STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE: HOW NEGOTIATION PROCESS AFFECTS SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS IN THE MASS PUBLIC

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ABSTRACT: There is growing populist discontent over interstate cooperation in international institutions. While this might reflect discontent with the substantive outcomes produced by these organizations, we suggest that it might also reflect ordinary citizens’ conceptions about the process and style by which states negotiate within the frameworks of international agreements. Using an original survey experiment of American registered voters, we find that the public generally supports the same outcomes more when their government adopts a “value-claiming” negotiating style where the leader makes the first offer and anchors the negotiation towards its preferred outcome. Those high in militant internationalism are also more supportive when the offer is accompanied by a threat, suggesting that leaders can generate support through aggressive negotiation postures. Finally, we find that Democrats are the most responsive to variations in the bargaining style when the leader is also a Democrat, rewarding the President more for hard bargaining than Republicans do. However, we also find that value-claiming tactics are a divisive strategy that can increase polarization and populist tensions. While the substance of international negotiations may matter, so does style.

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Introduction

There seems to be a rising tide of mass public, what we could call populist, resistance to international cooperation and international organizations. Whether it be the rise of opposition to trade deals in the United States or skepticism in Europe about the operations of the European Union, the public is increasingly questioning the value of international organizations and international cooperation. However, what is driving skepticism toward international cooperation and global governance remains hotly debated. These objections to global governance might be substantive in nature; perhaps those directly and materially harmed by international cooperation are expressing their discontent. They might also be sociotropic, resting on a general feeling that the national interest as a whole is not being served (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009).

Yet we have strong reason to believe that the ordinary citizen has very little understanding about the substantive outcomes produced by institutionalized diplomacy in international organizations. These are complex institutions, most of which deliberate largely in secret. It could be, however, that at least part of the growing opposition to multilateralism is based on assumptions about the process of institutionalized international diplomacy. While the mass public might generally not be able to judge the outcomes of international cooperation and whether it constitutes a good deal for themselves or others based on the substantive terms, they may nevertheless form opinions based on how their representatives and others are thought to negotiate. For instance, all things equal, the average American citizen will be more likely to support a trade deal if he or she thinks his or her President fought hard for it. That is a judgment based on the style rather than the substance of international negotiation (Rathbun, 2014). Indeed much of the rhetoric of Donald Trump on the campaign trail was that America had negotiated a set of bad deals without specifically mentioning any of the details. He criticized the Obama administration for not fighting hard enough for the American people and for accepting deals that should have been better and Trump vowed to renegotiate those agreements.

The literature on negotiation generally draws a distinction between two different types of negotiating styles: value-claiming and value-creating (Odell, 2000). Value-claiming is a distributive bargaining strategy premised on an assumption of a fixed-pie, accompanied by threats and inflated demands. It is the negotiation style that underlies international relations research on coercive bargaining and deterrence (Schelling, 1966), but is easily transposed into negotiation on international economic issues. This is the negotiating style that Trump himself has always pursued, a scorched-
earth policy of litigiousness and stubbornness. Value-creating, in contrast, is the search for win-win solutions based on reciprocity and information exchange. The general finding is that the default negotiation style for most is value-claiming, although based on individual-level differences, some are more predisposed to this tough, distributive bargaining than others.

In this article, based on an original survey experiment of American registered voters conducted in spring 2016, we demonstrate that public opinion toward international negotiations, specifically the negotiation of an investment dispute between the United States (under the leadership of President Obama) and a foreign firm, is affected by variation in the process of negotiation. Consistent with extensive findings outside of the international relations discipline, our respondents demonstrate an overall preference for value-claiming. Those surveyed indicate greater acceptance of the outcome of negotiation when the United States makes the first offer, a key element of value-claiming that seeks to anchor the negotiation closer to one’s own reservation point. Finally we find significant heterogeneity in the public’s response. The positive effect of making the first offer is particularly pronounced for Democrats, likely because they are more convinced that the President (Obama) was representing their interest. The positive effect of threats is stronger for those higher in militant internationalism, a foreign policy posture that provides an indirect measure of individual-level support for coercive bargaining (Wittkopf, 1990). Taken together, our results highlight how leaders can shape domestic public approval of international negotiations, not just by reaching better outcomes, but by using assertive value-claiming negotiation strategies that are popular among domestic voters.

**Literature Review and Theoretical Expectations**

We have theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that the style of negotiations will affect public support for its outcomes. Scholars have shown, for instance, that the public is often more supportive of outcomes whose process was reached in a procedurally legitimate fashion, even if the substance of the outcome is not favorable to one’s own interests. A democratic process, or one based on the rule of law, is more likely to meet approval than one based on coercion, even if the outcome reached through a more deliberative process is identical. Gibson et al show that the American public finds decisions reached by the Supreme Court more legitimate than those decided upon by Congress, even while holding self-interest constant (Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence, 2005). To our knowledge, however, no one has attempted to do the same with negotiating style.
Both the formal and the psychological literatures generally distinguish between types of negotiation. “Value-claiming,” sometimes called “distributive” or “contending” negotiation, is marked by “non-cooperative” behavior — making significant demands of the other side and refusing or only grudgingly making concessions. Value-claiming is marked by the heavy use of positional commitments, in which parties insist on specific settlements tilted highly in their favor and threaten to walk away unless their demands are met. The aim is to pressure the other side into making concessions, coercing others into deals closer to one’s ideal point. In the value-claiming framework, concessions from others are derided as inadequate, yet quickly pocketed without reciprocation. Negotiators use hold-outs and delays to extract as much as possible from the other side and one never reveals private information about his or her “reservation point,” the lowest possible outcome he or she would be ready to accept. Indeed value-claiming revolves around trying to make the other believe that point is as high as possible. All sources of leverage are used and one might hold an issue of value to the other (but not necessarily to himself) hostage, refusing to concede on it so as to extract concessions on more important issues (Odell, 2000; De Dreu and Boles, 1998; Beersma and De Dreu, 1999; Olekalns, Smith, and Kibby, 1996; Pruitt and Lewis, 1975; De Dreu and Carnevale, 2003). Value-claiming negotiation should be familiar to students of international relations, as it is the basis of models of coercive bargaining as pioneered by Schelling and elaborated more recently in bargaining theories of war (Fearon, 1995; Schelling, 1966).

Value-creating, on the other hand, aims at a win-win outcome in which each side secures his most important goals. Also called cooperative, integrative, or problem-solving negotiation, value-creation proceeds through reciprocity rather than coercion. Rather than withholding information, value-creation is only possible if states honestly and openly reveal their preference structure. Information exchange is crucial as only then is the potential for a win-win deal to be revealed. If states do not have asymmetrical preferences, those engaged in value-creating will act creatively, trying to draw in other issues through side payments that make for a mutually beneficial package deal. One concedes on issues of lesser importance, rather than holding them hostage, in exchange for concessions by the other side on those issues that one values more. Integrative negotiation avoids the use of threats and the brinksmanship of value-claiming negotiation.

Value-claiming is predicated on a particular framing of the negotiating situation, as a zero-sum distributive game in which one side’s loss is another’s gain and vice versa. This has been called the fixed pie bias. Negotiation scholars have found that negotiators tend to believe that one’s own and
others outcomes are diametrically opposed (De Dreu, Koole, and Steinel, 2000, 975), and that value-claiming is the modal negotiating style. Consistent with this underlying assumption, value-claiming precedes on the basis that other parties are misrepresenting their preferences. Negotiation precedes through a set of threats and counter-threats. Each side has a reason to believe that the other is misrepresenting its preferences in order to extract a better deal.

Indeed, given the underlying assumption of this negotiating style, value-claiming is associated by reactive devaluation: offers made by others are discounted simply by virtue of the fact that they have been offered by the other side (Ross and Stillinger, 1991). In other words, good deals might be devalued as bad deals based on assumptions that the other is engaged in hard bargaining. The finding is that the same offer made by a dispassionate third-party is more likely to be accepted, indicating that the process of negotiation matters as much as the substance. Individuals assess value not simply on the basis of the underlying payoff in a bargaining setting, but also how they got there.

If the public responds to value-claiming strategies, and not just the substance of agreements, then the style in which leaders negotiate can impact whether or not domestic constituents, and their representatives, will support international agreements and allow them to be implemented or ratified. In some cases, executives are free to act on their own, in which case domestic public support has a limited role in shaping international agreements. However, in other cases domestic support can directly or indirectly influence international negotiations by narrowing the domestic win-set of agreements and potentially eliminating the space for cooperative outcomes (Putnam, 1988). This can be due to public referendums or if leaders are responsive or accountable to their constituents. Most recently, we saw this take place in the United States where domestic support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) waned to the point that both presidential candidates in the 2016 election denounced the agreement. After years of painstaking negotiations on the TPP, President Trump claimed it was a bad deal and that the Obama administration had not employed strong enough value-claiming tactics to protect America’s interests. Trump’s criticisms, which resonated with his supporters, were consistent with his earlier complaints about U.S. negotiators, who he characterized as “well-meaning, but naive academic people negotiating, who do not know what they are doing in tough real-life situations. They have never faced tough, winner-take-all, fight-to-the-death negotiations against ruthless and vicious adversaries” (Trump and Zanker, 2008). Trump’s campaign rhetoric and focus on putting “America first” by using assertive negotiation tactics, were
accompanied by increasingly aggressive attacks on the TPP, which contributed to the demise of one of the largest trade deals in history. Public support for the TPP in the U.S. grew increasingly tenuous, resulting in congressional leaders — many facing re-election — being unwilling to stand behind the agreement in the face of a newly skeptical domestic public, highlighting the connection between public opinion, negotiation strategies, and international cooperation.

**General Negotiation Preferences**

Building on these theories and observations, we hypothesize that members of the mass public will, all things equal, be more supportive of a negotiation outcome in which their own country took the lead, making the first offer. This allows a country to anchor negotiations towards its own preferred end of the distribution and is an example of a value-claiming tactic. Offers made first by other countries, regardless of their content, will be devalued because value-claiming is premised on an assumption of a lack of good faith. We also expect that respondents will, in general, prefer a deal reached in which their own country accompanied its offer with a threat. This indicates that its leader engaged in tough bargaining in a negotiation presumed to be distributive in nature. In the value-claiming mindset, others will not simply concede items of value; they must be seized through tough bargaining. Threats are an indication that one is not underestimating the egoism of the negotiating partner, and so members of the public who subscribe to the value-claiming mindset will support such negotiation tactics.

**Individual-Level Differences**

Even though the literature has generally found that value-claiming is the default manner in which most individuals approach negotiations, there is considerable heterogeneity, with many embracing value-creating approaches. Our expectation is that value-claiming will find its greatest support on the part of those who embrace the underlying view of the distributive bargaining mindset, a fundamentally competitive international environment in which power is used to extract the most possible for one’s own country. There is a longstanding research agenda on individual-level variation in foreign policy dispositions. Both elites and the mass public have underlying postures in foreign affairs that they use to inform their attitudes about specific foreign policy issues. We expect that those higher in militant internationalism will be the most supportive of value-claiming negotiation
strategies (Wittkopf, 1990). This orientation is predicated on a belief that international relations is marked by threats and competition and that countries best secure their interests by standing firm. Should they not do so they invite provocation (Rathbun, 2007). Militant internationalism is essentially a belief in what Jervis has called the deterrence model of international relations (Jervis, 2017). It is founded on the same distrust as value-claiming. Although generally used to understand approaches to international security, militant internationalism should capture an underlying belief about how international politics (and indeed social life in general) works as a whole.

We expect that those who score higher on militant internationalism will be particularly supportive of negotiations in which the United States made the first offer and when this proposal was accompanied by a threat. The advantage of using militant internationalism to capture an underlying predisposition towards value-claiming is that it avoids the tautology that would accompany a more direct measurement method, such as asking respondents whether they believe that countries obtain more when the make threats in negotiations.

**Trust in the Executive**

Our research domain differs in an important respect from that which generally preoccupies negotiation scholars. While in most bargaining studies, individuals are engaging in negotiations directly, in international relations the mass public has delegated this authority to the government. For this reason, preference for negotiation outcomes likely reflects not only assumptions about how the negotiating partner is behaving, but also assumptions about the trustworthiness of one’s own delegate. All else equal, people may support an outcome negotiated by one leader over another simply based on assumptions they make about that leader and his or her negotiating style.

We believe that partisanship is a likely determinant of trust in the executive given the highly polarized nature of the current American electorate. This might manifest itself, however, in a number of different ways. On the one hand, Republicans are regarded as being the hawkish party which is seen as most strongly representing American interests abroad (Trager and Vavreck, 2011; Levendusky and Horowitz, 2012). This is seen most recently in the adoption of Trump’s “America first” slogan. However, what united all Republican factions on foreign policy is their foreign policy egoism, which is expressed in different ways (Rathbun, 2008). In an “against-type,” or Nixon goes to China logic, a Democratic President will therefore find more additional support among Republicans than Democrats for making the initial offer and issuing threats because these kinds of signals are
necessary to convince Republicans, who do not trust the President to bargain hard, of his resolve.

Another alternative, inspired by a motivated reasoning approach (Kunda, 1990), is that Democrats will give a Democratic President more credit than Republicans for bargaining hard. Given the intense partisanship and ideological polarization in American politics, including foreign policy (Nyhan and Reifler, 2010), it might be the case that Presidents simply cannot expect credit from across the political divide regardless of what they do. In this approach, if a president engages in value-claiming strategies, we would expect the president’s own party to respond favorably, since they would view the value-claiming tactics as genuine signs of putting their interests first. In contrast, members of the public from the other party would remain skeptical, since they are unlikely to trust the executive, and unlikely to view such tactics as credible signals that would alter their beliefs. We thus have two competing hypotheses about how partisanship will interact with value-claiming negotiation strategies.

Hypotheses

Based on this discussion, we offer the following hypotheses:

H1: Approval of the President’s actions will be higher when the President makes the first offer.

H2: Approval of the President’s actions will be higher when the President issues a threat.

As discussed above, however, we have reason to believe that militant internationalists in particular will respond to coercive bargaining and value claiming. This implies that:

H3: There will be an interaction between militant internationalism (MI) and proposal power in which those high in MI will demonstrate an even greater increase in support for the President when he makes the first offer or issues a threat.

Finally we offer competing hypotheses in regards to the interaction of partisanship with negotiating style. First, an against-type expectation would be that:

H4: The increase in support for the President when he engages in coercive bargaining will be higher for Republicans, when the President is a Democrat.

Alternatively, a motivated reasoning approach would suggest:

H5: The increase in support for the President when he engages in coercive bargaining will be higher for Democrats, when the President is a Democrat.
Methodology

To test how people respond to the process of international negotiations, we fielded a survey experiment in the spring of 2016 on a national American sample of 569 registered voters recruited by Survey Sampling International (SSI).\footnote{SSI uses an opt-in recruitment method, after which they randomly select panel participants for survey invitations, using population targets rather than quotas to produce nationally representative samples of respondents. See appendix, section 1, for sample demographics. For political science examples of recent experiments fielded using SSI, see Berinsky, Margolis, and Sances (2014); Kertzer and Brutger (2016); Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013).} The experiment was designed to isolate the effect of different negotiation processes on attitudes toward the negotiated agreement. The experiment presented each respondent with a hypothetical news story about an international investment dispute, where a foreign company sued the United States through investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), which was based on an actual dispute between the United States and Canada.\footnote{To read the news story that inspired our experiment’s design, please see the Wall Street Journal article by King and Mauldin (2016).} Although investment disputes were a relatively secret process for many decades, they have recently garnered significant attention from the media, politicians, and activists.\footnote{For examples, see Hamby (2016) and Warren (2015).} Investment dispute provisions are included in more than 3,000 international agreements (Peinhardt and Wellhausen, 2016), a number of which have been hotly contested in recent years, so our experiment noted that the dispute was initiated under an international agreement, although, to avoid priming respondents’ attitudes toward specific agreements with ISDS, such as NAFTA or the recently debated Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the agreement was not specified.

To measure peoples’ reactions to the negotiation process, the experiment randomly assigned each respondent to one of three conditions. To test the effect of value-claiming tactics and the importance of making the first offer, some respondents read that the U.S. proposed a settlement. When leaders or negotiators make the first move and propose the settlement, they are employing a type of anchoring that is an often used value-claiming strategy, which we expect will lead to greater approval of the agreement among respondents. In contrast to the U.S. proposal treatment, other respondents read that the foreign company proposed a settlement. Our expectation is that respondents who are motivated by value-claiming will have lower approval for the settlement when the foreign company proposes it, than when the U.S. proposes the settlement.

To test an additional component of value-claiming, the experiment also randomly assigned re-
spondents to a “threat” treatment, while holding constant the U.S. proposal. In the threat treatment, the President committed to fighting the investment dispute. This assertive negotiation strategy ought to resonate with members of the public who want to see their leader strongly advocate or fight for their interests, and thus we expect the threat to generate heightened support among members of the public who subscribe to the value-claiming perspective of negotiations. Because our experiment focuses on an investment dispute through an international agreement, the scenario obviously does not involve militarized threats, which are sometimes used in international disputes and have been the focus of most experiments on international bargaining. This distinction makes our design a harder test of the impact of assertive foreign policy on public approval, since we employ a relatively modest threat by the leader to fight the dispute to its conclusion through international arbitration, in contrast to previous studies that used threats of military escalation, which represents an even stronger and more assertive negotiation tactic. An added benefit of examining the impact of negotiation processes and the effects of threats in economic negotiations is that threats to escalate disputes through ISDS, the WTO, or other forms of international arbitration are much more prevalent than militarized compellent threats, and thus our work examines a broader set of cases, even if they have previously been overlooked as the “low politics” of international relations.

The details of the experiment are as follows. Respondents were first told that they would read about a hypothetical dispute and that they would be asked about their reactions to the dispute. The text was presented as a news report, which read:

**Company Starts Legal Actions Over Investment Denial**

TransCorp., a hypothetical company based in a neighboring country, on Wednesday said it was pursuing legal actions against the United States and the Obama administration in response to its refusal to issue a border-crossing permit for the company’s project. TransCorp said in a statement that it would initiate an international arbitration case against the U.S. under an international agreement. Through a process known as investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), companies and investors from one country can challenge the acts of a foreign government and receive compensation if they can show they weren’t treated in accordance with international law. TransCorp said it would attempt to recover more than $15 billion in costs and damages that the company said it has suffered as a

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4 For examples, see Tomz (2007) and Trager and Vavreck (2011).
5 Sechser (2011) shows that militarized compellent threats are quite rare in international relations.
result of the U.S. administration’s breach of its international obligations. [left blank or The Obama administration originally responded by stating it would fight the challenge until the arbitration panel made its decision.] [TransCorp or The Obama administration] has since proposed a settlement granting TransCorp twenty percent of the value of the suit, and the [Obama administration or TransCorp] accepted the settlement. ⁶

After reading the news report, participants were shown a brief summary of the report and were asked “Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the settlement?” They were also asked how strongly they approved or disapproved, and if they originally selected “neither” they were asked if they leaned toward approving or disapproving. Our measure yielded a seven-point approval score that lets us measure the direction and strength of approval, but we can also examine a coarser, but more easily interpreted measure of those who approve of the settlement or not.

In addition to our main dependent variable we also asked respondents about their perceptions of the settlement and how good the settlement is for the U.S. and for themselves. These measures allow us to examine the role of perceived benefits of the agreement to the individual and nation on overall support, which helps us understand the mechanisms through which the negotiation process affects individuals’ opinions. If people are concerned about value-claiming and their approval is significantly affected by the negotiation process, we expect that the effect is mediated by respondents’ perception of the benefits of the agreement and how good the agreement is for them or their country.

Since we are also interested in how different types of people respond to negotiations, we included a standard set of demographic questions that include the partisanship of the participants. We also included a measure of militant assertiveness adapted from Hermann (1990). ⁷ These individual measures allow us to test whether people whose dispositions and political affiliations ought to make them more likely to support value-claiming strategies respond positively to such tactics in international economic negotiations, as has been shown to be the case in other areas of foreign policy. ⁸

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⁶ In the treatment where no threat was made, the words “has since” were omitted from the last sentence of the report.

⁷ See appendix, section 2, for our dispositional instrumentation.

⁸ See Brutger and Kertzer (Forthcoming) and Kertzer and Brutger (2016) who find that those high in militant assertiveness (hawks) support the use of threats and believe it strengthens the leader’s reputation.
Results

We present our results in three phases. First we examine the overall effects of the negotiation process treatments on approval of the negotiated settlement. Second, we present results from nonparametric mediation analysis, which tests whether perceptions of how good the agreement is to the individual or country are driving the results. Finally, we examine the heterogenous treatment effects analyzing how different types of people respond to the treatments, and find that those whose characteristics predispose them to view negotiations through a value-claiming lens are much more likely to support agreements that are reached by a leader using assertive value-claiming tactics in the negotiations.

Average Treatment Effects

The distributions of average approval of the negotiated settlement, measured on a seven point scale, are displayed in Figure 1. The left panel of Figure 1 shows the average treatment effect of the U.S. making a proposal versus the foreign company making a proposal. We find that the average approval score for the agreement is significantly higher when the U.S. proposes the settlement (0.45, p < 0.01). The substantive effect of the change in approval is quite large, resulting in a total of 14 percent more of the respondents approving of the outcome when the U.S. proposed, as opposed to when the proposal was initiated by the foreign counterpart. These findings support hypothesis-1, which stated that approval would be higher when the president made the first offer.

The second set of results are shown in the right panel of Figure 1. This panel displays the average treatment effect of the leader making a threat versus not making a threat, while holding constant the U.S. proposing the settlement. Although we find that the average approval score is slightly higher when the President uses an assertive negotiation strategy and makes a threat, we do not find that the effect is statistically significant at conventional levels. This suggests that the general public takes a stronger cue from who makes the first offer, although we will show in our analysis of heterogenous treatment effects below that making a threat does have a significant effect on certain types of people.\footnote{Density plots of the percent of respondents approving are displayed in the appendix, section 3. Respondents are counted as approving of the agreement if they lean toward approving, somewhat approve, or strongly approve.}
Density plots display bootstrapped sampling distributions of average approval scores based on treatment assignment (1500 iterations). The effect sizes and p-values are calculated using the bootstrapped average treatment effects. P-values are reported for the one-sided hypothesis that the treatment effect is positive.

**Mediation Analysis**

To understand why people respond favorable when their leader makes the first proposal, we next use causal mediation analysis to test two potential mediators that are consistent with value-claiming in international negotiations. If the public believes the leader is doing a better job of value-claiming in the negotiation process, then the public should also believe that the outcome is either better for them, better for the country, or both. If this causal logic holds, we expect that respondents’ beliefs about how good the agreement is to them or their country will be significant mediators for overall approval of the agreement, which we test using nonparametric causal mediation analysis (Tingley et al., 2014).

Our results show that perceptions about how good the respondents believe the agreement is for them is a significant mediator on approval for the agreement when the U.S. makes the offer, as opposed to the foreign company making an offer, as is shown in Figure 2. In total, the mediator focusing on the benefit to the individual accounts for 33 percent of the total effect of the U.S. making the proposal (p < 0.05). This result highlights that the public believes their leader is getting
a better deal for *them* when the leader makes the proposal, which drives support for the settlement. In contrast to self-interest as a mediator, we do not find that perceptions about how good the agreement is for the country has any effect on approval. The mediation results for this sociotropic mediator are displayed in the appendix, section 4, which shows that it does not have a significant mediating role on approval of the agreement ($p < 0.26$). These findings highlight how the style of the negotiation, specifically whether or not the President made the first offer, alters individuals’ beliefs about how good the agreement is for them and the downstream effect of how likely people are to support the agreement, even though the substance of the agreement hasn’t changed.

Figure 2: Mediation Results for Self-Interest

![Figure 2: Mediation Results for Self-Interest](image)

Note: Figure 2 shows the average causal mediation effect (ACME), average direct effect (ADE), and the total affect of switching from the Foreign to the U.S. Proposer. The mediator is how good the settlement is perceived for the respondent (“On a scale of 1-7, how good for you is the settlement?”), which is responsible for 33 percent of the total effect ($p < 0.05$).

**Heterogenous Treatment Effects**

Next we turn to the question of whether different types of people respond differently to value-claiming tactics in international negotiations. One of the most important underlying characteristics of our results, is that partisanship plays a significant role in determining individuals’ levels of support
for the dispute settlement. This is not surprising given that the scenario noted that the Obama administration was sued in the dispute. Given the reference to President Obama, who was in office at the time our study was fielded, it is not surprising that the percent of Democrats supporting the agreement across all treatment conditions is about 19 percent higher than Republicans ($p < 0.00$). Consistent with the literature on elite cues (Berinsky, 2007; Saunders, 2015), we find that respondents were taking a cue from who the President was in the experiment and forming their opinion about the agreement based off of the partisan cue given.

More interesting is how partisanship shapes peoples’ responses to our treatment conditions and value-claiming tactics in general. Because international negotiations are conducted by an agent on behalf of the public, typically a member of the executive branch, we believe that the public’s trust in their negotiator will impact how they interpret the negotiation process. Our first of two competing hypotheses is that support for negotiated agreements will be higher among members of the President’s political party, when the President uses value-claiming tactics, since the President using an assertive foreign policy and proposing the agreement sends a cue that the outcome is favorable. In our case, since President Obama is the leader in our experiment, hypothesis-5 predicts that Democrats will be moved the most by our coercive bargaining treatments. Furthermore, if hypothesis-5 is correct, we expect Republicans to be less likely to trust that Obama’s value-claiming tactics are genuine, so Republicans should be less responsive to the treatments.

However, hypothesis-4 offers a competing perspective, which builds from the literature on leaders who act “against type.” This hypothesis proposes that leaders who act against type, for example, by using coercive bargaining tactics when they are traditionally viewed as soft or dovish, will generate heightened support from members of the public who are not from the leader’s political party. For our experiment, the prediction of this hypothesis is that Republicans will be most likely to be moved by the coercive treatments, because they would not have expected President Obama to negotiate strongly. Thus we would expect that the value-claiming treatments will have the greatest effect among Republicans if the against type hypothesis is accurate.

To evaluate how our treatments interact with partisanship, we breakdown our results by respondents’ political party and randomly assigned treatment in the top half of Table 1. Consistent with the aggregate results, in each treatment group a higher percentage of Democrats support the negotiated outcome than Republicans. However, when we look at the effect of the value-claiming treatments on Republicans, it is immediately clear that hypothesis-5 has strong support and hypothesis-4 does
not, since none of the treatments have a significant effect on Republicans. This is consistent with the theory that members of the public who are not of the same party as the President are unlikely to trust the signals from the President and are thus unlikely to update their beliefs about the negotiation when the President uses value-claiming tactics. This finding is especially striking given that people often assume that politics stops at the water’s edge and that partisan cues should be less relevant when it comes to foreign policy.

In contrast to Republicans, we find that Democrats have strong reactions to both of our treatments. Our findings are consistent with hypothesis-5 that value-claiming tactics will resonate with members of the public from the President’s political party, and that the President’s tactics send cues that his party members are likely to respond to. In our study, when President Obama made a threat during the negotiations it resulted in a 15.7 percentage point increase in support among Democrats ($p < 0.06$). Furthermore, we found that Democrats had an even stronger rise in approval when the President made the first offer and proposed the agreement, as opposed to the foreign company proposing, resulting in a 31.4 percentage point rise in support among Democrats ($p < 0.01$). Importantly for evaluating the relative effects of the treatments on Democrats versus Republicans, we find that the treatment effect of the U.S. making the first proposal is significantly greater among Democrats than Republicans (27.7, $p < 0.02$), highlighting the strong role of partisan cues in international negotiations.

We next consider how levels of militant assertiveness, an individual disposition that is essentially a belief in a “deterrence model” of international relations and is consistent with the distrust that motivates many value-claiming strategies, interacts with our assertive bargaining treatments. We expect that individuals high in militant assertiveness should prefer settlements that are negotiated by their leader through value-claiming tactics, such as making the first proposal and initiating threats. In the lower half of Table 1, we break down the experimental findings by levels of militant assertiveness, comparing respondents in the top and bottom quartiles of militant internationalism.

The first comparison, which highlights the difference between those who are high versus low in militant internationalism, is how they respond when both coercive tactics were present – the President made the first offer and accompanied it with a threat. This comparison, in the second column of results in Table 1, shows that those high in militant assertiveness were significantly more likely to support the agreement, with the percent supporting being 14.4 percentage points higher than those low in militant assertiveness ($p < 0.09$). Additionally, support for the negotiated
Table 1: Heterogenous Treatment Effects

<table>
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<th>US Proposes No Threat</th>
<th>US Proposes With Threat</th>
<th>Foreign Proposes (with U.S. Threat)</th>
<th>Treatment Effect</th>
<th>Difference in Treatment Effects</th>
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<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>31.4***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Militant</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>-14.4*</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>26.7**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Militant</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>-22.6**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Militant</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>13.3*</td>
<td>-9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Militant</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01.

Table 1 displays the percent of respondents supporting the agreement, the differences between groups, and the differences in treatment effects, based on respondents randomly assigned treatment and their individual characteristics (top or bottom quartile of militant assertiveness, or their party affiliation.)

settlement dropped by 13.3 percentage points among those high in militant assertiveness when the foreign company made the proposal (p < 0.08), demonstrating the importance of value-claiming tactics to this group of the public.

Most interesting is how those low in militant assertiveness responded when the President made a threat. Holding constant the President making the proposal, support dropped by 22.6 percentage points when a threat was made versus when no threat was made (p < 0.03). This suggests that those low in militant assertiveness actually oppose aggressive value-claiming tactics, which is consistent with theories of integrative or value-creating bargaining, where negotiators seek to find mutual gains. The significance of these results is reinforced when examining the difference in treatment effects among the subgroups, where we find that the threat treatment (compared to no threat) results in a 26.7 percentage point difference in support for the top and bottom quartiles of militant assertiveness (p < 0.04). These results not only highlight the important differences between members of the public who have high and low levels of militant internationalism, but they also find remarkably consistent results with crisis bargaining studies, which found that doves strongly disapprove of military threats and hawks support them (Kertzer and Brutger, 2016). The fact that doves and hawks react consistently to military threats and non-military threats suggests that perceptions of
value-claiming tactics in international negotiations are generalizable across negotiation issues and types of threats.

Conclusion

Given the populist discontent toward international institutions and recent backlash against international organizations, trade agreements, and investment dispute processes (Peinhardt and Wellhausen, 2016; Brutger and Strezhnev, 2017), it is increasingly important that we understand how the public interprets and responds to international negotiations and agreements. In this paper, we test how the negotiation process affects domestic support for negotiated agreements and find that the style of negotiations matters, even if the substance of the agreement doesn’t change. Using a survey experiment conducted on a sample of U.S. registered voters, we found that the public responds favorable when their leaders use value-claiming tactics and show that doing so can generate heightened support for international agreements.

We also find that there is significant heterogeneity in how members of the public respond to value-claiming negotiation strategies. On the one hand, those individuals who are most likely to have deterrence mindsets, those high in militant internationalism, support aggressive negotiation strategies and are more likely to favor agreements when the leader makes a threat and the first offer during the negotiation. These results are consistent with the public believing that international negotiations take place in a distributive bargaining framework where there are strong incentives to misrepresent one’s preferences. This implies that hawkish members of the public who disapprove of leaders who do not overtly pursue aggressive value-claiming strategies, which may account for some of the domestic reaction in the United States to the Iran Nuclear deal negotiated under President Obama. Our results further demonstrate that leaders can enhance domestic support by acting aggressively and employing value-claiming strategies, as opposed to value-creating strategies. In the American context, this helps explain why the bellicose rhetoric of President Trump is appealing to many of his supporters and why leaders engage in value-claiming strategies across a broad range of international negotiations.

However, we also find that making threats is a divisive strategy. Although our mediation results demonstrate that respondents often believe the leader is getting a better deal for them when negotiating aggressively, those individuals low in militant internationalism have a strong negative reaction
when leaders make threats — even threats that are relatively modest in scope and aggression. This means that domestic public opinion can actually be pushed in opposite directions, leading to greater polarization, when leaders engage in belligerent negotiation strategies. For those leaders who rely on support from hawkish audiences, there may be strong incentives to consolidate that support through assertive value-claiming strategies, but this will also drive the more dovish members of the audience away. These findings are particularly relevant at a time when leaders around the world have engaged in aggressive posturing on the international stage, which has the potential to increase populist tensions as it exacerbates domestic divisions.

Our findings are a reminder that how leaders conduct themselves and the manner in which they negotiate on the international stage are important in ways that extend beyond the policies they negotiate. As Putnam (1988) noted, leaders are engaged in a two-level game, and how they conduct themselves at the international level impacts what they can accomplish at the domestic level (and vice versa). When it comes to negotiating international treaties, settling international disputes, or revising the terms of existing IOs, the style in which leaders negotiate can independently change domestic support and alter the domestic win-set. This paper takes us a step closer to understanding how value-claiming and value-creating strategies impact public approval of international cooperation, and sheds light on the rise of populist discontent toward international negotiations and international agreements.
References


Appendix

1. Sample Demographics:

Table 2: Sample Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0-$50,000</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$100,000</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-$150,000</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000-$200,000</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000+</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School / GED</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD / JD / MD</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not all percentages add to 100 due to rounding.
2. Dispositional Measures

Militant assertiveness:

- The best way to ensure world peace is through American military strength. [Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree]

- The use of military force only makes problems worse. [Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree]

- Going to war is unfortunate, but sometimes the only solution to international problems. [Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree]

3. Results with Percent of Respondents Approving

Figure 3: Treatment Effects on Full Sample (Percent Approving)

(a) Effect of Proposal

(b) Effect of Threat

Density plots display bootstrapped sampling distributions of average percent of respondents approving based on treatment assignment (1500 iterations).
4. Mediation Analysis

Figure 4: Mediation Results for Sociotropic Mediator

Note: Figure 4 shows the average causal mediation effect (ACME), average direct effect (ADE), and the total affect of switching from the Foreign to the U.S. Proposer. The mediator is how good the settlement is perceived for the country (“On a scale of 1-7, how good for the U.S. is the settlement?”), which is not a significant mediator. The model was run with pre-treatment controls for education, income, gender, and ideology. The analysis was conducted using the mediation package in R (Tingley et al., 2014).