

REACTING TO THE OLIVE BRANCH:
HAWKS, DOVES, AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

Recent research suggests that foreign policy hawks have an advantage at bringing about rapprochement with international adversaries. This idea is rooted in domestic politics: voters respond more favorably to efforts at reconciliation when their own leader has a hawkish rather than a dovish reputation. Yet, domestic reactions are only part of the equation—to succeed, rapprochement must also evoke a favorable response by the adversary. Little is known, however, about how rapprochement efforts by hawks and doves are perceived by the other side. Here we argue that the counter-to-type nature of hawks' conciliatory gestures—what benefits them domestically—may be an international liability. Foreign audiences should view doves' overtures as more sincere and therefore be more willing to support cooperation with foreign doves than with foreign hawks. However, we also expect doves' international advantages to shrink when the foreign leader's gesture is costlier. We field a survey experiment to examine whether U.S. voters respond differently to foreign hawks or doves delivering the olive branch, what mechanisms drive any differences, and whether the strength of the conciliatory gesture matters. We find that foreign doves fare better at eliciting cooperation because their gestures are deemed more sincere. Moreover, we find that—contrary to expectations—foreign hawks may not be able to compensate by making costlier gestures. Thus, while hawks are better positioned domestically to initiate rapprochement, they appear to have a harder time eliciting a favorable response from the adversary.

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I. INTRODUCTION

When President Nixon lifted U.S. sanctions against long-term adversary China and visited Beijing in the 1970s, the adage that “it takes a Nixon to go to China” was born. In light of the Nixon case and other examples of successful rapprochement by hawkish leaders, the idea that major policy shifts are best accomplished by unlikely leaders has gained wide currency. Several studies shed light on the domestic political dynamics underlying the hawk’s advantage thesis, i.e. the claim that domestic audiences respond more favorably to hawks delivering the olive branch to an international rival than to doves (e.g. Cowen and Sutter 1998; Cuckierman and Tommasi 1995; Fehrs 2014; Kreps, Saunders, and Schultz 2018; Mattes and Weeks 2019; Nincic 1988; Schultz 2005).

Yet, rapprochement is ultimately a dyadic phenomenon. It only occurs if the adversary accepts the olive branch and reciprocates—Nixon not only required sufficient domestic backing, but China had to be willing to go along. In this paper, we therefore examine the largely overlooked question of whether hawks or doves have an *international* advantage at rapprochement, by increasing the receptivity of foreign publics to international cooperation.

We argue that the same dynamics that give hawks a domestic advantage when pursuing conciliation with an adversary work against the hawk internationally. Just as domestic leaders gauge public opinion when deciding whether to initiate rapprochement, foreign leaders assess whether their own publics will support returning a foreign country’s friendly gesture. For example, public opinion appears to have encouraged the recalcitrant Eisenhower administration to reciprocate Soviet cooperative advances in the 1950s (Larson 1987), and helped buoy the

cooperative Israeli response to Egyptian overtures in the late 1970s (Kelman 1985).¹ Studying the public's reaction is therefore informative (Tomz, Weeks, and Yarhi-Milo 2020).

We argue that voters in the target state may view a foreign hawk's counter-to-type behavior as suspicious and question its motives. By contrast, they will be more likely to believe that a foreign dove who initiates rapprochement is sincere in its intentions. As a result, they should be more inclined to favor reciprocation of a foreign dove's conciliatory gesture compared to an identical gesture by a foreign hawk, creating political conditions that are more conducive to reconciliation. Moreover, we argue that strong gestures by the foreign leader should diminish doves' international advantage over hawks, because when hawks make a very costly peace overture their sincerity is less likely to be in doubt.

Evaluating our hypotheses using historical data poses significant challenges. Given that international rapprochement involves strategic decisions with potential implications not only for the country's foreign policy but also for the leader's survival in office, historical cases might exhibit bias. For instance, if, as existing studies suggest, rapprochement is domestically riskier for doves than for hawks we might only observe instances of doves delivering the olive branch when they have reason to expect the adversary will welcome it. This makes it difficult to assess the relative success of doves and hawks in eliciting public support for reciprocation in the rival country.

We therefore opt for a survey experimental approach. We randomly and independently manipulate the hawkishness/dovishness of the foreign leader and the strength of the foreign

¹ Additionally, Trager (2017) shows that foreign adversaries may look to public sentiment in the rival state to gauge the other side's intentions. Thus, public opinion can affect the prospect for rapprochement directly, by constraining the public's representatives, as well as indirectly, by conveying information to the adversary.

leader's cooperative gesture, allowing us to address concerns about selection bias while more effectively holding constant important characteristics of the situation that could confound the effects of leader type and gesture strength. An experimental approach also allows us to gain insight into the mechanisms driving international responses to conciliatory gestures. Specifically, we can assess whether any preference for foreign doves is driven by the perception that doves are more sincere, or whether voters instead calculate that doves are more easily exploitable and that it may thus be beneficial to cooperate in the short term but renege in the long term. Only if we find support for the former mechanism should we conclude that doves possess an international advantage.

Our pilot survey, which was fielded to a diverse set of U.S. voters in November 2019 using Lucid, presented respondents with a future scenario involving increased competition in the Arctic.² In all scenarios, the Russian leader made a peaceful overture toward the US. We randomly varied whether the Russian leader was described as either a hawk or a dove, as well as the strength of the Russian gesture. All respondents were then provided the same information about the U.S. president's cooperative response to Russia and were asked whether they approve of the president.

Our findings suggest that hawks' domestic advantages are coupled with an international downside. Doves possess an advantage over hawks at eliciting international cooperation, as our subjects were significantly more approving when a U.S. president returned the peace efforts of a foreign dove compared to when he reciprocated identical efforts by a foreign hawk. This preference for doves appears to be driven by the perception that doves' peace efforts are more

² We preregistered our survey experiment with EGAP.

sincere than those of hawks. Moreover, and contrary to expectations, our pilot study did not find evidence that hawks can overcome their international disadvantage by making costlier gestures.

While the international relations literature has extensively investigated the domestic political reasons for why hawks may possess an advantage at bringing about rapprochement with an adversary, the international dimension has drawn less attention. This paper suggests that it is doves, not hawks, whose gestures elicit a more cooperative international response. By unpacking how a leader's reputation for hawkishness or dovishness affects support for cooperation with an adversary we also contribute to the broader literature on rapprochement and trust-building (e.g. Axelrod 1984; Blum 2007; Kydd 2007; Osgood 1962) as well as the literature on the role of reputation in international relations.³ While in the past the literature on trust-building has focused on the nature of the gestures that can put countries on the path to *détente*, here we argue that identical gestures may elicit different responses depending on the characteristics of the leaders that undertake them. Leader type—whether the leader is known to be a hawk or dove— affects the ability of a state to move toward *détente* with an international rival. Our study also suggests that, to the extent that foreign leaders are viewed as having a reputation for being of a particular type, domestic audiences in foreign states consider this reputation when deciding whether to endorse a particular foreign policy course.

II. THE HAWK'S DOMESTIC ADVANTAGE

A significant literature in political science and economics focuses on the benefits of counter-to-type actions (e.g. Chiozza and Choi 2003; Clare 2014; Colaresi 2004; Cowen and Sutter 1998; Cuckierman and Tommasi 1998; Fehrs 2014; Kreps et al. 2018; Mattes and Weeks

³ For a review, see Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth (2014).

2019; Schultz 2005; Sigelman and Sigelman 1986; Trager and Vavreck 2011). Scholars have argued not only that hawks have an advantage at international reconciliation, but that leftist governments are better positioned to carry out market-oriented reforms than rightist ones. Undergirding these claims is the idea that counter-to-type behavior leads domestic audiences to update positively either about the policy or about the leader. For example, Cowen and Sutter (1998) and Cuckierman and Tommasi (1998) argue that if voters observe a leader espouse a policy that runs counter to the leader's apparent type voters become more assured that this policy is indeed in the national interest rather than simply a venture that satisfies the leader's personal preferences. Schultz (2005) argues that when leaders who are known to be hawks deliver the olive branch, they signal that they are moderates and will thus reap electoral benefits; by contrast, doves who initiate rapprochement will be seen as extremists and will be penalized by the median voter. Empirical studies have found support for both the "policy credibility"-mechanism and the "leader moderation"-mechanism (Mattes and Weeks 2019; Schultz 2005). More generally, there is now a good amount of evidence that counter-to-type behavior can be quite beneficial for leaders domestically: hawks who initiate rapprochement receive greater domestic approval compared to doves who pursue an identical policy (Mattes and Weeks 2019; Sigelman and Sigelman 1986; Trager and Vavreck 2011).

To date, the focus of most of the literature on counter-to-type behavior has been on domestic political dynamics.⁴ It is of course important to understand the electoral incentives that leaders face when considering reconciliation with an international adversary; after all, these

⁴ Exceptions are Clare (2014) and Schultz (2005) which we discuss in the theory section.

incentives can explain why we might see some leaders deliver the olive branch but not others.⁵ Yet, when the outcome depends on how a foreign country reacts—as is the case in international rapprochement between long-term rivals—it is crucial to examine the international repercussions of counter-to-type actions as well. Below we argue that, in the international realm, counter-to-type behavior may be associated with significant costs. It should be doves, not hawks, who possess an international advantage at rapprochement.

III. THE DOVE'S INTERNATIONAL ADVANTAGE

Protracted rivalries are costly: they drive up defense spending, discourage trade and other beneficial cooperation, and may even cause countries to forego opportunities to join international organizations that require their members to first settle conflicts. In the face of these costs, voters—and the leaders that represent them— may in principle favor rapprochement with the rival. However, letting down one's guard by returning a seemingly-friendly overture from an enemy carries its own risks: the adversary may end up defecting on a cooperative response and instead advance its own relative position in the rivalry. Thus, at the forefront of voters' approval of reciprocation of a friendly gesture by an adversary is whether the gesture is sincere, and the foreign leader genuinely desires reconciliation.

Concerns about sincerity weigh heavily in international politics, both among decision-makers and the voters who put them in office. These observers draw on whatever sources of evidence are available to assess the credibility of the foreign counterpart, such as on their personal interaction with the foreign leader (Hall and Yarhi-Milo 2012), the costliness of the

⁵ An exclusive focus on domestic dynamics certainly makes sense whenever the policy outcome does not hinge on a foreign actor's response, such as with most kinds of domestic economic reform.

foreign leader's signal (e.g. Fearon 1997), and, importantly, the foreign leader's reputation (Dafoe et al. 2014). While several prominent studies have questioned whether reputations form and/or whether they influence foreign policy decision-making (e.g. Mercer 1996; Press 2005), there is now a good amount of evidence that individuals make inferences about a foreign actor's likely future behavior based on past actions (e.g. Kertzer, Renshon, and Yarhi-Milo Forthcoming; Renshon, Dafoe, and Huth 2018). These studies also show that reputations are not attached only to states, but that leader-specific reputations form as well. Here we build on this scholarship to argue that voters will interpret a foreign leader's intentions based on the leader's reputation for dovishness/hawkishness and that they will view behavior that diverges from the leader's perceived type with suspicion.

More specifically, we expect that voters will find peace overtures by foreign doves credible while questioning the sincerity behind foreign hawks' olive branches. Doves, by definition, have a reputation for preferring diplomacy and compromise over conflict. Therefore, a foreign dove's reputation reinforces the perception that the foreign leader's conciliatory gesture is genuine and that the leader indeed seeks improved relations. By contrast, hawks have a reputation for embracing more conflictual and competitive policies; thus, conciliatory gestures by foreign hawks run counter to what one would expect of them. As a result, such gestures by a hawk may seem suspicious, rather than reassuring. Voters may worry that the foreign hawk's concession is a ploy to relax the country's defenses in order to take advantage of it.⁶

⁶ There are parallels between our argument and Clare (2014). Clare argues that doves have an advantage at eliciting international cooperation because decisionmakers expect foreign doves to make more generous concessions than foreign hawks. Importantly, however, Clare argues that this only holds when foreign doves face a hawkish domestic opposition. By contrast, we argue that foreign doves should have an advantage over foreign hawks irrespective of the domestic political landscape in the foreign state. Our argument also focuses on the possibility of opportunism rather than on the size of concessions. A concern about Clare's empirical test using

This suggests that the relative rewards of counter-to-type and true-to-type behavior may be flipped at the international, compared to the domestic, level. At the domestic level, voters trust that their own leaders will carry out policies that they promise. They are instead focused on whether initiating foreign rapprochement is wise, and whether their leader holds extremist foreign policy preferences. Thus, according to the classic “Nixon goes to China” logic, leaders who pursue new policy initiatives that go against their type are more likely to receive domestic support than those who behave true-to-type. However, the true-to-type behavior may provide an advantage when it comes to the international reaction. Rapprochement initiatives by doves should be seen as more credible, and should thus be more likely to elicit a willingness to reciprocate, precisely because doves are known to seek peace. By contrast, because it is out of character, a foreign hawk’s cooperative advance provokes distrust and voters may be hesitant to embrace such an overture. We thus propose the following hypotheses:

H1 (Dove’s Advantage): Voters are more likely to approve of their leader’s decision to reciprocate a conciliatory gesture by a foreign dove than an identical gesture by a foreign hawk.

M1a (Sincerity 1): Voters are more likely to believe that a conciliatory gesture is sincere if the foreign leader is a dove rather than a hawk.

observational data is the selection bias we pointed to earlier: doves may only pursue cooperation with an adversary when they are confident that they will succeed. Unfortunately, testing Clare’s argument in a survey experiment would require varying the particular domestic circumstances in the foreign state which is beyond the scope of our experiment.

Doves, Hawks, and the Strength of the Conciliatory Gesture

So far, we have assumed a generic conciliatory gesture by the foreign leader. However, conciliatory gestures can vary significantly in the costs and risks that they impose on the sender—and thus the signal that they transmit about the sender’s motivation. In this section, we argue that foreign audiences take into account the nature of the conciliatory gesture and that the strength of the gesture moderates the extent to which voters differentiate between foreign doves and hawks.

Although most conflict research has focused on why short-term crises flare up and abate, i.e. on crisis bargaining, several studies examine rapprochement between long-time adversaries (e.g. Downes and Rocke 1990; Kupchan 2010; Kydd 2007; Larson 1987; Osgood 1962; Mattes 2018). A key insight of this literature is that the nature of the initial peace overture influences whether détente will be achieved. Scholars argue that the defining component of a successful cooperative overture is its costliness to the sender: the gesture must be costly enough that only a state with a genuine desire to improve relations would undertake it (Kydd 2007). A sufficiently costly gesture, in turn, is one that weakens the sender’s position relative to the opponent and makes it vulnerable to defection. Recent research confirms that the public indeed considers the costliness of an opponent’s gesture when evaluating whether or not to embrace cooperation with the opponent (Kertzer, Rathbun, and Rathbun Forthcoming).⁷

We build on these insights, but hypothesize that gestures are interpreted differently—and thus prompt different responses—depending on the type of the leader who makes them. More specifically, we argue that the costliness of the conciliatory gesture will have a greater effect on

⁷ Kertzer et al. show that, on average, costlier signals inspire more trust in reassurance efforts by the adversary, just as rational models of costly signaling would predict. However, they also highlight that prior dispositions of individuals moderate perceptions of costly signals.

how voters view peace overtures by foreign hawks compared to peace overtures by foreign doves. Based on the sincerity mechanism, we expect that conciliation efforts by foreign doves will be seen by voters as sincere and as deserving of a cooperative response, irrespective of the strength of the conciliatory gesture the foreign dove makes. By contrast, the strength of the gesture should loom large in voter evaluations of peace overtures by foreign hawks. Trepidation about cooperating with a foreign hawk should be especially pronounced if the hawk's gesture is relatively costless and their intentions thus remain ambiguous. But if the conciliatory gesture is unequivocally costly and risky for the adversary, voters should be more likely to perceive a foreign hawk's conciliation efforts as sincere. Based on a "costly signaling"-logic, we thus expect that foreign hawks can overcome their credibility disadvantage if their initial gesture is a strong and costly signal of their desire for peace. While foreign doves possess a clear international advantage relative to foreign hawks when the conciliatory gesture is relatively weak, we expect this advantage to decrease when the foreign leader makes a more costly overture.

H2: As the strength of the foreign leader's conciliatory gesture increases, the dove's advantage shrinks.

H2a (Sincerity 2): As the strength of the foreign leader's conciliatory gesture increases, the gap in voters' perceptions of the sincerity of conciliatory gestures by foreign doves versus by foreign hawks shrinks.⁸

⁸ For good measure, we also test the straightforward assumption that the public is more likely to reciprocate costlier signals: *H2b (Costly Signaling): Voters are more likely to approve of their leader's decision to reciprocate a conciliatory gesture when the foreign gesture is costlier.* If this assumption does not hold, H2 would not follow from our logic.

Alternative Explanation

Our argument suggests that foreign leaders who have a reputation for dovishness possess an international advantage at rapprochement over hawkish foreign leaders, because the former's gestures, even if not very costly or risky, are more likely to be viewed as sincere and as presenting a genuine opening for improved relations. However, it is important to recognize an alternative explanation for why domestic audiences in the target of reconciliation might prefer to reciprocate a foreign dove's initial cooperative gesture over a foreign hawk's identical gesture. We term this alternative explanation the *exploitation* mechanism.

Voters may genuinely desire détente, but they may also follow a more opportunistic calculus (Schultz 2005).⁹ When relations have been tense and competitive for an extended period, voters may favor reciprocating an adversary's conciliatory gesture not to facilitate long-term peace, but because short-term cooperation presents an opportunity to take advantage of the opponent. Voters might reason that a rival who makes concessions can be goaded into actions that would leave the rival ripe for exploitation down the line. Foreign doves may seem particularly vulnerable to this kind of strategy because they are perceived as more willing to grant concessions and less likely to retaliate against defection. By contrast, the public might expect hawkish foreign leaders to retaliate in response to defection, making them a less attractive target for exploitation.

This suggests that a foreign dove may be more likely than a foreign hawk to have its initial conciliatory gesture reciprocated, but that the reason for this—and the prospects for

⁹ Schultz's seminal study develops a formal model of the domestic and international dynamics underlying hawks' and doves' decisions to deliver the olive branch. As part of his model, Schultz suggests that a hawkish adversary may cooperate with a dovish foreign leader in the short term in order to exploit them in the longer run. We build on this logic for developing our *exploitation* mechanism.

rapprochement—are different than we proposed earlier. The *sincerity* mechanism that forms the basis of our theoretical argument suggests that voters genuinely want improved relations and will prefer to deal with a foreign dove whose efforts are viewed as sincere. In contrast, the *exploitation* mechanism posits that voters would like their country to gain an edge over the adversary and will prefer a dove as a counterpart because a dove's advances can be exploited more easily. Whether voters' preferences for reciprocating a foreign dove's peace overture are driven by a genuine desire for improved relations or by opportunism matters. If exploitative motives explain voters' preferences for reciprocating the peace overtures of foreign doves we would not be able to conclude that doves possess an international advantage at peace—the dove's initial gesture would be reciprocated but rapprochement would fail in the longer run.

We propose to test this rival explanation in two ways. First, recognizing that both the *sincerity* and *exploitation* mechanisms would lead us to find support for H1 (i.e., that doves possess an international advantage), we formulate a hypothesis to contrast with M1a (Sincerity 1). More specifically, we hypothesize that voters, in the longer run, will be more inclined to support defection on a foreign dove's conciliation efforts, compared to a foreign hawk's identical efforts.

M1b (Exploitation 1): Voters are more likely to favor reneging on cooperation with the foreign country at a later point if the foreign leader is a dove rather than a hawk.

Second, we examine whether the size of the foreign dove's advantage varies depending on the strength of the foreign leader's gesture. The *sincerity* mechanism suggests that, as the foreign gesture becomes stronger, the dove's advantage relative to the hawk shrinks. If so, hawks might be able to compensate for their international disadvantage by making stronger gestures. By

contrast, the *exploitation* mechanism implies that costlier gestures will further increase the extent to which voters prefer foreign doves over hawks. If domestic audiences perceive a foreign dove's overture as a promising opportunity to gain an edge over a naive adversary, then the larger the concession by the dove, the more naive and exploitable they will seem. Voters may thus be even more inclined to reciprocate the dove's overture in the hopes of taking advantage of the foreign adversary later. There should not be a corresponding dynamic for hawks; hawkish types should not be seen as easy targets for exploitation regardless of the gesture they make. Thus, based on the *exploitation* mechanism, we expect stronger gestures to increase voters' receptivity to foreign doves' overtures compared to hawks', and to strengthen voters' preferences for defecting on foreign doves, but not foreign hawks, down the road.

H3: As the strength of the gesture increases, the dove's advantage grows.

M3b (Exploitation 2): As the strength of the foreign leader's conciliatory gesture increases, voters are more likely to favor reneging on cooperation with the foreign country at a later point if the foreign leader is a dove rather than a hawk.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

To test our hypotheses, we fielded a preregistered survey experiment to 1,455 U.S.-based respondents via Lucid in November 2019.¹⁰ Subjects first answered a series of questions

¹⁰ Lucid recruited subjects to reflect the U.S. adult population by gender, age, geography, and race. In our final sample, 30% of subjects identified as Republicans, 36% as Democrats, and the remainder as Independent/another party/no preference. We collected data from 2,727 individual respondents. Twenty-four percent of those subjects failed simple pretreatment attention checks. Of those that passed the pretreatment checks, a further 30% failed at least 15% of a series of posttreatment attention checks. Per our preanalysis plan, the main text focuses on the 1,455 attentive respondents. The substantive results do not change if we include the 617 subjects who failed the posttreatment attention checks. See appendix.

regarding their party affiliation and their views on the use of force in international affairs, the role of the United States in world politics, their trust in other countries, and their perception of whether Russia is a friend or an enemy of the United States. We then told respondents: “We are going to describe a situation the U.S. could face in the future, in the year 2027, involving Russia. Some parts of the description may seem important to you; other parts may seem unimportant.”

Our scenario focuses on Russia because it is widely perceived as an adversary of the U.S., and Russo-American relations thus fit the theoretical parameters for rapprochement between rivals. According to Gallup, Americans have consistently ranked Russia among the United States’ four “greatest enemies” (besides North Korea, Iran, and China) over the last five years and an overwhelming majority of Americans (91%) now view Russia’s military power as an “important” or even “critical” threat to the United States.¹¹ Russia is thus a significant adversary in the eyes of most Americans and U.S. voters would likely be aware of the identity and reputation of a Russian leader.¹²

¹¹ For opinion polls on Russia see <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1642/russia.aspx> and <https://news.gallup.com/poll/247100/majority-americans-consider-russia-critical-threat.aspx>. There is currently significant polarization in the U.S. public with regard to views of Russia: 46% of Democrats and 34% of Independents consider Russia as the United States’ greatest enemy, compared to 14% of Republicans. This split is confirmed in our own data, where 60 percent of Democratic voters saw Russia as an “enemy” or as “unfriendly,” while only 40% of Republicans did. While such split opinions regarding an adversary may be unusual, we have no reason to expect that focusing on Russia would make us more or less likely to falsify our hypotheses. We also note that our survey is situated in the future and involves a fictional Russian leader, which might lessen the effects of any current polarization in the public.

¹² Pew public opinion surveys show that, in 2018, only 11% of U.S. respondents had never heard of the Russian president or had no opinion about him. Even prior to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, when the salience of Russia and President Putin was arguably lower, the corresponding number is 16% (<https://www.pollingreport.com/russia.htm>). Furthermore, recent work by Renshon et al. (2018) suggests that leader-specific reputations are especially likely to form when leaders have significant foreign policy authority such as when they govern in an autocracy and when security considerations are involved, as is the case in the scenario we present here.

In order to test our theoretical expectations, we randomly varied two key features of the experiment: 1) the foreign leader's type (hawk vs. dove) and 2) the strength of the foreign leader's cooperative gesture (weak or strong). In addition to these substantively interesting treatments, we also randomly varied the U.S. president's party (Democrat or Republican) and the U.S. president's type (hawk or dove) both in order to assess the effect of partisanship on voter support for reciprocation of an adversary's overture, and to avoid information leakage about domestic leadership based on the foreign leader's type and actions. We wanted to minimize the possibility that respondents impute information about domestic leadership—which may influence predispositions towards cooperation with an international rival—based on information they received about the foreign leader.

We introduced the experimental scenario in five parts: 1) the characteristics of the domestic leader, 2) the type of foreign leader, 3) the background of the international situation, 4) the action undertaken by the foreign leader, and 5) the response of the domestic leader.¹³

We first provided subjects with information about the U.S. president. We chose a fictional president, President Richards, in order to be able to more easily manipulate the president's party affiliation and type and to minimize any pre-existing attachment, or animosity, towards the U.S. president. According to the background information we provided, President Richards is male and became president in 2025 after five years in the U.S. Senate. We thus held constant President Richards' sex and his (foreign) policy experience. We then randomly varied

¹³ Respondents were given text to read on each of these aspects and were then asked to answer basic factual questions about the information given to them. We chose this approach to increase the likelihood that respondents picked up on key aspects of the scenario.

two characteristics of President Richards: his hawkishness/dovishness and his party affiliation.¹⁴

Table 1 shows the wording for this and other treatments.

TABLE 1: EXPERIMENTAL TREATMENTS

DOMESTIC LEADER PARTY AFFILIATION	
<i>Republican</i>	<i>Democrat</i>
... is a lifelong member of the Republican Party.	... is a lifelong member of the Democratic Party.
DOMESTIC LEADER TYPE	
<i>Hawk</i>	<i>Dove</i>
... is known for his emphasis on military power in U.S. foreign relations.	... is known for his emphasis on diplomacy and peaceful negotiation in U.S. foreign relations.
FOREIGN LEADER TYPE	
<i>Hawk</i>	<i>Dove</i>
... has a reputation for <u>favoring military solutions over diplomatic ones</u> . He has repeatedly emphasized that military force is essential to protecting Russian national security. In the past, he has said that he will not shy away from using force when necessary. He has also said that “the only way to achieve peace is to be ready for war.”	... has a reputation for <u>favoring diplomatic solutions over military ones</u> . He has repeatedly emphasized that military force is not the answer to protecting Russian national security. In the past, he has said that he believes in diplomacy and negotiations and will use military force only as a last resort. He has also said that “the only way to achieve peace is to act peacefully.”
FOREIGN LEADER CONCILIATORY GESTURE	
<i>Weak</i>	<i>Strong</i>
... declares that he is reducing the Russian military presence in the part of the Arctic closest to the U.S. Specifically, Russia is <u>closing two (2) military bases</u> in the area.	... declares that he is sharply reducing the Russian military presence in the part of the Arctic closest to the U.S. Specifically, Russia is <u>closing seven (7) military bases</u> in the area.

Note: Underlining appears in the original survey instrument.

¹⁴ The hawk/dove treatment for the American president is shorter, and therefore potentially weaker, than that for the foreign leader. Our interest is in understanding domestic reactions to a foreign hawk or dove rather than the relative explanatory power of the foreign leader’s hawkishness/dovishness compared to that of the domestic leader.

After introducing the U.S. President, we told respondents about Russia in 2027. We first noted that “Russia remains a non-democracy” and we then provided information on a fictional Russian leader, President Alexei Stepanov, who had entered office two years prior. As with his American counterpart, we chose a fictional Russian leader in order to be able to manipulate his leader type and to minimize preexisting affinity or dislike for the foreign leader. Just like the U.S. president, the Russian leader was described as male and as having political experience.

Respondents then learned about our key variable of interest, President Stepanov’s hawkishness/dovishness. Half of our respondents were told that he “has a reputation for favoring military solutions over diplomatic ones” and the other half that he “has a reputation for favoring diplomatic solutions over military ones.” We further reinforced these treatments by referring to President Stepanov’s previous statements regarding his willingness to engage in military conflict or peaceful diplomacy.¹⁵

With regard to the relationship between the U.S. and Russia in 2027, we told respondents that “a major security concern for the U.S. in 2027 is its very tense relationship with Russia” and that “the U.S. and Russia disagree over many important foreign policy issues.” We then explained that “one very tense issue is control over the Arctic”, that “40% of all trade is shipped through Arctic waters” and that “the area contains massive oil and gas reserves.” We further told respondents that “in 2027, *overall* global U.S. military power is about 30% greater than Russian overall global military power”, but that “in the Arctic, Russia is about 50% stronger than the U.S.” We stated that both Russia and the U.S. “have a major military presence in the Arctic”,

¹⁵ We focus on President Stepanov’s words rather previous actions to avoid leaking information about other threats Russia or the U.S. might confront internationally that might influence voters’ willingness to cooperate.

that Russia “has 19 military bases on its Arctic territory”, and that the U.S. “has 10 military bases in Alaska, including one on Alaska’s Arctic coast close to Russia.” We described both the Russian and American bases as housing “troops, icebreakers, military aircraft, missiles, nuclear-armed submarines, and other military equipment.”

We chose to situate our vignette in the Arctic because it is an area in which future tensions between the U.S. and Russia are likely to arise. Numerous news articles report the Russian military build-up in the Arctic and highlight the threat the U.S. faces in the area.¹⁶ In response, U.S. policymakers have voiced the need to enhance U.S. military capabilities in Alaska.¹⁷ Given the two countries’ current military positions both globally and in the Arctic, our scenario of the U.S. being 30% stronger than Russia in terms of global capabilities and Russia being 50% stronger than the U.S. in the Arctic in 2027 seems plausible.¹⁸ We hold constant the United States’ and Russia’s relative capabilities to address potential concerns about confounding: respondents may otherwise draw inferences about Russia’s military strength based on the hawkishness or dovishness of its leader or the type of gesture the leader makes and these inferences may affect respondents’ willingness to reciprocate the foreign leader’s gesture.

Next we provided respondents with information about the Russian leader’s actions in the Arctic. Subjects were told: “In 2027, Russian President Stepanov makes a speech about foreign

¹⁶ See, for example, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/04/europe/russia-arctic-kotelny-island-military-base/index.html>. Given the plausibility of a conflict between the U.S. and Russia in the Arctic, other scholars have also used an Arctic scenario in their vignettes (e.g. Gottfried and Trager 2016).

¹⁷ See, for example, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/06/climate/pompeo-arctic-china-russia.html> and <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2019/06/21/congress-wants-the-us-military-to-challenge-russia-with-a-new-arctic-port/>.

¹⁸ The ratio of Russia’s Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) score relative to the United States’ was 0.38 between 2008-2012, the last five years this data is available based on the National Material Capabilities v.5.0 dataset (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972).

policy. He announces that he wants to improve relations with the U.S.” Respondents were then randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions that varied the strength of the conciliatory gesture by the Russian leader. The “weak gesture” treatment informed subjects that President Stepanov “declares that he is reducing the Russian military presence in the part of the Arctic closest to the U.S. Specifically, Russia is closing two (2) military bases in the area.” This treatment thus moves beyond classic “cheap talk” in offering a tangible concession, but the gesture is quite weak, given that Russia would still retain 17 military bases in its Arctic territory. While this “weak gesture” carries few risks to Russia and its position in the Arctic relative to the U.S., it does constitute an initial signal of good will and implies that Russia is seeking a *détente*.

By contrast, the “strong gesture” treatment stated that President Stepanov “is sharply reducing the Russian military presence in the part of the Arctic closest to the U.S. Specifically, Russia is closing seven (7) military bases in the area.” Unilaterally dismantling seven of 19 Russian military installations in the Arctic— while the U.S. retains 10 military bases in the area— significantly weakens Russia’s position relative to the U.S. in the Arctic. It also exposes Russia to the risk that the U.S. might exploit this gesture to gain dominance in the contested region. This gesture is thus a good match for how the literature on rapprochement between longtime adversaries conceptualizes effective peace overtures—such acts should be unilateral, costly, but not too risky for the sender (e.g. Kydd 2007; Osgood 1962, Schultz 2003).

After reading about the Russian conciliatory gesture, all respondents were told: “A week later, U.S. President Richards makes a speech. He announces that he is closing the strategically important military base that is closest to Russia. He says he will consider withdrawing additional forces in the future.” President Richards’ response thus contains a notable concession—the closure of the U.S. base closest to Russia—but it is also a conservative response in that the U.S.

keeps open its remaining nine military bases in Alaska. Our goal for both the Russian gesture treatments and the U.S. response was to present realistic conciliatory acts in which neither side would be perceived to capitulate to the other, and to make clear that these are opening gestures that could lead to more extensive rapprochement down the road.¹⁹

After a bullet point summary of key aspects of the scenario, we measured approval of the U.S. president, as well as additional questions probing reactions to the president's cooperative behavior and the mechanisms that could explain presidential approval, described in further detail below. We concluded the survey by asking respondents about additional characteristics, including their level of political interest, education level, race, age, sex, and religiosity.

V. RESULTS

Main Effects

Do doves possess an international advantage at delivering the olive branch? Put differently, do hawks' domestic advantages at making peace generate international liabilities? To test this core hypothesis, we compared support for a U.S. president who reciprocates a cooperative gesture when the foreign leader was described as a hawk to support for a president who reciprocates an identical gesture when the foreign leader was described as a dove. To measure our core dependent variable, we followed the scenario and randomly-varied treatments with a question asking subjects whether they "approve of how U.S. President Richards is doing his job." We consider this a conservative test of the hypothesis that doves have an international

¹⁹ We deliberately aimed to minimize the comparability of the Russian and U.S. gestures in order to minimize the possibility that human preferences for fair and equitable solutions (e.g. if Russia closes 30% of bases U.S. should close 30%) would dominate other considerations. For voter preferences for fairness see Gottfried and Trager (2016).

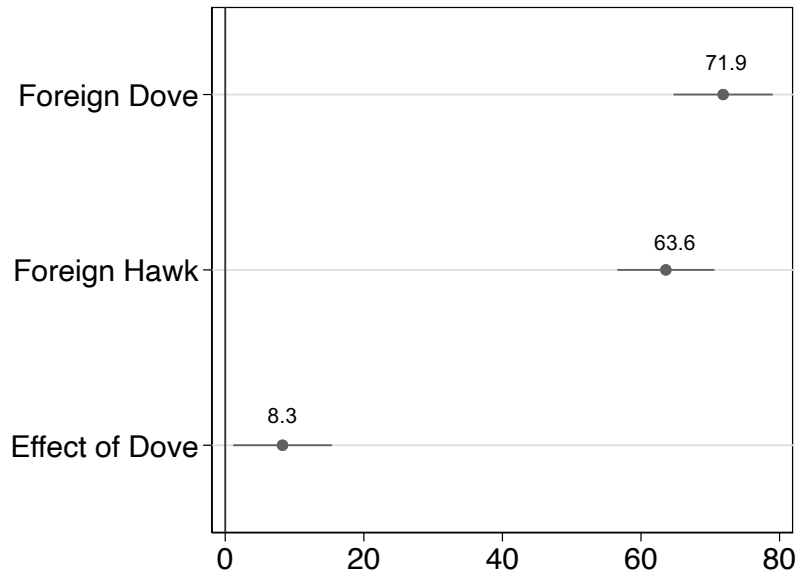
peacemaking advantage, given that voters could disapprove of the president not only because of the details of his foreign policy actions, but also for partisan reasons.²⁰ For ease of interpretation, we created a dichotomous dependent variable, *approve*, coded as 1 if a subject approved of how the U.S. president was doing his job, and 0 otherwise. For this analysis, following our preregistration plan, we focus on the weaker foreign gesture (closure of two Russian bases).

Figure 1 displays the percent of respondents who approved of the U.S. president in our vignette when the foreign leader was described as dovish versus hawkish, as well as the difference between those two treatment conditions.²¹ Overall, subjects showed relatively high levels of approval of the U.S. president—on average, 70% of respondents approved. However, we also find that respondents made a distinction when the foreign leader was described as a hawk versus as a dove. Our findings support H1: presidents who reciprocate foreign gestures receive modestly but significantly more approval when the foreign leader is a dove rather than an otherwise identical foreign hawk. When the foreign leader is a hawk, Americans throw 8 percentage points less approval behind a president who reciprocates the conciliatory gesture by closing an important U.S. base, a substantively and statistically meaningful effect ($p < .05$).

²⁰ This DV is also conservative because respondents may disapprove of President Richards not because he cooperates with Russia but because he does not cooperate enough. In our PAP, we proposed a second dependent variable in which we consider voters to approve of the president if they felt he had not closed *enough* bases. We realized upon reflection that voters could agree with the president's foreign policy choice but still disapprove of his behavior overall (as indeed 22% of our respondents did) so we do not show that analysis here. The results are very similar to those presented here.

²¹ To calculate the estimates displayed in Figure 1, we regress presidential approval on the foreign leader's type controlling for the two other treatments (hawkish or dovish U.S. president and the president's political party). The effects are nearly identical when we also control for a series of demographic and attitudinal control variables (the individual's political ideology, party ID, sex, age, race, education, political interest, political activism, religiosity, internationalism, hawkishness, and international trust), correcting for any minor imbalances across treatment groups. All demographic variables are described in the appendix.

Figure 1: Percent Presidential Approval by Foreign Leader Type



Note: figure shows percent of respondents approving of the U.S. president when the foreign leader was a hawk versus a dove and Russia closed 2 bases. N=696.

For additional insight, we followed up with a question about whether President Richards “is not closing enough U.S. bases in the region,” “is closing about the right number of U.S. bases in the region”, or “is closing too many U.S. bases in the region.” This question reveals whether, overall job approval aside, voters agree with the president’s decision to close bases.²² Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents who chose each answer option, depending on whether the foreign leader was a hawk versus a dove. The table shows that there was a nearly nine percentage-point increase in the number of respondents who felt the president had closed “too many bases” when the foreign leader was a hawk, rather than a dove. An analysis using

²² Due to the concerns outlined in fn. 19, we decided to deviate from our PAP and use this question not to create a second DV but instead to gain additional descriptive insight into how respondents view the president’s policy choice rather than his person.

multinomial logit indicates that this increase is statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level (see appendix).

Table 2: Opinions about Base Closures, by Foreign Leader Type

	<i>U.S. president closed...</i>			N
	<i>...too many bases</i>	<i>...about the right number of bases</i>	<i>...not enough bases</i>	
Foreign Hawk	27.4	66.1	6.5	354
Foreign Dove	18.62	73.27	8.11	333
Total	23.14	69.58	7.28	687

Mechanisms

Next, we consider *why* doves might have an international peacemaking advantage over hawks. Above, we laid out two mechanisms that would predict that doves should receive a warmer reception (*sincerity* and *exploitation*). To assess whether voters see foreign doves as more sincere than foreign hawks, we asked subjects whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement “Russian President Stepanov wants peace with the U.S.” To facilitate interpretation, we created a binary variable coded 1 if the respondent agreed with this statement and 0 if the respondent disagreed or remained neutral.

To assess the exploitation mechanism, we asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed that “The U.S. should temporarily close the U.S. base on Alaska’s Arctic coast, but reopen it and send additional forces once Russia has finished reducing its own forces in the Arctic” (*“close now but reopen later”*).²³ If subjects did not agree with this statement at higher rates

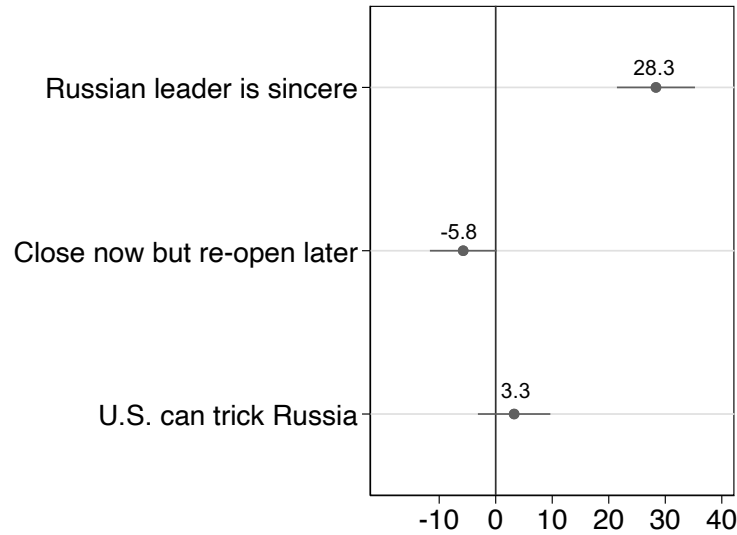
²³ This question came immediately after the question about approval for President Richards and whether he closed too many or too few U.S. military bases.

when the foreign leader was a dove, this would rule out exploitation as an explanation for the dove's advantage. In addition, in case subjects did agree with "*close now but reopen later*" at higher rates when the foreign leader was a dove, we asked a second question: whether respondents agreed or disagreed that "The U.S. can trick Russian President Stepanov into weakening Russia's position in the Arctic" (*U.S. can trick Russia*). If subjects supported renegeing on cooperation with doves ("*close now but reopen later*"), and agreed with the "*U.S. can trick Russia*" statement at a higher rate when the foreign leader is a dove, this would bolster the idea that voters approve of (short-term) cooperation with doves because they see them as exploitable.

We first estimate the effect of our foreign leader type treatment on these statements. For each of the three statements measuring mediators, Figure 2 summarizes the effect of a foreign dovish leader on the percent of respondents who agreed with the statement (95 percent confidence intervals in parentheses).²⁴ Positive values in Figure 2 therefore indicate that when the Russian leader was described as a dove, respondents were more likely to agree with the statement measuring the mediator compared to when the leader was described as a hawk. Negative values, in contrast, indicate that respondents were less likely to agree with the statement when the foreign leader was described as a dove.

²⁴ To calculate the estimates in Figure 2, we controlled for whether the U.S. president was described as a hawk or a dove and the president's political party.

Figure 2: Effect of Dovish Foreign Leader on Mechanisms



The figure shows support for our argument about sincerity: foreign doves were perceived as substantially more sincere than foreign hawks. When the Russian leader was described as a dove, subjects were 28 percentage points more likely to agree that he wanted peace than when the Russian leader was described as a hawk.

In contrast, we found no evidence in support of the *exploitation* mechanism. In fact, we found that, counter to the *exploitation* mechanism, voters were actually slightly *less* likely to endorse sending additional troops to the Arctic in the wake of a Russian drawdown when the foreign leader was a dove ($p < .06$). This suggests that they do not support preying on dovish foreigners. Moreover, we found that respondents were no more likely to believe that the U.S. would be able to trick Russia into weakening its position in the Arctic when the Russian president had a dovish reputation. In sum, we found strong support for our hypothesis that dovish foreign leaders are seen as more sincere, but no evidence for the idea that Americans want to cooperate temporarily with doves because they see them as exploitable.

The next question is whether perceptions of sincerity influence support for reciprocation. To find out, we regressed presidential approval on our three randomized treatments, the sincerity mediator, and the attitudinal and demographic control variables described earlier.²⁵ We found that perceiving the foreign leader to be sincere led to a 34% increase in approval of the U.S. president. Combining the two parts of the causal chain through mediation analysis (Imai, Keele, and Tingley 2010; Imai, Keele, and Yamamoto 2010), we find that the causal mediation effect of perceptions of sincerity is even larger than the total effect of foreign doves on presidential approval. In other words, other causal pathways (such as, potentially, a greater willingness to exploit hawks through short-term cooperation) slightly offset the sincerity mechanism. Further details are reported in the appendix.

Do Stronger Gestures Moderate the Effect of Foreign Leader Type?

Finally, we investigate whether the *strength* of the conciliatory gesture influences the extent to which voters react differently to foreign hawks and doves. Given that our earlier analyses found little support for the *exploitation* mechanism, in this section we focus on the implication of the *sincerity* mechanism: that the gap between foreign doves and foreign hawks should shrink when the gesture is more costly.

To investigate this hypothesis (H2), we examine respondents' approval of a U.S. president who reciprocates a gesture by a foreign dove relative to approval of a U.S. president who reciprocates an identical gesture by a foreign hawk, depending on whether the gesture by the foreign leader is either weak or strong.

²⁵ As Imai et al. (2010) note, causal mediation analysis relies on untestable assumptions, including that the observed values of the mediators are independent of the subject's treatment status and independent of all pretreatment confounders.

Figure 3: Effect of Dovish Foreign Leader on Presidential Approval, by Strength of Gesture

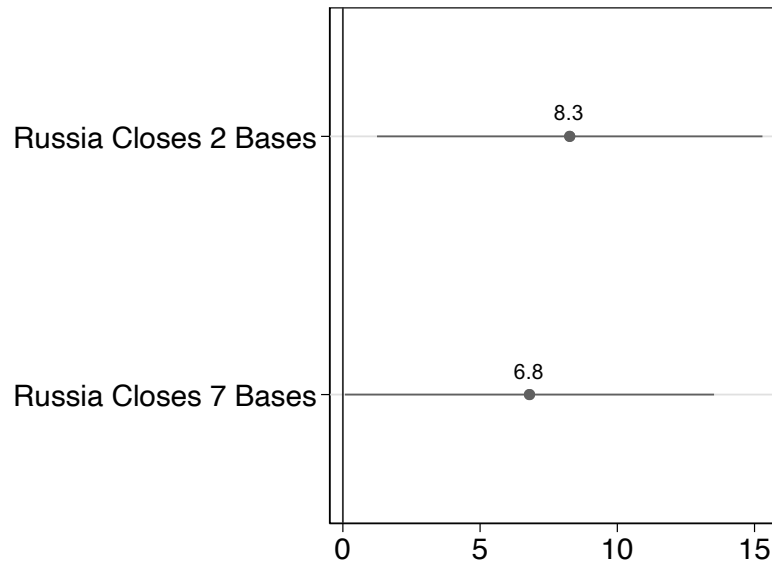


Figure 3 displays the effect of a dovish foreign leader on percent presidential approval, by strength of gesture. The first row shows the effect of being a foreign dove when the gesture is weak, i.e. when the Russian leader closes two out of 19 military bases. As reported previously, in that situation, the effect of “foreign dove” is about 8.3 percentage points. The second row shows the effect of foreign dove on presidential approval when the foreign gesture is stronger, i.e. when the foreign leader closes seven out of 19 bases. Here we find an effect of 6.8 percentage points. Thus, contrary to our theoretical expectations, the effect of a dovish foreign leader is indistinguishable when the foreign gesture is weak versus strong.

Furthermore, we find no support for H2a which predicts that as the strength of the foreign leader’s conciliatory gesture increases, the gap in voters’ perceptions of the sincerity of foreign doves versus foreign hawks should shrink. Our results (reported in the appendix) indicate that the

effect of a foreign dove on perceptions of sincerity is virtually identical when Russia closes two versus seven bases.

What do we make of this finding? One possibility is that voters did not perceive Russia closing seven bases to be any more meaningful than Russia closing two bases. To test this, we compute the effect of the strength of the foreign gesture on a) presidential approval and b) perceptions of sincerity, controlling for the other treatments (foreign hawk/dove, domestic president hawk/dove, and domestic president's party). If voters perceived closing seven bases to be a stronger signal than closing only two bases, we would expect presidential approval and perceptions of sincerity to be much higher when Russia closes seven bases, controlling for other factors. Counter to our expectations, however, voters were only 3 percentage points more likely to approve of the U.S. president when the Russian leader closed seven bases, compared to two bases—an effect that was not statistically significant. Similarly, perceptions of sincerity are only 4 percentage points higher when Russia closes seven bases, compared to two bases. Thus, it is possible that subjects in our experiment did not perceive the two gestures to be “strong” and “weak” in the way that we had intended.²⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

Existing IR scholarship suggests that, counterintuitively, hawks are better positioned to initiate rapprochement with an international rival than their dovish counterparts (e.g. Cowen and Sutter 1998; Cuckierman and Tommasi; Mattes and Weeks 2019; Schultz 2005). This research

²⁶ In addition to the above analyses, we preregistered several hypotheses about partisanship. We found that Republicans gave a modest preference for Republican presidents, but that Democrats (unexpectedly) did not. We found no major differences between partisans and independents in terms of the size of the dove's advantage. See appendix.

emphasizes hawks' domestic political advantages when it comes to selling a policy of conciliation to their constituents. But to understand the prospects for international rapprochement we also need to examine the adversary's response. Rapprochement only succeeds if the other side is willing to reciprocate.

This study complements existing work on the hawk's advantage thesis by examining how domestic audiences in the adversary state respond to conciliatory gestures by foreign hawks versus doves. We argue that the same factor that gives hawks an edge over doves at home creates an international liability. A hawk's counter-to-type behavior may sow doubt among international audiences about the foreign leader's intentions. Voters abroad will deem a foreign dove's peace efforts more credible, and should thus prefer to reciprocate a peace overture by a dove rather than an identical overture by a hawk. We further argue that, while doves should possess an advantage over hawks internationally, this advantage will diminish as hawks send more costly signals of their commitment to peace. To test our conjectures, we fielded a pilot survey experiment on a large sample of U.S. respondents. Our vignette described a hypothetical scenario in which a Russian president, who was portrayed as either a hawk or a dove, makes a peace overture, described as either weak or strong, toward the U.S. and the U.S. president reciprocates. We then asked respondents whether they approve of the American president's reciprocation of the friendly foreign gesture.

Our findings indicate that public opinion may favor peace initiatives by foreign doves over those by hawks. When the foreign adversary was described as a dove, respondents were eight percentage points more likely to approve of a U.S. president who reciprocated the conciliatory gesture compared to when the foreign leader was described as a hawk. This effect appears to be due to a perception that doves' peace overtures are more sincere than identical

gestures by hawks; it does not appear to be the result of opportunistic considerations. Furthermore, counter to our theoretical expectations, we found no evidence that doves' international advantages diminish with an increasingly costly signal of conciliation. Given our experimental set-up, we cannot conclude that there is not a sufficiently costly gesture that foreign hawks could make to overcome their disadvantages relative to doves; but, our findings suggest that, if at all possible, hawks' concessions may need to be significant. Of course, Mattes and Weeks (2019) found that hawks have substantially greater domestic backing for their rapprochement efforts than doves, so they may actually be in a position to make a significantly larger initial concession without experiencing much of a domestic political penalty. As a result, it is possible that, overall, hawks could still be advantaged relative to doves at making peace with an international adversary.²⁷ However, our findings indicate that, once one considers international dynamics, the hawk's advantage may be more limited than existing work on the domestic logic underlying the hawk's advantage thesis implies.

Our study also holds implications for the literatures on trust-building among adversaries and the role of reputation in foreign policy. While previous work emphasizes the character of successful conciliatory gestures (e.g. Kydd 2007; Osgood 1962), we highlight that leader reputation can also play a role in whether a foreign adversary's peace overture is perceived as credible. Recent research on crisis bargaining finds that individuals base their expectations about the credibility of a foreign leader's action on the leader's past behavior (e.g. Renshon et al.

²⁷ Mattes and Weeks (2019) suggest that the hawk's domestic advantage is large—a hawkish leader experienced 23 percentage points less disapproval for shifting from a status quo policy to rapprochement than a dove. By contrast, we find that the hawk's international disadvantage is more modest: 8 percentage points.

2018). Here we add to these insights by showing that a foreign leader's reputation for hawkishness/dovishness affects the public's policy preferences for rapprochement.

Our study raises several questions for future research. First, it would be interesting to examine how and when the mass public comes to view foreign leaders as either hawks or doves. We think that it is plausible that U.S. voters know about past actions and rhetoric of the leaders that govern long-term adversaries, such as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. These leaders' behavior and words are frequently reported in the media and noted by U.S. politicians; many of these leaders also stay in office long enough to become known to the American public. Yet, it would be worthwhile to delve further into which sorts of statements or actions by foreign leaders cause voters to conclude that the leader is a hawk or a dove, and to test how stable such reputations are over time.

Second, scholars should investigate the interaction between domestic and foreign leader types. Our study suggests that the most promising constellation for rapprochement between the U.S. and its international rivals may be a U.S. leader who is a hawk and can thus mobilize domestic support for making peace and a foreign leader who is a dove and is thus less likely to be distrusted by the U.S. public. Interestingly, at least one high profile historical case of rapprochement arguably fits this pattern: the cold war between the U.S. and the USSR ended as a result of President Reagan's and Gorbachev's efforts. A systematic examination of interaction effects between domestic and foreign leader types might help shed more light on whether this is indeed the constellation most conducive to effective rapprochement.

Third, future research should examine the temporal dynamics of rapprochement. We examine how foreign leader type affects the adversary's willingness to respond to a single *initial* peace overture. However, rapprochement is typically a long-term process that requires both sides

to make many concessions along the way. To be successful, rapprochement needs to move from cooperation on a single issue to broader patterns of cooperation in other issue areas. Future research should therefore study how a positive cooperation experience with a distrusted adversary affects the public's willingness to make additional concessions in other issue areas.

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