What Audiences Really Want:
The Effect of Compromise on Domestic Audience Costs

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Peace Science Conference

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Introduction

Existing Literature:

- Leaders pay a price when they back down from commitments.
- Threats are meaningful because they are costly.

Puzzle:

- Leaders often back down and reach compromises.
Introduction

**Broad Approval of Obama’s Delay of Syrian Airstrikes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obama’s delay of airstrike decision for diplomatic efforts</th>
<th>Rep</th>
<th>Dem</th>
<th>Ind</th>
<th>R-D gap</th>
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<td>80</td>
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<td>-24</td>
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<tr>
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<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>+16</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

**Will Syria give up chemical weapons in response to diplomacy?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rep</th>
<th>Dem</th>
<th>Ind</th>
<th>R-D gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-8</td>
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<td>Don’t know</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q. How can leaders *credibly* signal their intentions in negotiations?

Q. How does partisanship affect signaling strategies?

Q. When can leaders compromise?
Audience Cost Theory Focuses on Two Potential Mechanisms:

- **Lock-In**: Leaders become “locked in” because the costs of backing down are greater than the cost of war. *(Fearon, 1994)*

- **Separating Types**: Audience costs may signal a leader’s resolve, independent of a commitment device. *(Tarar et al, 2013)*
Theory: Public Threats & Signaling

Crisis Bargaining Model

H: Threaten or Not Threaten
F: Resist or Concede
H: Attack or Backs Down

Game Ends (War)

Game End (Stay Out)
Game Ends (Concessions)
Game Ends (Not Engage)
Theory: Public Threats & Signaling

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Crisis Bargaining Model

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H: Attack, Backs Down, or Propose Compromise
F: Reject or Accept

H: Attack or Don’t Attack

Game Ends (War)

Game Ends (War)
Game Ends (Concessions)
Game Ends (Not Engage)
Game Ends (Compromise)
Game Ends (Not Engage)

Game End (Stay Out)
Game End (Concessions)
Game Ends (Not Engage)
Game Ends (Compromise)
Game Ends (Not Engage)
Theory: Public Threats & Signaling

Crisis Bargaining Model

H: Threaten or Not Threaten
F: Propose Compromise or Concede
H: Accept or Attack

Game Ends (War)
Game Ends (Concessions)
Game Ends (Stay Out)

Game Ends (Compromise)
Reconsidering What Audiences Want:

- Audiences differentiate between types of inconsistency. Compromise settlements mitigate or eliminate audience costs.
  - Bluffing and compromising can be effective strategies. (Gowa, 1999; Mumpower, 1991)
  - Audience accountability does not reduce compromise behavior. (Druckman, 1994)
Reconsidering What Audiences Want:

- Existing Literature: Audience Costs are Non-Partisan
  
  “American politics scholars will no doubt be surprised by the dearth of partisan effects given their ubiquity elsewhere.”
  
  (Levendusky and Horowitz, 2012)

- Contrasts with Public Opinion Literature
  
  – Growing role of partisanship in foreign policy opinion.
    
    (Shapiro, 2005)
  
  – Conservatives support more aggressive policies.
    
Reconsidering What Audiences Want:

- Proposal Power: public prefers leaders who propose settlements.
  - Perception of leadership boosts approval.
  - Domestic reputation is maintained.
The Experiments:

- Respondents were told about a hypothetical international crisis: “A country sent its military to take over a territorial region in a neighboring country.”
- Randomly assigned the president’s strategy.
- Approval of the president’s strategy is the dependent variable. (Measured on a seven point scale)
Testing Compromise & Audience Costs

Respondent sees one randomly assigned condition:

- Stay Out

In remaining conditions, the President first issues threat:

“The U.S. president said that if the attacking country continued to invade, the United States military would immediately engage and attempt to push out the attacking country.”

- Engage
- Not Engage
- Compromise
Testing Compromise & Audience Costs

Qualtrics National Sample

Difference in Approval

Engage – Stay Out
Not Engage – Stay Out
Compromise – Stay Out

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What Audiences Really Want
Testing Compromise & Partisanship

Qualtrics National Sample

Difference in Approval

Audience of:
- Democrats
- Republicans

Engage – Stay Out
Not Engage – Stay Out
Compromise – Stay Out
Testing Compromise & Audience Costs

Follow-up Experiments:

- Varied whether president was a Democrat or Republican.
- Outcomes held constant across all treatments:
  
  “... the conflict ended with the attacking country taking control of 20 percent of the contested territory.”
Difference in Means: Compromise - Not Engage

Audience of:
- Democrats
- Republicans

Difference in Approval

- Republican President
- Democrat President
Testing Compromise & Proposal Power

Testing Proposal Power:

- The U.S. president (or leader of the attacking country) proposed a settlement...
- Test how partisans react to leaders of the same or opposing party

Compromise: “The attacking country continued to invade, but the president did not immediately engage. The U.S. president (or leader of the attacking country) proposed a settlement, which was agreed to by all parties, and the conflict ended with the attacking country taking control of 20 percent of the contested territory.”
Testing Compromise & Proposal Power

Average Approval for Compromise

- Average Approval Score
- Audience of:
  - ● Democrats
  - □ Republicans

Party Match
- President Proposes
- Foreign Leader Proposes

No Party Match
- President Proposes
- Foreign Leader Proposes

Audience of:

Democrats
Republicans

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Testing Compromise & Audience Costs

Signaling: Lock-in or Screening?

- **Lock-in**: Engage > Compromise
- **Screening**: Stay Out > Compromise > Engage
Testing Compromise & Audience Costs

Republican President Proposes Compromise

![Graph showing average approval scores for different actions, with audiences of Democrats and Republicans.]
Testing Compromise & Audience Costs

Democrat President Proposes Compromise

Average Approval Score

Audience of:
- Democrats
- Republicans

Stay Out    Engage    Compromise
Testing Compromise & Audience Costs

Democrat President Proposes Compromise

Average Approval Score

Audience of:
- ● Democrats
- □ Republicans

Stay Out | Engage | Compromise
Conclusions

- Republican presidents are unable to generate audience costs.
- Democratic presidents generate costs - only among republicans.
- Incomplete information & incentives to misrepresent persist.
- Rather than being committed to war, leaders have flexibility.
Thank You

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