Something is Rotten in the Alliance: Democratic Backsliding Reduces Public Support for Aiding Allies[*]

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Abstract:

Does democratic backsliding in allied states affect the public's willingness to support fulfilling alliance obligations? Despite growing interest in understanding backsliding, less attention has been paid to understanding how backsliding will change foreign policy and international relations. We argue that backsliding is likely to reduce the public's perceptions of an ally's compatibility and reliability, which reduces their willingness to provide support. Across two survey experiments in the United States, we find robust evidence that the public is less supportive of fulfilling obligations for a backsliding ally. Additionally, backsliding reduces perceptions of compatibility and reliability, and these perceptions mediate backsliding even when controlling for alternative explanations. Finally, the public indicates willingness to vote for a President that abandons an ally when they experience backsliding, suggesting audience costs may be conditional. Taken together, we find that backsliding around the world has the potential to destabilize long-standing alliances networks central to foreign policy.

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Introduction

Early in the morning of March 19, 2025, Turkish mayor and opposition leader Ekrem İmamoğlu was detained, before being formally charged, on suspicion of public corruption. In the months since his arrest, hundreds of individuals linked to the opposition have been arrested, including other local officials.[1] Although these arrests may serve as an escalation, they are also a continuation of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's steady weakening of democratic institutions over the last two decades, including a willingness to challenge the validity of elections. Unfortunately, Turkey is only one of many examples of democratic backsliding (e.g., Riedl, Friesen, McCoy, and Roberts 2024). Other prominent examples of democratic backsliding include fellow North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies Hungary (Enyedi and Mikola 2024) and Poland (Tworzecki 2024).

Concerns about democratic backsliding have sparked new interest among scholars and policymakers in democracies around the world. Much attention has been paid to diagnosing the existence of democratic backsliding (Hyde 2020; Riedl, Friesen, McCoy, and Roberts 2024; Little and Meng 2024), the causes of backsliding (Grumbach 2023; Grillo et al. 2024; Riedl, McCoy, Roberts, and Somer 2024), and which segments of the public support backsliding (Graham and Svolik 2020; Svolik 2023; Gidron et al. 2025). Given that security and economic cooperation *between democracies* has played an important role in post-World War II foreign policy(e.g., Ikenberry 2001), it is also important to understand how democratic backsliding might shape *international relations*. There is some evidence to suggest that democratic backsliding has foreign policy consequences. Possible U.S. democratic backsliding reduces U.S. soft power (Goldsmith et al. 2025) and support for intelligence sharing (Inouye et al. 2025) among other democracies, while the coup attempt in South Korea undermines the U.S. public's opinion toward a long-time ally (Horiuchi, Jo, and Matush 2025).

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[1] Ben Hubbard and Safak Timur, "Erdogan Calls It an Anticorruption Drive. His Rivals Call It a Political Crackdown." *New York Times*, August 19, 2025. `https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/16/world/europe/turkey-erdogan-corruption-drive.html`. Orla Guerin, "This 'tough guy' president says he's tackling corruption. Rivals say he's silencing opposition." *BBC*, September, 9, 2025. `https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckgqzk31qyzo`.

In this article, we argue that democratic backsliding poses a unique risk to alliances between democracies. We focus on alliances, in part, because they can help deter international aggression (Leeds 2003b; Johnson and Leeds 2011) and enjoy widespread public support within democracies (Tomz and Weeks 2021; Tomz, Weeks, and Bansak 2023). We also focus on instances of backsliding where there is strong reason to believe the regime in power has undermined the integrity of elections, in addition to other institutions. Democratic backsliding is likely to reduce public support for fulfilling alliance obligations because it changes the way the public perceives the *quality* of an ally. We contend that the public will form beliefs about a country's compatibility (interest alignment) and reliability (whether a partner will fulfill obligations) and use these beliefs to judge the merits of fulfilling costly obligations. As the public's perceptions of an ally's quality decrease, we expect that the public's support for abrogation to increase. While backsliding provides reinforcing negative signals about compatibility and reliability, transitions to democracy are likely to contain cross-cutting or reinforcing *positive* signals about compatibility and reliability.

Across two large-scale (combined $n \approx 4,300$) survey experiments in the United States (U.S.), we find consistent support for observable implications of our theoretical argument. In the first, we independently manipulate regime type and transition to separate the effect of backsliding from transitions more broadly. In the second, we leverage an embedded natural experiment (ENE) to better identify the effect of democratic backsliding on public opinion.[2] Across both studies, we find robust evidence that democratic backsliding reduces the public's willingness to fulfill the U.S.'s alliance obligations. Accounting for the *direction of transition*, we also find that backsliding is uniquely dangerous. In addition, we find that the negative effect of backsliding on support for fulfilling obligations holds even when the costs are relatively low, such as implementing sanctions on an aggressor.

Our results also shed light on the mechanisms driving public support for abrogation. Consistent with our argument, we find that backsliding reduces perceptions of ally quality.

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[2]ENEs can help control for these differences by mimicking natural experiments that social scientists use to identify causal effects with observational data (Dafoe, Zhang, and Caughey 2018).

However, this does not necessarily mean that these perceptions act as mechanisms (Blackwell, Ma, and Opacic 2024). Combining our ENE with a mediation analysis, we find that compatibility and reliability do in fact mediate the effect of backsliding, *even while controlling for other possible mediators* such as reputation costs (Gibler 2008; Mattes 2012; LeVeck and Narang 2017; Narang and LeVeck 2019; Fuhrmann and Sechser 2014) and moral obligations (Tomz and Weeks 2021; Tomz, Weeks, and Bansak 2023). These findings provide suggestive evidence in favor of the causal chain we propose theoretically.

Finally, we provide evidence of possible political consequences from backsliding among allies. Although we contend that public opinion about foreign policy can influence policy-making in democracies (Tomz, Weeks, and Yarhi-Milo 2020), we also find empirical evidence that democratic backsliding has political consequences. We find that an ally experiencing backsliding broadly makes the public *more* likely to vote for a copartisan that does *not* provide military assistance to the ally. This, in turn, suggests the domestic audience costs which can help reinforce and maintain alliances may be reduced in the wake of democratic backsliding and raise the spector of abrogation. We also probe the generalizability of our main findings. We find that foreign policy attitudes such as support for alliances, a desire for compatible allies, and support for using foreign policy to help other democracies moderate the effect of backsliding. Although this suggests critical scope conditions for when backsliding will change public opinion, we anticipate that, on average, democratic publics are likely to hold these foreign policy preferences.

This study contributes to several important literatures in political science. First, we contribute to a burgeoning literature trying to understand the rise of democratic backsliding around the world. Other studies document that backsliding can reduce soft power (Goldsmith et al. 2025), willingness to share intelligence (Inouye et al. 2025), and confidence in key allies (Horiuchi, Jo, and Matush 2025). Here, we argue that backsliding can undermine existing alliances between democracies by reducing the public's willingness to support fulfilling costly alliance obligations. Although public opinion can serve as a bulwark to stabilize alliances,

our findings suggest that backsliding abroad can weaken this bulwark and even generate political incentives for leaders to abandon allies. Crucially, our research design allows us to more credibly separate the effects of backsliding from the broader category of regime transitions.

Second, we contribute to the literature on alliances and security cooperation. Recent survey experiments find that the public generally favors fulfilling alliance obligations, even when it is costly to do so (Tomz and Weeks 2021; Tomz, Weeks, and Bansak 2023). We show that democratic backsliding can undermine this broad public support. Our findings are also consistent with cross-national observational studies which show an increased risk of abrogation associated with regime transitions (Leeds 2003*a*; Leeds and Savun 2007). However, in contrast to this line of research, we find that backsliding poses a unique risk to public support for fulfilling obligations in democracies and that an ally transitioning to democracy *increases* support for fulfilling costly obligations.

Finally, we contribute to the literature on psychology and international relations. We argue that the public is likely to rely on heuristics of ally quality when forming opinions about whether to fulfill costly obligations and that backsliding is likely to be one such heuristic. Empirically, we marshal a variety of evidence consistent with this argument. Backsliding reduces the public's perception that an ally (1) shares their country's interests, (2) is reliable, and (3) has the capability and capacity to fulfill its obligations under the alliance. In addition, we find evidence consistent with the expectation that perceptions of ally quality mediate the effect of backsliding. These results suggest that the public is likely to rely on heuristics when evaluating allies, just as they do when evaluating adversaries (Kertzer, Renshon, and Yarhi-Milo 2021). Finally, we find that perceptions of ally quality are separate from perceptions of moral obligations. Moral concerns and foundations are frequently cited as an important component of public opinion toward using force (Kertzer et al. 2014; Tomz and Weeks 2013, 2021; Tomz, Weeks, and Bansak 2023). Controlling for

how backsliding shapes the public's perception of a moral obligation to an ally, perceptions of ally quality remain an important mediating factor.

Theoretical Framework

Heuristics of Ally Quality

We begin with the assumption that the public uses *heuristics* when they form beliefs and attitudes about other countries (including allies). Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier (2011) define a heuristic as, "a strategy that ignores part of the information, with the goal of making decisions more quickly, frugally, and/or accurately than more complex methods" such as rigorous empirical analysis (544). While the public could access large amounts of information about other countries, we contend that they often rely on shortcuts rather than seek out more detailed information. Heuristics have long been recognized as important by international relations scholars.[3] Mental shortcuts, including images and schema have been linked to elite beliefs about adversaries (Holsti 1967; Herrmann 1986), as well as public support for war (Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser 1999) and perceptions of other countries' resolve (Kertzer, Renshon, and Yarhi-Milo 2021).

In this article, we focus on two dimensions of ally quality. The first dimension we consider is the *compatibility* between members of an alliance. Compatibility is the belief about the extent to which two countries' interests align within the context of an alliance. Interests might be conceived in multiple ways. First, countries might be interested in an alliance to achieve either greater security or influence Morrow (1991). Alternatively, one could think of compatibility in terms of ideal points in a policy space (Gibler and Rider 2004), such as the construction of international norms, border locations, or the structure of the international order. In this conception, the closer two countries' ideal points are in this

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[3]For reviews of the literature on psychology and international relations, see Hafner-Burton et al. (2017) and Kertzer and Tingley (2018).

space, the greater the perceived compatibility. Finally, the presence of a shared adversary (Snyder 1984) might increase perceived compatibility.

The second dimension we consider is the perceived *reliability* of a country as an ally. Reliability is whether an ally will fulfill their alliance commitments, even when doing so is costly.[4] Alliances often involve formal obligations from members (Leeds et al. 2002). For example, a defensive alliance such as NATO obligates one or more of its members to use military force to defend another. Alternatively, a neutrality agreement explicitly obligates members to stay out of military conflicts involving the other. Other alliance obligations might include providing financial support and military aid. For example, as a part of its alliance with the U.S., Japan is obligated to provide financial support for U.S. military bases located in Japan. Outside of formal obligations, allies, especially weaker countries, might be expected to support an ally's foreign policy priorities in forums such as international organizations.
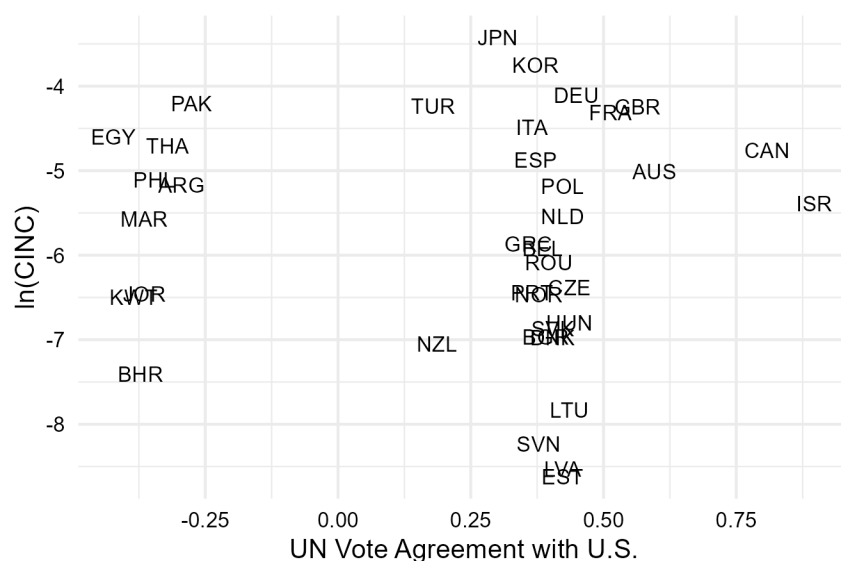
More compatible and reliable partners are likely to lead to more public support for an alliance because alliances are *inherently costly*. Entering an alliance can serve as a costly signal of support for another country (Fuhrmann and Sechser 2014). *Failing* to fulfill these obligations is likely to cause reputational harm (Gibler 2008; Mattes 2012; LeVeck and Narang 2017; Narang and LeVeck 2019). On the other hand, *fulfilling* one's obligations is also costly. In some cases, fulfilling an obligation might entail waging war against a shared adversary. For example, is North Korea were to invade South Korea or Russia were to invade a NATO member, the U.S. would be obligated to declare war in response. In other cases, it might involve providing financial assistance or supporting a non-preferred foreign policy position. We contend that the public will be more supportive of paying the costs associated with fulfilling alliance obligations as perceptions of ally quality increase. More specifically, when the public believes an ally is both compatible and reliable, they will be more supportive of fulfilling alliance obligations.

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[4]Defined in this way, reliability is conceptually related to the concept of resolve. For a similar definition of resolve see Kertzer (2016).

What heuristics might the public use to form beliefs about reliability and compatibility? Some might look at military capability and spending. In a weaker country, having a strong ally might be one of the most important heuristic criteria. Even in stronger countries, the public may be interested in military capability. In recent years, much of the public debate about U.S. alliances has revolved around NATO burden-sharing. In 2024, a majority of the U.S. public supported encouraging NATO allies to increase military spending, with approximately one third supporting withholding security guarantees to force an increase in allied military spending (Smeltz and Daalder 2024). Another heuristic the public might use, especially for compatibility, is foreign policy similarity. Others might look at a country's past actions, including whether it honored its alliance commitments before, economic factors such as trade, or sociocultural factors such as race and religion.

Figure 1: U.S. Allies Vary on Capabilities and U.N. Voting Agreement

Notes. We include all U.S. NATO and non-NATO major allies as of 2004. CINC scores taken from Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey (1972). U.N. voting scores taken from Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2017). All data from 2015.

Reliance on heuristics is likely to generate substantial variation in the perceived quality of a (potential) ally.[5] Crucially, there is also meaningful variation *even among allies and partners.* Figure 1 shows a snapshot of both the military capabilities of U.S. security partners and foreign policy similarity between the U.S. and its partners in 2015. Among U.S. security partners, there is substantial variation in military capability and foreign policy similarity with the U.S. Some, like NATO allies including the United Kingdom, Canada, and France, and non-NATO allies including Japan and South Korea, have both high levels of military capability and high foreign policy similarity. Others like Egypt, Pakistan, Lithuania, and Estonia, fall on an off-diagonal, scoring high on either capabilities or foreign policy similarity, but not the other. Thus, if the public relies on heuristics, some allies are likely to be perceived as being higher quality than others.

While we acknowledge that there are likely to be multiple heuristics on which the public draws, in this article, we focus on the role of *regime type* and *transitions.* Figure 1 also shows that the U.S. allies and partners that score high on both capabilities and foreign policy similarity tend to be *democracies.* This suggests that regime type might be a particularly useful for the public to evaluate the quality of an ally.

Backsliding and Support for Abrogation

What constitutes democratic backsliding? Bermeo (2016) defines democratic backsliding as "the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy" (5). This definition is broad enough to encapsulate a wide spectrum of cases ranging from a slow and moderate erorsion of democracy to a sudden self-coup. Although there are a variety of possible backsliding pathways, many fall under the umbrella of *executive aggrandizement* (Bermeo 2016; Haggard and Kaufman 2021; Riedl, McCoy, Roberts, and Somer 2024). Executive aggrandizement "occurs when elected executives weaken checks on executive power one by one, undertaking a series of institutional changes

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[5]As we show in SI.E, U.S. partners are systematically different from non-partners in that they tend to have more military capabilities and higher rates of U.N. voting agreement than non-partners.

that hamper the power of opposition forces to challenge executive preferences" (Bermeo 2016, 10). Drawing on case studies of backsliding from around the world, Riedl, McCoy, Roberts, and Somer (2024) identify three distinct forms of executive aggrandizement – legislative capture, plebiscitary override, and executive power grab – all united by the central role of an elected executive in undermining democratic institutions.

Democratic backsliding sits at the intersection of two important factors that are likely to serve as heuristics when democratic publics evaluate allies. The first of these factors is regime *type*. Democracies are thought to have a shared set of norms and values that help contribute to cooperation (Doyle 1986). Shared democracy is correlated with shared foreign policy preferences (Gartzke 1998, 2000; Oneal and Russett 1999). Democracies are also likely to have market economies (Przeworski 1991) and relatively free trade (Mansfield, Milner, and Rosendorff 2000; Milner and Kubota 2005). Finally, democracies tend to enter conflict to protect or obtain public goods (Graham, Gartzke, and Fariss 2017). Thus, democracies are likely to have policy alignment in multiple domains. While we do not expect the public to be aware of each of these stylized facts, we do contend that they are likely to have a heuristic that democracies tend to have *shared interests*.

Democratic publics are also more likely to view other democracies as more reliable than autocracies. Renshon, Yarhi-Milo, and Kertzer (2023) show that democratic countries have a reputation for military capability and success among other democracies. This reputation is well earned given that democracies tend to win a disproportionate number of conflicts in which they participate, and they tend to fight very hard in those conflicts (Lake 1992; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999; Reiter and Stam 2010). Democracies are also likely to be viewed as wealthier than autocracies (Dafoe, Zhang, and Caughey 2018). These factors suggest that democratic publics are likely to view other democracies as more reliable from an *instrumental* perspective (i.e., they have the capability and capacity to fulfill obligations).

Separate from instrumental concerns, various systems of checks and balances associated with democratic governance are likely to increase the perceived reliability of democratic

allies compared to autocracies.[6] Democratic institutions typically involve a variety of vertical (elections), horizontal (legislative and judicial), and social (civil society) accountability mechanisms on executives. In turn, these mechanisms are thought to increase the *credibility* of democracies by facilitating the imposition of costs on leaders that renege on agreements (Fearon 1994, 1997; Schultz 1999; Hegre, Bernhard, and Teorell 2020; Barnhart et al. 2020). These mechanisms are also particularly visible. Due to this visibility, accountability mechanisms are more likely to be known by the public in another country. For example, in 2024, U.S. media covered elections in democracies around the world, including Japan, the United Kingdom, India, Mexico, and more. Awareness of of accountability mechanisms is likely to increase the public's perception that a democracy will 'keep its word' and fulfill its obligations.

In addition to regime type, the second factor that constitutes democratic backsliding is the presence or increased possibility of a regime *transition*. Regime transitions can be chaotic times for countries and generate uncertainty about foreign policy positions and the stability of pre-existing ties. Transitions are correlated with both an increased risk of alliance (Leeds and Savun 2007) and rivalry (Saunders 2023) termination, suggesting that there is a broad realignment in terms of foreign policy priorities and positions post-transition. This sense of uncertainty is likely to trickle down to the public through the media as images of protests or military troops, and articles about the erosion of previous institutions spread around the world.

Although all regime transitions are likely to increase uncertainty about reliability and compatibility, we contend that democratic backsliding is most likely to induce *concern* about an ally. As an ally transitions to democracy, there are likely to be strong domestic and international incentives to adopt (1) closer ties with other democracies, and (2) policy positions largely consistent with other democracies. Historically, democratic transitions are also likely to be preceded by increases in executive constraints, which further increase after

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[6]This is not to say that autocracies cannot have checks on executive authority (Weeks 2008, 2012), just that among democratic publics, democracies are likely to have a comparative advantage.

the transition (Boldt 2025). Together, these factors are likely to color the uncertainty of a transition with a sense of optimism about the future direction of the country. However, in the case of democratic backsliding (and possible authoritarian reversal), concerns about an autocracy's compatibility and reliability are likely to magnify concerns raised by transitions.

To help illustrate these different dynamics, consider the case of Tunisia. In the 21st century, Tunisia has experienced both a democratic transition during the 2011 Arab Spring and then subsequent democratic backsliding since 2019 under President Kais Saied. Qualitatively, both of these events led to changes in Tunisian foreign policy. Following its democratic transition during the Jasmine Revolution, Tunisia adopted closer ties to the U.S. and has received large amounts of military aid as a non-NATO major ally. Under democratic backsliding, Tunisia has sought closer ties with non-democratic U.S. adversaries, including China, Russia, and Iran (Arieff 2025).[7] Outside of foreign policy positions and international relations, there are also signs of norm and value change in the shadow of backsliding. For example, since 2021, multiple international non-governmental human rights organizations have publicly alleged abuses by the Saied government.[8]

Other Mechanisms

While we focus on the role of compatibility and reliability, we acknowledge that there are likely to be additional mechanisms. Here, we consider two possible alternatives: reputational harm and moral obligations. Both of these mechanisms focus on the *costs of reneging on an ally*, instead of the quality of an ally. Rather than changing the public's perceptions of the ally, backsliding in an ally might reduce the perceived costs of not fulfilling an alliance agreement. For reputation, the costs of abrogating an alliance are external, result from the (in)action of others in the future, and may not be felt by the individual. In the case of

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[7]However, democratic backsliding did not eliminate either Tunisia's status as a non-NATO major power ally or U.S. military aid.

[8]See, for example: Amnesty International, "Tunisia: Alarming increase in number of civilians facing military courts," November 10, 2021. Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: Wave of Arrests Targets Critics and Opposition Figures," February 23, 2023.

perceived moral obligations, the costs of reneging on an ally are psychological and are more likely to stem from self-conception.

Reputation costs.

One additional mechanism is that the public may not believe there will be meaningful reputation costs for abandoning an ally after it experiences backsliding. Failing to fulfill alliance obligations has reputational consequences, especially for future alliances (Gibler 2008; Mattes 2012; LeVeck and Narang 2017; Narang and LeVeck 2019), helping alliances to serve as costly signals (Fuhrmann and Sechser 2014). However, regime transitions are correlated with increased alliance abrogation (Leeds and Savun 2007), suggesting that leaders may not anticipate suffering reputational harm when there are major shifts since commitments were made. It is possible, and perhaps likely, that the public applies a similar logic when evaluating the consequences of abandoning an ally. In addition, if democracies do have reputations (Renshon, Yarhi-Milo, and Kertzer 2023), and their publics want to maintain this reputation, it may be comparatively easier to abandon an ally that is not a democracy. Together, these factors suggest that democratic publics may support abrogating an alliance when there is democratic backsliding because there less of a reputation cost to doing so.

Moral obligations.

Another possibility is that backsliding alters the perceived moral obligation to use military force. Moral obligations, concerns, and values have previously been linked to attitudes toward using military force to help allies (Tomz and Weeks 2021; Tomz, Weeks, and Bansak 2023), as well as attitudes toward military force generally (Tomz and Weeks 2013, 2020; Kertzer et al. 2014). Moral foundations theory divides five distinct, universal pillars of moral systems into two categories: individualizing foundations focused on equality and justice, and binding foundations focused on order and in-group cohesion (Kertzer et al. 2014). Both types of foundations may encourage democratic publics to support using force to aid a democratic ally. However, following democratic backsliding, the public may not perceive the ally as being part of their in-group (i.e., the group of democracies) and the public may

view using force to help a dictator as unjust. Thus, democratic backsliding may decrease the amount of perceived moral obligation to use military force to help an ally. In turn, by reducing perceived moral obligations, democratic backsliding might reduce the psychological costs associated with an individual's support for abrogation.

Context: The U.S. Alliance Network

In this article, we focus on how democratic backsliding within the U.S. alliance network affects U.S. public support for fulfilling alliance obligations. In the decades following the end of WWII, the U.S. has constructed a sophisticated and formidable network of alliances and security partnerships spanning the globe. Some of these, including NATO and bilateral agreements with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, involve formal defense agreements with deep levels of policy integration and institutionalization. Despite some debate about the threat of entanglement this web of partnerships may pose (e.g., Beckley 2015), there remains a bipartisan consensus among key policymakers that security cooperation is crucial for U.S. foreign policy.[9] Furthermore, the U.S. public generally supports a foreign policy involving cooperation with allies and partners, especially NATO allies (Smeltz and Daalder 2024).

In particular, cooperation *with other democracies* has been central to the post-WWII U.S. alliance network. NATO began as a method of collective defense and deterrence against possible Soviet aggression during the Cold War. During the first round of NATO expansion, U.S. President Clinton specifically pointed to a desire to cooperate with other democracies, saying, "we must keep NATO's doors open to new democratic members, so that other nations will have an incentive to deepen their democracies."[10] In the Indo-Pacific, U.S. alliances

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[9]Paul McLeary, "Hegseth warns Asia allies that China threat is 'imminent'." *Politico*, May 30, 2025. https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/30/hegseth-warns-asia-allies-that-china-threat-is-imminent-00378700. Joohee Cho, "Secretary of Defense underlines importance of alliance in first trip to South Korea." *ABC News*, March 17, 2021. https://abcnews.go.com/International/secretary-defense-underlines-importance-alliance-trip-south-korea/story?id=76506234.

[10]See: https://clintonwhitehouse5.archives.gov/WH/EOP/NSC/html/nsc-05.html.

with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand place a high priority on the defense of democracy and democratic norms, in addition to the threat of China.

Figure 2: The U.S. Public Is More Favorable toward Other Democracies

Notes. Favorability determined based on whether a respondent indicated they were "Very favorable" or "Mostly favorable" toward a country. Error bars correspond to the 95% CI of the group mean. Data taken from Gallup: `https://news.gallup.com/poll/1624/perceptions-foreign-countries.aspx`.

Domestic political factors are likely to contribute to this widespread cooperation with other democracies. McManus and Yarhi-Milo (2017) argue that democratically elected elites are more likely to provide *public* signals of support to other democracies because democratic publics prefer cooperation with other democracies. Drawing on U.S. public opinion data from 1989 to 2013, they show that the U.S. tends to have a more favorable view of democracies than autocracies. In Figure 2, we replicate and extend their analysis using Gallup data from 2000 to 2024. We reach the same conclusion: the U.S. public generally has a more favorable opinion of other democracies than it does of nondemocratic countries. Importantly, this favorable opinion has not appreciably declined in the last decade. If anything, the favorability toward other democracies appears to *increase* in more recent years. We confirm this increase is statistically significant using a *t*-test of the difference in means (est. = 9%, 95% CI = [5%, 12%], $p < .001$).

Expectations

During the 21st century, optimism for the spread of democracy has given way to concern about democratic backsliding, even among U.S. allies.[11] Several NATO allies, including Hungary (Enyedi and Mikola 2024), Poland (Tworzecki 2024), and Turkey (Somer 2024), have experienced democratic backsliding as authoritarian-minded executives successfully captured national legislatures. Non-NATO major allies, including Tunisia (Blackman 2024), have also experienced backsliding.[12] Against the backdrop of backsliding, will the U.S. public still be willing to pay the costs associated with fulfilling alliance obligations?

Generally speaking, we expect that *democratic backsliding in a U.S. ally will reduce support for taking costly actions to fulfill alliance obligations by reducing perceptions of ally compatibility and reliability* (see SI.A for preregistered hypotheses). Because U.S. alliances tend to involve a formal commitment for the U.S. to use military force to protect its allies, we focus on attitudes related to the use of force. We expect that when the U.S. public is exposed to information that an ally has undergone backsliding, they will be less supportive of using force to help an ally that has been invaded. Disentangling the components of backsliding, we expect that the public will be more supportive of aiding democratic allies, while less supportive of aiding allies that undergo regime transitions. Furthermore, we anticipate that democratic backsliding will be particularly pernicious and reduce public support for using force more than transitions to democracy. Focusing on our proposed mechanisms, we expect that exposure to information about democratic backsliding will reduce the U.S. perceptions that an ally is compatible (shares U.S. interests) and is reliable (will fulfill its obligations).

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[11]Some debate the extent to which backsliding is a concern (Little and Meng 2024).

[12]Non-NATO major allies enjoy access to special, legally protected forms of military aid, assistance, and cooperation. Even when there is no formal alliance, U.S. law specifically uses the term 'ally' to refer to these countries.

Study 1: Disentangling Regime Type and Transitions

Our first experiment (Study 1) focused on disentangling the effects of regime type and transitions on the public's support for using military force to help an ally. Study 1 ($n = 1,605$) was embedded within the Primary Election Survey in California, Nevada, and Michigan prior to their respective 2024 U.S. Presidential primary elections.[13] Participants read an experimental vignette describing a scenario where a US ally is invaded. Using a between-subjects factorial design, we randomized (1) the current regime type of the US ally, (2) whether the ally experienced a regime transition since becoming an ally, and (3) the geographic region of the conflict.[14] Our primary outcome of interest is support for military force, which we measured using expressed (dis)agreement with the statement "[t]he United States should use the military to help its ally Country B" on a five-point Likert scale where higher values indicate more agreement.

Table 1 presents estimates of the effect of regime type, transitions, and democratic backsliding on the U.S. public's support for using military force to fulfill an alliance obligation. In Model 1, we interact a dummy variable indicating whether the U.S. ally is currently a democracy (*Democracy*) with a dummy variable indicating whether the ally experienced a regime transition since becoming a U.S. ally (*Transition*), while controlling for geographic region in the vignette. In Model 2, we also control for pretreatment hawkishness.[15] Table 1 (A) provides coefficient estimates for *Democracy*, *Transition*, and the interaction between the two. Table 1 (B) presents the estimated average marginal effects (AMEs) of both regime type and regime transition. Finally, Table 1 (C) shows the estimated effect of democratic backsliding by comparing a stable democratic ally to an ally that transitioned to autocracy.

First, we examine how regime type and regime transitions affect public support for using military force to fulfill an alliance obligation. Focusing on AMEs, we find that the

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[13]The survey firm Verasight was responsible for sampling. The sample included U.S. adults living in California, Michigan, and Nevada and an oversample of likely primary voters.

[14]The result is a 2x2x5 factorial design, see also SI.A.

[15]We did not preregister Model 2, but include it to attempt to increase the precision of estimates, especially the interaction term between *Democracy* and *Transition*.

Table 1: Effect of Regime Type and Transitions on Support for Military Force (Study 1)

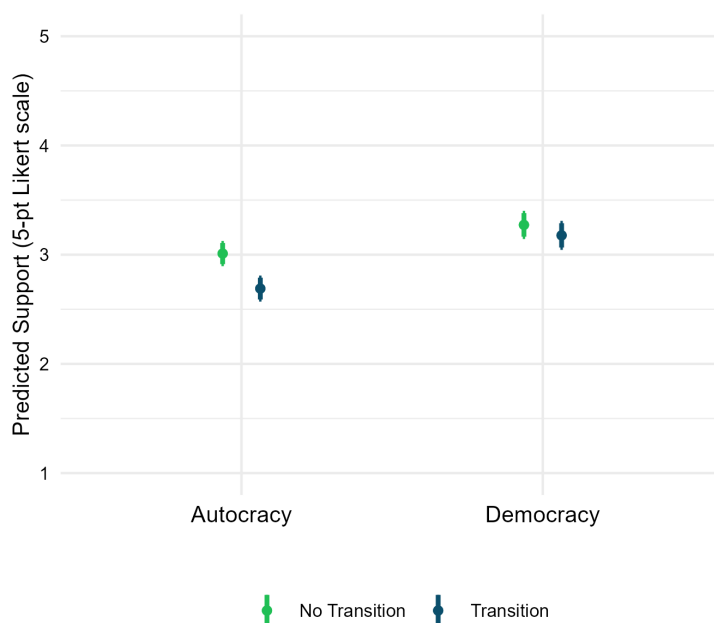|	Unadjusted	Adjusted for Hawkishness
	(1)	(2)
Panel A: Coefficient Estimates		
Democracy	0.27***	0.26***
	[0.10, 0.44]	[0.09, 0.44]
Transition	−0.30***	−0.32***
	[−0.47, −0.14]	[−0.49, −0.15]
Democracy x Transition	0.20	0.22$^+$
	[−0.05, 0.45]	[−0.02, 0.47]
Panel B: Average Marginal Effects		
Democracy	0.37***	0.37***
	[0.24, 0.49]	[0.25, 0.50]
Transition	−0.21***	−0.21***
	[−0.33, −0.09]	[−0.34, −0.09]
Panel C: Backsliding Estimates		
Democratic Backsliding	−0.57***	−0.58***
	[−0.75, −0.4]	[−0.76, −0.41]
Num.Obs.	1594	1575
R2	0.030	0.046

Notes. $^+p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All estimates control for the randomized geographic region in the vignette. Support for use of force measures using a five-point Likert scale. See also Table B.1 in SI.B.

U.S. public responds differently to information about an ally's regime type and whether it has experienced a regime transition. Averaging across whether there has been a regime transition, the U.S. public is more willing to use military force to fulfill an obligation to a democratic ally than an autocratic ally ($p < .001$).[16] In addition, averaging across regime type, the U.S. public is less willing to use military force to fulfill an obligation to an ally that has undergone a regime transition ($p < .001$). This pattern is consistent with our

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[16]We also preregistered a hypothesis that support for the use of force would be higher for a stable democracy than a stable autocracy, which we find support for ($p < .001$).

theoretical expectations. It also suggests that the U.S. public relies on both regime type and transitions when forming an opinion about whether they support taking costly action to fulfill an alliance obligation. However, regime *type* appears to be a particularly influential heuristic. Substantively, the AME of the ally's regime type is equal to approximately 30% of a standard deviation change in support for the use of force. In contrast, the AME of regime transition is equal to about 15% standard deviation change.

Figure 3: Predicted Support for Using Military Force (Study 1)

Notes. Estimates are predicted group means, holding covariates constant at observed values, with 95% (thinner) and 90% (thicker) CIs. Estimates based on Model 1 in Table 1. See also Table B.1 in SI.B.

We also find evidence consistent with our general expectations about how backsliding will affect U.S. public opinion toward allies. To estimate the effect of backsliding, we compare support for the use of force when participants read about a stable democratic ally to one that transitioned to autocracy since becoming a U.S. ally. Although our Study 1 estimates are exploratory, they nonetheless reveal that democratic backsliding decreases public support for the use of force ($p < .001$). This estimated effect of backsliding is equal to approximately 45% of a standard deviation change in public support for the use of force. Furthermore, this

effect is large enough to move the public from generally supporting aiding an ally that has been invaded to generally opposing using force to help that ally (see Figure 3).

Our results also suggest that democratic backsliding is uniquely dangerous. While the interaction terms in Table 1 suggest that the effect of transition is statistically similar regardless of whether an ally transitions to democracy or autocracy, they fail to adequately capture *the direction of transition*. However, Figure 3 shows that, compared to a stable autocracy, the public is more supportive of using force to help an ally that experiences a transition to democracy. Accounting for the direction of transition, compared to a transition to democracy, democratic backsliding decreases public support for the use of force (est. $= -.75$, 95% CI $= [-1.00, -.50]$, $p < .001$). Substantively, this difference-in-differences is equivalent to approximately 60% of a standard deviation reduction in support for the use of force.

Study 2: Isolating the Effects of Backsliding

Our second experiment (Study 2) built on the findings of Study 1, focusing on the effects of democratic backsliding. One possible concern with Study 1 is the possibility of insufficient information equivalence across experimental conditions. To address this concern, in Study 2 we implemented an ENE designed to mimic a natural experiment with observational data and improve information equivalence (Dafoe, Zhang, and Caughey 2018). In our ENE, participants were told about a 'coin-flip' election due to low turnout caused by a natural disaster. In the *Control* condition, the democratic government barely won reelection and the country remains a democracy. In the *Backsliding* condition, an opposition with authoritarian tendencies won the election and subsequently eroded democratic institutions resulting in a dictatorship.[17] After the ENE, participants read a hypothetical news story about this ally

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[17]We also randomized geographic region (as in Study 1) and time since alliance formation, resulting in a 2x2x5 factorial design. For more information on the ENE vignettes, see SI.A.

being invaded that was nearly identical to the vignette we used in Study 1.[18] We fielded Study 2 in September 2025, partnering with the survey firm PureSpectrum to sample U.S. adults while implementing census quotas.

In Study 2, we measured a variety of outcomes of interest, including multiple measures of the public's willingness to fulfill alliance obligations and a range of possible mechanisms. First, we focus on public support for fulfilling obligations. Attempting to replicate the result from Study 1, we measure the public's support for using military force. One possible concern with focusing on this outcome is that using military force is perhaps the most *costly* way to fulfill an alliance obligation. Not only are there less costly ways of fulfilling an obligation, but the costs of the obligation might make the public more sensitive to changes within an alliance. To this end, in Study 2, we also measure the public's support for (1) providing military aid to the ally, and (2) imposing sanctions on the invading country. We measure each of these outcomes using seven-point Likert scales.[19]

We begin by examining the effect of democratic backsliding on the public's willingness to fulfill their country's alliance obligations. Table 2 presents results from regressions of different measures of support for fulfilling obligations on a dummy indicator for democratic backsliding, while controlling for geographic region and time since the alliance was formed and various pretreatment foreign policy attitudes. We successfully replicate our finding from Study 1: democratic backsliding reduces public support for using military force to help an ally ($p < .001$). Backsliding also has a negative effect on the public's willingness to provide military aid to an ally that is being attacked ($p < .001$) and impose sanctions on the invading country ($p < .01$). Together these results suggest that democratic backsliding leads to a general reduction in public support for fulfilling alliance obligations.

We do find some evidence to suggest that the cost of fulfilling obligations may matter. Substantively, the magnitude of effect is larger on support for using force or providing military

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[18]Due to the length of the vignette in the ENE combined with information about the invasion, our Study 2 sample only includes participants who passed a mock vignette check (Kane, Velez, and Barabas 2023).

[19]For question wording, see SI.A.

Table 2: Effect of Backsliding on Support for Fulfilling Obligations

	Use of Force	Military Aid	Sanctions
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Backsliding	−0.50***	−0.52***	−0.13**
	[−0.60, −0.39]	[−0.62, −0.42]	[−0.23, −0.03]
Num.Obs.	2675	2675	2675
R2	0.246	0.201	0.188

Notes. $^{+}p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All estimates control for the randomized geographic region and time since alliance in the vignette, and foreign policy attitudes measured pretreatment. Outcomes measured on a seven-point Likert scale. See also Table B.2 in SI.2.

aid (32-35% of a standard deviation), compared to the imposition of sanctions (10% of a standard deviation). Although the costs differ between using force and providing military aid, the effect of backsliding is substantively similar. However, there *is* a noticeable difference in the magnitude of effect when we consider public support for imposing sanctions – the least costly obligation we consider. Importantly, backsliding reduces the U.S. public's support for fulfilling alliance obligations *even when costs are relatively low*. Furthermore, it is important to contextualize the effect size we observe in regard to support for imposing sanctions. Due to imperfect treatment compliance, all estimates in Table 2 are best thought of as intent-to-treat effects. Thus, they will *underestimate* the effect of backsliding on compliers. Among compliers, we estimate that the effect of backsliding on support for the use of force and military aid can be as large as one standard deviation in magnitude (see also SI.C).

The Role of Reliability and Compatibility

Next, we examine the role that perceptions of reliability and compatibility play in shaping public opinion about fulfilling costly alliance obligations. We directly measure participants' perceptions that the U.S. and its ally have shared interests and whether the ally will be reliable in the future. We also separately measure whether participants believe the ally will

have the economic and military capability to fulfill its obligations under the alliance. Finally, we also measure alternative mechanisms, including participants' perceptions of (1) the U.S.'s reputation will suffer if it does not fulfill its alliance obligations, and (2) the U.S.'s moral obligation to help an ally. We measure each of these intermediate outcomes using seven-point Likert scales.

Our approach is particularly helpful in separating out the role of the public's perception that a U.S. ally is capable. There is reason to expect that an ally's capabilities are likely to be an influential heuristic as the public tries to determine the quality of the ally. We observe patterns consistent with this in data from Study 2. Perceptions of an ally's military and financial resources are positively correlated with perceptions of shared interests and reliability. Indeed, we find evidence that participants think about these questions similarly (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$). Furthermore, backsliding may plausibly affect the public's perception that an ally is capable, which means that it could play a particularly important role in shaping attitudes toward alliance obligations. However, from a theoretical perspective, we view compatibility and reliability as more than just synonyms for capabilities. We also find evidence to support this proposition. Using principal components analysis, we show that, while all four outcomes are positively correlated with each other, perceptions of shared interests and reliability load onto different factors than perceptions of capabilities (see SI.F).

Furthermore, we find evidence suggesting that democratic backsliding affects perceptions of shared interests and reliability differently from perceptions of an ally's capabilities. We regressed each of these four outcomes on a dummy variable indicating exposure to backsliding, while controlling for geographic region, time since alliance, and pretreatment foreign policy attitudes Table 3 shows that, across each of these four intermediate outcomes, democratic backsliding has a consistent, statistically significant negative effect ($p < .001$). Substantively, the effect of democratic backsliding ranges from approximately 40% of a standard deviation for perceptions of shared interests and reliability to approximately 20% of a standard deviation for perceptions of financial and military resources. This suggests that

information about an ally's democratic backsliding may not operate primarily by affecting perceptions of capabilities.

Table 3: Effect of Backsliding on Perceptions of Ally Quality

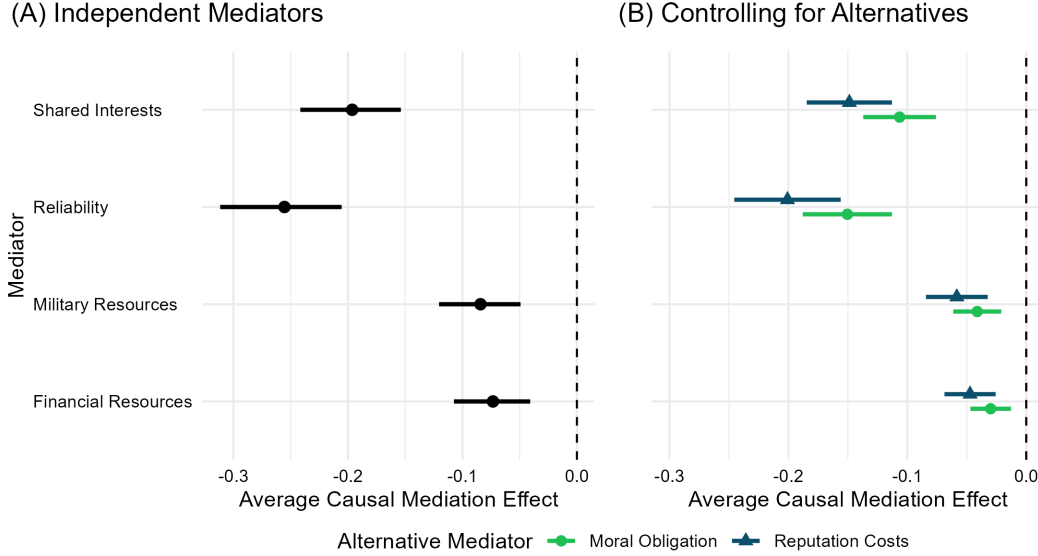|	Shared Interests	Reliability	Financial Resources	Military Resources
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Backsliding	−0.65***	−0.58***	−0.28***	−0.29***
	[−0.76, −0.54]	[−0.68, −0.48]	[−0.38, −0.17]	[−0.39, −0.18]
Num.Obs.	2623	2623	2623	2623
R2	0.160	0.196	0.122	0.130

Notes. $^{+}p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All estimates control for the randomized geographic region and time since alliance in the vignette, and foreign policy attitudes measured pretreatment. Outcomes measured on a seven-point Likert scale. See also Table B.3 in SI.B.

Next, we turn to whether perceptions of compatibility and reliability operate as mechanisms. Although backsliding affects an intermediate outcome does not mean that backsliding shapes support for fulfilling alliance obligations *through that intermediate outcome* (Blackwell, Ma, and Opacic 2024). However, our theoretical argument suggests that backsliding does indeed affect support for fulfilling obligations by changing perceptions of ally compatibility and reliability. To see whether there is evidence that this might be the case, we employ an exploratory mediation analysis. Figure 4 (A) shows the average causal mediation effect (ACME) for each of these four intermediate outcomes. We find consistent evidence that perceptions of compatibility and reliability appear to shape support for abrogation ($p < .001$ for all measures). In addition, perceptions of shared interests and reliability appear to have a stronger mediation effect than perceptions of capabilities. This also suggests that backsliding is not shaping support for abrogation primarily through changing perceptions of capabilities.

Importantly, perceptions of compatibility and reliability appear to operate as mechanisms *even while controlling for other mechanisms*. Other possible mechanisms include perceived reputation costs and moral obligations. Imai and Yamamoto (2013) develop a

Figure 4: Mediation Analysis of Reliability and Compatibility

Notes. Estimates represent the ACME, with 95% bootstrapped CIs using the quantile approach. (A) treats each mediator as independent. (B) controls for either perceived reputation costs or moral obligation, in turn.

method to estimate the ACME while controlling for other mediators. This relaxes an important assumption of traditional mediation analyses that mediators are causal independent from each other. Figure 4 (B) shows the estimated ACME when we control for these other mediators. When we control for either perceived reputation costs or moral obligations, the size of the ACME decreases slightly. However, we still find that each of our measures of compatibility and reliability have a negative and statistically significant ACME on support for fulfilling obligations.[20]

We acknowledge that, while mediation analysis is useful for establishing whether an intermediate outcome might operate as a mechanisms, it nonetheless relies on stringent assumptions. One assumption is the sequential ignorability assumption. We try to improve the plausibility of this assumption in two ways. First, we control for foreign policy attitudes when estimating the ACME in Figure 4 (A). Second, in Figure 4 (B), we employ Imai and Yamamoto (2013)'s approach to control for alternative mediators while estimating the ACME.

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[20]This methodology does not accommodate control for multiple alternative mechanisms at once, so we control for alternative mechanisms in turn.

This second analysis improves the plausibility of the sequential ignorability assumption, but in turn relies a homogeneous interaction assumption which maintains that the amount of interaction between backsliding and primary mediator is constant across participants. We also conduct a series of sensitivity analyses to probe the consequences of violations of these assumptions (see SI.D). Our estimates in Figure 4 (A) are robust to a large amount of un-modeled confounding. Although results for resource-focused mediators in Figure 4 (B) are less robust to violations of the homogeneous interactions assumptions, results for shared interests and reliability are quite robust.

Political Consequences of Backsliding

One possible concern with focusing on attitudes toward fulfilling alliance obligations is that these attitudes may not have straightforward political consequences. To address the concern, in Study 2 we asked participants to rate their willingness to vote for a copartisan first-term U.S. President if that President did not use military force to help an ally that was invaded.[21] In Table 4 we show that when a U.S. ally has undergone backsliding, the public is more likely to vote for a President that refrains from using military force to aid the ally ($p < .001$). Substantively, the effect we observe is relatively small (approximately 12% of a standard deviation).

Furthermore, this effect generalizes across large segments of the U.S. public. We find that Democrats, Republicans, and Independents are similarly affected by backsliding when they consider supporting a President that does not use military force to help an ally. Foreign policy attitudes such as a participant's belief that alliances are important to U.S. foreign policy do not appear to moderate the effect of backsliding. The one exception is hawkishness, which may moderate the effect of democratic backsliding. However, the most hawkish members of the public still tend to support a copartisan that abandons an ally.

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[21]For self-identified Independents, we randomized the party of the President to be either Democrat or Republican.
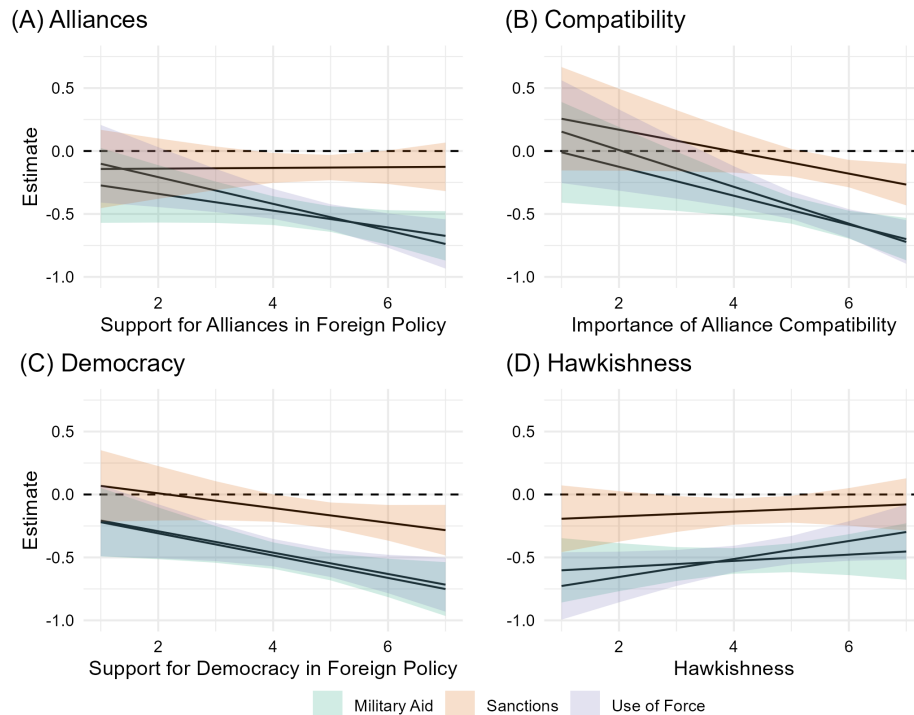
Table 4: Effect of Backsliding on Vote Intentions

	Copartisan Voting					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Backsliding	0.19***	0.29***	0.19***	0.19***	0.19***	0.19***
	[0.08, 0.30]	[0.09, 0.48]	[0.08, 0.30]	[0.08, 0.30]	[0.08, 0.30]	[0.08, 0.30]
Backsliding x Independent		−0.10				
		[−0.37, 0.17]				
Backsliding x Republican		−0.18				
		[−0.44, 0.09]				
Backsliding x Alliances			−0.01			
			[−0.10, 0.07]			
Backsliding x Compatibility				0.07		
				[−0.03, 0.16]		
Backsliding x Democracy					−0.06	
					[−0.14, 0.02]	
Backslding x Hawkishness						−0.09*
						[−0.17, −0.01]
Num.Obs.	2666	2666	2666	2666	2666	2666
R2	0.025	0.053	0.025	0.026	0.026	0.027

Notes. $^{+}p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All estimates adjust standard errors for the (randomized) geographic region and time since alliance in the vignette, and foreign policy attitudes measured pretreatment. Outcomes measured on a seven-point Likert scale. Foreign policy attitudes are mean-centered. See also Table B.4 in SI.B.

Instead, it is the least hawkish among the public that are more likely to reward a copartisan that abandons an ally after backsliding (see Figure G.1 in SI.G).

Finally, we examine the extent to which the effects of backsliding we observe generalize to the broader public. This is important to better understand possible electoral consequences because effects isolated to small sub-groups may fail to meaningfully alter the decisions of elected officials in democracies. Here, we focus on how various foreign policy attitudes measured moderate the effect of backsliding on support for fulfilling alliance obligations in Study 2. Figure 5 shows the conditional effect of democratic backsliding on support for using military force, providing military aid, and imposing sanctions across different levels of various foreign policy attitudes. We do find some evidence to suggest that the effects we observe are conditional upon the public's foreign policy attitudes. The effect of democratic backsliding is strongest among those that have a stronger belief that alliances are important,

Figure 5: Heterogeneous Effects of Backsliding by Foreign Policy Attitudes

Notes. Estimates represent the conditional effect of backsliding with 95% CIs calculated using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. All estimates control for the randomized geographic region and time since alliance formation as well as other foreign policy attitudes. See also Tables B.5-B.8 in SI.B.

that compatibility in an alliance is important, and that U.S. foreign public should prioritize helping other democracies. Among those that express strong disagreement with those statements, backsliding has no discernible effect. In contrast, a participants' hawkishness does not appear to moderate the effect of backsliding on support for fulfilling alliance obligations.

Discussion and Implications

In this article, we argue that democratic backsliding is likely to reduce public support for fulfilling costly alliance obligations by undermining perceptions of ally quality. Across two experiments in the U.S., we find that learning that a U.S. ally has undergone backsliding reduces the public's support for using military force to help the ally after it is invaded.

We also find that the public responds to backsliding different than transitions to democracy, indicating that it poses a unique risk to existing democratic alliances. In addition, the public appears more willing to reward a leader that abandons an ally when the ally experiences backsliding. Finally, we find consistent evidence that the public's perception of ally quality are important factors shaping opinion on fulfilling obligations.

Our results are defined by important scope conditions: instances of democratic backsliding within military alliances that result in the strong possibility of authoritarian reversal or transition to dictatorship. These conditions mean that our results may not necessarily extend to the formation of new alliances or be indicative of how the public within a non-democracy would respond to democratic backsliding. However, these conditions do apply to important contemporary instances of backsliding, including NATO members Hungary and Turkey. While we focus on an extreme end of democratic backsliding, we expect that the effects we observe would be similar in instances where backsliding occurs but an ally still remains a democracy. In such a situation, we expect the magnitude of the effect to attenuate, but nonetheless be consistent with what we observe here.

Crucially, our findings also suggest additional scope conditions that are likely to determine when and where our results might hold in other contexts. Namely, backsliding is most likely to reduce the public's support for maintaining alliances when the public generally believes (1) alliances are valuable, (2) allies should be compatible, and (3) their country's foreign policy should support other democracies. We contend that these conditions are likely to hold in most democracies around the world. As such, we expect that our primary results would hold in most democracies that use alliances as a key part of their foreign policy. Ultimately, we leave it to future research to examine where these conditions exist.

While we present empirical evidence consistent with our argument that perceptions of compatibility and reliability serve as mechanisms, we acknowledge that this evidence relies on stringent assumptions. We use a variety of approaches to improve the plausibility of these assumptions and present multiple sensitivity analyses to examine the consequences of vio-

lating these assumptions. The bulk of the evidence we present here suggests perceptions of ally quality mediate the effect of backsliding on support for fulfilling costly obligations. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that future research can employ experimental designs to further improve the credibility of assumptions required to identify the causal effect of mechanisms. In this way, we view our approach as an important first step in understanding how backsliding shapes opinion toward allies and fulfilling alliance obligations.

Finally, this article has important policy implications for democratic policymakers navigating security threats, as well as implications for future research. From a policy perspective, we show that perceptions of ally quality are important factors shaping the public's support for taking costly actions to fulfill alliance obligations. Policymakers who hope to maintain existing alliances would do well to consider and monitor how foreign publics perceive their country. Developing deep, positive ties with local communities can help foster long-term alliances. However, actions that undermine how a country is perceived abroad risk undermining even established alliances. Our results also raise important questions for future research. We show that backsliding may increase the political benefits of abrogation. Future research can examine just how much these benefits matter for winning elections and whether there is a similar punishment for politicians that cooperate with states that experience backsliding.

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Something is Rotten in the Alliance: Democratic Backsliding Reduces Public Support for Aiding Allies

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Supplementary Information

Contents

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A: Experimental Design

A.1: Treatment Wording

Figure A.1: Study 1 Experimental Vignettes

Please carefully consider the following hypothetical scenario.

Country A and Country B are two countries located in [**South America / Africa / the Middle East /Asia / Eastern Europe**]. Country A launched a military attack on Country B so that Country A could gain territory and increase its power and resources. Country A is not a democracy and does not have high levels of trade with the United States. Country B has an alliance with the United States. **When Country B formed an alliance with the United States, Country B was a [democracy/dictatorship].**

Before being attacked, Country B [stopped holding free and fair elections and became a dictatorship/transitioned to being a democracy and holds free and fair elections].[1] Both Country A and Country B have less than half the conventional military strength of the United States and neither side possesses nuclear weapons.

Figure A.2: Study 2 Experimental Vignettes

Over the next several screens, you will read about a hypothetical scenario involving Country B, an ally of the United States, before answering questions about the scenario you read.

[**Five years ago/Several decades ago**], Country B was an emerging democracy in [**South America/Africa/the Middle East/Asia/Eastern Europe**]. It elected a president and other government officials in a series of free and fair elections. The president of Country B entered the country into an alliance with the United States. In this alliance, Country B agreed to help defend U.S. interests in the region. In return, the U.S. would provide support for improving citizen living conditions in Country B and agreed to defend Country B if it was attacked. At the time, the United Nations issued a report concluding that without the current president, there was a very high probability the country's opposition party would overthrow the government and try to establish a dictatorship.

A year ago, a natural disaster struck Country B. As a result of this disaster, the next regularly scheduled election had much lower turnout than previous elections. [During this election, the current administration won in a close race. Observers characterized the elections as a "coin-flip" because of how narrow the victory was. Now, **Country B is still a democracy**./During this election, the opposition won in a close race. Observers characterized the elections as a "coin-flip" because of how narrow the victory was. Shortly after the transition of power, the new government declared martial law and cancelled future elections. Now, **Country B is a dictatorship.**]

Now, please consider a hypothetical news report you might read about Country B.

Report: U.S. Ally Attacked

- Country A launched a military attack on Country B, a U.S. ally.

- According to experts, Country A aims to gain territory and increase its power and resources.

- Like Country B, Country A is located in [South America / Africa / the Middle East / Asia / Eastern Europe].

- Country A is not a democracy and does not have high levels of trade with the United States.

- Both Country A and Country B have less than half the conventional military strength of the United States and neither side possesses nuclear weapons.

A.2: Covariates and Outcomes

Study 1

To measure our primary and secondary outcomes, respondents were asked to gauge their support for military intervention aiding Country B (honoring the alliance), potential reputational costs for the US for not honoring its alliance commitment, and the value of alliances on a **five-point Likert scale.** [Strongly agree: 5 / Somewhat agree: 4 / Neither agree nor disagree: 3 / Somewhat disagree: 2 / Strongly disagree: 1]

"Keeping in mind the scenario you just read, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

Alliance Commitment: "The United States should use the military to help its ally Country B."
Reputation Costs: "If the United States does not use its military, it will harm the United States' standing in the international community."]
Alliance Importance: "Alliances are an important part of maintaining the United States' national security."

We also measured two pretreatment covariates.
Hawkishness: "Generally speaking, the United States should use the military to deal with problems." [Strongly agree: 5 / Somewhat agree: 4 / Neither agree nor disagree: 3 / Somewhat disagree: 2 / Strongly disagree: 1]
Party ID: A seven-point party ID variable constructed in two steps. The first asks participants to indicate whether they identify as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, No Preference, or Other. If participants do not identify as a Democrat or Republican, they are then asked whether they lean toward one party or the other, or if they identify with neither party. If participants to identify as a Democrat or Republican, they are asked whether they identify as a "strong" or "not so strong" member of the party. Using this two-step measurement we will construct a seven-point party ID variable.

Study 2

We measured multiple primary and secondary outcomes using 7-point Likert scales:
Military Intervention: "How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement: The United States should use the military to help its ally, Country B." [Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]
Military Aid: "Would you say the United States should increase or decrease military aid to Country B?" [Decrease a lot, Decrease, Decrease a little, Neither increase nor decrease, Increase a little, Increase, Increase a lot]
Sanctions: "How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement: the United States should place economic sanctions on Country A after it invaded Country B?" [Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Copartisan Voting: "At the time the attack on Country B occurred, the U.S. President was a [Republican/Democrat – coded based on partisanship of participant and randomized for Independents] in their first term in office. Suppose the President did not send its military to help Country B. How likely would be to vote for this president?" [Not at all likely, Not likely, Somewhat likely, Likely, Very likely, Extremely likely, Certain]

Reputation Cost: "How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement: If the United States does not use its military in this scenario, it will harm the United States' standing in the international community." [Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Moral Obligations: "How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement: The United States has a moral obligation to send its military to defend its ally, Country B, that was attacked." [Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Shared Interests: "How would you describe the foreign policy interests and goals of the United States and its ally Country B?" [Very different, Different, A little different, Neither different nor similar, A little similar, Similar, Very similar]

Reliability: "In alliances, countries are often required to fulfill certain obligations. Those that fulfill their obligations are considered reliable. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement: Country B will be a reliable ally in the future." [Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Financial Resources: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Country B will provide the necessary financial resources to accomplish the goals of its alliance with the US." [Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Military Resources: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Country B will provide the necessary military resources to accomplish the goals of its alliance with the US." [Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Factual Manipulation Check: "Thinking about Country B (the U.S. ally) in the scenario you read, was Country B a democracy or an autocracy?" [Full dictatorship, Dictatorship, Weak dictatorship, Neither democracy nor dictatorship, Weak democracy, Democracy, Full democracy]

We also measured several pretreatment covariates.

Hawkishness: "Generally speaking, the United States should use the military to deal with international problems." [Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Democracy: "Generally speaking, the United States should use its foreign policy to support other democracies, even if it is costly to do so." [Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Alliances: "Generally speaking, the United States should use its foreign policy to support its allies, even if it is costly to do so." [Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Compatibility Preference: "How important is it to you that the United States and

its allies share similar foreign policy goals?" [Not at all important, Not important, Not really important, Neither important nor not important, Slightly important, Important, Very important]

Party ID: "Generally speaking, which of the following best describes your political preference?" [Strong Democrat, Not very strong Democrat, Lean Democrat, Independent, Lean Republican, Not very strong Republican, Strong Republican]

A.3: Preregistered Hypotheses

Study 1
H1: *Support for the use of military force will be higher if the U.S. ally is a democracy than if the U.S. ally is an autocracy.*
H1b: *Support for the use of military force will be higher if the U.S. ally is a stable democracy than if the US ally is a stable autocracy.*
H2: *Support for the use of military force will be lower if the U.S. ally experienced a regime change than if the U.S. ally did not experience a regime change.*
H3: *Support for the use of military force will be higher if a U.S. ally transitions to democracy than if it transitions to autocracy*

Study 2
H1: *Support for the use of military force will be higher if a U.S. ally is a stable democracy than if a U.S. ally has undergone democratic backsliding and become and an autocracy.*
H2: *Support for the provision of military aid will be higher if a U.S. ally is a stable democracy than if a U.S. ally has undergone democratic backsliding and become an autocracy.*
H3: *Support for the imposition of sanctions on an initiator will be higher if a U.S. ally is a stable democracy than if a U.S. ally has undergone democratic backsliding and become an autocracy.*
H4: *Perceptions of ally reliability will be higher if a U.S. ally is a stable democracy than if a U.S. ally has undergone democratic backsliding and become an autocracy.*
H5: *Perceptions of ally compatibility will be higher if a U.S. ally is a stable democracy than if a U.S. ally has undergone democratic backsliding and become an autocracy.*

Table A.1: Preregistered Hypotheses Summary

Study	Hypothesis	Direction	Empirical Support
Study 1	H1	$+$	✓
	H1b	$+$	✓
	H2	$-$	✓
	H3	$+$	
Study 2	H1	$+$	✓
	H2	$+$	✓
	H3	$+$	
	H4	$+$	✓
	H5	$+$	✓

Notes. A ✓ indicates that we find that there is a statistically significant effect consistent with our preregistered hypothesis.

B: Tables

Table B.1: Full Regression Results for Table 1 and Figure 1 in the Main Text

	Unadjusted	Adjusted for Hawkishness
	(1)	(2)
Democracy	0.27***	0.26***
	[0.10, 0.44]	[0.09, 0.44]
Transition	−0.30***	−0.32***
	[−0.47, −0.14]	[−0.49, −0.15]
Democracy x Transition	0.20	0.22+
	[−0.05, 0.45]	[−0.02, 0.47]
Eastern Europe	0.08	0.09
	[−0.11, 0.28]	[−0.10, 0.28]
Asia	0.13	0.12
	[−0.08, 0.33]	[−0.08, 0.33]
Africa	0.12	0.13
	[−0.08, 0.32]	[−0.07, 0.32]
Middle East	0.08	0.09
	[−0.12, 0.29]	[−0.11, 0.29]
Hawkishness		0.13***
		[0.08, 0.19]
Num.Obs.	1594	1575
R2	0.030	0.046

Notes. $^{+}p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All covariates are mean-centered. Latin America is the omitted geographic region. Support for use of force measures using a five-point Likert scale.

Table B.2: Full Regression Results for Table 2 in the Main Text

	Use of Force	Military Aid	Sanctions
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Backsliding	−0.50***	−0.52***	−0.13**
	[−0.60, −0.39]	[−0.62, −0.42]	[−0.23, −0.03]
Eastern Europe	0.05	0.10	0.15+
	[−0.11, 0.21]	[−0.06, 0.25]	[−0.01, 0.31]
Asia	−0.07	−0.05	−0.02
	[−0.23, 0.10]	[−0.21, 0.11]	[−0.18, 0.14]
Africa	−0.05	−0.01	0.05
	[−0.22, 0.12]	[−0.18, 0.15]	[−0.12, 0.21]
Middle East	−0.05	0.12	0.08
	[−0.21, 0.11]	[−0.04, 0.28]	[−0.08, 0.24]
Short Alliance	−0.08	−0.03	−0.01
	[−0.18, 0.03]	[−0.12, 0.07]	[−0.11, 0.09]
Hawkishness	0.19***	0.10***	0.07***
	[0.15, 0.23]	[0.07, 0.14]	[0.03, 0.11]
Alliances	0.17***	0.15***	0.11***
	[0.12, 0.23]	[0.10, 0.20]	[0.06, 0.16]
Democracy	0.13***	0.13***	0.15***
	[0.08, 0.18]	[0.08, 0.18]	[0.10, 0.20]
Compatibility Preference	0.16***	0.15***	0.24***
	[0.11, 0.21]	[0.10, 0.19]	[0.19, 0.29]
Num.Obs.	2675	2675	2675
R2	0.246	0.201	0.188

Notes. $^{+}p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All covariates are mean-centered. Latin America is the omitted geographic region. Long-standing alliance is the omitted time since alliance category. Outcomes measured on a seven-point Likert scale.

Table B.3: Full Regression Results for Table 3 in the Main Text

	Shared Interests	Reliability	Financial Resources	Military Resources
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Backsliding	−0.65***	−0.58***	−0.28***	−0.29***
	[−0.76, −0.54]	[−0.68, −0.48]	[−0.38, −0.17]	[−0.39, −0.18]
Eastern Europe	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.04
	[−0.16, 0.19]	[−0.12, 0.20]	[−0.12, 0.22]	[−0.13, 0.21]
Asia	−0.07	−0.07	0.08	−0.04
	[−0.24, 0.10]	[−0.23, 0.09]	[−0.09, 0.25]	[−0.21, 0.13]
Africa	−0.13	−0.12	0.05	0.00
	[−0.31, 0.05]	[−0.29, 0.04]	[−0.13, 0.22]	[−0.18, 0.17]
Middle East	0.00	0.10	0.11	0.10
	[−0.18, 0.17]	[−0.06, 0.26]	[−0.05, 0.28]	[−0.07, 0.26]
Short Alliance	0.05	0.05	−0.04	0.07
	[−0.06, 0.17]	[−0.05, 0.15]	[−0.15, 0.07]	[−0.03, 0.18]
Hawkishness	0.13***	0.14***	0.16***	0.18***
	[0.08, 0.17]	[0.10, 0.18]	[0.12, 0.21]	[0.14, 0.22]
Alliances	0.11***	0.15***	0.09***	0.08***
	[0.05, 0.16]	[0.10, 0.20]	[0.03, 0.14]	[0.03, 0.13]
Democracy	0.11***	0.08***	0.09***	0.07***
	[0.06, 0.17]	[0.03, 0.13]	[0.04, 0.14]	[0.02, 0.12]
Compatibility Preference	0.13***	0.14***	0.10***	0.12***
	[0.08, 0.18]	[0.10, 0.19]	[0.05, 0.15]	[0.07, 0.17]
Num.Obs.	2623	2623	2623	2623
R2	0.160	0.196	0.122	0.130

Notes. $^+p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All covariates are mean-centered. Latin America is the omitted geographic region. Long-standing alliance is the omitted time since alliance category. Outcomes measured on a seven-point Likert scale.

Table B.4: Full Regression Results for Table 4 in the Main Text

	Copartisan Voting					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Backsliding	0.19***	0.29***	0.19***	0.19***	0.19***	0.19***
	[0.08, 0.30]	[0.09, 0.48]	[0.08, 0.30]	[0.08, 0.30]	[0.08, 0.30]	[0.08, 0.30]
Backsliding x Independent		−0.10				
		[−0.37, 0.17]				
Backsliding x Republican		−0.18				
		[−0.44, 0.09]				
Backsliding x Alliances			−0.01			
			[−0.10, 0.07]			
Backsliding x Compatibility				0.07		
				[−0.03, 0.16]		
Backsliding x Democracy					−0.06	
					[−0.14, 0.02]	
Backslding x Hawkishness						−0.09*
						[−0.17, −0.01]
Independent		−0.10				
		[−0.30, 0.09]				
Republican		0.52***				
		[0.33, 0.71]				
Alliances	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
	[−0.05, 0.06]	[−0.05, 0.05]	[−0.06, 0.08]	[−0.05, 0.06]	[−0.05, 0.05]	[−0.05, 0.06]
Compatibility Preference	0.05+	0.02	0.05+	0.01	0.05+	0.05+
	[0.00, 0.10]	[−0.03, 0.07]	[0.00, 0.10]	[−0.05, 0.08]	[0.00, 0.10]	[0.00, 0.10]
Democracy	0.04	0.06*	0.04	0.04	0.07*	0.04
	[−0.01, 0.09]	[0.01, 0.11]	[−0.01, 0.09]	[−0.01, 0.09]	[0.00, 0.13]	[−0.02, 0.09]
Hawkishness	0.09***	0.07***	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.14***
	[0.05, 0.13]	[0.02, 0.11]	[0.05, 0.13]	[0.05, 0.13]	[0.05, 0.13]	[0.08, 0.20]
Eastern Europe	−0.06	−0.05	−0.06	−0.06	−0.06	−0.06
	[−0.24, 0.11]	[−0.22, 0.13]	[−0.24, 0.11]	[−0.24, 0.11]	[−0.24, 0.12]	[−0.24, 0.12]
Asia	−0.10	−0.08	−0.10	−0.10	−0.10	−0.10
	[−0.28, 0.08]	[−0.25, 0.09]	[−0.27, 0.08]	[−0.28, 0.07]	[−0.27, 0.08]	[−0.27, 0.08]
Africa	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01
	[−0.17, 0.18]	[−0.15, 0.19]	[−0.17, 0.18]	[−0.17, 0.18]	[−0.16, 0.18]	[−0.16, 0.18]
Middle East	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
	[−0.15, 0.20]	[−0.12, 0.22]	[−0.15, 0.20]	[−0.15, 0.20]	[−0.15, 0.20]	[−0.14, 0.21]
Short Alliance	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.03
	[−0.08, 0.14]	[−0.07, 0.15]	[−0.08, 0.14]	[−0.08, 0.15]	[−0.08, 0.14]	[−0.08, 0.14]
Num.Obs.	2666	2666	2666	2666	2666	2666
R2	0.025	0.053	0.025	0.026	0.026	0.027

Notes. $^{+}p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All covariates are mean-centered. Latin America is the omitted geographic region. Long-standing alliance is the omitted time since alliance category. Democrat is the omitted partisanship category. Outcomes measured on a seven-point Likert scale.

Table B.5: Full Regression Results for Figure 5 (A) in the Main Text

	Use of Force	Military Aid	Sanctions
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Backsliding	0.00	−0.21	−0.15
	[−0.38, 0.39]	[−0.57, 0.16]	[−0.53, 0.24]
Alliances	0.23***	0.19***	0.11***
	[0.16, 0.29]	[0.13, 0.25]	[0.05, 0.17]
Backsliding x Alliances	−0.11**	−0.07+	0.00
	[−0.18, −0.03]	[−0.14, 0.01]	[−0.07, 0.08]
Eastern Europe	0.05	0.10	0.15+
	[−0.11, 0.21]	[−0.06, 0.25]	[−0.01, 0.31]
Asia	−0.06	−0.04	−0.02
	[−0.23, 0.10]	[−0.20, 0.11]	[−0.18, 0.14]
Africa	−0.05	−0.01	0.05
	[−0.22, 0.12]	[−0.18, 0.15]	[−0.12, 0.21]
Middle East	−0.05	0.12	0.08
	[−0.22, 0.11]	[−0.04, 0.28]	[−0.08, 0.24]
Short Alliance	−0.08	−0.03	−0.01
	[−0.18, 0.02]	[−0.13, 0.07]	[−0.11, 0.09]
Hawkishness	0.19***	0.10***	0.07***
	[0.15, 0.23]	[0.07, 0.14]	[0.03, 0.11]
Democracy	0.13***	0.13***	0.15***
	[0.08, 0.18]	[0.08, 0.18]	[0.10, 0.20]
Compatibility Preference	0.16***	0.15***	0.24***
	[0.11, 0.21]	[0.10, 0.19]	[0.19, 0.29]
Num.Obs.	2675	2675	2675
R2	0.249	0.202	0.188

Notes. $^+p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All covariates except *Alliances* are mean-centered. Latin America is the omitted geographic region. Long-standing alliance is the omitted time since alliance category. Outcomes measured on a seven-point Likert scale.

Table B.6: Full Regression Results for Figure 5 (B) in the Main Text

	Use of Force	Military Aid	Sanctions
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Backsliding	0.30	0.10	0.34
	[−0.20, 0.79]	[−0.38, 0.59]	[−0.15, 0.84]
Compatibility Preference	0.23***	0.20***	0.28***
	[0.17, 0.29]	[0.14, 0.26]	[0.21, 0.34]
Backsliding x Compatibility Preference	−0.15***	−0.11**	−0.09+
	[−0.24, −0.06]	[−0.20, −0.03]	[−0.18, 0.00]
Eastern Europe	0.05	0.10	0.15+
	[−0.11, 0.21]	[−0.06, 0.25]	[0.00, 0.31]
Asia	−0.06	−0.04	−0.02
	[−0.23, 0.10]	[−0.20, 0.12]	[−0.18, 0.14]
Africa	−0.05	−0.01	0.05
	[−0.22, 0.12]	[−0.17, 0.15]	[−0.11, 0.22]
Middle East	−0.05	0.12	0.08
	[−0.22, 0.11]	[−0.04, 0.28]	[−0.09, 0.24]
Short Alliance	−0.08	−0.03	−0.01
	[−0.18, 0.02]	[−0.13, 0.07]	[−0.11, 0.09]
Hawkishness	0.19***	0.10***	0.07***
	[0.15, 0.23]	[0.06, 0.14]	[0.03, 0.11]
Alliances	0.18***	0.15***	0.11***
	[0.12, 0.23]	[0.10, 0.21]	[0.06, 0.16]
Democracy	0.13***	0.13***	0.15***
	[0.08, 0.18]	[0.08, 0.18]	[0.10, 0.20]
Num.Obs.	2675	2675	2675
R2	0.250	0.204	0.190

Notes. $^{+}p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All covariates except *Compatibility Preference* are mean-centered. Latin America is the omitted geographic region. Long-standing alliance is the omitted time since alliance category. Outcomes measured on a seven-point Likert scale.

Table B.7: Full Regression Results for Figure 5 (C) in the Main Text

	Use of Force	Military Aid	Sanctions
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Backsliding	−0.12	−0.13	0.13
	[−0.48, 0.23]	[−0.47, 0.21]	[−0.23, 0.48]
Democracy	0.17***	0.17***	0.18***
	[0.11, 0.23]	[0.12, 0.23]	[0.12, 0.24]
Backsliding x Democracy	−0.08*	−0.09*	−0.06
	[−0.16, −0.01]	[−0.16, −0.01]	[−0.13, 0.01]
Eastern Europe	0.05	0.10	0.15+
	[−0.11, 0.21]	[−0.06, 0.26]	[0.00, 0.31]
Asia	−0.07	−0.05	−0.02
	[−0.23, 0.10]	[−0.21, 0.11]	[−0.18, 0.14]
Africa	−0.04	−0.01	0.05
	[−0.21, 0.13]	[−0.17, 0.16]	[−0.11, 0.22]
Middle East	−0.05	0.12	0.08
	[−0.21, 0.11]	[−0.03, 0.28]	[−0.08, 0.24]
Short Alliance	−0.08	−0.03	−0.01
	[−0.18, 0.03]	[−0.12, 0.07]	[−0.11, 0.09]
Hawkishness	0.19***	0.10***	0.07***
	[0.15, 0.23]	[0.06, 0.14]	[0.03, 0.11]
Alliances	0.17***	0.15***	0.11***
	[0.12, 0.23]	[0.10, 0.20]	[0.06, 0.16]
Compatibility Preference	0.16***	0.14***	0.24***
	[0.11, 0.21]	[0.10, 0.19]	[0.19, 0.29]
Num.Obs.	2675	2675	2675
R2	0.248	0.203	0.189

Notes. $^{+}p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All covariates except *Compatibility Preference* are mean-centered. Latin America is the omitted geographic region. Long-standing alliance is the omitted time since alliance category. Outcomes measured on a seven-point Likert scale.
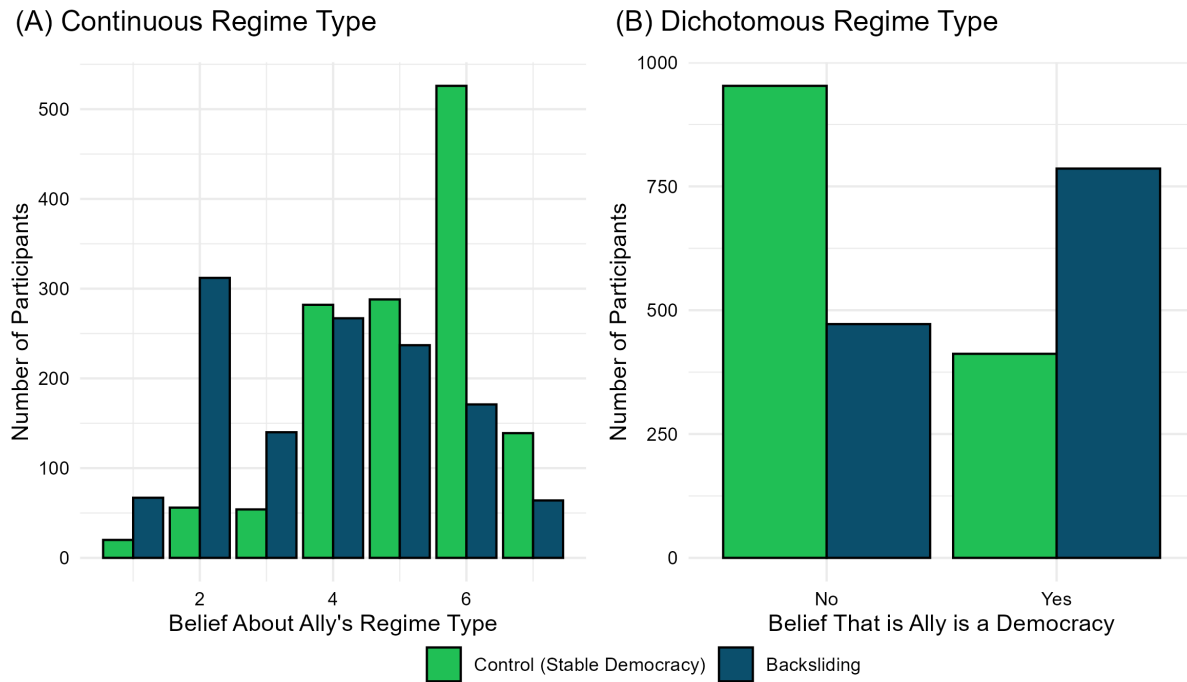
Table B.8: Full Regression Results for Figure 5 (D) in the Main Text

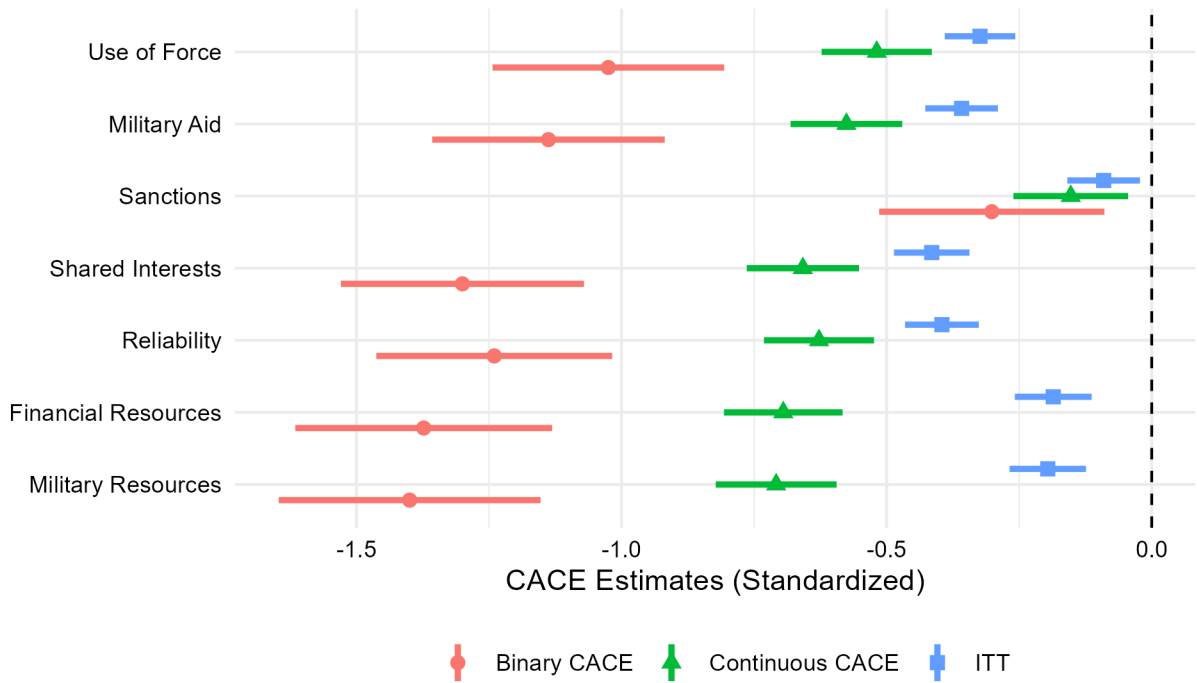|	Use of Force	Military Aid	Sanctions
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Backsliding	−0.80***	−0.63***	−0.21
	[−1.13, −0.46]	[−0.95, −0.30]	[−0.54, 0.12]
Hawkishness	0.15***	0.09***	0.06*
	[0.10, 0.21]	[0.04, 0.14]	[0.01, 0.11]
Backsliding x Hawkishness	0.07+	0.02	0.02
	[0.00, 0.14]	[−0.05, 0.10]	[−0.05, 0.09]
Eastern Europe	0.05	0.10	0.15+
	[−0.11, 0.21]	[−0.06, 0.25]	[−0.01, 0.31]
Asia	−0.07	−0.05	−0.02
	[−0.23, 0.10]	[−0.21, 0.11]	[−0.18, 0.14]
Africa	−0.05	−0.01	0.05
	[−0.23, 0.12]	[−0.18, 0.15]	[−0.12, 0.21]
Middle East	−0.05	0.12	0.08
	[−0.22, 0.11]	[−0.04, 0.28]	[−0.08, 0.24]
Short Alliance	−0.07	−0.02	−0.01
	[−0.17, 0.03]	[−0.12, 0.08]	[−0.11, 0.09]
Democracy	0.13***	0.13***	0.15***
	[0.08, 0.18]	[0.08, 0.18]	[0.11, 0.20]
Alliances	0.17***	0.15***	0.11***
	[0.12, 0.23]	[0.10, 0.20]	[0.06, 0.16]
Compatibility Preference	0.16***	0.15***	0.24***
	[0.11, 0.21]	[0.10, 0.19]	[0.19, 0.29]
Num.Obs.	2675	2675	2675
R2	0.248	0.201	0.188

Notes. $^{+}p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.005$ corresponding to two-tailed hypothesis tests using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. Square brackets contain the 95% CI for each estimate. All covariates except *Compatibility Preference* are mean-centered. Latin America is the omitted geographic region. Long-standing alliance is the omitted time since alliance category. Outcomes measured on a seven-point Likert scale.

C: Compliance and CACE Estimates

Figure C.1: Beliefs About Ally Regime Type by Treatment Condition (Study 2)

(A) Continuous Regime Type

(B) Dichotomous Regime Type
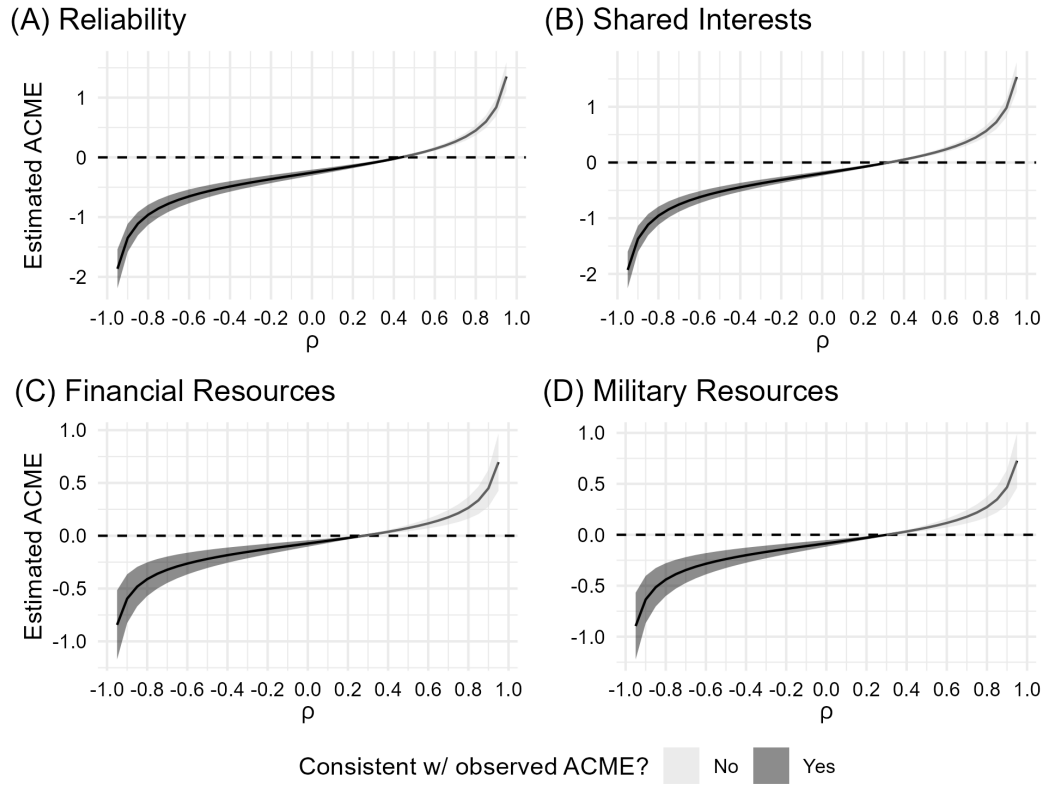
■ Control (Stable Democracy)   ■ Backsliding

Figure C.2: Standardized CACE Estimates (Study 2)

Notes. Estimates represent (standardized) CACE estimates with 95% CIs calculated using "HC2" heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors. For CACE estimates using a quasi-continuous measure (seven-point Likert scale) of allied regime type, the estimate is the first difference between the 25th percentile ("Neither democracy nor dictatorship") and 75th percentile ("Democracy"). All estimates can be interpreted in terms of standard deviation changes in the outcome.

D: Sensitivity Analyses

Figure D.1: Sensitivity Analysis for Results in Figure 4 (A)

(A) Reliability

(B) Shared Interests

(C) Financial Resources

(D) Military Resources

Consistent w/ observed ACME? No Yes

Notes. Estimates represent the ACME while allowing for different violations of the sequential ignorability assumption. Panels are different (independent) mediators.
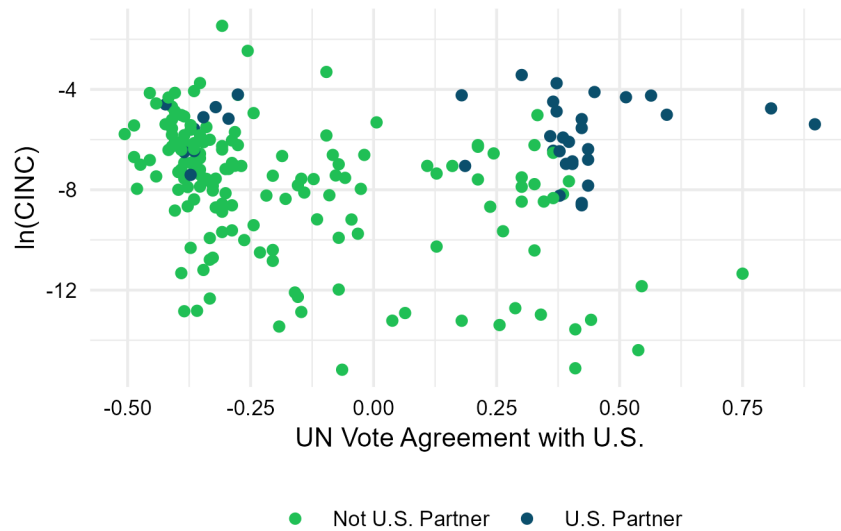
Figure D.2: Sensitivity Analysis for Results in Figure 4 (B)

Notes. Estimates represent formal bounds on the ACME while allowing for different violations of the homogeneous interaction assumption. Rows correspond to different (primary) mediators. Columns correspond to different alternative mediators.
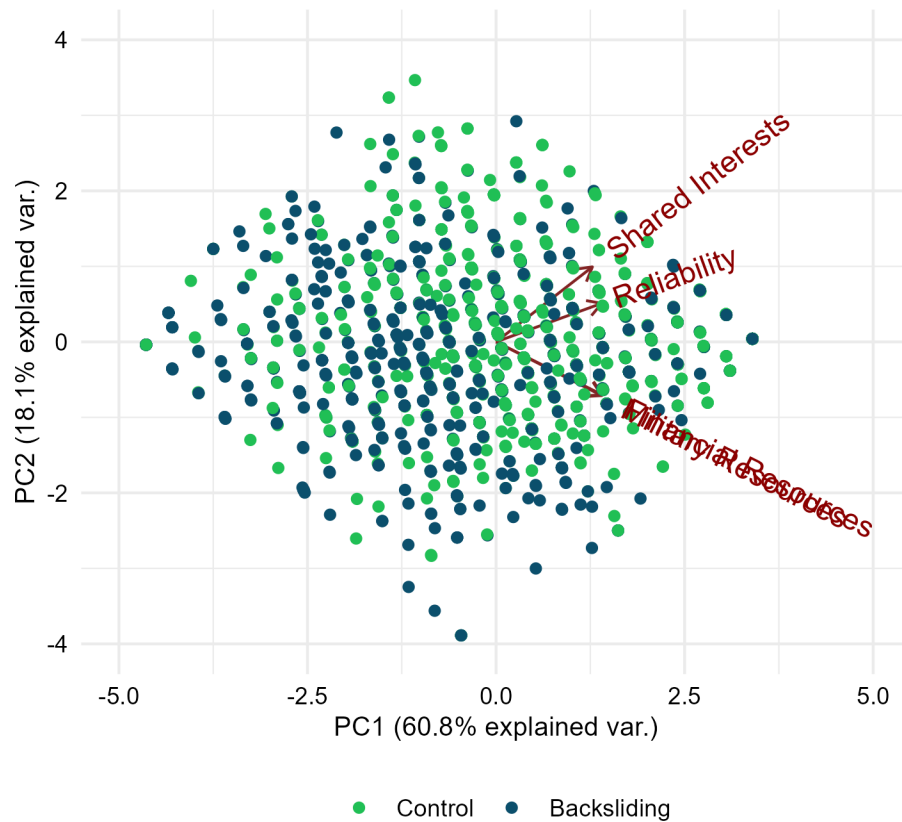
E: Characterizing Partners vs Non-Partners

Figure E.1: Comparing Capabilities and U.N. Voting of U.S. Partners to non-Partners in 2015

Notes. U.S. partners include all U.S. NATO and non-NATO major allies as of 2004. CINC scores taken from Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey (1972). U.N. voting scores taken from Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2017). All data from 2015.
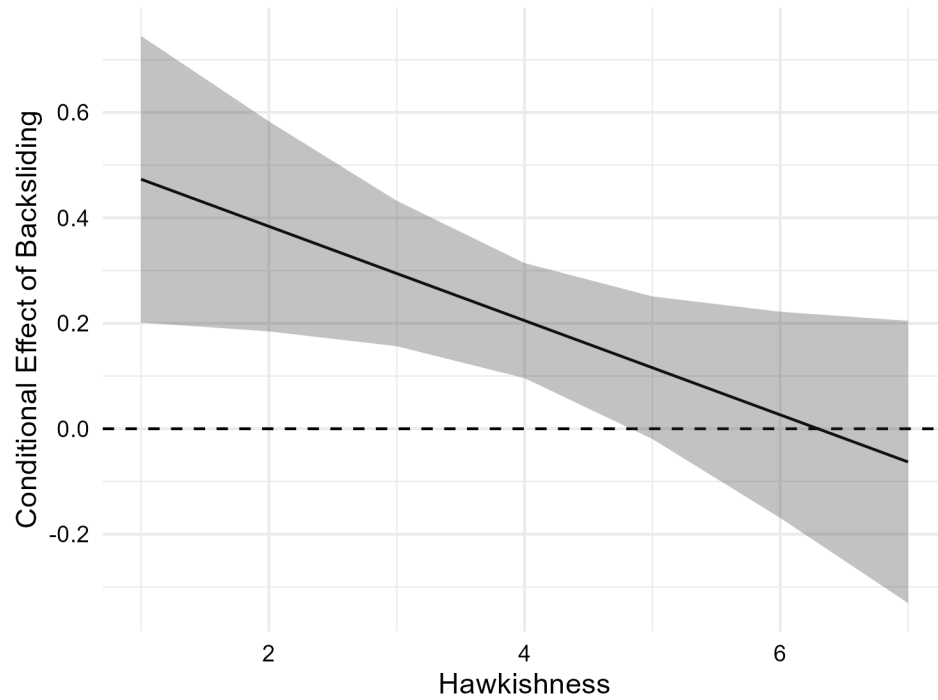
F: Principal Components Analysis

Figure F.1: Principal Components Analysis of Compatibility and Reliability

G: Additional Marginal Effects Plots

Figure G.1: Conditional Effect of Backsliding from Table 4, Model 6

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Bailey, Michael A, Anton Strezhnev, and Erik Voeten. 2017. "Estimating dynamic state preferences from United Nations voting data." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61 (2): 430–456.

Singer, J David, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey. 1972. "Capability distribution, uncertainty, and major power war, 1820-1965." In *Peace, war, and numbers*, ed. Bruce Russett. Sage pp. 119–143.