

Thinking Outside the Alliance: Frontstage v. Backstage Signals of Support

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Signals of Support

- **Major powers have an interest in signaling support for their protégés**
- **Most literature to date has focused on alliances as a means of signaling support**
- **But major powers also signal support in many other ways**
 - Troops
 - Military aid
 - Arms sales
 - Leadership visits

Foreign Policy Substitutability

- **To some extent, all of these signals of support are substitutes**
- **Yet they also have some differences**
 - Hand-tying v. sunk costs
 - Requirements for veto player approval
 - Level of publicity
- **How does a major power choose which type of signal to send?**

The Puzzling Case of Saudi Arabia

- **In the last 10 years in our dataset (1998-2007), the US:**
 - Sold more arms to Saudi Arabia than to 98% of other countries
 - Deployed more troops in Saudi Arabia than in 95% of other countries
- **And yet**
 - The US president never visited Saudi Arabia
 - The Saudi king never visited the US
 - The US has no formal defense pact with Saudi Arabia



Riyadh: A destination rarely visited by US presidents

Frontstage v. Backstage Signals

- **To explain how major powers select which signals of support to send, we divide signals into two categories:**
 - Frontstage signals
 - Associated with high levels of publicity
 - Includes defense pacts and leader visits
 - Backstage signals
 - Not secret, but likely to receive less attention
 - Includes military aid and arms sales

The Signaling Decision

- **Major powers will generally prefer to send frontstage signals, either alone or in conjunction with backstage signals**
 - Publicity makes potential adversaries more aware that a signal has been sent
 - Publicity creates hand-tying costs that increase credibility

The Signaling Decision

- **Yet democratic major powers, such as the US, may be reluctant to send frontstage signals to an autocratic protégé due to:**
 1. Hypocrisy costs
 - Criticism for not practicing the democratic values preached
 2. Democratic credibility impediment
 - Frontstage signals of support for an autocratic regime may create public backlash that would actually undermine the credibility of the signal

The Signaling Decision

- **Autocratic protégés may also be reluctant to accept frontstage signals from the US because of:**
 1. Need for regime justification
 - Some autocrats justify their regimes based on opposition to the US-led world order
 2. Need to maintain perception of strength
 - Autocrats might not want to look weak by needing US support
 3. Fear of democratic values
 - Autocrats do not want their population to look on democratic values promoted by the US favorably

Hypotheses for the United States

- **Based on this theory, we expect:**
 - H1a: The United States is more likely to send frontstage signals of support to more democratic countries.
 - H1b: The United States is more likely to send solely backstage signals of support to less democratic countries.

Research Design

- **Dataset of country-years between 1950 and 2007**
 - The universe of potential US protégés
- **Use multinomial logit model to predict type of signal sent**
- **Key independent variable: Polity score**
- **Control variables**
 - MIDs fought against US rivals, MIDs fought on same side as US, other MIDs, UN voting similarity, Soviet alliance indicator, imports from and exports to US, time trend

Dependent Variable

- **The dependent variable has four categories**
 1. No signal of support (52% of sample)
 2. Backstage signaling only (4% of sample)
 - Level of military aid or arms sales in top 10%, but no visits or defense pact
 3. Frontstage signaling only (31% of sample)
 - Leader visit or defense pact, but no military aid or arms sales in top 10%
 4. Both types of signaling (13% of sample)
 - Leader visit or defense pact **as well as** level of military aid or arms sales in top 10%
- Note: For now, we omit troop deployments

Dependent Variable Examples

Countries Most Frequently in Cat. 2 (Backstage Only)

1. Saudi Arabia
2. Taiwan
3. Thailand
4. Morocco
5. Tunisia
6. Spain (before 1982)
7. Indonesia
8. Iran (before 1979)
9. Bahrain
10. Oman

Countries Most Frequently in Cat. 3 (Frontstage Only)

1. Costa Rica
2. Iceland
3. Luxembourg
4. Nicaragua
5. Panama
6. Paraguay
7. Dominican Republic
8. Guatemala
9. Haiti
10. Uruguay

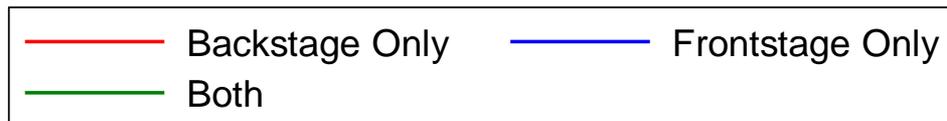
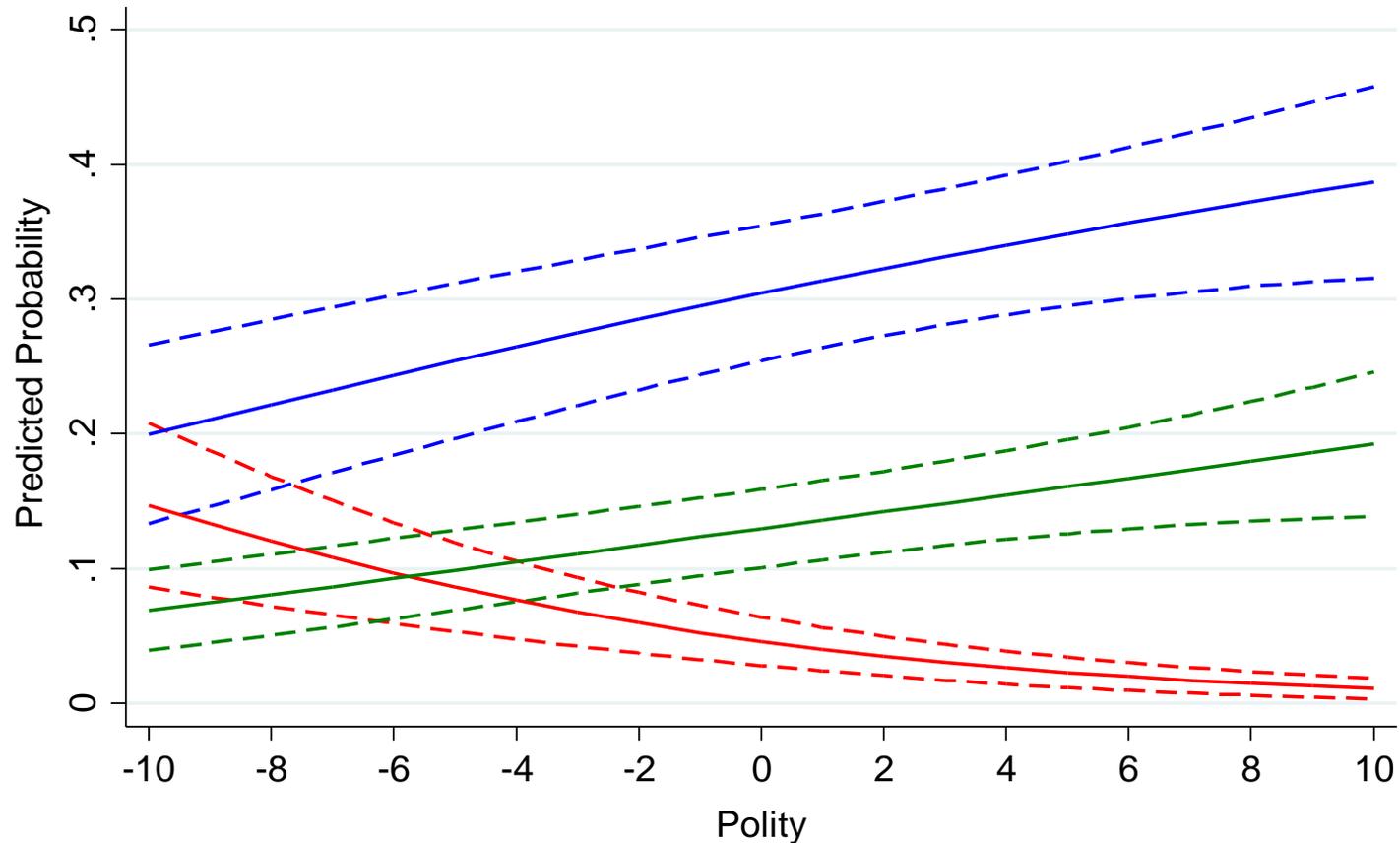
Countries Most Frequently in Cat. 4 (Front and Backstage)

1. Turkey
 2. Japan
 3. Greece
 4. South Korea
 5. Italy
 6. Netherlands
 7. Canada
 8. Israel
 9. United Kingdom
 10. Philippines
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Results

	Category 2: Backstage Only	Category 3: Frontstage Only	Category 4: Both Front and Backstage
Polity	-0.105^{***} (0.027)	0.061^{***} (0.015)	0.082^{***} (0.022)
US Rival MIDs	0.633 ^{***} (0.215)	-0.195 (0.191)	0.809 ^{***} (0.203)
US Side MIDs	0.767 ^{**} (0.342)	0.577 ^{**} (0.283)	1.035 ^{***} (0.293)
Other MIDs	0.071 (0.116)	-0.133 (0.098)	0.116 (0.086)
UN Voting Similarity	2.731 ^{***} (0.747)	1.973 ^{***} (0.278)	2.519 ^{***} (0.385)
Russian Ally	-1.619 ^{***} (0.468)	-1.019 ^{***} (0.247)	-1.171 ^{**} (0.499)
US Exports	0.856 ^{***} (0.268)	0.842 ^{***} (0.274)	0.899 ^{***} (0.271)
US Imports	-0.121 [*] (0.071)	-0.134 [*] (0.077)	-0.145 [*] (0.075)

Substantive Effect of Democracy



Robustness Checks

1. Lagged indicators of support categories
2. Multinomial probit
3. Splitting sample into Cold War and post-Cold War
4. Dropping some countries that might be outliers
5. Including troops as frontstage, then backstage signal
6. Putting leader visits in the opposite category from defense pacts – **Our result goes away, as predicted**
7. Adjusting threshold for aid and arms to be considered a signal of support
8. Controlling for region, identity of US president, US domestic conditions, and more
9. Changing the measurement of democracy, defense pacts, and previous MIDs

Conclusion

- **The US is more likely to send solely backstage signals of support to less democratic countries**
 - Suggests that concerns over the public reaction in both the US and the supported country influence signaling decisions
- **Not saying this is the only thing that matters in signaling decisions**
 - Control variables are also significant
 - Yet controls cannot provide a strong explanation for why one type of support signal is chosen over another