Surrendering Influence: The Effects of Major Power Withdrawal

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September 5, 2025

Abstract

What would be the effect of the US abandoning the liberal international order (LIO)? Major powers sometimes withdraw their support from protégé states, often due to changes in the former's strategic priorities (e.g., retrenchment) or domestic politics (e.g., collapse of the USSR). Building on recent work on relational hierarchies, I argue that sudden changes have both short- and long-term impacts on a protégé state's domestic and foreign policies relative to a major power's broader milieu goals. Using a novel measure of major–minor power latent security influence, I analyze changes in US and Russian ties with all minor powers from 1950—2010 on protégé states' policies. I find sudden decreases of US support are associated with short- and long-run declines in minor powers' democratic practices, human rights protections and judicial independence, US trade, and dis-alignment from US foreign policy. In converse, Russian losses of influence lead to minor powers' liberal policy implementation and more independent foreign policies. Similar results are found for changes in Chinese, French, and British influence. These results have implications for the future of the LIO, as well as major power competition and global order more generally.

US President Trump's public berating of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy in the Oval Office of the White House on February 28, 2025, and his announcement of world-wide 'reciprocal tariffs' on April 2, just a few weeks later, shocked analysts and country leaders alike (Chyzh 2025; Last 2025). A day after the tariff announcement, Canadian Prime Minister Carney declared that "The eighty-year period when the United States embraced the mantle of global economic leadership—when it forged alliances rooted in trust and mutual respect, and championed the free and open exchange of good and services—is over" (Last 2025).

While striking in their presentation, Trump's actions were consistent with his previous skepticism of the usefulness of the post-World War II liberal international order (LIO), previously a pillar of US foreign policy. He dismantled USAID, accused NATO of "taking advantage of the US," questioned the benefits of foreign troop deployments in countries such as Germany, Japan, and South Korea, called off military exercises with South Korea, cited national security concerns when initiating economic sanctions against formal allies, and threatened to annex Canada, Greenland, and the Panama Channel. Though each of these efforts undermines US global leadership, it is less clear how the US surrendering its global influence affects other participants of the LIO. How should we expect these states to behave without the US underpinning the LIO? More broadly, what is the impact of major power disengagement on a minor power's domestic and foreign policies?

The US unilaterally withdrawing from atop the LIO is hardly the first case of a major power disengaging from the network of allied and aligned states that it leads. The disintegration of the Soviet Union initiated a collapse of global communism and dramatically undercut Russian influence. Similarly, British and French global influence declined along with their relative material power. The loss of influence among these powers, however, was not geographically uniform: major power influence was maintained in some regions, reduced in others, and abandoned altogether elsewhere. France, for example, withdrew from Indo-China, yet remains a key actor in francophone Africa.

I argue that sudden changes in major power influence have both short- and long-term im-

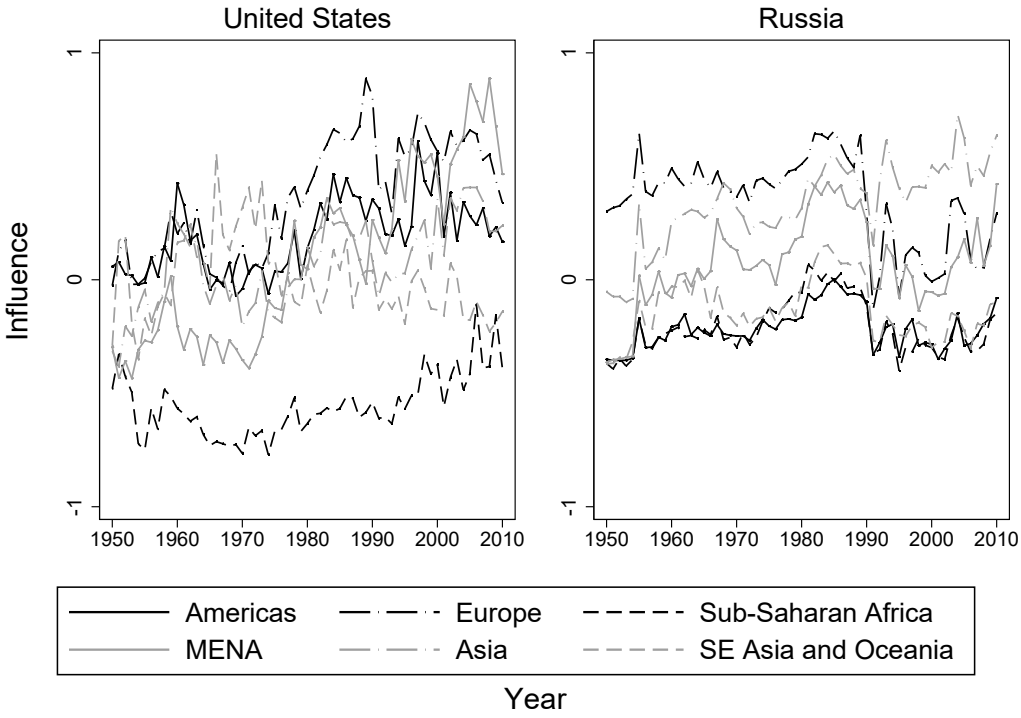
pacts on their protégé state's domestic and foreign policies. My theoretical framework begins with the premise that major powers sit atop informal, hierarchical networks of protégé states. These hierarchies build systems of legitimacy—based on ideology or perceived success—to encourage emulation or deference to a hegemon over specific policy domains without relying exclusively on material capabilities (Wendt and Friedheim 1995; Fordham and Asal 2007; Lake 2009; Kang 2010; Thies 2013; Norrlof 2014). The outcome of these hierarchies are loose political orders, where protégé states vary in terms of their closeness to the major power and the degree to which their policies are influenced. From this perspective, political orders are dynamic rather than constant, and vary in intensity both temporally and spatially.

This hierarchical network framework has generated a number of theoretical and empirical analyses insights, but most existing research focus on *cross-sectional* variation in the level of major power influence, rather than on *changes* in that influence. That is, this literature asks whether a minor power's presence in a major power's informal, hierarchical protégé-network leads to differences in domestic and foreign policy. McDonald (2015), Beardsley et al. (2020), and Wang et al. (2024), for example, demonstrate that whether a minor power is in a major power's network impacts the minor power's conflict propensity, trade openness, and other policy positions. Similarly, Lake (2009) and Nieman (2016*b*) show that the position of a minor power within these networks impact their domestic and foreign policies, with greater embeddedness associated with practices more in-line with that of the major power.

In this manuscript, I focus on the impact of *temporal* variation—how sudden changes in the degree of hierarchy within a major power's network affect protégé state behavior. A focus on temporal variation takes advantage of the fact that memberships of major power political orders—as well as their degree of closeness within an order—change over time. Figure 1 highlights this variation, displaying US influence (left-hand side) and Russian influence (right-hand side) aggregated by region from 1950–2010 using major power influence data from McManus and Nieman (2019).[1] The figure shows that, in contrast to conventional static

[1]The McManus and Nieman (2019) data are collected at state-year level for all minor powers from five major powers. These data are described in more detain in the Research Design section.

Figure 1: Average US- and Russian-Protégé Influence by Region.



conceptualizations, political orders change unevenly across both space and time.[2] Moreover, influence increases in some regions while simultaneously declining in others. The average US influence in the Middle East, for example, has increased consistently since 1970 while its average support in Asia has been volatile around a consistent mean. Meanwhile, Russian influence in Europe decreased substantially through the 1990s at the same time that its influence in Asia increased.

My primary theoretical interest lies with the effect of major power *disengagement* on a protégé state's domestic institutions and foreign policy practices. I expect that major power withdrawal leads to a number of negative political outcomes in terms of the major power's milieu goals and geopolitical interests. Specifically, sudden decreases of support by a liberal major power should lead to both immediate and long-run declines in a minor power's level

[2]The US consistently has one of its highest levels of average influence in the Americas region, for example, while the region is among the lowest in terms of average influence for Russia. Yet, both have high levels of average influence in the European region.

of democracy, human rights protections and rule of law, trade with the major power, and dis-alignment from the major power's foreign policies. These effects are likely greater if the liberal major power's influence is replaced by that of an illiberal power. Conversely, losses of influence on the part of an illiberal major power should result in a minor power adopting liberal domestic policy reforms and pursuing a more independent foreign policy.

I evaluate these predictions using a Bayesian error correction model (ECM) (Nieman and Peterson 2025). This estimation strategy isolates temporal variation in major power influence and protégé state behavior, offering causal leverage and circumventing unobservable static, unobservable unit-level features that may otherwise correlate with the levels of the outcomes of interest. The estimator also allows for assessing both short- and long-run effects of changes in major power influence on minor power domestic and foreign policy outcomes—democratic reform, human rights and legal practices, international economic interactions, and foreign policy alignment—offering a more complete picture of the total impact. Substantively, looking at the micro-effects of major power withdrawal, from a global sample of states across wide range of policy areas, enables a more theoretic- and empirically-informed understanding to the macro-effects for the end of major power-led political orders. Thus, the results have implications for the future of the LIO, as well as major power grand stragy, major power competition, and global order more generally.

Building and Maintaining Political Orders

Recent scholarship on status and relational hierarchies views major powers as sitting atop networks of protégé states. These networks are inherently hierarchical, as the major power has significant policy influence over protégés (Lake 2009; McDonald 2015; Henke 2017; Beardsley et al. 2020). Yet this influence is not absolute: within each network, protégés vary in terms of their closeness to the major power and the degree to which their policies are influenced (Wendt and Friedheim 1995; Nieman 2016*b*; Duque 2018; Henke 2019*a*,*b*; Nedal and

Nexon 2019). Thus, the extent to which a country is a major power's protégé is conceptualized as a continuum, rather than drawing a bright line between protégés and non-protégés.[3]

These arrangements are mutually beneficial for a major power and a protégé state (Morrow 1991; Lake 2009), while also impacting the cost-benefit calculations of other states within and across major power-led political orders (Nieman 2016*a*,*b*).[4] Protégés receive security guarantees and benefit from the rule-based international order that a major power-led political order produces (Lake 2009; Johnson 2015). These benefits enable them to lower their defense spending and trade costs, as well as broaden their security and economic networks (Lake 2009; Allen, VanDusky-Allen and Flynn 2016; Allen, Flynn and VanDusky-Allen 2017; Allen 2018; Norrlof and Wohlforth 2019).[5] At the micro-level, such benefits increase the resources available to leaders of protege states and help them remain in power (DiGiuseppe and Shea 2015, 2016).

Major powers benefit both ideationally and materially from their protégé-networks. Major powers gain ideationally from diffusing their preferred norms and rules to their protégés—ranging from preferred domestic political, legal, and economic institutions (Davie 2000; Fordham and Asal 2007; Ruby and Gibler 2010; Gunitsky 2014; Norrlof 2014; McDonald 2015; Chyzh and Labzina 2018; Martinez Machain 2021)—which coincidingly aid in developing shared preferences and foreign policy goals (Wolfers 1984; Lanoszka 2013; Mousseau 2019; Resnick 2022). Subsequently, major powers are able to gain legitimacy for their actions when their protégés join their international initiatives (Lake 2009; Henke 2017). Materially, major powers can integrate their economies and security networks with those of their protégés, while leveraging their own centrality within these networks to bolster their own power

[3]My focus is on the degree of connectivity (Hays, Kachi and Franzese 2010; Chyzh and Kaiser 2019) rather than separate communities (Beardsley et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2024). This conceptualization allows for overlapping protégé-networks, either among aligned major powers (Nieman et al. 2021) or cross-pressured minor powers, e.g., Turkey.

[4]See Chyzh (2016*a*) for a formal assessment of how changing cost-benefit calculations impact international network participation and domestic institutional practices and outcomes.

[5]They also receive special treatment and are granted greater benefit-of-the-doubt should they break the rules than a non-protégé (Stone 2002, 2004; Nieman and Ring 2015; Nieman 2016*b*; Lipscy and Lee 2019; Ferry and Shea 2025).

(Norrlof 2014; Norrlof and Wohlforth 2019; Acevedo-Ossa 2025). Recent empirical work further illustrates the substantial benefits of building and maintaining protégé networks. Major powers are able to shape the foreign policies of their protégés towards their own goals, with regards to military involvement (Nieman 2016*b*; Henke 2017, 2019*a*,*b*), alliance formation (Allen, Flynn and VanDusky-Allen 2017), and trade policy (Lake 2009; Fordham 2010; Allen 2018).

Such hierarchical relationships also carry costs. Protégé states lose autonomy and are required to contribute to coalitions and organizations that support the major power-led political order (Morrow 1991; Nieman 2016*b*; Henke 2017; Norrlof and Wohlforth 2019). Major powers, meanwhile, incur 'governance costs,' such as the money spent maintaining a military capable of projecting force across the globe, military aid to protégés, a wide-ranging diplomatic presence, as well as defending protégés (Lake 2009; McManus and Nieman 2019).[6] Given these costs, there are likely to be limits on the number of protégés a major power can retain or pursue (Gilpin 1981; MacDonald and Parent 2011; Haynes 2015). Even wealthy major powers are unlikely to be able to afford to spend a large amount of money and attention on every actual or potential protégé in the world. Therefore, major powers must make decisions about how to prioritize among potential protégés and which protégés they will most actively seek to recruit or retain.

There are some protégé state features that limit governance costs. Protégé states that are in key geographical locations or have access to key resources may offset costs (McManus and Nieman 2019), while being surrounded by other protégé states can consolidate costs and improve logistical efficiency (Allen, VanDusky-Allen and Flynn 2016; Nieman et al. 2021). Similarly, features like shared regime type, common legal systems, linguistic similarity, and cultural closeness may make maintaining some relationship easier or harder (Mousseau 2003; Lai and Reiter 2000; Mitchell and Powell 2011; Liu 2014; Cook and Liu 2106; Ward 2020).

[6]Musgrave and Nexon (2018) suggest that major powers may undertake costly symbolic projects to demonstrate their capabilities and legitimacy.

Differing Political Orders and Protégé Behavior

Political orders differ across major powers in terms of what they can offer minor powers. These differences reflect the milieu goals of the great power (Wolfers 1984; Mousseau 2019) and often correlate with the policy levers that major powers will use to promote or lock-in these goals (Lanoszka 2013; Chyzh and Labzina 2018). Milieu goals may include specific international arrangements, types of international law, or economic models, among others.

The LIO promoted by the US, for example, is associated with democratic and legalistic domestic institutions and a free market-based economic model. The US uses international legal institutions to further augment their material and ideological interests (Keohane 1984; Ikenberry 2000, 2024). Conversely, China markets itself as providing tools to combat domestic opposition (e.g., China and Hungary working together on police training/surveillance tools), aid without domestic reform, and an alternative economic order to promote development and stabilization during crises (Greitens and Kardon 2024; Carmody and Owusu 2007; Harvey 2005; Norrlof and Reich 2015). This 'no strings attached' approach not only supports aligned governments and increases China's economic and political reach (An and Wang 2024), but also facilitates 'gray zone' activities, such as "economic pressure, dissemination of propaganda, cyber attacks, use of domestic legal structures to manipulate international adversaries, as well as limited and targeted kinetic operations" (Belo 2022, 279). While contradictions between a promoted ideological framework and its practice exist (e.g., Pickering and Peceny 2006; Freeman 2023; Rathbun, Parker and Pomeroy 2025), different milieu goals manifest in protégé states more often adopting the preferred domestic institutions and practices of the major power at the top of their specific order (Simmons and Elkins 2004; Fordham and Asal 2007; Gunitsky 2014; McDonald 2015; DiGiuseppe and Shea 2022).

These differences can be illustrated with a recent example of Ukrainian agricultural trade with African states. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia cynically sought African support by attacking Ukrainian shipping, arguing that Ukraine could not be counted on for grain deliveries. These attacks prompted a global food price shock and

fear of food shortages, particularly in less developed countries (Jia et al. 2024). Russia then requested that African states support its initiatives in the UN in exchange for grain stocks from its own domestic production, while simultaneously benefiting from political instability in Europe resulting from the food price shock-induced African migration.

Yet, after Ukraine sank a quarter of the Russian Black Sea fleet and reopened its shipping routes, it did not demand symbolic support for food supplies. Despite Kyiv actively seeking African support—and with roughly half of African states providing rhetorical support for Russia's war efforts—it did not link the two issues and honored pre-existing contracts.

Ukraine did so for three reasons. First, it had a significant economic need to export goods to help its ailing economy. Second, as an aspiring member of the rules-based LIO, Ukraine treated intentionally starving a population to coerce its government to support it, as being morally abhorrent. Third, it would not be welcomed by states in the liberal order it sought closer relations with, if it did conduct its foreign policy in such an overtly cynical manner.

Major Power Disengagement

Memberships within a major power-led political order, and even more so, the closeness between a major power and a protégé state, vary over time. The main driver of this is that the relative distributions of costs are determined by the broader geopolitical context (Gilpin 1981; Palmer and Morgan 2006; Braumoeller 2008, 2012; Martinez Machain and Morgan 2013) and changing domestic coalitions in the major power—and with them, which specific milieu goals to emphasize (Cantir and Kaarbo 2012; Wehner and Thies 2014; Mattes, Leeds and Matsemura 2016; Demirduzen and Thies 2022; Nedal and Schramm 2025; Wehner 2025).

While leading an order offers a major power many benefits, there are also costs. The relative benefits (and costs) that any individual protégé contributes, moreover, are uneven. Major powers may prefer to reallocate their resources in favor of some protégé states—or attempt to attract new members—at the expense of others, in order to maximize their own benefits. In periods of deteriorating geopolitical conditions, a major power can pursue

strategic retrenchment, with the goal of reducing its foothold while still maintaining some influence in some key regions (MacDonald and Parent 2011; Haynes 2015).

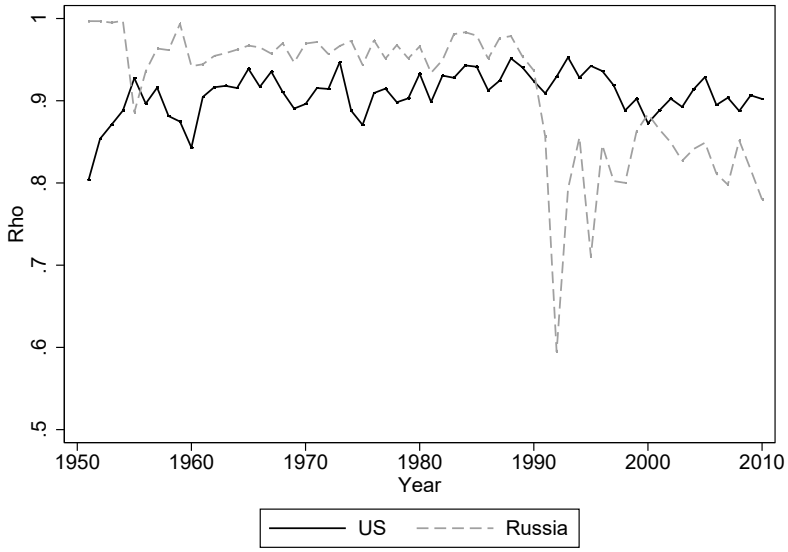
In times of domestic contestation or turmoil, this may result in the sudden withdrawal of support—and loss of influence—over many states simultaneously. When the domestic turbulence is severe enough, the major power may willingly abandon its own order altogether (Norrlof 2018; Kang and Gibler 2013, 699). The collapse of the Soviet Union is one such example, as efforts to maintain authority over satellite states became secondary to more pressing domestic crises. The decline of a political order can also occur in a more drawn out fashion, as seen in the decline of the British empire after World War II, or the erosion of French influence in Southeast Asia in the 1960s and in francophone Africa more recently (MacDonald and Parent 2011). Even in these cases, however, retrenchment is often not uniform, but exhibit significant variation in speed (Haynes 2015).

Major power disengagement may also occur alongside expansion or maintenance, as part of a more gradual re-prioritization of foreign policy interests. The US's frequent efforts to 'pivot to Asia', for example, has seen increased resource allocations to the Indo-Pacific at the expense of engagement with Latin America and Western Europe. This is variation is further heightened as geopolitical conditions change; following the September 11 terrorists attacks in 2001, the US increased engagement with Middle Eastern and African governments to combat terrorism, despite repeated attempts at retrenchment with the former and a previous lack of engagement with the latter.

Figure 2 shows how the correlation between the level of major power influence and its lag change over time, for the US and Russia, using the McManus and Nieman (2019) data. The US annual correlation ranges from $\rho = .8$ to $\rho = .95$ and is relatively stable year-to-year. The Russian annual correlation begins even higher, hovering around $\rho = .95$ with a high of $\rho = .99$, until the collapse of the Soviet Union when it drops precipitously to $\rho = .59$, before climbing back to around $\rho = .83$ during the 2000s.

These relatively high aggregate year-to-year correlations, however, mask broader treads

Figure 2: Annual Year-to-Year Correlation of US- and Russian-Protégé Influence.



within the series. Table 1 reports the correlation for the level of major power–protégé influence in year t to the previous year, $t-1$, as well as to five years earlier, $t-5$, for both the US and Russia to all minor powers on the left, and the correlation in the analogous year-to-year *change* in influence at time t with the change from the previous year, $t-1$, and five years prior, $t-5$. For both the US and Russia, the correlation from one year to the next is high, with $\rho = .91$. Five years on, that correlation decreases, to $\rho = .85$ for the US and $\rho = .82$ for Russia.

Looking at the right-hand side of the table, the correlation in the year-to-year *change* in influence at time t and $t-1$ has a moderate negative correlation with the change for both the US and Russia in the following year. This suggests that any increase (decrease) in support sees a slight regression to the mean in the subsequent period. There appears to be no relationship, however, between a change in support between time t and its five-year lag—the correlation of change in support for both the US and Russia is close to zero. Taken together, the correlations in the change in influence for the two different time periods indicate that while there may be a slight reversion immediately after an increase or decrease in their support for a protégé between years t and $t-1$, that initial change tends to stabilize to a

Table 1: Correlation in Major Power–Protégé Influence

	Level of Influence		Change in Influence	
	One Year Lag	Five Year Lag	One Year Lag	Five Year Lag
US	.91	.85	-.38	-.01
Russia	.91	.82	-.30	-.06

new equilibrium within a few years. Overall, Table 1 indicates that major powers hold the same degree of influence over states within their protégé-networks most of the time, but that when changes occur, they do so fairly rapidly before stabilizing at a new level.

Whether occurring broadly or in isolated cases, the impact of the major power disengagement on minor powers, then, should function to the inverse of its gains. That is, if the material and ideological benefits of major power–protégé networks alter domestic and foreign policy behaviors, then there absence should counteract them for several reasons. First, as observed policy outcomes result from a trade-off between a protégé's own preferred policy and pressure from a major power, the removal (or reduction) of support means observed policies are likely to shift away from position of the major power. That is, without costs generated by external pressure, a state is more likely to implement policies closer to its own ideal point. This is similar to the standard security–policy trade-off logic attributed to asymmetric alliances (Morrow 1991; Johnson 2015).[7]

Second, major powers often provide material support and technical expertise to protégé states, which reduces the transaction costs for policy implementation and enables easier policy alignment. In the absence of such support, even protégés that are ideologically inclined may fail to achieve preferred policy outcomes. For example, DiGiuseppe and Shea (2022) show that close ties to the US can improve state capacity building and moderate the risk of civil war onset. They argue one reason for this is because the US provides logistical and technical training for bureaucracies and law enforcement—e.g., intellectual property protec-

[7]While this is most obvious in the case of external policy, such as hosting foreign troops or joining a military coalition, many domestic policies are also impacted by external factors. For example, a country's judicial independence and tax extraction capabilities are impacted by external geopolitical factors, such as its economic competitors and partners (Chyzh 2016*b*; Thies, Chyzh and Nieman 2016).

tion training for police officers, prosecutors, and judges—to build administrative capacity (DiGiuseppe and Shea 2022, 771). Similarly, Ruby and Gibler (2010) show that US military training of foreign officers contributes to the development of civilian control of security forces in recipient states.[8] If the technical and material assistance were to cease, then state capacity is likely to erode.

These two complementary mechanisms lead to the two following expectations:

H_1: A sudden withdraw of major power support results in a protégé state immediately shifting away from that major power's milieu goals and foreign policy positions.

H_2: A sudden withdraw of major power support results in a protégé state's long-term divergence from that major power's milieu goals and foreign policy positions.

Finally, an external mechanism for a protégé state's policy shift is that, when a protégé state loses support from one major power, it may turn to an alternative patron. The milieu goals and policies promoted in the alternative political order may not be consistent with those of the protégé's previous order. In these cases, a protégé state's domestic and foreign policies may undertake an even larger transformation.

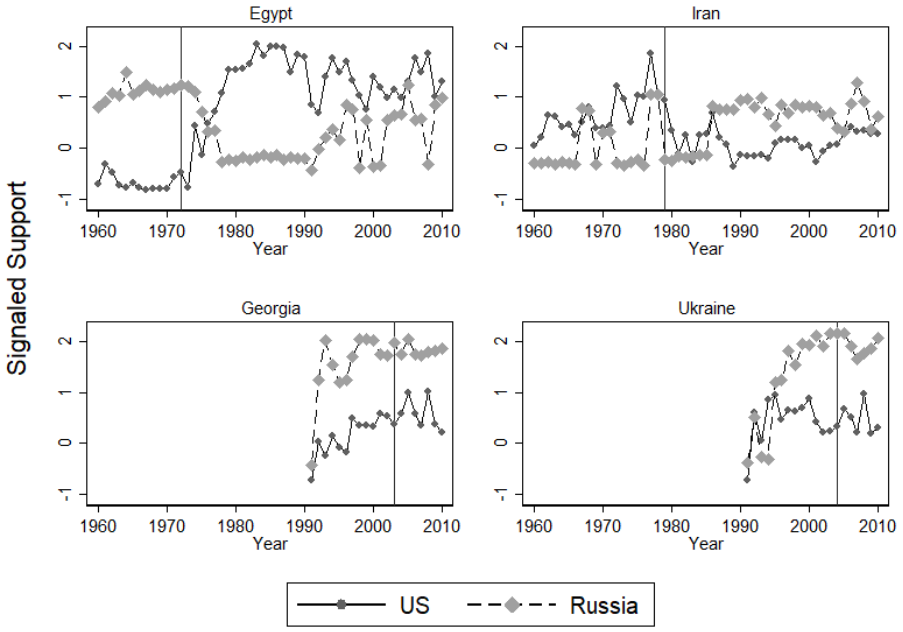
This external mechanism, however, is relatively uncommon in practice. While Cold War fears and color revolutions capture the popular imagination, there are few cases where a decrease in alignment from one major power order is met with an immediate increase with a different major power. Using the McManus and Nieman (2019) data, the correlation between *US* and *Russia Support* for protégés from 1950–2010 is $r = -.07$. This reflects two factors: first, that many minor powers are unaligned and, second, that a loss of engagement with one major power does not imply an improvement with an alternative one.[9]

Even in high profile cases, such as al-Sadat's Egypt severing an alliance with the USSR in 1972, the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution, and Ukraine's 2004

[8]Major power assistance, of course, may also take more coercive forms. Russia, for example, gave assistance to Yanukovych's Ukraine in the form of intelligence and security agents to repress Maidan protesters (Chyzh and Labzina 2018).

[9]If the US- and Russia-led political orders were reverse images, than the correlation would be strongly negative, rather than close to zero.

Figure 3: US and Russian Influence in Egypt, Iran, Georgia, and Ukraine.



Note: The vertical line indicates the timing of a major policy change. From top left to bottom right: al-Sadat's withdraw from Soviet treaty, Iranian Revolution, Georgia's Rose Revolution, and Ukraine's Orange Revolution.

Orange Revolution, did not result in sudden changes in major power influence or immediate transitions from one major power-led political order to another. As shown in Figure 3, Egypt and Iran saw shifts from Soviet to US influence over the course of a half-decade, while Russia continued to exert influence in Georgia and Ukraine even after the Color Revolutions, with only marginal US increases that never approached that of Russian support. These cases illustrate that minor powers rarely switch major power-led political orders quickly; instead, lost major power support results in the minor power either remaining non-aligned or only slowly entering an alternative political order.[10]

Instead of an instantaneous effect, protégé realignment due to major power competition

[10]Even in cases such as the Cuban Revolution—where the fall of the Batista regime and rise of Castro coincided with a transition from the US political order to the Soviet one—the transitions, though in close temporal proximity, are not instantaneous nor simultaneous (Stodden and Weiss 2016). Castro, for example, initially kept several moderate and liberal officials in government and described the need for continued positive US economic relations. In addition, Castro referred to the USSR and the US as equally imperialist and his relations with the Soviets was still cold throughout much of 1959. Only once Moscow moved the Soviet Technical and Agricultural Exposition to Havana did Cuba shift into the USSR's protégé network (Stodden and Weiss 2016, 82–87).

is more likely to occur gradually, over several years. That is, a decrease in one major power's influence is followed by an increase in an alternative major power several years later. Thus, when a protégé state shifts from a political order led by a liberal major power to one led by an illiberal one—or vice versa—then the aggregate policy shift of the protégé is greater: it is not only the loss of one major power's influence but is compounded by the gain of the (rival) major power. That is, the long-run impact of the changes in major power support are independent of one another. This leads to the follow expectation:

H_3: A sudden increase of major power support results in a protégé state's long-term shift towards that major power's milieu goals and foreign policy positions, even after controlling for changes in support by an alternative major power.

Research Design

I evaluate these hypotheses using annual data on major power influence for all minor powers from 1950–2010. Specifically, I use data from McManus and Nieman (2019) that focuses on the security concerns. The measure uses a number of possible signals—e.g., alliances, troop deployments, joint military exercises—to generate continuous scores for the latent degree of support by major powers—identified as the US, Russia, China, UK, and France—to all other states in the international system.[11]

I look at how changes in major power influence with a protégé correspond to changes across a range of the minor power's domestic and foreign policies: democratic reform, human rights protections, trade openness, bilateral trade share with the major power, domestic militarization, and foreign policy alignment. For the domestic institutions and policies, I expect changes in major power influence to align with shifts in the protégé state towards the former's milieu goals, e.g., toward liberalism for the US, UK, and France and toward illiberalism for Russia and China (Wolfers 1984; Ruby and Gibler 2010; McDonald 2015; Martinez Machain 2021, 2024; Nieman and Allamong 2023).

[11]Minor powers are all non-major powers in the state-system list from Miller (2022).

Methodology

I use a Bayesian ECM to evaluate the hypotheses. An ECM allows me to focus on the dynamic properties of the relationship between changes in major power support and a minor power's policy outcomes (De Boef and Keele 2008; Webb, Linn and Lebo 2020). A Bayesian framework, meanwhile, aids in construction of the long-run effects—particularly in estimates of their uncertainty (Nieman and Peterson 2025).

The ECM is specified as:

$$\Delta y_t = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 y_{t-1} + \beta_0 \Delta x_t + \beta_1 x_{t-1} + \epsilon_t \tag{1}$$

where the first difference of y_t is determined by a constant, α_0, the lagged value of y_{t-1}, the first difference and lagged value of x_t, and the stochastic term ϵ_t. The error correction parameter, α_1, accounts for how fast the system (i.e., the time series of y and x) returns to equilibrium after a shock.[12] The theoretical range of this parameter is $0 > \alpha_1 > -2$, where the midpoint, $\alpha = -1$, implies an immediate return to equilibrium whereas values further away (towards either bound) imply a slower return.[13]

The instantaneous effect of a change in x_t is captured by β_0, while the impact of the lagged level of x is represented by β_1. The latter identifies the shock to the equilibrium that will then reverberate through the lagged dependent variable until the system returns to equilibrium. The long-run effect of a change in x on y, then, needs to account for the total effect of a change in x across multiple time periods. This is calculated from the long-run multiplier (LRM), which is the initial shock divided by the error correction rate, or $-\frac{\beta_1}{\alpha_1}$.

While recovering an estimate of the long-run effect is relatively straightforward, calculat-

[12] The ECM from Equation 1 is mathematically equivalent to an auto-distributed lag (ADL) model specified as $y_t = \delta_0 + \delta_1 y_{t-1} + \gamma_0 x_t + \gamma_1 x_{t-1} + \epsilon$, where y is measured in level terms, x_t and x_{t-1} are measured as the level of the independent variable at time t and $t-1$. The relationship between the key coefficients on y_{t-1}, x_t, and x_{t-1} for the ECM and ADL are: $\alpha_1 = \delta_1 - 1$, $\beta_0 = \gamma_0$, $\beta_1 = \delta_0 + \delta_1$. See Marriott and Newbold (1998, 327–328), De Boef and Keele (2008, 189–190), and Keele, Linn and Webb (2016).

[13] An error correction rate where $0 > \alpha_1 > -1$ implies a steady return to the long-run equilibrium, whereas a rate of $-1 > \alpha_1 > -2$ indicates an oscillating return. Values of either $\alpha_1 > 0$ or $\alpha_1 < -2$ mean that the relationship is explosive and no long-run equilibrium exists. See Keele, Linn and Webb (2016, 34–35).

ing its uncertainty is more complicated, as there is not a direct estimate of the standard error of the LRM (De Boef and Keele 2008, 191–192). Since the LRM is a ratio of coefficients, the formula for the variance of the ratio of coefficients with known variances can be used. The formula is:

$$Var(\frac{a}{b}) = (\frac{1}{b^2})Var(a) + (\frac{a^2}{b^4})Var(b) - 2(\frac{a}{b^3})Cov(a, b). \tag{2}$$

There are two common approaches used to approximate the variance of this ratio. The first is to calculate the LRM from an ECM and use the Bewley transformation, which estimates the variance of the LRM directly, while the second is to apply the Delta method, which expands a random variable—in this case the LRM—via a Taylor series and calculating the resulting asymptotic variance of this estimate. While these estimates of the standard error are *asymptotically* accurate, they may not be as appropriate for relatively short series, nor when the dynamic properties of the data exhibit high autocorrelation or are unknown (Webb, Linn and Lebo 2019, 2020; Nieman and Peterson 2025). The data used in the current study exhibit both characteristics: a relatively short time series for international states and the key variables have high autocorrelation. As a result, the approximations of the variance of the LRM can lead to standard errors that do not conform with the theoretical range of the point estimates, and possibly take on nonsensical values (Nieman and Peterson 2025).[14]

I overcome these issues by applying a Bayesian technique developed by Nieman and Peterson (2025) to directly estimate the LRM and its uncertainty. The technique uses a semi-informed prior for the coefficient on the lagged dependent variable and estimates the posterior distribution from Markov chain Monte Carlos (MCMC). The semi-informed prior is informed in that it constrains the resulting dynamic relationship to their theoretical bounds; but by giving equal density to the values between these bounds, it is uniformed so as not to bias the point estimate. This technique also takes advantage of the well-

[14]If the confidence interval for α_1 nears or exceeds 0, then the denominator of the LRM can take very small, or even negative, values. In that case, the estimation of the variance of the LRM will be "mildly explosive" Hill and Peng (2014, 293). If $\alpha_1 = 0$, the variance will be undefined.

known property MCMC methods that one can estimate and summarize the distribution of functions of parameters (e.g., ratios of coefficients) *directly* from the posterior distribution (Gelfand et al. 1990; Murr, Traunmüller and Gill 2023). This eschews the need for asymptotic assumptions: once a Markov chain has converged, each individual MCMC simulation draws parameter estimates from the joint probability distribution and, since the LRM is a ratio of coefficients, then it, too, is drawn from the posterior distribution.[15] The combination of the semi-informed prior and the MCMC estimation keeps both the point estimate and its uncertainty within the same theoretical bounds, providing direct and theoretically-informed estimates of the long-run effects of a change in the independent variable.

The Bayesian ECM is specified as in Eq 1, with a semi-informed prior of $\mathcal{U}(-2, 0)$ on the coefficient for lagged y, diffuse priors of $\mathcal{N}(0, 20)$ for the constant and the coefficients associated with Δx_t and x_{t-1}, and a prior for the variance distributed $\mathcal{G}(1, 10)$. The specific size of the MCMC sample, number of burn-in iterations, and degree of thinning vary based on diagnostics for the specific model.[16]

Major Power Influence

In order to capture the degree of *major power support* projected toward for a minor power, I use a data from McManus and Nieman (2019). These scores are measured annually for each minor power, from each major power, for the period from 1950 to 2010. The data are derived from using a Bayesian latent measurement model to construct a measure of the level of support signaled based on seven component variables: alliances, nuclear and troop deployments, arms transfers, military exercises, and leadership visits and statements.[17]

These signals are valuable in measuring major power influence, as they require more than just intention on the part of the major power but also a degree of agreement and

[15]The quality of inference for sampling-based methods, such as MCMCs, relies on the *number of samples* taken, rather than the *size of the sample* (McNeish 2016).

[16]The minimum number of MCMCs are 50,000 after a burn-in of 250,000 and thinning of 50.

[17]McManus and Nieman (2019) include only security-related signals in their measure. Though economic tools could be used to recruit and retain protégés, McManus and Nieman (2019, fn 2) find that such gestures have little correlation with security-oriented signals, suggesting that they are used for different purposes.

subordination of the part of the recipient protégé state, reflecting the security–autonomy tradeoff (Morrow 1991; Lake 2009; Johnson 2015). This intentionality on both the sender and receiver makes these data useful for measuring major power influence. That the sender is readily able to suspend these signals, moreover, make them especially appropriate for looking at the effects of sudden major power disengagement on protégé outcomes.

The measurement model treats various signals of support as manifestations of the underlying degree of support by a major power to a protégé. The measurement model captures the latent level of influence by estimating the relative importance of the individual signals based on their frequency and correlation, and calculates the total support for each minor power based on the relative weights of the observed signals they receive. The measurement model yields a continuous measure of overall signaled support for each minor power, with higher values indicating greater support.

The *major power support* measure offers other advantages over alternative measures. First, rather than relying on just one or two possible signals, the measurement model allows for capturing support across a variety of potential foreign policy tools at a major power's disposal (Most and Starr 1989; Palmer and Morgan 2006), while weighing each signal's relative contribution to the total support signaled. Next, by incorporating several indicators of support, the measure can account for foreign policy substitution in conveying support. This is important, as some major powers use different signals for democratic and autocratic protégés (McManus and Yarhi-Milo 2017). Relying on only one or two signals may fail to capture support in these and other cases (Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka and Cooper 2016). Finally, rather than assuming that all signals convey the same informational value when sent by different major powers, McManus and Nieman (2019) account for heterogeneity in the signaling strength of individual gestures of support across major powers.

Since I estimate an ECM, *major power support* is included as a first difference and as a lag measured in level terms.

Dependent Variables

I evaluate the hypotheses using a number of different dependent variables. By using several different dependent variables, I am able to assess whether the impact of changing (increasing/decreasing) major power influence is heterogeneous or constant across multiple several domestic and foreign policy outcomes.

Democracy is operationalized using the polyarchy score from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Pemstein and von Römer 2025). The polyarchy measure is constructed from an index weighing various indicators of electoral processes and government constraints. The resulting measure is scaled between 0 and 1.

I also investigate other domestic practices, specifically *human rights protections* and *judicial independence*. Human rights protection capture the level of physical integrity right protections using data from Fariss (2014). Fariss uses a measurement model to estimate latent human rights protections over time while accounting for changing standards in accountability. The data range between -3.11 and 4.67. Judicial independence is latent variable of de facto independence in the rule of law based on a measurement model developed by Linzer and Staton (2012). This measure varies from 0 to 1.

Next, I account for *trade openness* and *major power share of trade* to capture international economic behavior. Trade openness captures how dependent an economy is to international economic processes and is measured as a state's total trade divided by GDP. Major power trade share accounts for the proportion of a countries total trade that is with the specified major power. These are measured using trade data from Barbieri, Keshk and Pollins (2009) and GDP from Gleditsch (2002).

Finally, *foreign policy alignment* is operationalized in two ways. First, I use an alliance-based measure of foreign policy similarity. The assumption is that states with a less diversified alliance portfolios, such as those where most or all of its allies share an alliance with the same major power, are more reliant on that major power and more aligned in their foreign policy. Conversely, a more diversified alliance portfolio, with a greater share of alliances that

are independent of the major power, are less aligned (Bueno de Mesquita 1981; Lake 2009). The specific variable employed is Häge's (2011) kappa measure.

Second, I use a measure based on United Nations general assembly voting agreement. While alliances capture broad, structural components of the foreign policy alignment, UN voting accounts for more topical and less rigid elements. I operationalize this measure as the percent agreement with a specific major power and obtain UN voting data from Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten (2017). Together, these two measures capture the most common dimensions of foreign policy similarity (Signorino and Ritter 1999; Gallop and Minhas 2021).

Controls

I also include several statistical controls.[18] I include *GDP/capita* and *external threat* in all models. GDP/capita is from Gleditsch (2002). External threat is a continuous latent measure that accounts for the probability of a violent militarized dispute conditioned by a state's geopolitical neighborhood and is obtained from Nieman and Gibler (2023). Models for human right protections include controls for the logged number of *protests*, logged *population*, and an indicator for a new or ongoing *civil war*. The first two variables are from Banks and Wilson (2010) and the last variable from Dixon and Sarkees (2016). Models for trade openness, major power trade share, and foreign policy alignment include controls for GDP, obtained from (Gleditsch 2002). The trade models also account for human rights protections. Lastly, all models include democracy (except when it is the outcome of interest).

Since the ECM focuses on the first difference the dependent variables, rather than their level, time-invariant cross-sectional factors (e.g., former colonial status) or unit-level unobservables, which are often modeled with dummy variables or country fixed effects, are effectively differenced out of the estimated equations. The ECM thus enhances causal leverage by isolating the impact of temporal changes on the variables of interest.

[18]Each control variable is included as a first difference and as a lag measured in level terms in the ECM.

Results

I evaluate the hypotheses across several domestic and foreign policies. The results are presented in two parts: the top of each table reports the short-term effects associated with changes in major power support, while the bottom of each table displays the long-term effects. For each, I summarize the posterior distribution from the MCMCs where coefficients are the median value for each associated variable, and their 95 percent credible intervals are underneath in braces.[19] In this section, I present results for each outcome, first for the US, and then add Russia as an alternative power. I estimate the effect for other major powers in the next section.

Table 2 reports the impact of changes in the US and Russian support on a protégé state's level of democracy. Model 1 focuses on the impact of changes in US support: I start with the instantaneous effect, which is captured by the coefficient on Δ*US support*. The coefficient for Δ*US support* is positive and its 95 percent credible interval excludes zero, indicating a positive effect. In fact, the effect is positive in over 99.9% of the draws from the posterior, indicating an extremely high level of confidence in a positive effect. Of course, a positive effect for Δ*US support* reflects that the level of democracy increases when there is a year-to-year increase US support; the inverse, then, also holds, a decrease in US support leads to a decrease in a protégé's democracy level. This offers initial support for hypothesis 1.

The long-term impact of changes in US support is constructed by from the ratio of the coefficients from $US\ Support_{t-1}$ and $Democracy_{t-1}$. The former represents the initial shock to the equilibrium—the joint effect of US support at time t and $t-1$, in this case—and the latter captures the error correction rate—the speed in which the system returns to equilibrium after a shock. This ratio is the LRM, which captures the total effect of a change in the independent variable.

The coefficient on $US\ Support_{t-1}$ is positive and the 95 percent credible interval is again positive; here, more than 99.9% of draws from the posterior are positive. The coefficient

[19] Control variables are not displayed.

Table 2: Effect of Changes in Major Power Support on Protégé Democracy.

Sample:	All Regimes	Mixed Regimes	Mixed Regimes
Δ US Support	.005	.008	.008
	[.002, .008]	[.003, .012]	[.003, .012]
US Support$_{t-1}$	.004	.008	.007
	[.002, .005]	[.005, .010]	[.005, .010]
Δ Russia Support			-.005
			[-.011, .001]
Russia Support$_{t-1}$			-.003
			[-.005, -.001]
Democracy$_{t-1}$	-.017	-.075	-.080
	[-.021, -.012]	[-.086, -.065]	[-.089, -.069]
Long-run Effect			
US Support	.215	.102	.090
	[.122, .315]	[.068, .138]	[.058, .124]
Russia Support			-.042
			[-.069, -.016]
Controls	Y	Y	Y
Number of Observations	7945	4154	4154

Note: Median and 95% credible interval (in braces) summarize the posterior distribution estimated from Bayesian error correction model with 50,000 MCMCs after 250,000 burn-in and thinning of 50. Control variables are *GDP/capita* and *external threat*. Long-run effects are constructed from the MCMCs for the ratio of parameters for the change and lag of major power over the lagged dependent variable (long-run multiplier: $-\frac{\beta_1}{\alpha_1}$).

for $Democracy_{t-1}$ is very close to zero—the upper limit—and far away from -1, which would indicate a series with no dynamics or memory at all. That $\alpha = -.017$ indicates a very slow return to equilibrium; in other words, the variable is largely determined by its own prior values and exhibits a high degree of autocorrelation.[20] As such, a shock in support at time t will impact future values of outcome for periods far beyond the initial change.

As noted above, the primary advantage of the Bayesian approach in the context of an ECM is its estimation of the long-run effects and especially their variance, as their estimates are obtained directly from the MCMCs (Gelfand et al. 1990; Murr, Traunmüller and Gill 2023). In the case of a change in US support, there is clear evidence of a positive long-run impact on a protégé state's level of democracy: the median estimate is a .215 increase on

[20] An estimate of $\alpha = -.017$ on the lagged dependent variable from an ECM is equivalent to an estimate of $\delta_1 = .983$ on the lagged dependent variable from an ADL model in fn 12. While the presentation of the ADL model is more familiar, the ECM is parameterized in terms of change and is more consistent with the theory, as well as being preferable with data series that have extremely high autocorrelation.

the level of democracy and the entirety of the 95 credible interval is above zero, with a lower bound of .126 and an upper bound of .321, and over 99.9% of draws above zero. A decrease in US support, of course, would translate to the inverse of these figures, with a decrease of between .123 and .316 in democracy on a scale of 0–1. Substantively, this is a shift in the quality of democracy equivalent to the difference of the single party rule Mexico of 1992 to its competitive democratic 2008 version.

The slight asymmetry in the Bayesian credible intervals reflects the slow error correction rate: as the denominator (α_1) of the long-run multiplier nears zero, the impact of the numerator (β_1) is significantly heightened and skews the credible interval. This asymmetry highlights the value of the Bayesian ECM with a semi-informed prior: traditional estimates of uncertainty of the LRM, e.g., the Bewley transformation, rely on asymptotic properties and ignore the theoretical-induced limited range of the error correction rate—bound between -2 and 0. Most of the time series for the countries in the sample in the current study, however, are relatively short, with a maximum of 61 observations. Moreover, the semi-informed prior keeps the estimates of α_1 firmly within its theoretical limits and results in a posterior distribution—summarized by the MCMCs—that keep estimates of uncertainty within those bounds, providing more substantively plausible and theoretically-informed results.

Model 2 repeats the analysis but restricts the sample to one of mixed regimes.[21] The results are similar: the coefficients for Δ*US support* and *US support*$_{t-1}$ are positive while the parameter on *Democracy*$_{t-1}$ is slightly lower at $\alpha_1 = -.075$ but remains elevated and indicates that contemporaneous shocks persist through strong temporal autocorrelation. Through the short-run effect sizes of a change in US support and the previous level of support are slightly greater than in the full sample, the reduction in the size of the error correction rate is large enough to reduce the long-run effect roughly in half. Substantively, this smaller effect size is akin to a difference between Mexico in 1992 to its late 1990s, emerging democracy version.

Model 3 also examines mixed regimes, but adds Δ*Russia Support* and *Russia Support*$_{t-1}$

[21]States are coded as mixed regimes if their value on V-Dem's *polyarchy* measure ranges between .15 and .65. This range excludes consolidated democracies and autocracies.

to account for Russia as an illiberal alternative major power. The results for the Δ*US Support* and *US Support*$_{t-1}$ are the same as the previous model; both have positive effects. In contrast, Δ*Russia Support* and *Russia Support*$_{t-1}$ are each negative, though about half the size of their US counterparts. The 95 percent credible interval for Δ*Russia Support* includes zero—ranging from -.011 to .001—though it is negative in approximately 94% of draws, giving relatively high confidence in inferring a negative effect. *Russia Support*$_{t-1}$ is also negative and the credible interval excludes zero. The error correction rate is similar to that of model 2, with high autocorrelation between periods. The long-run effect for a change in US support is similar to the previous model. The long-run effect for a positive change in Russian support is a reduction of democracy level of .04, with a positive estimate in over 99.9% of draws from the posterior.

Table 3 displays the results for four models comparing the impact of changes in US and Russian support on the domestic legal institutional practices of human rights protections (models 1 and 2) and rule of law (models 3 and 4). Models 1 and 3 report the changes in US support, the lagged level of US support, and the error correction rate (lagged dependent variable). Model 2 replicates the first model while adding the first difference and lagged value of Russian support.

Models 1 and 2 show little evidence of an instantaneous effect on human rights protections for changes by either major power. Both models, however, find that the lagged level of major power support, and the lagged level of human rights protections, have significant effects. Both US and Russian support are positive while the error correction rate is close to zero, suggesting that changes in major power support reverberate through their new levels of support and feedback through the dependent variable to produce long-run effects. The results bear this out: changes in US support are positively associated with relatively large long-run effects. Surprisingly, changes in Russian support yield directionally similar, albeit smaller, long-run effects.

What explains this puzzling result? One explanation is that the baseline level of human

Table 3: Effect of Changes in Major Power Support on Protégé Domestic Practices

	Human Rights Protections		Judicial Independence	
Δ US Support	.001	.004	.000	.001
	[-.008, .010]	[-.003, .010]	[-.001, .002]	[-.001, .002]
US Support$_{t-1}$	.007	.011	.001	.001
	[.003, .012]	[.007, .015]	[.001, .002]	[.000, .002]
Δ Russia Support		.001		-.002
		[-.010, .011]		[-.003, -.000]
Russia Support$_{t-1}$		.009		-.000
		[.004, .013]		[-.001, .001]
Human Rights Protections$_{t-1}$	-.019	-.020	-.010	-.009
	[-.023, -.015]	[-.023, -.016]	[-.012, -.008]	[-.012, -.006]
Long-run Effect				
US Support	.387	.542	.120	.121
	[.148, .645]	[.341, .759]	[.050, .212]	[.046, .221]
Russia Support		.435		-.009
		[.200, .692]		[-.087, .067]
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
Number of Observations	7738	7738	7693	7693

Note: Median and 95% credible interval (in braces) summarize the posterior distribution estimated from Bayesian error correction model with 50,000 MCMCs after 500,000 burn-in and thinning of 100 for models 1 and 2, and 100,000 MCMCs after 1,500,000 burn-in and thinning of 200 for models 3 and 4. Control variables are: *GDP/capita*, *democracy*, *protests*, *civil war*, *external threat*, and population. Long-run effects are constructed from the MCMCs for the ratio of parameters for the change and lag of major power over the lagged dependent variable (long-run multiplier: $-\frac{\beta_1}{\alpha_1}$).

rights protects for protégé states with relatively high US support are greater than that of those protégé states with relatively high Russian support. Since an ECM looks at changes in, rather than levels of, the dependent variable, it may be the case that greater major power support lends itself to enhanced stability which then prevents the worst levels of human rights violations, rather than that increases in major power support lead to improved human rights altogether. In support of this interpretation, the conditional mean for human rights of a country with a US support score of .5 or greater (e.g., conducting a joint military exercise and receiving arms transfers) is just under one standard deviation more than for a country with a Russia support score of .5 or greater. This descriptive analysis—combined with the results in Table 3—suggest that while there are clear baseline differences in human rights practices between US and Russian protégé states, decreases in major power support power worsen human rights conditions.

Models 3 and 4 demonstrate that while there is little evidence of a short-term impact of

Table 4: Effect of Changes in Major Power Support on Protégé Trade.

Dependent Variable:	$\frac{\text{Trade}}{\text{GDP}}$	$\frac{\text{Trade}}{\text{GDP}}$	$\frac{\text{US Trade}}{\text{Total Trade}}$	$\frac{\text{US Trade}}{\text{Total Trade}}$
Δ US Support	.004	.004	.041	.039
	[-.006, .014]	[-.007, .014]	[.019, .065]	[.014, .063]
US Support$_{t-1}$	-.004	-.003	.026	.017
	[-.010, .002]	[-.010, .003]	[.012, .041]	[.002, .033]
Δ Russia Support		-.008		-.027
		[-.020, .004]		[-.056, .003]
Russia Support$_{t-1}$		.000		-.051
		[-.007, .008]		[-.066, -.037]
Dependent Variable$_{t-1}$	-.038	-.038	-.072	-.081
	[-.045, -.031]	[-.045, -.031]	[-.080, -.063]	[-.090, -.072]
Long-run Effect				
US Support	-.100	-.090	.368	.212
	[-.270, .064]	[-.266, .081]	[.171, .569]	[.030, .408]
Russia Support		.004		-.631
		[-.200, .202]		[-.805, -.461]
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
Number of Observations	6086	6086	7383	7383

Note: Median and 95% credible interval (in braces) summarize the posterior distribution estimated from Bayesian error correction model with 50,000 MCMCs after 100,000 burn-in and thinning of 50. Control variables are: *GDP/capita*, *GDP*, *democracy*, *human rights protections*, and *external threat*. All controls include their difference and one-year lag. Long-run effects are constructed from the MCMCs for the ratio of parameters for the change and lag of major power over the lagged dependent variable (long-run multiplier: $-\frac{\beta_1}{\alpha_1}$).

US support and judicial independence, there is a positive relationship between the lagged level of US support and judicial independence. The reverse holds for Russian support: there is a small negative relationship between changes in support and judicial independence, but there is no evidence of a relationship between the lagged level of support and judicial independence. The error correction rate is again close to zero, indicating strong feedback processes. The long-run effect of increases (decreases) in US support are relatively large gains (losses) in judicial independence. There is little evidence, however, for an impact of Russian support on long-term judicial independence.

Next, I look at the impact of major power support on trade openness and US trade share, in Table 4. Trade openness captures the liberal principle of trade in general, whereas US trade share looks at the specific benefits for one major power. I focus on US trade share, rather than Russian trade share, owing to a lack of reliable data during the Soviet period.

Each of the models estimate an error correction rate near zero, indicating significant

autocorrelation in the time series. Models 1 and 2 show limited evidence, however, for either a short- or long-run impact from changes in major power support on trade openness.[22] Models 3 and 4, however, are more stark, as the US trade share is significantly impacted. As the dependent variable is logged, the coefficient is interpreted as the approximation of the percent change in the outcome. A one-unit increase in US support (one-unit decrease) is associated with roughly a 4 percent increase (4 percent decrease) in US trade share. Similarly, an increase (decrease) in Russian support leads to an approximate 2.5 percent decrease (2.5 percent increase) in US trade share. Taken together, Table 4 indicates little evidence that a decrease in US support changes a minor power's reliance on trade, but does decrease how much it trades with the US.

To calculate the long-run impact of change in US support on the US share of a minor power's trade, the percent approximation breaks down; instead, the formula $\%\Delta y = 100[\exp(\beta) - 1]$ is used. Applied to model 3, a one-unit increase in US support is associated with an approximate 44 percent change in US trade share. The inverse, a decrease in US support, however, would have a negative coefficient, producing a 31 percent decrease in the US share of trade. Model 4 reveals a result in the same direction, but smaller in scope. Here, a one-unit increase of US support would lead to a 24 percent increase in the US share of trade over the long-run, while a similarly sized decrease would produce a reduction in US share of total trade of roughly 19 percent. An increase in Russian support would have a long-run effect of reducing the US trade share nearly 47 percent.

Finally, Table 5 looks at the impact of a change in US support on a minor power's foreign policy alignment with the US and with Russia. Protégé state foreign policy positions appear fairly stable over time; the error correction rates indicate high temporal dependence, though the coefficients for Russian alignment (models 3 and 4) are lower than that of US alignment (models 3 and 4). Models 1 and 2 focus on US foreign policy alignment, with the former an alliance-based measure and the latter based on UN voting. Both show that increases in

[22]The long-run impact as the LRM is negative in 88.3% and 85.1% of draws, respectively.

Table 5: Effect of Changes in Major Power Support on Protégé Foreign Policy Alignment.

Dependent Variable:	US Align. (Alliance)	US Align. (UN Votes)	Russia Align. (Alliance)	Russia Align. (UN Votes)
Δ US Support	.001	.012	.000	.000
	[-.001, .003]	[.006, .017]	[-.003, .003]	[-.006, .007]
US Support$_{t-1}$	.001	.003	-.001	-.002
	[.000, .003]	[-.001, .006]	[-.003, .001]	[-.006, .002]
Δ Russia Support	-.004	-.009	.032	.032
	[-.006, -.001]	[-.016, -.002]	[.028, .035]	[.024, .039]
Russia Support$_{t-1}$	-.000	-.005	.011	.017
	[-.001, .001]	[-.009, -.002]	[.009, .014]	.013, .020
Dependent Variable$_{t-1}$	-.008	-.147	-.061	-.176
	[-.011, -.005]	[-.157, -.136]	[-.068, -.055]	[-.188, -.165]
Long-run Effect				
US Support	.163	.018	-.014	-.011
	[-.003, .330]	[-.007, .042]	[-.046, .016]	[-.032, .011]
Russia Support	-.050	-.037	.186	.095
	[-.203, .104]	[-.060, -.014]	[.156, .216]	[.074, .116]
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
Number of Observations	7945	7224	7945	7222

Note: Median and 95% credible interval (in braces) summarize the posterior distribution estimated from Bayesian error correction model with 40,000 MCMCs after 75,000 burn-in and thinning of 50. Control variables are: *GDP/capita*, *GDP*, *democracy*, and *external threat*. Long-run effects are constructed from the MCMCs for the ratio of parameters for the change and lag of major power over the lagged dependent variable (long-run multiplier: $-\frac{\beta_1}{\alpha_1}$).

US support correspond to increased alignment in both the short- and long-run, with ΔUS *Support* positive in over 89% of draws using the alliance-based measure and over 99.9% of draws with the UN voting measure and the LRM positive in over 97.7% of draws with the alliance-based measure and over 92.5% of draws for the UN voting measure. Increases in Russian support are negative in the short-run for the alliance-based measure,[23] and both the short- and long-run for the measure based on UN voting. Substantively, the short-run effects of changes in US support are very small for both the alliance- and UN-based measures, while the long-run effects are moderate for the alliance-based measure[24]—the coefficient of .172 represents a change of 57% of one standard deviation from the mean—but only a 2 percentage point change in the percent of UN voting agreement.

Models 3 and 4 look at foreign policy alignment with Russia, using the same two measures.

[23]The long-run effect is negative in only 75% of draws.

[24]The alliance-based measure varies from a minimum of -.33 to a maximum .9.

In this case, increases in Russian support exert both short- and long-run positive effects in alignment with Russian foreign policy. Moreover, these effects are larger, in substantive terms, than those of increases in US support. For the alliance-based measure, the long-run effect for Russian are larger than those of US increases at just over one standard deviation while the differences in agreement in UN voting is over four times more. Of course, the inverse is that decreases in Russian support are associated with similarly sized dis-alignment in a minor power's foreign policy. Conversely, changes in US support have virtually no short-term effect on a minor power's alignment towards Russian foreign policy. There is also only moderate evidence of a long-term effect, with the LRM for the alliance- and UN voting-based measures being negative in over 82.6% and 83.4% of draws, respectively.

The differences in the substantive effects for changes in major power support and protégé state foreign policy alignment, across the US- and Russian-led networks, may reflect differences in how such hierarchical networks are organized and structured (McManus and Nieman 2019; Norrlof and Wohlforth 2019), or whether a network is led by either liberal or illiberal power (Lanoszka 2013; Chyzh and Labzina 2018). In particular, there is likely variation in whether carrots are withdrawn or sticks applied, by major powers when a minor power acts counter to the existing hierarchical arrangement (Lanoszka 2013; Truckos 2021). In either case, the results of Table 5 indicates that when support is withdrawn, minor powers tend to drift away from the major power's alignment.

Overall, the results summarized in the four tables illustrate the impact of variation in US and Russian support on protégé states' domestic institutions and practices, as well as their foreign economic and security policies. Reductions in major power support sometimes leads to an short-term turn against the major power's milieu goals—e.g., democracy, trade—offering mixed support for H_1. Yet, even when there is not an immediate shift, there is strong evidence of a long-term backlash against the major power's milieu goals across the range of policy outcomes. This result is consistent with H_2. Finally, the repercussions are heightened eve more if a rival major power is able to step in to fill the void, consistent with H_3.

Other Major Powers

The previous section demonstrates the impact of changes in US- and Russian-support impact the degree to which protégé states adhere to the former's milieu goals. Here, I consider whether changes in support and influence by other liberal and illiberal major powers similarly impacts variation in protégé state behavior over both the short- and long-term. Specifically, I look at the impact of changes in support by the UK, France, and China, for all non-major powers in the international system. I treat the UK and France as holding liberal milieu goals and China promoting illiberal goals. In the cases of the UK and France, I use the same 1950–2010 sample; however, I restrict the analysis to the time period after the end of the Cold War (post 1990) in the case to China, to reflect its re-emergence as a global actor. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 6.

The results are broadly similar to those reported in the previous section, with the impact of the liberal major powers of UK and France having similar effects to the US, and the impact of the other illiberal major power of China having similar effects to Russia. Increases in support by the UK and France are associated with short- and long-run increases in democratic reform and human rights protections.[25] In contrast, increases in support by China are associated with negative short- and long-term effects for democratic reform and human rights.[26] Increases in support by all three major powers are associated with short- and long-term increases in bilateral trade, and foreign policy alignment.[27]

Overall, the results from this and the previous section demonstrate the impact of major power support and withdraw. On average, increases in support from a liberal major power correspond to improvements in democracy and human rights in the minor power, an increased share of the minor power's trade for the major power, and more aligned foreign

[25]Increases in $\Delta Support$ for the UK and the LRM for France are positive in over 97.1% and 94.1% of draws, respectively, for *democracy*. In the case of *human rights*, $\Delta Support$ for the UK and France are positive in over 92.9% and 97.6% of draws, respectively.

[26]Increases in $\Delta Support$ for China are negative for *human rights* in over 94.4% of draws and, surprisingly, positive for *judicial independence* in over 91.4% of draws.

[27]For *foreign policy alignment*, increases in $\Delta Support$ for China are positive in over 96.8% of draws.

Table 6: Effect of Changes in UK, France, and China Support on Protégé Policies

Dependent Variable:	Democracy	Human Rights	Judicial Independence	$\frac{\text{Trade}}{\text{GDP}}$	$\frac{\text{MP Trade}}{\text{GDP}}$	MP Align. (Alliance)
			Major Power: United Kingdom			
Δ Support	.005	.006	-.000	-.009	.015	.010
	[-.000, .010]	[-.002, .014]	[-.001, .001]	[-.018, .001]	[-.004, .034]	[.007, .012]
Support_{t-1}	.007	.011	-.000	-.000	.025	.011
	[.003,.011]	[.005, .018]	[-.001, .001]	[-.008, .007]	[.010, .039]	[.008, .013]
$\text{Dependent Variable}_{t-1}$	-.072	-.020	-.009	-.038	-.080	-.026
	[-.082, -.061]	[-.024, -.017]	[-.011, -.006]	[-.045, -.031]	[-.089, -.072]	[-.031, -.021]
Long-run Effect	.097	.561	-.040	-.010	.305	.400
	[.038, .158]	[.269, .866]	[-.152, .065]	[-.213, .192]	[.120, 491]	[.326, .477]
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Number of Observations	4154	7738	7693	6086	7383	7945
			Major Power: France			
Δ Support	.001	.007	.000	.001	.017	.006
	[-.003, .005]	[-.000, .014]	[-.001, .001]	[-.006, .009]	[.000, .034]	[.003, .008]
Support_{t-1}	.003	.008	.000	.000	.034	.005
	[-.001, .007]	[.002, .014]	[-.001, .001]	[-.007, .007]	[.020, .049]	[.003, .008]
$\text{Dependent Variable}_{t-1}$	-.071	-.019	-.010	-.038	-.075	-.022
	[-.081, -.060]	[-.023, -.015]	[-.012, -.008]	[-.045, -.031]	[-.083, -.068]	[-.027, -.018]
Long-run Effect	.046	.408	.004	.001	.455	.244
	[-.012, .104]	[.086, .740]	[-.083, .082]	[-.192, .187]	[.264, 641]	[.153, .330]
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Number of Observations	4154	7738	7693	6086	7383	7945
			Major Power: China			
Δ Support	-.009	-.011	.000	-.020	.049	.003
	[-.015, -.002]	[-.025, .002]	[-.001, .002]	[-.035, -.006]	[.022, .076]	[-.000, .007]
Support_{t-1}	-.011	-.020	.001	-.010	.049	.001
	[-.018, -.004]	[-.034, -.007]	[-.000, .002]	[-.026, .006]	[.020, .078]	[-.003, .005]
$\text{Dependent Variable}_{t-1}$	-.085	-.030	-.004	-.037	-.057	-.007
	[-.102, -.069]	[-.036, -.025]	[-.007, -.000]	[-.047, -.026]	[-.070, -.044]	[-.014, -.000]
Long-run Effect	-.129	-.675	.231	-.285	.853	.182
	[-.218, -.050]	[-1.137, -.236]	[-.116, 2.531]	[-.762, .151]	[.355, 1.322]	[-1.317, 2.066]
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Number of Observations	1791	3259	3253	3083	3067	3277

Note: Median and 95% credible interval (in braces) summarize the posterior distribution estimated from Bayesian error correction model with 50,000 MCMCs after 500,000 burn-in and thinning of 100 for models 1 and 2, and 100,000 MCMCs after 1,500,000 burn-in and thinning of 200 for models 3 and 4. The sample for *democracy* includes only mixed regimes. All samples for China restricted to after 1990. Control variables are the same as for the dependent variables in Tables 2–5. Long-run effects are constructed from the MCMCs for the ratio of parameters for the change and lag of major power over the lagged dependent variable (long-run multiplier: $-\frac{\beta_1}{\alpha_1}$).

policies. Minor powers that lose the support of a liberal major power experience democratic backsliding, a deterioration of human rights, and a diversification in trade and foreign policy alignment away from the liberal major power. Increased engagement with an illiberal power yield declines in democracy, less trade with liberal powers, and a more aligned foreign policy, while decreased engagement leads to the inverse.

Conclusion

I argue that major power disengagement has significant impacts on minor power's behaviors. The results bear these expectations out across a range of domestic institutions and policy practices. Minor powers broadly shift away from the major power's milieu goals in both the short- and long-run. These shifts are even more stark if a rival major power is able to replace the previous major power's influence with its own.

The impact of the changes for protégé states also impact the major power. Losses of relatively low cost means of influence by a major power over a protégé state may require far more costly actions to achieve the same policy outcomes in the future. For instance, states whose preferences and policy positions already lean towards that of a major power require far less material inducements to join international coalitions (Henke 2017) or allow the presence of military bases (Nieman et al. 2021). The minor powers with publics that hold favorable views of a major power are more inclined to approve of its foreign policy and are less likely to object and demonstrate against requests for support (Allen et al. 2020, 2023; Henke 2018).

The results paint a fairly pessimistic picture for the future of the LIO. As US President Trump continues to abandon and undermine its relationship with aligned protégé states, the US will find itself in a world less hospitable to its values, be less able to influence global events, and required to pay a higher cost when it tries to do so. Moreover, the impact of US withdraw will likely not be fully felt for some time. While the empirical results here indicate that the US could offset or reverse these changes under a future administration, these effects would not be instantaneous either. Unless other liberal allies are able to replace the US's role with each minor power that the US abandons, while also preventing the expansion of rival major powers such as China and Russia, it is likely that liberal domestic and foreign policies will decline. Under such a scenario, the LIO is unlikely to disappear, but its depth and scope would contract precipitously.

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