause of conflict, empirically it is difficult to rule out the possibility that a perception of indivisibility, justifiable or not, does play a role in some of the most long lasting territorial disputes such as those discussed earlier. Not only that some disputants refuse to accept any kind of division of the territories, they also refuse to consider alternative arrangements that involve side payments.⁷ Moreover, if it is the commitment problem at play in such cases, then we should observe states searching for credible enforcement mechanisms, perhaps by engaging international mediators and monitoring bodies, for mutually acceptable allocations of the goods. Yet, it is rare that both parties of a dispute seek engaging an international organization to resolve the dispute, precisely for the reason that their own hands may be tied (Fang 2010).

A lingering sense of the importance of indivisibility in explaining territorial disputes has led to a second literature that investigates the nature and logic of territorial indivisibility (Gibler, Hutchison, and Miller 2012, Goddard 2006, 2009, Hassner 2003, Hensel and Mitchell 2005, Johnson and Toft 2013/2014, Toft 2006). In the vast majority of the cases, the disputed territories *are* physically divisible, but some are perceived, or argued, to be indivisible. Therefore, physical properties alone cannot be the basis for the claims of territorial indivisibility, which leaves open the possibility that territorial indivisibility arises from actors' beliefs. Brams and Taylor (1996, 51) define indivisible goods as those "whose value is destroyed if they are divided." Applying the definition to territorial issues, we may say that indivisible territories are those whose value is *perceived* to be destroyed or significantly lost if they are divided.⁸ This definition has two important implications.

⁷Alternative arrangements can include territorial exchanges, which were fairly common in pre-19th century European peace settlements, but they are quite rare today. See also footnote 12.

⁸Along a similar line, Kydd (2015, 72) suggests that indivisible issues may be better thought of as a

First, the distinction between “indivisible by nature” and “indivisible by creation” is not as useful as it first seems. Even if an issue is strategically constructed to be indivisible by the political elites of a country, once the indivisibility becomes a prevailing belief of the public, then the issue in effect takes on the quality of losing its values significantly in the eyes of the public if divided. To be even more explicit, a *belief* of issue indivisibility (indivisible by creation) and issue indivisibility (indivisible by nature) are conceptually identical. Indeed, some scholars have rejected the distinction altogether (Goddard 2006, Toft 2006). Goddard (2006) argues that all indivisibility in essence is a social construction through the legitimation process (a process that justifies a claim to an issue); moreover, political elites choose such legitimations strategically. This constructivist perspective in fact is consistent with a rationalist account that stresses strategic construction of issue indivisibility to strengthen one’s bargaining position (Frieden, Lake, and Schultz 2012, 115-117, Wiegand 2011).

Second, since actors’ belief about a territory rather than its physical properties forms the basis of a claim of territorial indivisibility, it becomes important to understand what gives rise to the belief, which then helps to explain when and how indivisibility may become policy relevant in territorial disputes. Hassner (2003) singles out sacred space – religious centers – as the only type of issues that are by nature indivisible. But sacred space is not unique in the sense of generating a belief of “value lost if divided;” the historical ownership of a territory, which is often invoked in territorial disputes, may also generate a belief of indivisibility. We develop this particular argument in the next section.

That a belief of indivisibility may be socially constructed, perhaps by a strategic choice of leaders initially, does not lead to the conclusion that the same leaders would not be constrained by the existence of such a belief. The conditions surrounding a contentious issue can change such that an optimal bargaining strategy of making an issue indivisible may no longer be optimal at a different time for leaders; moreover, leaders may inherit an indivisible issue that was not of their own making. On the other hand, to argue that a public’s belief of territorial indivisibility constrains leaders’ bargaining options, one has to answer how a belief of indivisibility becomes a widely shared cultural norm if it was initially advocated by a handful of political elites, perhaps strategically. That is, how has a “chosen” belief of situation where actors “significantly undervalue intermediate outcomes” in a bargaining framework.

indivisibility by political entrepreneurs become either internalized by the public such that they abide by the norm willingly, or costly for leaders to violate?

An easy answer, one that is frequently invoked, is that leaders are quite capable of convincing the public to believe in what is convenient for the leaders. But if that were the case, wouldn't it be just as easy for leaders to dissuade the public of the belief in order to avoid a costly war? Any casual observation of nationalistic responses to territorial disputes would challenge the notion that a public could be easily persuaded to believe that compromising on such issues is a good thing. In other words, there seems to be an asymmetry in the direction that the public's belief over the ownership of a territory could be influenced – it is a lot easier to convince the public that a disputed territory is “ours” than having an alternative viewpoint accepted. The asymmetry suggests that the public may have more agency in its acceptance, if not in its choice, of a belief than what is often assumed in the literature on nationalism.⁹

3. Historical Ownership, Identity, and Territorial Indivisibility

It has been observed that historical ownership has been the most frequently invoked justification for territorial claims in the post WWII era (Murphy 1990).¹⁰ In the meantime, most dangerous territorial disputes today involve irredentist claims, such as those over Crimea, islands in the South and East China Seas, and Palestine. Why does a historical ownership, if believed to be true, tend to generate particularly strong reactions from the citizens of a country, making a dispute more difficult to resolve? Stated another way, what does it mean to lose a territory that is believed to be historically owned by a people? We argue that a loss of a historically owned territory may have a significant impact on a nation's identity, which in turn can affect an individual's identity through the pride that the individual derives from being a citizen of the nation. Consequently, individuals may react, with more or less emotional intensity, to events that threaten the ownership, because such events ultimately

⁹For a useful discussion of the limitations to political framing, see Zellman (2015).

¹⁰Murphy (1990) argues that the phenomenon is due to the fact that historical arguments have become the only widely accepted justification for territorial claims that has some basis in international law. We make no distinctions between historical ownership being the true motivation behind a territorial claim or a cover for other underlying economic or strategic considerations, as long as it is put forward as *the* justification for a claim.

threaten a part of their own identities. In the extreme, such emotional responses can lead to a perception of territorial indivisibility and an “all-or-nothing” policy preference of some citizens.

The argument starts from the link between historical ownership and national identity. National identity is a social category, which consists of a membership rule and some social content (Fearon 1999, 95). Its membership rule is quite clear, but what does the content of national identity entail? While its full content may vary across countries, a nation’s unique history and its (believed) territorial boundaries are likely to be important components of any nation’s identity (Newman 1999). Losing the historical ownership of a territory, which links a country’s historical experience with its territorial boundaries, can thus damage a nation’s sense of itself (Goertz and Diehl 1992, 12-19, Herb and Kaplan 1999, Newman 1999, Hensel 1999).

How does the loss of national identity affect an individual’s sense of well being? Individual citizens of a country may be more or less attached to their nation’s identity, depending on the importance that they place on being a member of the nation relative to the other social categories that they belong to. In particular, if occupation and social rank of an individual are not significant sources of self-esteem due to prevailing valuation of such social categories that the individual accepts, then the individual may value the national category more in his or her self-identification (Fearon 1999, 24). A significant change in the national identity then affects individual citizens’ personal identity, albeit in varying degrees, because a part of what makes them proud as individuals is threatened. It then follows that a threat of losing the historical ownership of a territory may generate emotional responses from the citizens of a nation.

This chain of linkage from historical ownership to personal identity is not as “natural” as it may seem, however. First, historical narratives are subject to interpretations; it is not unusual to find contradictory interpretations of history and thus incompatible claims based on them. Moreover, as we discussed earlier, political elites can advocate a particular narrative, or belief, that gives them advantage domestically or internationally. Thus, the content of national identity can change, and political actors have some control over it. Closely related, the process of national identity entering into an individual’s identity can involve

“complex and possibly nefarious or coercive ways” (Fearon 1999, p.16). In other words, the content that individuals “choose” to form part of their identities may be influenced by outside forces without their own awareness. Because of these two possibilities – the possibility by political elites to influence the content of national identity, and the possibility for them to influence the relative importance of national identity in personal identity, scholars tend to downplay the constraining effect of cultural beliefs on the policy choice of leaders.

However, for a belief to transition from being promoted by political elites to being socially accepted, more than strategic manipulation may be necessary. As we discussed earlier, it is typically a lot easier to stoke nationalism than suppress them, which suggests that strategic manipulation can only work within certain limit, most likely set by preexisting cultural norms. Specifically, elite promotion can make salient in the public awareness a belief that is consistent with an existing norm, but cannot achieve the same with a belief that does not satisfy the condition. In the realm of territorial disputes, the beliefs that can prevail after being promoted by elites are likely to be those that are consistent with patriotism or nationalism. Some of the territories that are often thought to be indivisible, including Northern Ireland and Jerusalem, were deemed to be divisible in the past (Goddard 2006, 2009). Yet, reverting back to the old view would seem to be much more difficult, if at all possible. Therefore, there are limitations to strategic manipulation; and furthermore, we are likely to observe manipulation in one direction – in the direction of intensifying those cultural norms that favor nationalist responses in territorial disputes.

The important point from this discussion is that while we should not take a claim of historical ownership and nationalist responses based on the claim at their face value, we should also not dismiss entirely the underlying cultural norms and beliefs that strongly favor such dispositions. In the extreme, a firm belief in the historical ownership of a territory combined with the significance of the territory in a nation’s identity may generate a belief of territorial indivisibility when the ownership is challenged. By this argument, then, historical ownership is a source of a belief of territorial indivisibility, but it does not work uniformly on all territories and all individuals. Its effects are likely to be conditional on the significance of a territory in a nation’s identity, and the relative importance of the national identity to an individual. In other words, some territories may be deemed more central to a nation’s identity

than others, and some individuals are more likely to develop a perception of indivisibility over a disputed territory than others. Moreover, a belief of territorial indivisibility may be latent till events threatening the ownership occur. When such events do occur, those who perceive themselves to be very closely associated with the nation’s identity may perceive the loss of any piece of the territory as impinging on their personal pride, whereas those who do not define their identities in a similar way may care much less about alternative arrangements of the territory. So there will be variations in the reactions to the threat.

The theoretical argument leads to three main hypotheses that can be tested using survey experiments. First, historical ownership may be an important source of a belief of territorial indivisibility; such a belief may lead to a preference for non-compromising outcomes in the dispute.¹¹ Thus we have the following hypothesis:

H1: Historical Ownership and Indivisibility. *Individuals are more likely to prefer non-compromising outcomes in a territorial dispute if the territory is deemed to be historically owned by their country.*

Second, according to our theoretical argument, the effect is not uniform across individuals, however: the development of a perception of territorial indivisibility may be conditional on an individual’s attachment to her nation’s identity (or an individual’s degree of nationalism). The stronger the attachment, the more value an individual may place on possessing the entirety of the territory, which then leads to a preference for non-compromising outcomes. This leads to our second hypothesis:

H2: The Conditional Effect of Nationalism on Indivisibility. *More nationalistic individuals are more likely to prefer non-compromising outcomes in a territorial dispute if the territory is deemed to be historically owned by their country.*

Our third hypothesis tests the link between indivisibility and conflict. We conjecture that those who perceive a territory to be indivisible, and thus prefer non-compromising outcomes,

¹¹Note that our design indirectly gets at the beliefs of the respondents on the divisibility of a disputed territory by asking their preferences over the outcomes of the dispute. We can certainly directly ask if respondents believe a disputed territory is indivisible, however, we strongly suspect that the answer would be overwhelmingly “yes” given the familiarity of the language in Chinese government’s official position. Such one-sided answers are not problematic if they are reflections of the true underlying beliefs, but more likely than not, they may mask a more diverse beliefs because of the way the questions is posed. Our indirect approach allows the respondents to reveal their beliefs through their preferences over outcomes.

are more likely to support aggressive and costly policy actions. In particular, we test if such individuals are more likely to support military actions.

H3: Indivisibility and Policy Preference. *Those who perceive a territory to be indivisible are more likely to support military actions.*

4. Experimental Design

To test the hypotheses, we designed a survey experiment embedded in a public opinion survey. All participants received an introductory statement: “The following questions are related to potential territorial disputes that China may experience with neighboring countries. We will describe a hypothetical scenario, and then ask your preference over likely outcomes of the dispute and your opinion on the appropriate policy actions toward achieving the outcomes.” Respondents then read the following hypothetical scenarios embedded with a randomized treatment that varies in the historical ownership of the territory. We also randomly varied three additional contextual features of the dispute, including the military strength of the potential opponent in the dispute, whether it is a land or island dispute (Fravel 2008), and whether the territory has economic values (a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design):¹²

Please consider the following hypothetical scenario carefully and then answer the questions. China is involved in a dispute with a [militarily strong/weak] neighboring country over a piece of territory. This territory is [an island/a piece of land bordering the two countries], [has economic value/the economic value is unknown], and [historically belonged to China/historically did not belong to any country].

With this design we are interested in whether the fact that a disputed territory is seen to be historically owned by China makes a difference in a respondent’s perception of the

¹²Our main consideration in choosing the treatments was to strike a balance between making the hypothetical scenarios plausible to Chinese respondents and maintaining some generalizability. Such a balance is necessary in order to elicit serious and reasoned responses that could provide insights beyond a specific existing dispute. Therefore, we did not include some treatments that would make sense in the context of other countries but not China, such as the existence of co-ethnics in a disputed territory. Such a condition does not exist in China’s current territorial disputes with the exception of Taiwan (and thus can uniquely identify Taiwan as the hypothetical scenario if we used the treatment).

(in)divisibility of the territory, and thus her preference for the outcome of the dispute as well as her policy choice. The other contextual variables tap into competing explanations for the preference of respondents. After reading this scenario, the respondents were asked two questions in sequence. The first question aims to test our first and second hypotheses by capturing the respondents' preferences over possible outcomes of the dispute. The second question aims to test our third hypothesis regarding their policy choice.

In the first question, respondents were presented with four possible outcomes of the dispute. They were then asked whether or not they found each outcome acceptable, unacceptable, or they were “unsure.” The four outcomes are:

1. China and the neighboring country share both the sovereignty of and the right to use the territory;
2. China enjoys the sovereignty of the territory, but both countries share the right to use the territory;
3. China enjoys the sovereignty of and the right to use the territory, but makes economic or political compensations to the neighboring country. Both countries reach an agreement on the terms of the compensation, [which will be monitored by international organizations (e.g. the UN, the International Court of Justice)/no monitoring mentioned];
4. China enjoys the sovereignty of and the right to use the territory, and does not make any other concessions to the neighboring country.

The first two options are “divisible” outcomes. They are alternative arrangements of joint-ownership of the territory by separating the sovereignty and the right to use and also allowing sharing of either. Such approaches have been proposed in actual policy toward some of the territorial disputes in which China has been involved, and thus are sufficiently realistic for the respondents to form their opinions over the options. The third and fourth options represent “indivisible” outcomes where neither the sovereignty nor the right to use is shared. In the third, however, there is a bargaining solution nevertheless through side payments, while in the fourth, China makes no compromise at all. If historical ownership is a source of a perception of territorial indivisibility, then in general, we should see respondents receiving the ownership treatment more likely to find the “indivisible” outcomes acceptable and the

other outcomes less so.

It is important to note that each respondent can choose more than one acceptable outcome because the design of the question allows one to choose all that are acceptable to her. Compared with a design in which a respondent chooses only her most preferred outcome, our design has two advantages: it does not bias toward the indivisible outcomes – the more likely candidates for the most preferred outcome, and it provides us with much more information than the alternative. In particular, our design allows us to learn the *threshold* outcome that is acceptable to a respondent, which forms the lower bound of a bargaining set. Then the upper bound of the set could naturally be an indivisible outcome that a respondent finds most preferable and thus will also choose as acceptable.

We added a twist to the third option, which allows for side-payments, to see if the existence of an international enforcement mechanism of the arrangement may make a difference in the preference of those who chose the option. Specifically, for this outcome, half of the respondents were told additionally that the agreement will be monitored by international organizations such as the UN and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The treatment is to get at whether credible commitment problem is at the root of bargaining failure, and thus conflict, for such issues (Powell 2006).

In the second question, respondents were presented with six policy options with a statement that says that the Chinese government has adopted in the past, and may adopt in the future, these policies and measures to address actual territorial disputes. The respondents were then asked whether or not they found each option (in)appropriate for the hypothetical dispute scenario that they were (randomly) assigned to, or they were “unsure.” The six policy options are:

1. Strengthening externally-directed propaganda, guiding domestic public opinion, and encouraging the masses to display their dissatisfaction towards the disputing countries;
2. Imposing economic sanctions against relevant countries, canceling official visits, and reducing cooperative projects;
3. Taking military actions;
4. Reaching a compromise through bilateral negotiation;
5. Submitting [the dispute] to international organizations (e.g. the UN, the ICJ) for

arbitration;

6. Shelving the dispute and jointly developing the resources.

The order of these options was randomized. Moreover, those who supported IO arbitration received a follow-up question asking whether or not they thought that China should comply with the IO ruling *regardless* of what the decision is. They can choose either “yes,” or “it depends on whether the decision is consistent with China’s interest.” The additional question allows us to get at the willingness to comply with an IO ruling.

This question gauges the respondents’ support for different policy positions that are realistically available to the Chinese government. Moreover, the policy positions include those cooperative ones that the government has taken in the past, and the respondents were explicitly reminded of the fact. Thus, the framing of the question is a hard test for finding the effect of indivisibility, as the respondents are reminded of compromises that the government has made in the past. Within the choices, we included perhaps the most well-known policy of “shelving the dispute” (with respect to Diaoyu/Senkakus islands). We also included the option of submitting the dispute to an international organization, which has not been adopted by the Chinese government but has been advocated by some of China’s neighbors. If issue indivisibility does lead to war, we expect that respondents who consider the territory to be indivisible are more likely to support policy options that are conflictual.

After completing the two questions, the survey asked respondents whether they envisioned the neighboring country in the hypothetical scenario to be a real country when they were answering the two questions. If the answer was “yes,” then they were asked to specify that country, and they were further asked whether or not they thought the “real” country had allies. If the answer was “yes,” then they were asked to specify the allies. We believe that these two follow-up questions can shed additional insights into the considerations behind the respondents’ policy choices.

In the remainder of the survey we asked typical demographic questions, but we also included two questions that are important for our theoretical argument. Specifically, in order to test our second hypothesis, we need to have a measure for the degree of patriotism/nationalism of the respondents. Therefore, we asked respondents to what extent that they agree with each of the following statements (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat

disagree, strongly disagree, and “it’s hard to say”):

1. I am very proud to be Chinese;
2. I would rather be a Chinese citizen than a citizen of any other country;
3. China is the greatest country in the world;
4. I am proud of China’s long history and culture;
5. China should first take care of its self-interests, even if this means having conflict with other countries.

The answers to this question allow us to test the second hypothesis, which links nationalism with the perception of territorial indivisibility. The other non-demographic question is an open-ended question asking what respondents usually do when they are dissatisfied with the government’s foreign policy. As we argued earlier, it is difficult to dismiss relevance of public opinion on significant foreign policy issues such as territorial disputes in China, yet the link between public opinion and actual foreign policy is not straightforward and well established. The question allows us to begin to assess how the public may convey their opinions to the policy makers, and what type of pressure they may be able to bring to bear on the government.

5. Data and Findings

The survey was administered in May 2015 by an Internet marketing research firm in China.¹³ The respondents were randomly drawn from the company’s online subject pool of over 1.6 million panelists, who take surveys in exchange for small cash payments and the opportunity to win larger prizes. A total of 10,000 solicitations were sent to the subject pool, yielding a response rate of 21.60%, that is, a random sample of 2,160 Chinese adults. After reading the introduction, each respondent was given the hypothetical scenario and the subsequent questions as described above. At the end of the survey, they answered a battery of sociodemographic and attitudinal questions.¹⁴

In terms of the (self-reported) demographic characteristics, the average age of the re-

¹³The entire experiment lasted two weeks, and to the best of our knowledge, there was no major news event that could have influenced the respondents’ answers in a particular way.

¹⁴We designed the survey questionnaire in Qualtrics and the company gave the link to the survey to the respondents, who were redirected back to the company’s server at the end of the survey to claim their points.

spondents is 37.4; 97.3% are of the Han nationality; the male/female ratio is 62%/38%. Moreover, 84% identify themselves to be urban residents (Rural Hukou), and 70% have college degrees. About 16% of the respondents have annual income less than 30,000 Yuan and 20% over 120,000 Yuan. This is generally consistent with the self-identified social status: 21.02% low income, 52.22% middle income, and 26.76% high income. In addition, 42% of the respondents work in the state sector and 22.2% are Communist party members.¹⁵ In terms of the knowledge relevant for our study, 86% respondents answered that they are very or fairly interested in China’s foreign affairs. Overall, our sample represents a younger, richer, better informed, and politically more active portion of the Chinese population, similar to online samples drawn in other studies conducted in China (Huang 2015, Truex forthcoming). Mean comparisons of these variables confirm that the covariates are balanced across the treatment and control groups of the four experimental conditions (historical ownership, military strength of the neighbor, economic value and island/land).¹⁶ Even though they do not accurately reflect the general population, one could argue that they are in fact the more politically attentive segment of the Chinese society, particularly from the Chinese government’s perspective, and is the likely source of domestic pressure on the government’s foreign policy.

5.1 Historical Ownership and the Perception of Territorial Indivisibility

Figure 1 presents the results from the first question in the survey, which is the estimated effect of historical ownership on the respondents’ preferences over all possible outcomes of the hypothetical dispute provided to the respondents. Here we omit those people who said that they were “unsure” (thus the sample sizes are less than 2,160), but the results are similar when we combine the indecisive responses with the “unacceptable” ones.¹⁷ The horizontal axis is the proportion of support for an outcome, and the vertical axis lists all possible outcomes of the dispute. Note that there are five outcomes (instead of four) in the figure because as we mentioned earlier, for the outcome with side-payments half of the respondents

¹⁵It is worth pointing out that a party affiliation does not necessarily reflect a strong political ideology of an individual in today’s China. The party membership is often a prerequisite for career advancement and thus individuals may join the Party out of career and economic motivations.

¹⁶See Appendix for descriptive statistics of the sample and randomization checks/balance tests.

¹⁷See Appendix for more details.

were told that the agreement would be monitored by international organizations. In each row, the hollow squares or circles are the point estimates for the proportion of respondents who found the outcome acceptable, and the bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The (two-tailed) p-values are based on two-sample T-tests for means.¹⁸

We highlight two findings in Figure 1. First, regardless of historical ownership, of the five alternatives provided, the outcome that receives the highest support (over 85%) is the most uncompromising one in which China has both the sovereignty of and the right to use the territory. The least preferred outcome is the one in which China and the neighboring country share both the sovereignty and the right to use. The other three alternatives involving limited sharing or side-payments received similar level of supports (around 60%), and fall between these two extremes. Note that the estimates with and without an IO to enforce the agreement are almost identical. This shows that whether or not there is a third party enforcement – the concern for credible commitment – does not seem to matter here. This ranking of levels of support is not surprising in that respondents were asked to choose outcomes that are acceptable to them, and if an outcome in which China makes substantial compromises is acceptable to a respondent, then we would expect that an outcome in which China makes less or no compromises is also acceptable to the respondent.

Second, as we hypothesized, historical ownership makes a difference in the respondents' preferences over the outcomes. Compared with the case of no historical ownership, if the hypothetical territory is historically owned by China, respondents found the outcome in which China shares the right to use less acceptable, regardless of whether China retains the sovereignty to itself or not (the first two roles in Figure 1). The differences are statistically significant as reported by the t statistics from the two-sample T-tests.¹⁹ When there is a historical ownership, respondents were also slightly less likely to find indivisible outcomes with side-payments acceptable compared with the case of no historical ownership, and the

¹⁸The results are almost identical if we use two-sample T-tests for proportions.

¹⁹Note that in Figure 1 as well as the subsequent figures, some of the t-statistics would point to statistically significant differences between the two group means while visually the two confidence intervals overlap. This is due to the root of the discrepancy, i.e. distance from the mean is calculated in a different way for the t-statistic than it is for mean confidence intervals. In other words, when two statistics have non-overlapping confidence intervals, they are necessarily significantly different but if they have overlapping confidence intervals, it is not necessarily true that they are not significantly different. See, for instance, Wolf and Hanley (2002), who caution the so-called “by eye” test of significance between the two group means without examining the actual statistical tests.

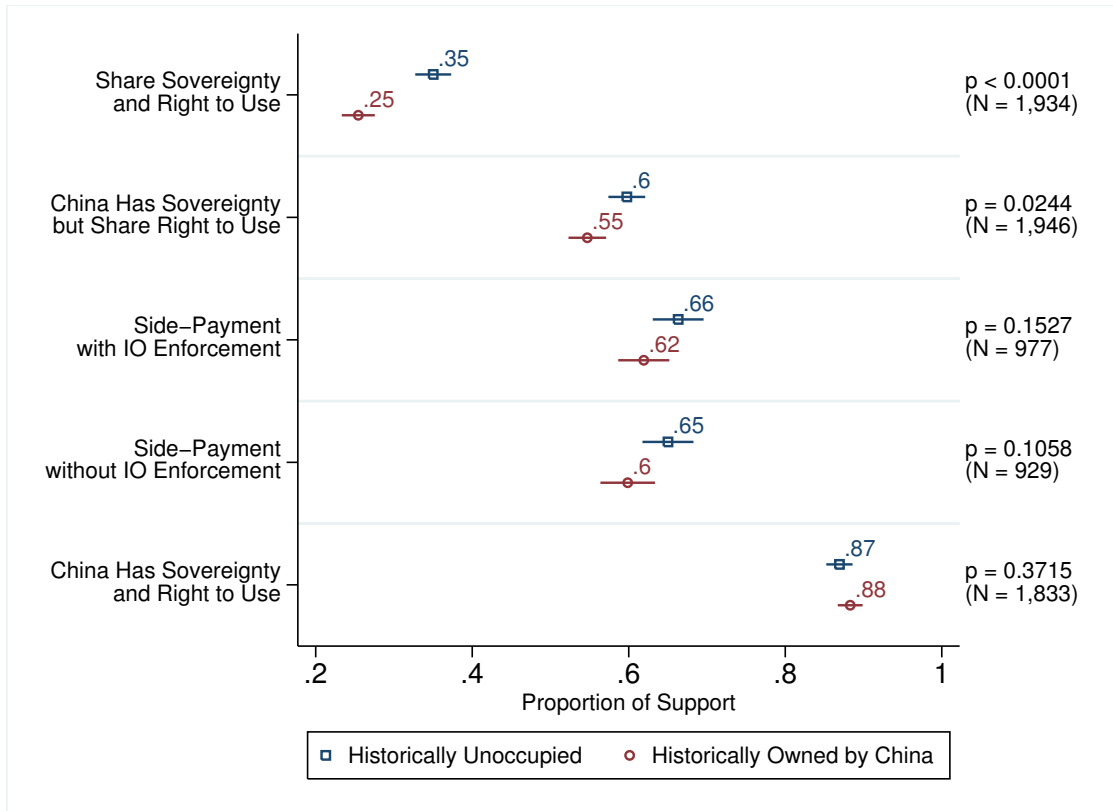


Figure 1: *Average Level of Support for Different Outcomes* Figure shows proportion of respondents who support different potential outcomes of the dispute with 95% confidence intervals. The column on the right reports test statistics from two-sample T-test comparing respondents with and without the historical ownership treatment.

difference is statistically significant ($p = 0.033$).²⁰ On the other hand, respondents were no more likely to prefer the most extreme indivisible outcome (China has both the sovereignty and the right to use) under a historical ownership – the difference is 0.01 and is not significant. Again, this result is intuitive: respondents were certainly going to find the outcome most favorable to China acceptable, regardless of China’s historical ownership of the territory.

Do other characteristics of the dispute affect people’s preference for the indivisible outcomes? We investigate this possibility using the other three contextual variables. Here we find that none of the contextual variables – whether the neighboring country is militarily strong or weak, whether the territory has economic value or not, and whether the territory is an island or a piece of land – make a difference in the respondents’ preference for the out-

²⁰For this comparison we combined the cases with or without IO enforcement because there is essentially no difference in the support for these two cases regardless of historical ownership.

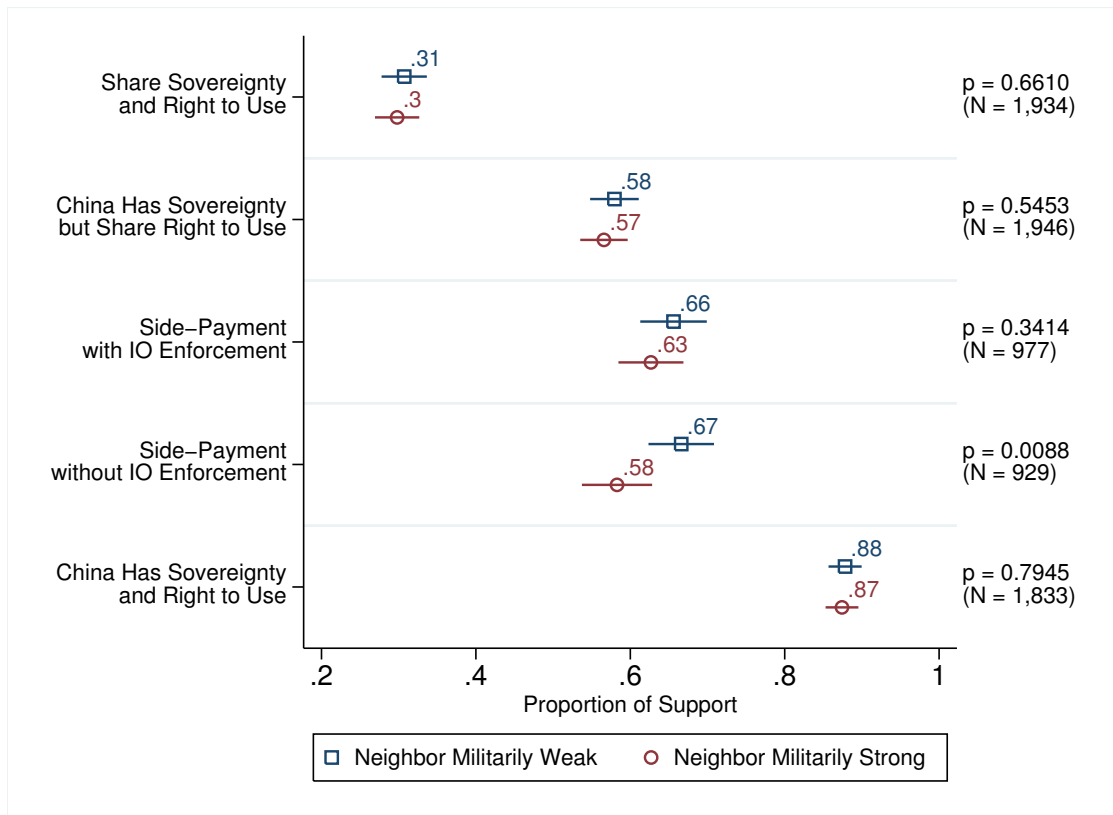


Figure 2: *Average Level of Support for Different Outcomes* Figure shows proportion of respondents who support different potential outcomes of the dispute with 95% confidence interval.

comes of the dispute. There is one interesting exception for the contextual variable military strength.²¹ In Figure 2, we see that respondents are more likely to choose side-payments without IO enforcement when the neighboring country is militarily weak. It suggests that perhaps the Chinese public generally are worried that IOs may favor the weaker side of a territorial dispute, and thus the respondents were less enthusiastic about involving IOs when China is faced with such an opponent. This is a rather intriguing finding, which says something about how IOs are perceived by the Chinese public. It will be very interesting to see if this phenomenon holds in other countries. Thus, we can conclude that, overall, the substantive effects are consistent with our first hypothesis: the existence of a historical ownership (but not the other contextual variables) increases the respondents' perceptions of territorial indivisibility, and thus reduces their preference for outcomes that involve sharing the sovereignty and the right to use, or compromises in the form of side-payments.

²¹The results for the other two contextual variables, economic value and island or land, are presented in the appendix.

5.2 Individual Characteristics and the Perception of Territorial Indivisibility

The above results are based on analyzing the support that *each outcome* received from the respondents separately. However, the vast majority of the respondents chose multiple outcomes as acceptable, and analyzing the changes in the pattern of multiple choices with or without historical ownership can provide us with additional information. Specifically, most respondents found the most demanding indivisible outcome – China has both the sovereignty and the right to use without offering side-payments to the neighboring country – acceptable, along with lesser demanding outcomes. Thus, by just looking at the indivisible outcome without side-payments we cannot tell if some individuals became more extreme when China has a historical ownership compared with no such ownership. But we can tease out this information by looking at the proportion of individuals who find the *only* acceptable outcome is the indivisible outcome without side-payments. A small proportion of respondents expressed this extreme preference, and utilizing this fact, we break the respondents into two groups. The first group includes those who viewed the indivisible outcome without side-payment as the only acceptable outcome for the hypothetical territorial dispute (i.e. they choose either “unacceptable” or “unsure” for the rest of the choices). We label this group as “hardcore indivisible.” The rest of the respondents are relegated to the second group, which we label as “compromise possible” – these individuals find either some sort of sharing of the territory or no sharing but paying side-payments to the neighboring country acceptable for resolving the dispute. Out of the 2,160 respondents, 383 are “hardcore indivisible”.

In Table 1, we compare the proportion of “hardcore indivisible” respondents by each of the contextual treatments. It is apparent that when primed with the treatment that the hypothetical territory under dispute is historically owned by China, a higher proportion of the respondents chose the indivisible without side-payments, i.e., the most uncompromising outcome, as the only acceptable outcome. The difference is statistically significant. In the meantime, military power of the neighbor, value of the territory and whether or not the territory is an island once again do not lead to a change in preference for the most extreme outcome. The result lends additional support to our first hypothesis that historical ownership makes respondents more likely to perceive a territory to be indivisible and thus more likely to prefer the most demanding indivisible outcome.

Table 1: Proportion of Hardcore Indivisible by Treatment Group

	Yes	No	t-Statistic
Historically Owned by China?	0.195	0.159	2.193
Neighbor is Militarily Powerful?	0.186	0.168	1.1015
Territory is Valuable?	0.174	0.18	-0.3614
Territory is an Island?	0.191	0.164	1.6105

The test statistics are from two-sample T-tests. The bold ones indicate that the differences are statistically significant.

Our theory suggests that the effect of historical ownership on individuals' perceptions of territorial indivisibility may be conditional on the importance that individuals place on their national identity relative to their other social identities. In particular, our second hypothesis states that those who are more nationalistic are more likely to perceive a territory deemed to be historically owned by their country as indivisible, and thus less likely to accept outcomes that involve compromises. To examine whether this is indeed the case, we first transform the five questions tapping into nationalism to binary measures, with 1 indicating agreement with the statements and 0 otherwise. We then take the average of the five binary measures, resulting in a composite index of nationalism that ranges from 0 to 1. Finally, we include historical ownership, nationalism and their interaction in a logistic regression predicting the likelihood of an individual being a hardcore supporter of territorial indivisibility.²²

We use logistic regression rather than simple mean comparisons here because the nationalistic feelings were self-reported rather than being randomly assigned by the experimental design. Also included in the model as controls are a battery of demographic and attitudinal controls, including age, ethnicity, gender, region, education, income,²³ social status,²⁴ interest in international affairs,²⁵ whether or not the respondent is employed in the state sector, is a member of the CCP membership, has rural household registration and ranks

²²To reduce multicollinearity among the interaction and constitutive terms and to make the regression coefficient of the main effects more interpretable, nationalism is centered in the model. That is, we subtract the mean from the nationalism index for each individual. For more details on centering, see Aiken and West (1991).

²³Income is measured on a seven-point scale with 1 indicating less than 10,000 Yuan (approximately \$1,600) annual income.

²⁴Social Status is respondent's self-perceived social group on a 10-point scale from poorest to richest.

²⁵Interest in International Affairs is measured on a four-point scale from "very interested" to "not interested at all".

national defense as the top issue facing China (as opposed to economic development, social stability, democracy, corruption, income inequality and environmental protection). The results of the baseline model with only contextual variables and the full model with other sociodemographic controls are presented in Table 2.

In both models, the coefficient estimate for historical ownership is positive and statistically significant. Substantively, if a disputed territory is said to be historically owned by China, it would increase the probability that a respondent becomes a “hardcore indivisible” type by 3.4%. This is a large change considering that only about 17.7% of the respondents in our sample are the “hardcore indivisible” type. Once again, this is consistent with our first hypothesis and the previous results. Furthermore, in terms of the control variables, respondents are more likely to become “hardcore indivisible” if they are older, living in the eastern/coastal provinces, and are more likely to rank national defense as the top priority for China.

However, the coefficient estimates of nationalism, both the main effect and its interaction with historical ownership, are not statistically insignificant. That is, our second hypothesis about the effect of historical ownership being conditional on individuals’ nationalism is not supported, although the coefficients are in the hypothesized direction. One possible explanation for this non-finding is that the nationalism questions were given toward the end of the survey, after the respondents were exposed to scenarios of China’s territorial disputes with a neighboring country. It is possible that those respondents who otherwise would have had moderate views on the nationalism questions were influenced by the reading of the scenarios and scaled up their answers to the nationalism questions. In fact, the average level of nationalism is quite high in our sample, 0.8 out of 1. This consequently would bias the slope coefficient downwards towards the null as we over-estimate the level of nationalism for some respondents more than others. Presumably, this potential bias can be reduced if the nationalism questions were asked in the beginning of the survey. The challenge, though, is that such an ordering could contaminate the responses for the main questions that we are interested in this experimental design. Given that our focus is on historical ownership as a source of indivisibility, the current ordering is the better option.²⁶

²⁶Yet another possible explanation for the non-result is that national identity is highly internalized to be individual identity by the Chinese public in general, and thus the variation in the nationalism is very small

Table 2: Effect of Historical Ownership Conditional on Nationalism

VARIABLES	(1) Baseline	(2) Full
Nationalism	0.403 (0.329)	0.429 (0.344)
Historical Ownership	0.229* (0.115)	0.240* (0.118)
Historical Ownership \times Nationalism	0.507 (0.475)	0.342 (0.483)
Age		0.0194** (0.00637)
Han Chinese		-0.272 (0.340)
Male		-0.00512 (0.125)
Eastern		0.588* (0.252)
Central		0.364 (0.288)
Rural Hukou		0.0766 (0.174)
College Degree		-0.00919 (0.140)
State Sector Employee		0.0382 (0.127)
CCP Member		0.0643 (0.147)
Income		-0.0610 (0.0452)
Social Status		-0.0582 (0.0320)
Interest in International Affairs		-0.0708 (0.0963)
National Defense Top Issue		0.587** (0.121)
Constant	-1.641** (0.0834)	-2.147** (0.574)
Observations	2,111	2,056
Likelihood Ratio χ^2	14.09	62
Prob $<\chi^2$	0.00278	2.40e-07

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

5.3 Indivisibility and Policy Preference

Thus far we have demonstrated that historical ownership is a source of perceived indivisibility of a territory. We next investigate whether or not such a perception affects people’s preferences for policy positions regarding the territory, which is the focus of our third hypothesis. Table 3 presents the estimated support for each of the policy positions toward the disputed territory using logistic regressions.²⁷ The key independent variable here is an indicator of whether or not a respondent chooses the most extreme indivisible outcome (China has both the sovereignty and right to use without side-payments to the neighbor) as the only acceptable one. If the coefficients for the variable are statistically significant, then they suggest that indeed there are differences in the policy preferences between the hardcore indivisible group and the compromise possible group. We also include a range of controls in the model, including the other three contextual variables and a battery of sociodemographic variables.²⁸

Table 3: Support for Policy Positions Regarding the Disputed Territory

Variable	(1) Increased Publicity	(2) Economic Sanctions	(3) Bilateral Negotiation	(4) IO Arbitration	(5) Shelving Dispute	(6) Military Actions
Hardcore	-0.172 (0.130)	0.335* (0.137)	-1.770** (0.135)	-0.809** (0.137)	-2.031** (0.147)	0.558** (0.137)
Historically Ownership	0.133 (0.0991)	0.207* (0.102)	-0.161 (0.117)	-0.193 (0.104)	-0.292** (0.106)	0.182 (0.103)
Nationalism	1.187** (0.203)	1.043** (0.196)	1.161** (0.224)	-0.113 (0.207)	1.047** (0.210)	1.036** (0.208)
Strong Neighbor	0.166 (0.0992)	0.250* (0.102)	-0.0311 (0.116)	0.0365 (0.104)	-0.0879 (0.106)	0.134 (0.103)
Valuable	-0.0629 (0.0989)	-0.133 (0.102)	-0.00761 (0.116)	0.124 (0.104)	-0.171 (0.106)	-0.0263 (0.103)
Island	0.0364 (0.0987)	0.00622 (0.102)	0.0364 (0.116)	0.181 (0.104)	0.0319 (0.106)	-0.0656 (0.103)
Age	-0.00263 (0.00572)	0.00979 (0.00597)	0.0145* (0.00676)	-0.0335** (0.00602)	0.00604 (0.00605)	0.00217 (0.00602)
Han Chinese	-0.338 (0.309)	-0.418 (0.340)	0.506 (0.345)	-0.235 (0.308)	0.00502 (0.325)	-0.568 (0.323)

Continued on next page

for the respondents in our sample. This does not contradict our argument.

²⁷Again, we dropped the observations that answered “unsure” to a question about the policy. The results are similar when we combine the “unsure” answers with the “unacceptable” answers. See Appendix for more details.

²⁸We include historical ownership in the controls to account for the possibility that it has a direct effect on the policy preference, in addition to its indirect effect through the hardcore indivisibility variable. The results are almost identical if we remove the historical ownership variable from the controls.

Table 3 – *Continued from previous page*

Variable	Increased Publicity	Sanctions Sanctions	Compromise Negotiation	IO Arbitration Arbitration	Shelve Dispute	Military Actions
Male	-0.0915 (0.105)	0.0175 (0.108)	-0.230 (0.124)	-0.617** (0.112)	-0.00528 (0.113)	0.288** (0.109)
Eastern	-0.0494 (0.185)	-0.0368 (0.200)	-0.258 (0.236)	0.389* (0.198)	-0.0229 (0.202)	-0.206 (0.196)
Central	0.0302 (0.217)	0.00815 (0.234)	-0.208 (0.274)	0.433 (0.230)	-0.0621 (0.234)	-0.331 (0.229)
Rural Hukou	-0.260 (0.152)	-0.201 (0.152)	0.0374 (0.175)	0.351* (0.163)	-0.151 (0.156)	-0.286 (0.155)
College Degree	0.00366 (0.122)	0.0103 (0.126)	0.396** (0.140)	0.0912 (0.128)	0.146 (0.128)	-0.282* (0.126)
State Sec Employee	0.246* (0.108)	0.115 (0.110)	-0.274* (0.125)	-0.477** (0.112)	0.0536 (0.115)	0.222* (0.111)
CCP Member	0.0173 (0.124)	-0.0721 (0.130)	0.118 (0.148)	0.424** (0.131)	-0.0460 (0.135)	0.154 (0.129)
Income	-0.0144 (0.0376)	-0.0396 (0.0396)	-0.0449 (0.0444)	0.0125 (0.0400)	0.0969* (0.0412)	-0.0235 (0.0392)
Social Status	0.0404 (0.0275)	0.0147 (0.0283)	-0.126** (0.0330)	0.0210 (0.0286)	0.0421 (0.0293)	0.0511 (0.0283)
Interest in Intl.Affairs	0.116 (0.0824)	0.197* (0.0842)	0.0184 (0.0960)	-0.267** (0.0872)	-0.00307 (0.0873)	0.233** (0.0857)
Defense Top Issue	0.369** (0.107)	0.116 (0.110)	-0.283* (0.123)	-0.0899 (0.110)	-0.287* (0.114)	0.484** (0.111)
Constant	-1.231* (0.508)	-1.013 (0.529)	0.739 (0.580)	2.649** (0.527)	-0.557 (0.535)	-1.582** (0.531)
Observations	1,749	1,777	1,896	1,718	1,810	1,681
Likelihood Ratio χ^2	93.57	78.93	236.1	198.9	304	151.7
Prob< χ^2	0	2.84e-09	0	0	0	0

Standard errors in parentheses. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

Focusing on the effect of perceived indivisibility first, we can see that, except for the largely innocuous policy option of strengthening publicity, the differences in support for the remaining options are all statistically significant. The respondents in the hardcore indivisible group are more likely to support the conflictual policies, such as economic sanctions and military actions, and less likely to support the other more cooperative solutions, including bilateral negotiation, IO arbitration and shelving the dispute (i.e., leave for future resolution).

Figure 3 presents the predicted probability of support for each of the policy position regarding the territory in dispute for the two groups of respondents. For the compromise possible group, five of the six policy positions received majority support (greater than 50%), with bilateral negotiation receiving the most support (89%). The remaining option, military actions, is picked up by 45% of the respondents. This suggests that among those who are

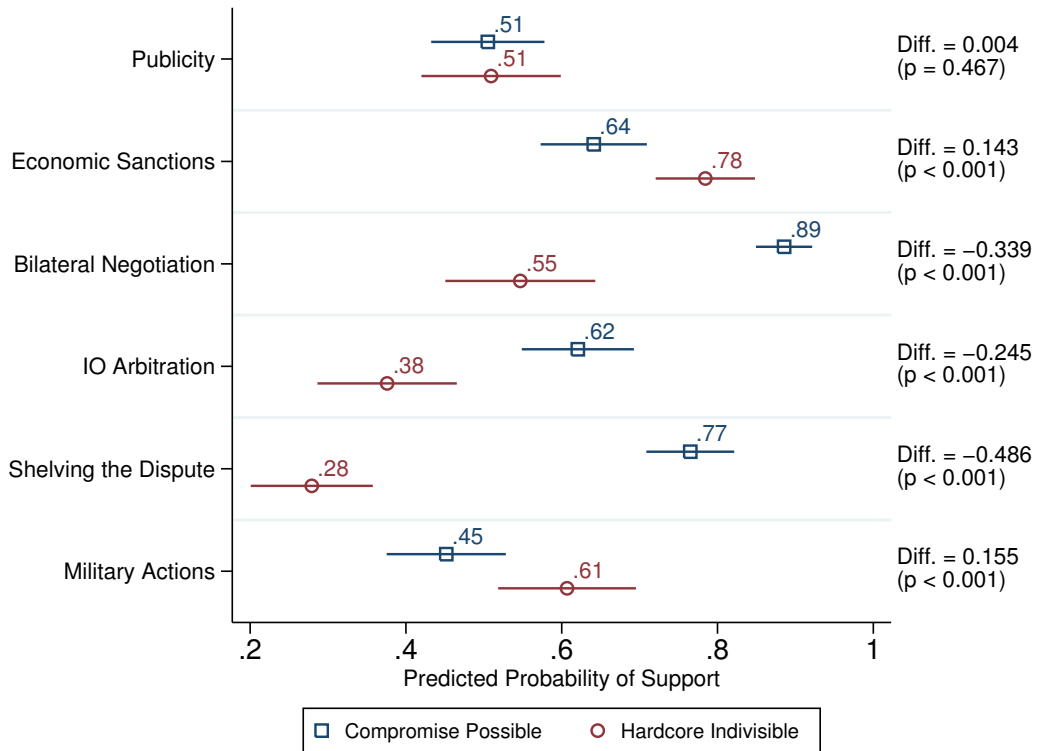


Figure 3: *Predicted Probability of Support for Each Policy Positions by Two Groups* Predicted Probabilities are calculated with the rest of the variables held at their median. The 95% confidence intervals are calculated using the delta method.

willing to consider a wide range of policy options, military actions is not only the least attractive but also is supported by a minority. For this group, we also notice that the level of support for IO arbitration falls clearly behind the support for bilateral negotiation. This ordering may reflect a preference for more control of the dispute resolution process, which is likely to decrease from bilateral negotiation to third party arbitration. In other words, the respondents prefer the method that gives China more control of the process. In this regard, IO arbitration is not seen as particularly special, even though the UN (the example provided as an illustration of IOs) is perhaps the most significant world organization.

Turning to the hardcore indivisible group, economic sanctions and military actions received the highest levels of support from the hardcore indivisible group – the respondents who rejected any scheme that involves sharing the territory or making side-payments to the neighboring country. This is consistent with our hypothesis that a perception of territorial indivisibility leads to more conflictual foreign policy preferences. For the other four

options, again, the bilateral negotiation received more support than IO arbitration as in the case for the compromise possible group. The most surprising finding is that only 28% of the respondents in this group supported the policy position of “shelving the disputes and seek joint-development,” a long-held official position by the Chinese government on the Diaoyu/Senkakus Island. This mismatch between government policy and mass preference should be of particular interest to policy makers.

Additional patterns emerge when we compare the responses from the two groups. Except for the largely innocuous policy option of strengthening publicity, the differences between the percentages of support for the remaining options are all statistically significant and the substantive differences are large. On the one hand, the hardcore indivisible group are 14.3% and 15.5% more likely to support economic sanctions and military actions as a solution for the hypothetical territorial dispute. On the other hand, the predicted probabilities of the group’s support for the other three cooperative choices are much lower than those of the compromised group. Most dramatically, the predicted probabilities of support for bilateral bargaining and shelving the dispute decrease by 33.9% and 48.6%, respectively, while the reduction in support for IO arbitration is 24.5%.

Table 3 provides more insights into the individual characteristics of those who support each policy position. The most interesting findings are associated with IO arbitration. Nationalism increases support for almost all policy options except for IO arbitration – the effect is negative but not statistically significant. Again, it suggests that perhaps the Chinese public is less trusting of international organizations. Looking at other variables, we can see more nuanced patterns for this result. First, we find that older respondents, males, and state sector employees are less likely to support IO arbitration, and the effects are all statistically significant. Second, being more interested in international affairs also decreases the support. We conjecture that this may be associated with the fact that China has received a lot of criticisms in recent years on territorial disputes with neighboring countries. The negative international media coverage may lead the group to be less trusting of international arbitration on such matters. On the other hand, the support for IO arbitration comes from two factors: living in the Eastern part of China, and being a party member. It has been found that the population in the Eastern/costal areas of China tend to be more cosmopolitan in their world

views, which may result in more favorable views about international bodies. However, we do not have a good explanation for the effect of party membership.

For the other policy choices, having a college degree increases the support for bilateral negotiation; on the other hand, those who believe national defense is the most important issue facing China today are less supportive of bilateral negotiation. Additionally, those who are more nationalistic and male are more supportive of military actions, as well as those who are more interested in international affairs. Finally, historically ownership decreases the support for shelving the dispute, which again is in contrast to the Chinese government's long-held official position.

5.4 Additional Findings: IO compliance, Alliances

There are a few additional findings from the survey that are not central to our investigation of the effect of territorial indivisibility, but are interesting from a broader perspective of international politics. First, for those who support IO arbitration, a clear majority (70.44%) responded that compliance with the decision depends on whether or not the ruling is consistent with China's interests. This pattern emerges regardless of China's historical ownership of the territory. This result is somewhat surprising given the findings in the existing literature that IOs have a conflict reducing effect, and suggests that perhaps such an effect does not extend to most severe territorial disputes where the sovereignty is seen as indivisible. We do note that our framing of the compliance question is rather conservative—we asked if China should comply with the ruling *regardless* of the outcome, which may lead the respondents toward a negative answer. However, we still see about 30% of the respondents say that China should comply with the UN ruling, which is not trivial by any means. Moreover, the breakdown between the two groups is also revealing in a way that is consistent with our theory. Of the 40% of the hardcore indivisible group who chose IO arbitration as one of the appropriate policies, 88% chose “it depends on whether the decision is consistent with China's interest,” while of the 60% of the compromise possible group who chose IO arbitration, 68% made the choice. Again, we see that those who strongly believe in the indivisibility of the disputed territory are less likely to accept IO ruling even if they initially considered appealing to an IO.

Second, recall that to investigate the effect of alliance, we asked the respondents whether or not they considered the possibility that the neighboring country might have support from its allies. 1,456 out of 1,575 (92.4%) of the respondents said “yes.”²⁹ When probed further which particular country (or countries) that they had in mind as the allies for the neighboring country, an overwhelming majority of them said it was the United States (81.9%). It suggests that even for those that were primed with a “weak” neighbor, they could have in effect been thinking about a militarily strong opponent, and the fact that we found an increase in preference for indivisible outcomes under the treatment of historical ownership suggests that the result cannot be attributed to a consideration of military strength.

6. Conclusion

Scholars of different persuasions have debated the importance of issue indivisibility as a cause of conflict. An important rationalist account of the causes of war argues that issue indivisibility is a symptom of some other underlying problem rather than a cause of war itself. Other theories have suggested that certain issues are indeed innately indivisible and are more likely to lead to conflict, or all indivisible issues ultimately are what actors make of them but that they can have unintended consequences. While providing important insights, none of the existing studies provides direct empirical evidence of how a perception of indivisibility may arise from a particular source, and what the consequences are on conflict as a result.

We offer such an empirical analysis in this study, using a theoretically informed survey experiment. We argue that historical ownership is an important source of the perception of issue indivisibility, which then influences policy preferences toward such issues. The findings from China suggest that, at least for territorial disputes, historical ownership does lead to a perception of territorial indivisibility, which leads to more conflictual policy preferences.

Additionally, we found that there appears to be a preference ordering for the three methods of dispute resolution when the issue is perceived to be indivisible. Specifically, unilateral actions receive the most support, while bilateral negotiation comes as a distant second. From

²⁹Only those respondents who said that they had a real country in mind regarding the hypothetical neighboring country received this follow-up question about allies. This group includes 72% of the respondents. Additionally, the top three (real) countries that appear in the answers were Japan (58%), the Philippines (13%), and Vietnam (7%).

this result we conjecture that the Chinese public prefers a method that gives China the most control of the process. Existing studies have shown that IO mediation can reduce conflict; our result suggests that perhaps there is a limit to such an effect on issues that are deemed to be indivisible.

In the next stage of the research, we are interested in whether these findings are unique to China or are shared by other countries, particularly countries in the East Asian region, including Japan and South Korea, which also have ongoing territorial disputes based on historical claims. The experimental template that we have developed can be used for such a purpose, with attentions to local contexts. The findings from the comparative study will have wide-ranging implications for international relations theory and foreign policy.

Appendix

A. The results for the contextual variables economic value and island.

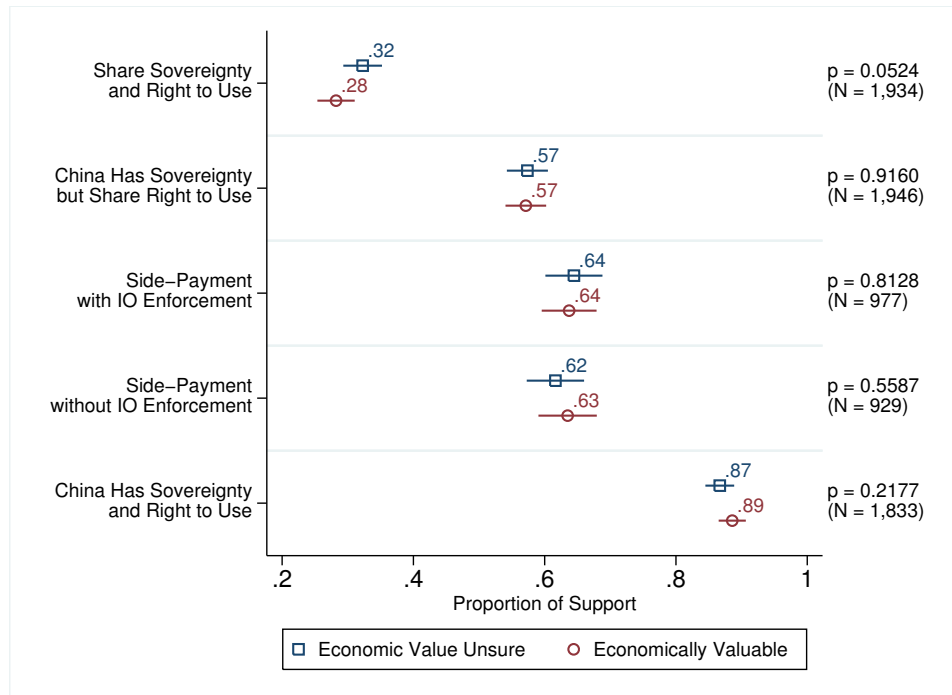


Figure 4: *Average Level of Support for Different Outcomes* Proportion of respondents who support different potential outcomes of the dispute with 95% confidence interval.

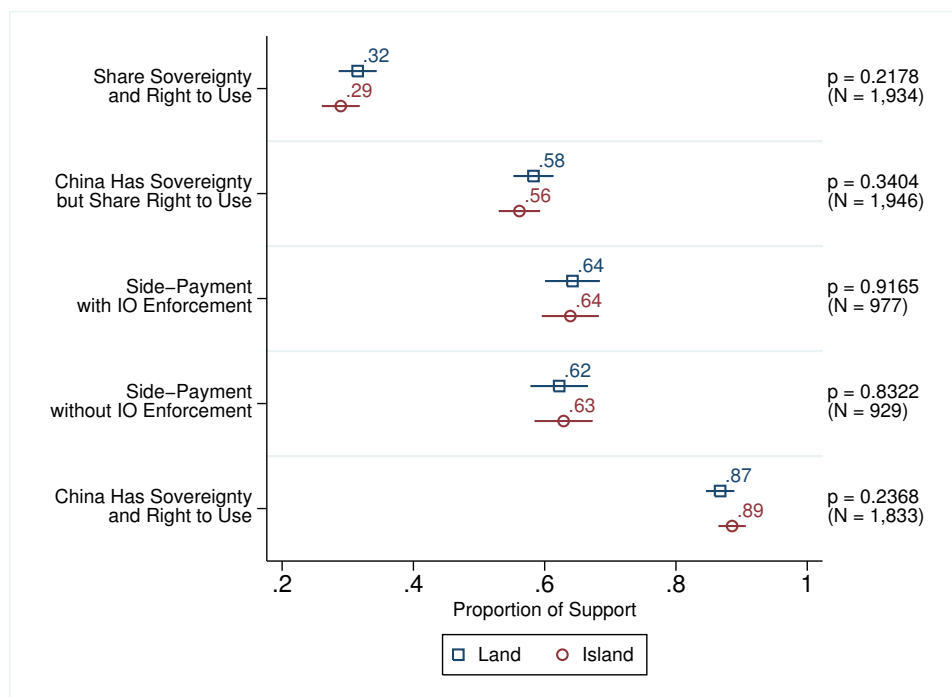


Figure 5: *Average Level of Support for Different Outcomes* Proportion of respondents who support different potential outcomes of the dispute with 95% confidence interval.

B. Descriptive statistics of the sociodemographic data of the respondents

	Median	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Age	36	37.43	9.49	14	76
Han Chinese (= 1)	1	0.97	0.16	0	1
Male (= 1)	1	0.62	0.49	0	1
Coastal (= 1)	1	0.78	0.42	0	1
Central (= 1)	0	0.15	0.36	0	1
Rural Hukou (= 1)	0	0.16	0.37	0	1
College Degree (= 1)	1	0.70	0.46	0	1
State Sector Employee (= 1)	0	0.42	0.49	0	1
CCP Member (= 1)	0	0.22	0.42	0	1
Income	4	3.90	1.54	1	7
Social Status	5	5.13	2.07	0	10
Interest in International Affairs	3	3.17	0.68	1	4
National Defense Top Issue	0	0.34	0.47	0	1
Proud to be Chinese	1	0.84	0.36	0	1
I'd Rather be Chinese Citizen	1	0.74	0.44	0	1
China is the Greatest Country	1	0.80	0.40	0	1
Proud of Chinese History & Culture	1	0.91	0.29	0	1
China Should Put Its Interest First	1	0.73	0.45	0	1
Nationalism Index	1	0.80	0.27	0	1

Note: Number of observation is income is Income is 2,101 for income and 2,160 for the rest of the variables. Income is measured on a seven-point scale with 1 indicating less than 10,000 Yuan (approximately \$1,600) annual income. Social status is respondent's self-perceived social group on a 10-point scale from poorest to richest. Interest in international affairs is measured on a four-point scale from "very interested" to "not interested" at all. National defense indicates whether or not the respondent chose national defense as the most important issue facing China today (as opposed to economic development, social stability, democracy, corruption, income inequality and environmental protection). Each of the five measures on nationalism reports the proportion of

respondents who agree or strongly agree with the statements.

C. Randomization check/balance test

	Historical No	Owned Yes	Neighbor Weak	Military Strong	Economic No	Value Yes	Topography Land	Island
Age	37.52	37.33	37.49	37.37	37.13	37.73	37.29	37.58
Han Chinese	0.97	0.97	0.98	0.97	0.98	0.97	0.97	0.97
Male	0.61	0.63	0.64	0.60	0.61	0.63	0.62	0.62
Coastal	0.78	0.77	0.77	0.78	0.77	0.78	0.77	0.78
Central	0.14	0.15	0.14	0.16	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.15
Rural Hukou	0.15	0.17	0.17	0.15	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16
College Degree	0.67	0.72	0.69	0.70	0.68	0.71	0.70	0.69
SOE Employee	0.41	0.42	0.40	0.43	0.41	0.43	0.42	0.41
CCP Member	0.20	0.24	0.21	0.23	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.23
Income	3.83	3.96	3.92	3.87	3.90	3.89	3.89	3.90
Social Status	5.14	5.12	5.13	5.13	5.12	5.14	5.10	5.16
Int'l Affairs	3.17	3.17	3.20	3.14	3.17	3.16	3.15	3.19
National Defense	0.34	0.34	0.35	0.33	0.34	0.34	0.34	0.34
nationalism1	0.83	0.86	0.85	0.84	0.84	0.85	0.83	0.86
nationalism2	0.74	0.75	0.75	0.74	0.75	0.74	0.73	0.76
nationalism3	0.80	0.79	0.79	0.80	0.79	0.81	0.78	0.82
nationalism4	0.90	0.91	0.91	0.90	0.90	0.91	0.91	0.91
nationalism5	0.73	0.73	0.72	0.73	0.72	0.73	0.73	0.73
Nationalism	0.80	0.81	0.81	0.80	0.80	0.81	0.79	0.81

Note: This table reports the mean comparisons of these variables. The bold entries indicate that the mean differences are statistically significant (based on the t tests).

Overall, these results suggest that the covariates are mostly balanced across the treatment and control groups of the four experimental conditions (historical ownership, military strength of the neighbour, value and topography of the territory).

D. Main results including the “unsure” responses (footnote 6)

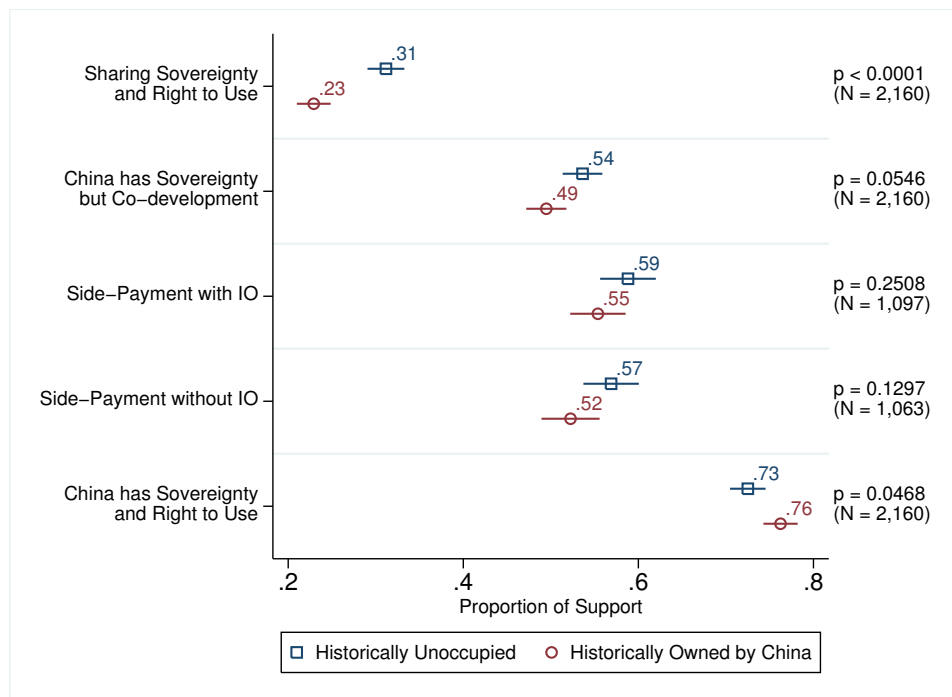


Figure 6: *Average Level of Support for Different Outcomes* Proportion of respondents who support different potential outcomes of the dispute with 95% confidence interval.

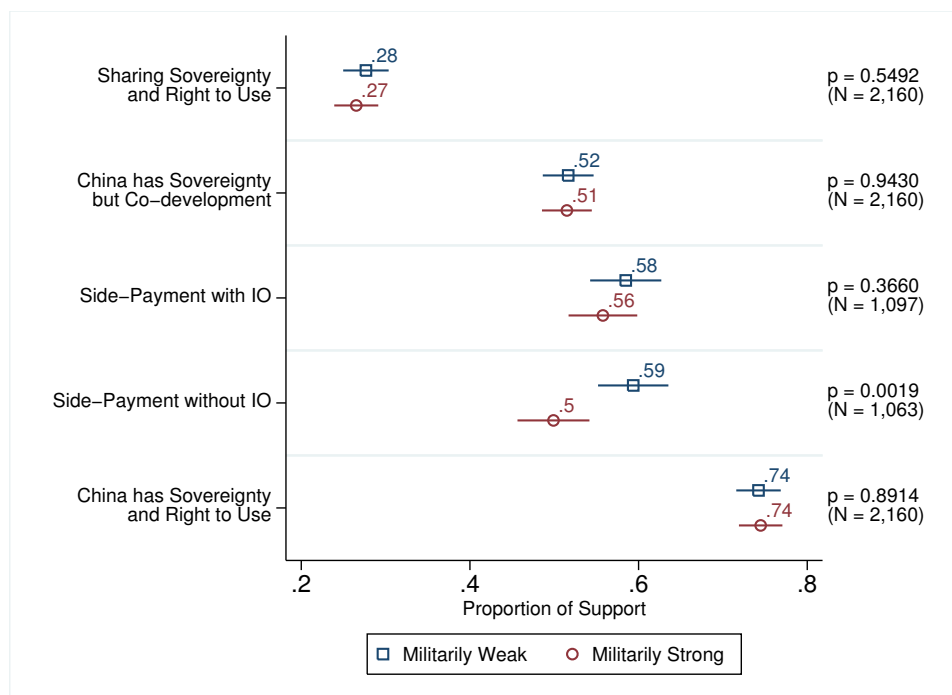


Figure 7: *Average Level of Support for Different Outcomes* Proportion of respondents who support different potential outcomes of the dispute with 95% confidence interval.

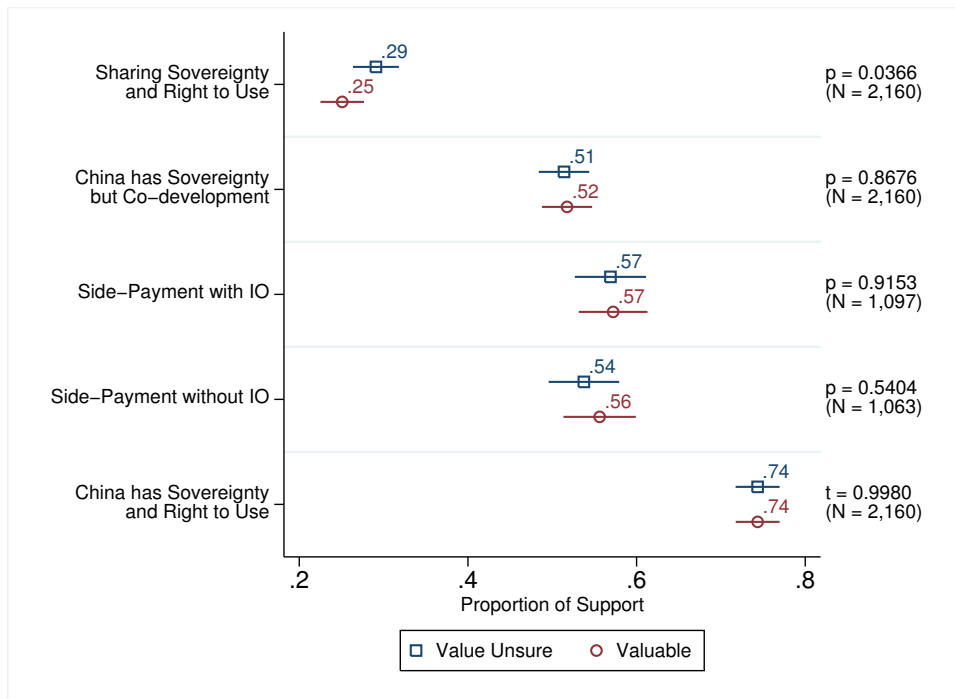


Figure 8: *Average Level of Support for Different Outcomes* Proportion of respondents who support different potential outcomes of the dispute with 95% confidence interval.

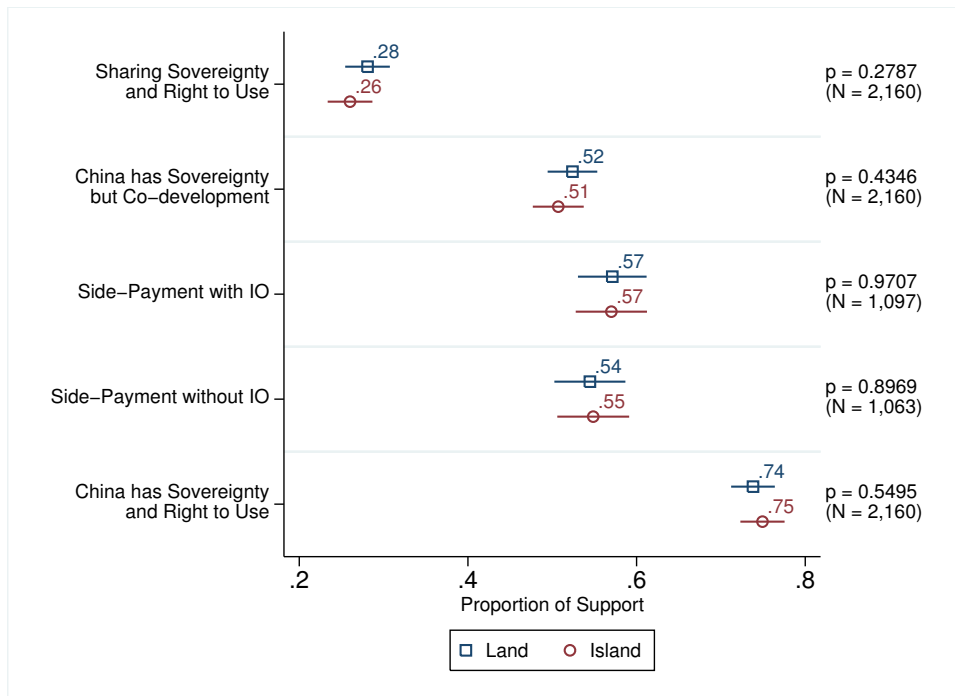


Figure 9: *Average Level of Support for Different Outcomes* Proportion of respondents who support different potential outcomes of the dispute with 95% confidence interval.

E. Support for policy positions including the “unsure” responses (footnote 11)

Table 4: Support for Policy Positions Regarding the Disputed Territory

Variable	(1) Increased Publicity	(2) Economic Sanctions	(3) Bilateral Negotiation	(4) IO Arbitration	(5) Shelving Dispute	(6) Military Actions
Hardcore	-0.121 (0.121)	0.394** (0.123)	-1.514** (0.125)	-0.665** (0.126)	-1.787** (0.141)	0.520** (0.121)
Historical Ownership	0.104 (0.0918)	0.116 (0.0914)	-0.157 (0.102)	-0.167 (0.0925)	-0.175 (0.0952)	0.137 (0.0940)
Nationalism	0.971** (0.193)	0.903** (0.183)	1.081** (0.198)	-0.0447 (0.185)	0.930** (0.191)	0.762** (0.197)
Strong Neighbor	0.142 (0.0919)	0.267** (0.0916)	0.000993 (0.102)	-0.0104 (0.0926)	-0.0689 (0.0953)	0.126 (0.0941)
Valuable	-0.0480 (0.0916)	-0.142 (0.0913)	0.0210 (0.102)	0.159 (0.0923)	-0.128 (0.0951)	-0.0842 (0.0938)
Island	0.00967 (0.0914)	-0.0126 (0.0911)	-0.0319 (0.102)	0.0807 (0.0921)	-0.0283 (0.0949)	-0.0985 (0.0936)
Age	-0.00734 (0.00529)	0.00222 (0.00526)	0.0119* (0.00596)	-0.0303** (0.00550)	0.00435 (0.00546)	-0.00443 (0.00539)
Han Chinese	-0.283 (0.281)	-0.240 (0.286)	0.513 (0.302)	-0.424 (0.282)	-0.0161 (0.292)	-0.464 (0.284)
Male	-0.0533 (0.0977)	0.133 (0.0971)	-0.155 (0.109)	-0.410** (0.0980)	0.0768 (0.101)	0.223* (0.100)
Coastal	-0.256 (0.177)	-0.0323 (0.178)	-0.342 (0.211)	0.304 (0.183)	-0.0817 (0.184)	-0.300 (0.178)
Central	-0.146 (0.205)	-0.107 (0.206)	-0.325 (0.242)	0.458* (0.211)	-0.0742 (0.213)	-0.401 (0.208)
Rural Hukou	-0.299* (0.140)	-0.209 (0.137)	0.0487 (0.154)	0.243 (0.139)	-0.0944 (0.143)	-0.209 (0.143)
College Degree	0.00248 (0.112)	0.00972 (0.111)	0.309* (0.123)	0.0874 (0.113)	0.0958 (0.115)	-0.289* (0.114)
State Sector Employee	0.228* (0.0992)	0.257** (0.0994)	-0.112 (0.111)	-0.341** (0.101)	0.00361 (0.103)	0.278** (0.101)
CCP Member	0.0907 (0.115)	-0.0361 (0.117)	0.0679 (0.131)	0.397** (0.118)	-0.0317 (0.121)	0.142 (0.117)
Income	0.00766 (0.0352)	0.0123 (0.0351)	-0.00109 (0.0391)	0.0566 (0.0356)	0.0971** (0.0366)	0.00558 (0.0360)
Social Status	0.0492 (0.0256)	-0.00213 (0.0254)	-0.0850** (0.0286)	0.0305 (0.0257)	0.0670* (0.0263)	0.0595* (0.0262)
Interest in Intl. Affairs	0.134 (0.0761)	0.117 (0.0751)	0.0474 (0.0834)	-0.121 (0.0762)	0.0259 (0.0781)	0.229** (0.0782)
Defense Top Issue	0.373** (0.0983)	0.256* (0.0993)	-0.248* (0.109)	0.0317 (0.100)	-0.221* (0.103)	0.397** (0.0997)
Constant	-1.252** (0.467)	-1.150* (0.464)	0.0354 (0.510)	1.423** (0.467)	-1.023* (0.480)	-1.535** (0.477)
Observations	2,056	2,056	2,056	2,056	2,056	2,056
LR χ^2	100.8	93.63	207.1	153.2	274.6	143.3
Prob< χ^2	0	0	0	0	0	0

Standard errors in parentheses. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

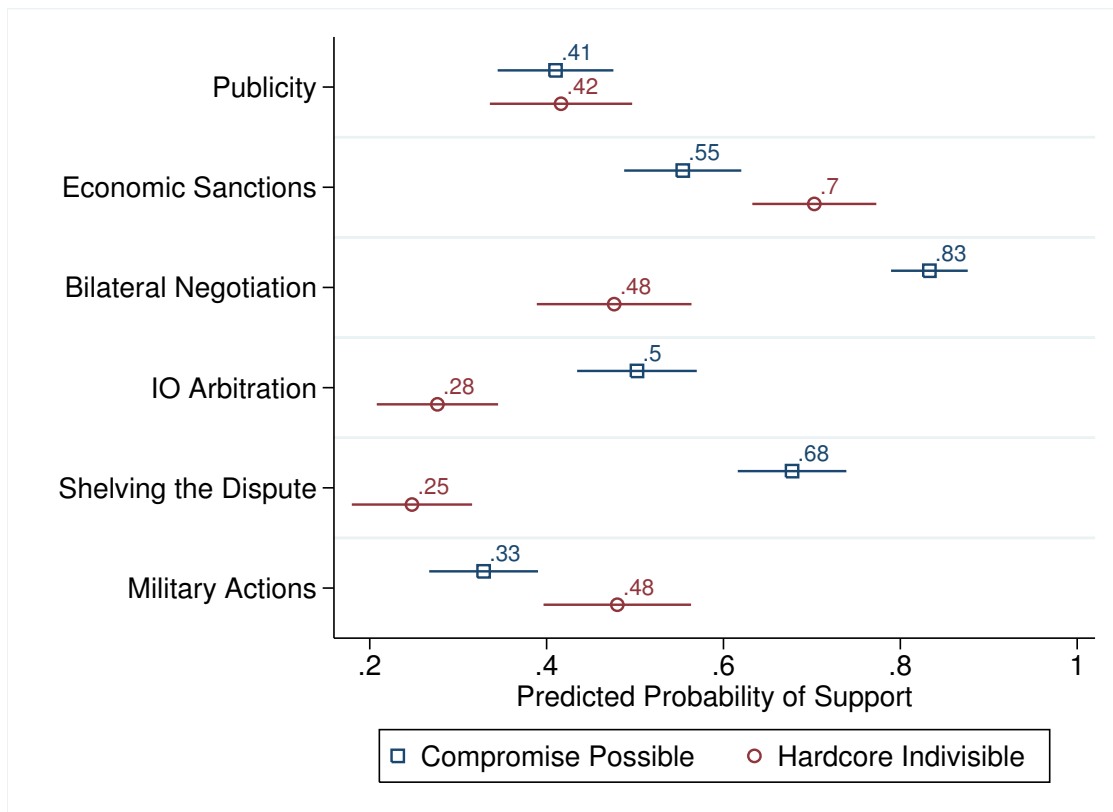


Figure 10: *Predicted Probability of Support for Each Policy Positions by Two Groups* Predicted Probabilities are calculated with the rest of the variables held at their median. The 95% confidence intervals are calculated using the delta method.

F. Regression Analysis for Hypothesis 1

The analysis for Hypothesis 1 in the main text calculates the quantities of interest using simple differences in means. The table below reports results from a logistic regression model using the binary measure on support for each policy outcome as the dependent variable and binary indicators for each treatment and contextual variable, as well as a series of socio-demographic controls. The results are consistent with those presented in the main text.

Table 5: Support for Policy Outcomes Regarding the Disputed Territory

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Historical Owership	-0.487** (0.104)	-0.223* (0.0949)	-0.190 (0.141)	-0.281 (0.144)	0.106 (0.153)
Strong Neighbor	-0.0651 (0.104)	-0.0633 (0.0951)	-0.177 (0.141)	-0.338* (0.144)	0.00896 (0.153)
Valuable	-0.168 (0.103)	0.00276 (0.0948)	-0.00292 (0.140)	0.0999 (0.144)	0.116 (0.153)
Island	-0.110 (0.103)	-0.0891 (0.0945)	-0.00413 (0.141)	0.0298 (0.143)	0.159 (0.153)
Age	-0.0125* (0.00614)	-0.00466 (0.00542)	-0.0256** (0.00788)	-0.0161 (0.00840)	0.0177 (0.00937)
Han Chinese	0.106 (0.323)	0.234 (0.283)	0.457 (0.403)	-0.377 (0.478)	0.0568 (0.443)
Male	-0.281** (0.109)	-0.0435 (0.101)	-0.0503 (0.149)	-0.102 (0.156)	-0.117 (0.161)
Coastal	-0.582** (0.187)	-0.302 (0.187)	-0.499 (0.283)	-0.235 (0.288)	-0.131 (0.309)
Central	-0.658** (0.224)	-0.160 (0.217)	-0.409 (0.321)	-0.170 (0.338)	-0.139 (0.356)
Rural Hukou	0.0263 (0.159)	-0.0980 (0.142)	-0.0752 (0.216)	0.0285 (0.213)	0.0621 (0.235)
College Degree	0.139 (0.129)	0.0636 (0.115)	0.0528 (0.174)	0.351* (0.172)	0.345 (0.184)
State Sector Employee	0.247* (0.112)	0.0592 (0.103)	-0.367* (0.152)	-0.103 (0.155)	-0.262 (0.165)
CCP Member	0.212 (0.128)	0.164 (0.121)	-0.231 (0.177)	0.158 (0.182)	5.07e-05 (0.197)
Income	0.0943* (0.0397)	0.0692 (0.0365)	0.0305 (0.0521)	0.0448 (0.0571)	-0.00752 (0.0576)
Social Status	0.0838** (0.0291)	0.0497 (0.0262)	0.0391 (0.0384)	-0.00745 (0.0407)	-0.161** (0.0425)
Interest in International Affairs	-0.0607 (0.0851)	0.141 (0.0786)	0.0949 (0.114)	0.00547 (0.121)	0.191 (0.123)
National Defense Top Issue	-0.271* (0.112)	-0.442** (0.101)	-0.643** (0.148)	-0.381* (0.153)	-0.186 (0.163)
Nationalism	-0.699** (0.202)	-0.0297 (0.193)	0.939** (0.278)	1.388** (0.294)	2.709** (0.256)

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Table 5 – *Continued from previous page*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Constant	0.435 (0.528)	-0.174 (0.474)	0.820 (0.687)	0.620 (0.771)	-0.583 (0.747)
Observations	1,883	1,894	955	901	1,782
LR χ^2	97.58	54.18	63.96	53.21	142.2
Prob $<\chi^2$	0	1.72e-05	4.61e-07	2.44e-05	0

Standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$. Dependent variables for Models (1)-(5) are: sharing sovereignty and right to use, China has sovereignty but co-development, side-payment with IO, side-payment without IO, China has sovereignty and right to use.

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