

Center for UN and Global Governance Studies



SCHOOL OF DIPLOMACY AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

Who Supports the UN? A Quantitative Analysis

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Synopsis

As the world's largest international organization with 193 member states, the United Nations plays an important role in international affairs. Since the US contributes over 22 percent of the UN's regular budget and nearly 27 percent of the UN's peacekeeping budget, and since the organization's headquarters is located in New York City, understanding how the American public views the United Nations is critical.

Working with data gathered from a survey conducted by the Better World Campaign in October 2014, we have created a study to better understand the determinants of US public attitudes of the United Nations. In this component of the project, we analyzed quantitative data from the survey in order to determine the effect that various demographic variables have on an individual's view of the favorability of the United Nations.

In October 2014, the Better World Campaign reported the findings of a survey of 800 randomly-selected registered voters. The margin of error in this survey was plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. Survey participants were asked a number of questions about current international events and their attitudes toward the United Nations. Respondents were asked the following question: *Please tell me whether your opinion of the United Nations is very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable.*

As reported by the Better World Campaign, the overall findings for UN favorability among survey respondents appear in Figure 1 below. The UN's favorability rating (58%) is more than twice as high as its unfavorability rating (28%).

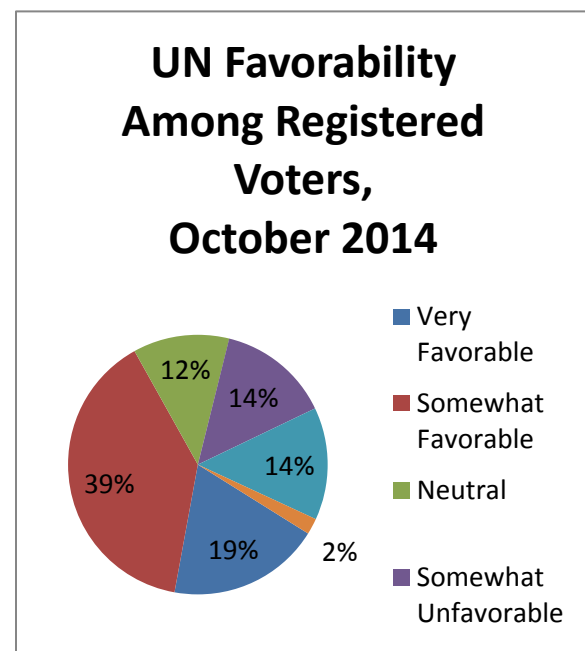


Figure 1

The challenge is to understand why survey respondents felt the way that they did. To answer this question, we conducted a series of bivariate statistical tests on UN favorability using the following demographic independent variables: Gender, Level of Education, Age, Party Identification, Ideology, Ethnicity, and Income.

The results are summarized in the table below. Statistical significance is noted as a YES if the p-value is less than .05 (as is standard practice). This means that the probability that the relationship between these variables is random chance is less than one in twenty. Each of the findings is discussed in turn below.

Table One: Factors Shaping UN Favorability	
Variable	Statistically Significant?
Gender	YES
Level of Education	NO
Age	YES
Party Identification	YES
Ideology	YES
Ethnicity	YES
Income	NO

Gender:

In this survey, there were slightly more female respondents (N=400) than male respondents (N=379). 53% of men (N=199) had favorable opinions of the UN. In other words, they answered either “very favorable” or “somewhat favorable.” In contrast, 65% of female respondents (N=261) had favorable opinions of the UN.

The gender gap in opinions of the UN held on the negative end as well. 37% of men (N=139) had unfavorable opinions of the UN, answering either “somewhat unfavorable” or “very unfavorable.” There was a 15% difference between men and women on this end of the

spectrum, as only 22% of female respondents (N=88) evaluated the UN unfavorably. A simple chi-square test tells us that the probability that the difference in UN favorability ratings between men and women is random chance is very small: less than one in a thousand.

Age:

Survey respondents were also grouped according to their age: 18-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+. Younger respondents tended to have more favorable views of the UN than older respondents. In the 18-34 age group, 65% of respondents (N=145) answered either “very favorable” or “somewhat favorable.” In contrast, only 57% of respondents in the 65+ age group (N=80) had favorable views of the UN.

These differences were more pronounced on the negative end of the spectrum. 22% of respondents aged between 18 and 34 (N=50) had unfavorable views of the UN, and 37% of respondents aged 65 and up (N=52) had unfavorable views.

In the intermediate categories, the differences are much less pronounced. Nonetheless, a chi-square test tells us that the difference in favorability rankings by age is statistically significant and the possibility that these results are mere chance is less than one in fifty.

Party and Ideology:

Survey respondents were asked whether they identified as a Republican, Independent, or Democrat, and whether they identified as a Conservative, Moderate, or Liberal. The findings point in the same direction: opinions on UN favorability diverge strongly based on partisan and ideological distinctions. Republican respondents were almost equally likely to view the UN favorably (42%; N=122) as they are to view it unfavorably (46%; N=133). Democratic respondents, by contrast, were almost seven

times more likely to view the UN favorably (76%; N=234) as they were to view the UN unfavorably (11%; N=35). Independents occupied a middle ground, being almost twice as likely to view the UN favorably (57%; N=95) as unfavorably (32%; N=54). Partisan differences in UN favorability are highly statistically significant; the probability that these differences are due to random chance is less than 1.7×10^{-19} .

We obtained similar results for ideological distinctions. As above, respondents who identified as Conservative were evenly divided between those that viewed the UN favorably and unfavorably (both at 44%). Liberals were more than five times likely to view the UN favorably (77%) than unfavorably (15%). Moderates were more likely to approve of the UN by almost a 3:1 margin (64% compared to 22%). These ideological distinctions in UN favorability are also profoundly significant; the probability that these differences are attributable to random chance is less than 3.8×10^{-14} .

Race and Ethnicity:

Survey respondents also self-identified in terms of race and ethnicity. 74% of the survey respondents identified as White, 12% (N=91) as African-American, and 10% (N=75) as Latino. We found evidence that UN favorability differed along racial and ethnic lines. African-American and Latino respondents were much less likely to offer unfavorable views of the UN compared to White respondents (17% compared to 32% for Whites), and more likely to be neutral compared to White respondents (22% compared to 9% for Whites). These differences in UN favorability were also profoundly statistically significant, as the probability that these differences are random chance is less than one in ten thousand.

Two of the variables that we initially thought might matter for UN favorability, but did not,

were education and income. Chi-squared tests here were statistically insignificant, suggesting that attitudes toward the UN are the same for those with high and low incomes as well as those with high and low levels of education.

Broader Implications:

These findings suggest a number of important implications for how outreach on the UN could be designed moving forward. The good news is that the findings here certainly justify the efforts that UNA-USA has put into youth outreach. The GenUN program is worthwhile in its own right, but as these findings suggest, younger survey respondents are more likely to be UN supporters. Further efforts invested into youth outreach may produce benefits as a cohort of youth already engaged with UNA-USA ages.

These findings also suggest some possible avenues for future programmatic development. We found evidence of both a gender gap and a race and ethnicity gap, as women and African-Americans and Latinos viewed the UN more favorably. We cannot learn *why* these respondents feel the way that they do from this study, but these findings suggest that targeted outreach to these communities might well increase favorability ratings in the future.

Partisanship and ideology represent a serious challenge. The good news is that the bipartisan international consensus that has shaped US multilateralism, while certainly under stress, is not dead. Both Republican and Conservative respondents were evenly divided between favorable and unfavorable views of the UN. Talking to these audiences is doubtless a daunting task, but the important thing to remember here is that UN supporters still exist in both communities. The task is to communicate a message appropriately in an effort to persuade opponents. Focusing on how the UN's priorities reflect American national

interests is one possibility. Our own follow-up work evaluating the verbatim survey responses (in other words, understanding the responses to a question about why respondents gave the favorability ratings that they did) also underscore possible directions to confront the partisan divide.

Finally, it is worth stressing that we need to learn more about this topic. This study could only be conducted as a bivariate analysis given the nature of the data we were provided. Respondent-level observations allow not only the ability to test these variables head to head against each other, to learn *how robust* these findings are, but they also help to understand *how much* each of these factors affect UN favorability. Answering those questions would require full access to the data at a respondent level and specification of a multivariate model.

Armed with richer findings, better strategies can be designed.

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