

# Contextualizing Individual Attitudes on Economic Statecraft\*

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## Abstract

When do US citizens express greater support for economic intervention abroad in response to violation of international norms? Under what conditions do they express greater support for punitive sanctions or positive inducements? Given that these policies rarely are studied together, we know little about whether and to what extent citizens offer greater support for sanctions compared to positive inducements and how contextual factors might alter support for each. We design a conjoint survey experiment to gauge support for an intervention—i.e., sanctions or inducements—using comparable counterfactuals. We compare long-enduring bad behavior to recent shocks, differently framed consequences of inaction, as well as varying expertise levels among policy proposal authors. We also consider preexisting attitudes about the target country. In a US sample, we find that policy proposals are generally supported to a greater extent when they involve sanctions as opposed to inducements, but that preexisting affinity towards the country has a strong conditioning impact. We also find that a “ticking clock” to disaster, as opposed to a prediction of steady future conditions, is associated with greater support for US economic intervention, particularly when it takes the form of sanctions.

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# Introduction

In the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the United States and many of its allies imposed sweeping sanctions against Putin’s regime. While some pinned the blame for the invasion on the West itself for encroaching on Russia’s historical sphere of influence, at least implicitly suggesting accommodation as a superior strategy (Walt 2022, see also Mearsheimer 2014), the overwhelmingly dominant narrative emphasized that Russia’s aggression deserved nothing less than severe punishment aimed at sending a message to Vladimir Putin as well as any other leaders who might consider engaging in similar behavior in violation of well-established norms against territorial conquest.<sup>1</sup>

Economic statecraft is the attempt to influence foreign state behavior via the provision of rewards—i.e., inducements, or the imposition of punishments—i.e., sanctions.<sup>2</sup> Given the argument by Wagner (1988) that economic sanctions can succeed only when preexisting economic ties result in an unexploited bargaining advantage favoring the sanctioning state (see also Hirschman 1945), inducements would seem to a more readily available option to employ successfully (Newham 2000). Further, inducements are less subject to the negative externality of a target backlash that could threaten the sender’s broader foreign policy interests (Mastanduno 2012). Yet the Russian invasion makes clear an important limitation of foreign policy carrots: inducements following the flagrant violation of an international norm such as that against territorial conquest would be perceived widely as appeasement (Nincic 2011) and could potentially invite future blackmail (Baldwin 1971).

The studies above consider economic statecraft primarily from the standpoint of leaders and policy-makers. We know less about how individuals consider these foreign policy tools, particularly in comparison to each other. This gap is notable given that (at least demo-

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<sup>1</sup>That said, while few scholars advocate accommodation, scholars have emphasized that it is critical for the US and its allies to signal that sanctions can be relaxed in exchange for Russian concessions, or else sanctions would lose much of their coercive function (e.g., Cebul, Dafoe and Monteiro 2021).

<sup>2</sup>Inducements are also called *positive sanctions*.

cratic) leaders are responsive to public opinion (Risse-Kappen 1991; Holsti 1992; Knecht and Weatherford 2006; Rottinghaus 2008; Chu and Recchia 2022). For example, prior work suggests that individuals determine foreign policy attitudes in accordance with perceived fairness (Powers et al. 2022). As such, we might expect citizens who witness armed aggression, human rights abuse, nuclear proliferation, and terrorism as a shock to the status quo to view inducements as an unfair and unjust response, instead preferring to punish this bad behavior with sanctions (Heinrich, Kobayashi and Peterson 2017). Conversely, inducements might be acceptable or even preferable by US citizens who observe that bad behavior is the steady state and so action is perceived in terms of investing in positive change (Nincic 2011) rather than rewarding bad behavior. At other times, US citizens might care more about getting results regardless of whether it involves inducements or sanctions. Prior work studying one of these policies in isolation cannot differentiate between support for this policy and support for an economic intervention more broadly; thus, this work could overlook the bigger picture regarding public opinion on economic statecraft.

In this paper, we explore the ways in which these types of contextual factors might shape support for different policy tools, seeking to identify citizens' support for either punishments or inducements using otherwise comparable scenarios. We design a conjoint survey experiment that allows us to measure support for economic statecraft—randomly varying whether it takes the form of sanctions or inducements—given further random variation in important background conditions. We vary conditions including: the type of proscribed behavior that occurs, status quo disruption vs. a steady state of behavior, and the type of the public official—a career professional with substantive expertise or an appointee potentially selected in accordance with patronage—proposing sanctions or inducements. We also consider respondents' preexisting views of the target state. Results suggest that citizens generally express greater support when sanctions are the proposed response, and that preexisting attitudes about a country are a large driver of support for positive or negative coercion. We

also find that a “ticking clock” to disaster, as opposed to a prediction of steady future conditions, is associated with greater support for US action, particularly when it takes the form of sanctions. Additionally, we do not find evidence of greater support for inducements—or even that the margin in favor of sanctions shrinks—when comparing a long-enduring situation to a recent negative shift in the status quo.

This study contributes to our understanding of public support for economic statecraft in several ways. First, we provide insight into whether contextual factors condition preferences for economic statecraft as a response to norm-violating behavior (Heinrich, Kobayashi and Peterson 2017). We find greater support when sanctions are proposed, irrespective of the realizations of most other treatments we randomize. This aligns with previous work highlighting processes that inspire hawkish attitudes (Kertzer et al. 2022; Davies and Johns 2016) and suggests that US citizen preferences for sanctions to address proscribed behaviors outside the US are not readily movable even when examining scenarios that are *not* sudden, negative shifts to the status quo. Finally, we advance knowledge by overcoming limitations of observational analyses of sanctions vs. inducements, including the difficulty identifying causal relationships. Our experimental design allows us to provide identical conditions, randomly propose sanctions or inducements, and then gauge respondent support. While greater support for punitive sanctions might not be surprising in most cases, our findings allow us to consider factors that could condition the extent of this relative preference.

## Preferences for punishment and inducement

Economic statecraft is the use of economic power to achieve foreign policy goals (Hirschman 1945; Baldwin 1985). Sanctions involve the threat and imposition of restrictions on commerce with the sanctioning state (sender), while inducements (sometimes called positive sanctions) involve the promise and provision of benefits, typically economic, by the sender in exchange

for a policy concession ([Mastanduno 2003](#)). Inducements can be as simple as a one-time quid pro quo or could involve a longer-term investment to foster permanent change in the target state ([Nincic 2011](#)). The target of sanctions or inducements ultimately confronts a similar choice when facing either policy: choose between some economic benefit provided by the sender or continue some otherwise preferred policy ([Baldwin 1971](#)). North Korea serves as a case in which the US has employed inducements and sanctions at various times ([Haggard and Noland 2012](#)). The 1994 Agreed Framework is a classic example of an inducement, as the US provided fuel to North Korea and assisted construction of light water nuclear reactors in exchange for a freeze in development of heavy water reactors that could produce fuel for nuclear weapons. This deal broke down in 2002, as North Korea continued developing its nuclear program. The US has since imposed multiple rounds of sanctions on North Korea, both unilaterally and through institutions such as the United Nations. Largely as a result of US initiatives, North Korea currently faces comprehensive sanctions that include, among other provisions, strict prohibitions on trade and finance ([Office of Foreign Assets Control 2023](#)).

Despite some underlying similarities between sanctions and inducements, there appears to be a dramatic difference in the frequency with which each foreign policy tool is used. Sanctions often are a first resort of US foreign policy,<sup>3</sup> demonstrating action by US leaders amid public demand to “do something” ([Whang 2011](#)).<sup>4</sup> Previous work has suggested that sanctions could also be beneficial in signaling to third parties the consequences of engaging in sender-proscribed behavior ([Peterson 2013](#); [Miller 2014](#); [Peterson 2014](#); [2021](#)); and US citizens approval of sanctions increases when informed of this third party deterrent effect

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<sup>3</sup>Research finds that sanctions are more effective when combined with inducements ([Solingen 2012](#); [Kwon 2024](#)), suggesting that these foreign policy tools can be complements rather than substitutes. However, sanctions data suggest that added carrots are relatively rare ([Morgan, Bapat and Kobayashi 2014](#)).

<sup>4</sup>We focus on US citizens because the US is arguably unique in its ability to intervene anywhere in the world. The US is the most frequent sender in sanctions cases ([Hufbauer et al. 2007](#); [Morgan, Bapat and Kobayashi 2014](#); [Weber and Schneider 2022](#)) and also the largest donor of foreign aid measured in dollars ([Alesina and Dollar 2000](#)).

(Heinrich, Kobayashi and Peterson 2017).

However, there are a number of factors that one might expect to make inducements more attractive. Imposed economic restrictions could cause the target public to rally around even an authoritarian ruler (Galtung 1967). Sanctions could also weaken the sender economy, empower third-party sanctions busters, and crash global commodity markets, all of which are counterproductive to sender interests (Demarais 2022). Indeed, sanction threats could be seen as provocation that would invoke a psychological resistance to acquiescence in the target even when giving in to sender demands would be cost-effective (Dafoe, Hatz and Zhang 2021; Powers and Altman 2023). Inducements should not have these particular counterproductive effects. Second, inducements are more flexible (Mastanduno 2012), as senders can offer a wide variety of incentives, effectively limited only by budget. Conversely, sanctions are possible only where preexisting economic ties exist; and sender leaders must navigate potential domestic opposition by economic interests who stand to lose out from cut ties (McLean and Whang 2014).

Given the advantages of positive engagement as a tool of foreign policy engagement, scholars have proposed several explanations for the tendency of the US to employ punishments over inducements. For example, Nincic (2011) suggests that the US has evolved a punitive culture reinforced by salient historical events.<sup>5</sup> Notably, European concessions to Hitler in the period before World War II were subsequently characterized as appeasement to be avoided at all costs, likely reinforcing the Cold War policy of containment (Nincic 2011). Considering the decision-making context, the negative example of appeasement as set by the pre-World War II experience might have influenced generations of policy-makers, institutionalizing a professional culture emphasizing punishment over inducement (DiCicco and Fordham 2018).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, inducements could potentially invite future blackmail (Bald-

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<sup>5</sup>Related, Stein (2015) argues that vengefulness is associated with more aggressive foreign policy. Notably, the author uses the death penalty as a domestic indicator of vengefulness. The US stands out among developed states—and especially democracies—in its maintenance of a death penalty at the national level.

<sup>6</sup>Notably, the US did not appease Japan pre-WWII, instead instituting severe sanctions on oil and scrap

win 1971). From a public opinion perspective, sanctions could be more commonly preferred following from moral considerations. Indeed, sanctions to punish—or reform—proscribed practices could lead to a coalition of support among those seeking engagement in accordance with the promotion of liberal values as well as those seeking disengagement in accordance with isolationist sentiment (Kertzer et al. 2014).<sup>7</sup>

But while a punitive US culture across elites and the mass public alike could contribute towards hawkish foreign policy attitudes and incentivize the use of sanctions, it is also possible that sanctions, as well as the events leading to their use, are more easily observed, particularly by ordinary citizens (Peterson 2024). Sender leaders have an incentive to advertise sanctions to their domestic audience (Whang 2011). Even sanction threats are often made public in order to generate potential audience costs if leaders were subsequently to back down (Fearon 1994). Conversely, *quid pro quo* inducement deals could be private, particularly if the sender public is wary of potential appeasement. Considering existing research in this light provides hints that inducements are used, just not always for the publicly-stated purposes. For example, Bearce and Tirone (2010) argue that Western development aid largely failed to achieve its stated aims during the Cold War because donors could not enforce demands for economic reform. Rather, aid was used as an inducement to preserve recipient state alignment against the Soviet bloc.<sup>8</sup> While the use of inducements could be less visible, that does not mean that there are not publicly observed examples of inducements, such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (also see Kwon 2024). However, uncertainty surrounding the public observability of negative vs. positive coercion suggests that we might

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metal that likely incentivized Japan to seize these resources by force. However, these events did not create a negative impression of sanctions in the way that the Vietnam experience created a negative impression of using force abroad, as discussed by DiCicco and Fordham (2018).

<sup>7</sup>The authors distinguish between cooperative internationalists (CI) and militant internationalists (MI) (p. 829). In this case, both types could see value in sanctions given that CIs might perceive sanctions as an alternative to force, while MIs might emphasize the future deterrent effect of (economic) punishment.

<sup>8</sup>US democracy aid targeting states geographically proximate to the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Meernik, Krueger and Poe 1998) and to US adversaries in the post-Cold War period (Peterson and Scott 2017) could be understood similarly.

be limited in our understanding of the public’s potential support for each policy tool.

## Theoretical expectations

In order to provide a more complete picture of US citizen attitudes on economic statecraft, we consider how contextual factors might affect support for action generally, as well as how context might condition support for sanctions or inducements. To begin, we expect that US citizens will likely support punishment to a greater extent than rewards in an effort to change a behavior that violates international norms—or at least runs counter to US foreign policy interests. Proscribed behaviors, such as attempts to build or test nuclear weapons, state support for terrorism, narcotics trafficking, or crackdowns on human rights, will likely provoke opposition to the use of inducements because these behaviors typically are perceived as intentional aggressive acts (Kertzer et al. 2022), increasing hawkish tendencies.<sup>9</sup> Considering moral sentiments, we expect many to believe that fairness dictates a reciprocal aggressive response to an action perceived as aggressive (Kertzer et al. 2014).<sup>10</sup>

Further, we can think about why proscribed behaviors abroad would provoke a preference among US citizens for punishment over inducement by using an extension of recent work on the perceived provocation and consequential psychological resistance associated with coercive threats (Dafoe, Hatz and Zhang 2021; Powers and Altman 2023). This previous work demonstrates that compelling threats lead to resistance among the targets, who perceive attempts to change their country’s behavior as provocative. However, given that the US is

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<sup>9</sup>Specifically, intentionality bias occurs when one perceives the intention of action in terms of its outcome, regardless of the true motivations behind it.

<sup>10</sup>The US often frames its response to such behavior as in support of liberal values. As counter-intuitive as it might seem, the US has a long tradition of hawkishness in defense of liberal values, in line with Karl Popper’s “paradox of tolerance” (Desch 2007). Previous experimental research tests this Kantian logic, finding that citizens are more hawkish when potentially threatening behavior is conducted by an authoritarian state (Tomz and Weeks 2013). Our argument can be seen as an extension of this logic. We argue that illiberal behavior will, all else equal, provoke a Kantian response. Thus, we expect that sanctions will gain greater support in response to illiberal behavior, all else equal.



often seen as a global leader that uses its foreign policy to enforce international norms, we argue that the potential for provocation is greater. US citizens who have internalized this US role could perceive any proscribed behavior abroad counter to US stated values—as well as US interests—to be a provocation. This perception could occur even if the inciting event were not directed at the US nor intended to change US behavior.<sup>11</sup> Given the perception of provocation, we contend that citizens would likely view any US policy to use inducements to change this behavior in a relatively less favorable light. Conversely, we expect sanctions to be viewed more positively as a response to these kinds of proscribed behaviors (see [Whang 2011](#)).

However, there are contextual factors that might affect relative support for sanctions vs. inducements. The discussion above highlights conditions under which behavior abroad might lead US citizens to feel personally and intentionally attacked. The *immediacy* of the event likely informs the cognitive processes that perceive a provocation and favor a hawkish response. Thus, we expect the preference for sanctions to be greater when citizens are informed of a specific action that causes a negative shock to the status quo. Conversely, individuals might be *relatively* more favorable towards inducements compared to punishments if the background bad behavior were more stable and consistent over time rather than one in which a dramatic event provokes the perception of an intentional provocation. As such, there could be less concern that inducements would be seen as appeasement that could invite blackmail. Indeed, individuals could see inducements in this case as an investment in achieving positive change over time, moving away from the status quo. This phenomenon would constitute an individual-level extension of the catalytic model of inducements proposed by [Nincic \(2011\)](#).<sup>12</sup> Of course, even a stable, long-term bad behavior could invoke a distaste for

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<sup>11</sup>Citizens in other countries might respond differently. Indeed [Tomz and Weeks \(2013\)](#), when testing an individual-level extension of the democratic peace argument, found that individual support for a military strike against potential nuclear proliferators was consistently higher in the US than in the UK.

<sup>12</sup>We can also think of this argument as similar to prospect theory ([Tversky and Kahneman 1981](#)). A shock to the status quo could lead to a perception of loss, which might motivate individuals to prefer a more

what might be seen as a reward for wrongdoing; we simply expect a smaller margin in the relative preference for sanctions, all else equal.

The consideration of these influences on individual perception leads to our first two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1** *Support for sanctions will be higher than support for inducements.*

**Hypothesis 2** *Support for sanctions compared to inducements will be higher when the foreign country is reported to have recently changed policy leading to worsened behavior (relative to a situation in which the country has a long history of this behavior).*

Not all states are equally likely to engage in bad behaviors. And more importantly, individuals likely hold disparate beliefs about which states they perceive as bad actors. Repeated exposure to media over time could shape overall disposition towards a wide variety of states. Media reports could even be tailored towards (assumed) internalized biases, presented as “soft” news (Baum 2005), introducing challenges for researchers of media effects. We contend that support for a US response to bad behaviors involving sanctions, relative to a counterfactual response involving inducements, stems at least in part from preexisting attitudes about the country that engaged in such behaviors. Citizens might be more forgiving of bad behavior or see less need for punitive action against states they perceive more positively. This expectation can be viewed as an individual-level extension of the argument by Drezner (1999).<sup>13</sup> Specifically, despite the fact that inducements might be more successful among targets commonly viewed unfavorably, individuals could be reluctant to offer inducements to

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aggressive, riskier response (Kertzer et al. 2022). Conversely, a longstanding bad behavior might be seen as an opportunity to gain from inducing reform. As noted above, sanctions are riskier given that they can have negative externalities, for example creating a rally around the flag in which the target leader and population turns against the sender. Sanctions could also harm the sender’s economy while enriching third party sanctions busters (Early 2015). However, average citizens might not be aware of the lower-risk nature of an inducement; thus, this logic might not extend to the individual level as easily as theories on perceptions of provocation.

<sup>13</sup>Specifically, Drezner (1999) argues that inducements are more palatable to targets who expect future conflict with senders, while these senders are less likely to use inducements under the expectation of future conflict.

these states because the bad behavior in question reinforces their preexisting distrust. Conversely, individuals could give the benefit of the doubt or otherwise discount bad behavior by states they view more favorably, leading to *relatively* more support for inducements. As such, our third hypothesis is:

**Hypothesis 3** *Support for sanctions compared to inducements will be higher for those who have a more unfavorable preexisting attitude towards the target country.*

It is important to distinguish a preference for a hawkish response from an overall desire for the US to intervene in a situation. Given that the US is a global leader with a long history of interventionism, at least some citizens might respond favorably to a US economic intervention proposal aimed at addressing problems abroad, at least under some conditions. Accordingly, we consider a number of additional factors that are likely to induce support for economic intervention, without necessarily having differing effects on the support for sanctions relative to inducements. In other words, these are factors that could affect support for a proposed US response, but contrary to the conditioning impacts of the factors presented in H2 and H3, the effect of factors below would *not* be conditional on whether the proposal centered on sanctions or inducements.

First, security threats might provoke the perception that US action is necessary, leading to greater support for proposed policies irrespective of their nature. For example, nuclear proliferation could provoke perception of a security threat given the devastation a nuclear attack could cause in the US, as well as the general destabilization that could result from a nuclear attack anywhere in the world.<sup>14</sup> Given the experience with 9/11, state sponsorship of terror could also invoke a threat perception, though possibly less salient than nuclear weapons given the relatively low impact of terror in the US in recent years.<sup>15</sup> We expect narcotics

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<sup>14</sup>As noted above, [Tomz and Weeks \(2013\)](#) find that individuals support even military action to counter proliferation abroad—particularly when the proliferator is an authoritarian state.

<sup>15</sup>That said, polls from Pew conducted in 2020 suggest that the spread of nuclear weapons and terrorism are similarly of high concern, in both cases with 73% of Americans perceiving them as a “major” threat ([Pew Research Center 2020](#)).

trafficking also to be seen as worthy of policy action given the continuing public health crisis associated with (frequently imported) opioids. Conversely, crackdowns on democracy and human rights—a primarily internal, repressive behavior by offending states—may seem remote to most US citizens. While repression of pro-democracy movements violates post-World War II norms advanced by the United States, we expect that individuals will see such behavior as less worthy of action than the other issues that provoke a potentially direct threat to the safety of US citizens.

**Hypothesis 4** *Support for the proposal (for either sanctions or inducements) will be higher in the case of a higher security interest for the United States, with security interests ranked from highest to lowest: target nuclear proliferation; state support for terrorism; drug trafficking across borders; repression of pro-democracy protesters.*

By accounting for the long-term predictions if the US were to do nothing, we can further consider the context in which citizens determine their policy preferences. The “ticking clock” framing of bad behavior also could affect perceptions that US action is needed quickly. Ticking clocks tend to be associated with nuclear proliferation, as media can evoke visceral reactions to images of a literal bomb timer (not that such imagery accurately portrays nuclear technology) ticking down to 0:00. However, we suspect that the ticking clock framing could be effective at increasing support for either proposed policy action across all bad behavior types and issues we examine.

**Hypothesis 5** *Support for the proposal (for either sanctions or inducements) will be higher in the presence of a “ticking clock” in which inaction is predicted to lead to a major crisis (relative to a situation where a mere continuation of the current behavior is expected).*

Finally, as different actors with different sets of motivations and qualifications might propose these policy actions, we consider whether it matters who is advancing a particular policy position—in this case, a career professional in the US foreign service (particularly those noted to possess country expertise) or a political appointee (particularly those noted as

a presidential campaign donor). We suggest that citizens will support a policy, whether punishment or inducement, more when informed that it was authored by a career professional, particularly one with country expertise, as opposed to a political appointee, particularly one who is noted to be a campaign donor. There are reasons to think that career bureaucrats, especially those with noted expertise, will be perceived as more competent and qualified to offer proposals. First, there is evidence that agencies headed by career bureaucrats exhibit higher levels of performance compared to those headed by political appointees (Lewis 2007; Gallo and Lewis 2012; Miller 2015), and that agencies headed by political appointees connected to the president’s campaign have lower levels of performance than agencies run by other political appointees and career professionals (Gallo and Lewis 2012). Potential explanations for these differences often include experience and tenure in office (Lewis 2007; Gallo and Lewis 2012). Leader experience is also shown to have important implications for foreign policy decision-making and outcomes (Saunders 2017).

Perhaps more important for our work, research suggests that support of experts is linked, at least in some cases, to increased citizen support for and compliance with a particular policy (see Page, Shapiro and Dempsey 1987; Bokemper et al. 2021; Stauffer, Miller and Keiser 2023).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, there is evidence that, when thinking about appointments to government positions, citizens associate career bureaucrats with higher levels of competence compared to campaign fundraisers for the president. Using a survey experiment, Hollibaugh (2016) finds that citizens presented with administrative leaders who were previously campaign fundraisers for the president report decreased levels of trust in government and viewed them as having lower levels of competence, while citizens presented with administrative

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<sup>16</sup>We acknowledge that the dynamics connecting leader expertise to public opinion involve additional complexity, given that recent populist movements in Western states such as the US have involved deep skepticism of and even hostility towards experts (Drezner 2019; Boucher and Thies 2019). Trust in scientific experts has decreased recently in the US (Pew Research Center 2022a) and some have argued that distrust in experts can be viewed as a political statement (Nichols 2018). Proposals might be distrusted when the underlying issue is polarized and the proposal author is perceived as a out-partisan (Guisinger and Saunders 2017). We look at how partisanship conditions these effects in the appendix.

leaders who were previously bureaucratic careerists had greater levels of trust and viewed them as having higher levels of competence (see also [Hollibaugh 2017](#)). These findings align with a recent poll showing that citizens have greater confidence in federal government career employees than political appointees ([Pew Research Center 2022b](#)). Thus, citizens appear to associate higher levels of competence with career bureaucrats compared to those involved with the president’s campaign. This difference might shape the extent to which citizens support the policy recommended by a particular actor – in our case, a career professional in the US foreign service (particularly those noted to possess country expertise) or a political appointee (particularly those noted as a presidential campaign donor).

**Hypothesis 6** *Support for the proposal (for either sanctions or inducements) will be higher when a career professional (particularly those with experience) authored the US proposal for action, compared to cases where a political appointee (especially those noted to have donated to a presidential campaign) authored the proposal.*

The discussion above lays out our expectations that US citizens will, on average, prefer sanctions over inducements to address proscribed behavior abroad (H1). While we expect some contextual factors will reinforce this relative preference (H2 and H3), others factors could potentially lead to increased support for either kind of intervention (H4-H6).

## Research design

To test our preregistered hypotheses, we designed a conjoint survey experiment. We focus on a sample of US adults.<sup>17</sup> Conjoint designs help to reflect complex decision-making environments ([Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014](#)) and have been shown to align well with real-world behavior ([Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto 2015](#)). We designed our experiment to gauge respondent support for a proposed US policy—randomized to be sanc-

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<sup>17</sup>We preregistered the hypotheses and experiment using [As Predicted](#). The preregistration report is also included in the supplemental materials. This project was approved as exempt by the Arizona State University Institutional Review Board.

tions or inducements—to address some (randomized) proscribed behavior in a (randomized) target state. We include attributes representing a variety of contextual factors both to test the hypotheses above and reflect real world complexity. We use a single profile design, and respondents completed only one conjoint task; as such, no individual was presented with both sanctions and inducements as proposed policies.<sup>18</sup> Further, by presenting each respondent with only one conjoint task, we preclude the possibility of carry-over effects. We simultaneously conducted three experiments (using entirely different respondents for each) that were identical except for the types of bad behavior considered and countries involved (chosen from a realistic set). As such, we can analyze these three experiments together, treating them as a single conjoint experiment with a constrained design (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015).<sup>19</sup>

We have 2,473 respondents in the first experiment, 2,474 in the second, and 2,445 in the third, giving us 7,392 respondents in total. We lose 105 respondents due to missing values, giving us 7,287 observations in our analyses. The sample was recruited using Lucid Theorem and the survey was administered via Qualtrics.<sup>20</sup> Lucid recruits participants to target US baseline demographic characteristics, in an attempt to create a sample that reflects the US adult population in terms of age, gender, race, and region.<sup>21</sup> Our sample largely reflects the demographic characteristics of the US adult population (see the appendix Table A-1

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<sup>18</sup>We opted for a single profile design as we think that this helped to preserve realism, as it did not suggest competing policy proposals from the executive branch of the US government.

<sup>19</sup>This combined experiment is a constrained design only because we allow certain countries to appear only for some of the inciting bad behaviors. Below, we discuss our estimation strategy intended to account for this constrained design.

<sup>20</sup>Each of the three experiments were run independently of any others. The three experiments were administered simultaneously in April 2021. Respondents who participated in one experiment were disqualified from participating in either of the other two.

<sup>21</sup>For more information on demographic targets, see: <https://lucidtheorem.com/faq>. Lucid also takes a number of steps to try to improve data quality, including blocking bots and using attention checks. A study by Coppock and McClellan (2019) shows that Lucid’s demographic distributions are much closer to those from the ANES 2012 with respect to e.g., age, gender, education, political interest, and ideology than those obtained by Amazon’s MTurk, and that the experimental results obtained from a Lucid sample generally replicated those from other studies.

for details). Importantly, our sample is balanced across our attribute values, as only one Chi-squared test (out of 35 tests) comparing across the attribute value groups is statistically significant. The probability of at least one false positive with this many tests is .83. The appendix presents this information (Tables A2-A6).

## Experiment design

Figure 1 illustrates the survey flow for all three experiments. Respondents begin by answering two attention screener questions.<sup>22</sup> Next, respondents were asked to rate their favorability toward ten countries using a five-point scale (very favorable to very unfavorable, including neutral). The countries that could be included in the particular conjoint experiment were always included in this list, though the other five or six countries were randomized.<sup>23</sup>

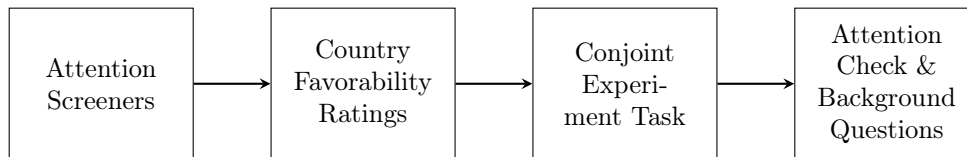


Figure 1: Survey experiment flow chart

After completing the country ratings, respondents clicked through to introductory text for the vignette. The text read: “As you may know, the United States uses foreign policy to promote its security and economic prosperity. Towards these ends, the US seeks international compliance on a variety of goals, such as stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons, preventing drug trafficking across borders, fighting terrorism, and promoting democracy and human rights. On the following screen, you will be presented with information about a proposed foreign policy action.” Notably, all respondents saw this same introduction

<sup>22</sup>Following a recommended practice, those who did not pass these pre-treatment attention checks were exited from the survey (Ternovski and Orr 2022).

<sup>23</sup>Countries that could be included in the list were: China, Pakistan, Russia, Afghanistan, North Korea, India, Myanmar, Canada, United Kingdom, Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, Colombia, Syria, Iran, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, and South Africa.



irrespective of which bad behavior they were then randomly assigned. Accordingly, this text helps give all respondents a similar background regarding the universe of issues over which the US potentially uses economic statecraft.

Respondents waited at least 15 seconds before clicking through to the conjoint task. The conjoint task that followed always took the basic form as follows. Some background information was presented at the top of the page. This background information presented the randomly selected country and bad behavior, as well as whether there was a long history of this behavior or a recent policy shift. Specifically, respondents were presented these two sentences at the top of the screen: “The United States is considering taking action in **[Country]** following reports of **[Bad behavior]**. **[Country]** has a long history of **[Bad behavior]**. **[OR]** **[Country]** recently shifted policy, leading to a surge in **[Bad behavior]**.” Right below these two sentences was a table that included five additional randomized attribute values. Table 1 presents all the attribute values that were randomized;<sup>24</sup> and Figure 2 presents an example of a conjoint task. In the table on the screen, all respondents saw “Proposal” first, but the remaining attributes were listed in random order. In Table 1 (and throughout the paper), the “primary attributes” relate to our hypotheses while “secondary attributes” were included in the experiment and analysis to better reflect the complexity of reality, but with no associated hypotheses.

Respondents were then asked to answer six questions (with order randomized) on a 0-100 scale (labeled from strongly disagree to strong agree, with 50 representing neither agree nor disagree) using a slider. Our primary DV is “I support the proposed policy.” However, we also included five additional DVs to gauge specific attitudes about the policy: 1) “This

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<sup>24</sup>We designed the attributes such that any combination of realizations would be realistic. One might question, for example, if it makes sense to combine “a long history” of a bad behavior with a “ticking clock” to disaster. However, we argue that many imminent crises can follow from long-running past actions. Or, more importantly, leaders might try to persuade the public that this is the case. For example, in 2012, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used an image of a cartoon bomb during a speech to the United Nations to convey a sense that a long-running Iranian nuclear program was nearing completion of a weapon.

Primary Attributes	Values
Issue/bad behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repressing pro-democracy activists</li> <li>- Developing technologically advanced nuclear weapons</li> <li>- Sponsoring terrorist activity</li> <li>- Ignoring drug trafficking across its borders</li> </ul>
Proposed policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial sanctions</li> <li>- Financial inducements</li> </ul>
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recent policy shift</li> <li>- Long history of behavior</li> </ul>
Outcome if no action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Without action, [extreme event - mass killing of activists, terrorist attack inside US, etc.] is likely in the near future</li> <li>- Without action, conditions in [Country] are likely to continue</li> </ul>
Author	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Long-term career professional in the US foreign service</li> <li>- Long-term career professional in the US foreign service with expertise on [Country]</li> <li>- Political appointee</li> <li>- Political appointee &amp; presidential campaign donor</li> </ul>
Secondary Attributes	Values
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Immediate impact encouraging an immediate response</li> <li>- Enduring impact encouraging a response over time</li> </ul>
Effect on target economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Random draw from uniform distribution between \$50-900 million</li> </ul>
Country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiment 1 (democracy crackdown / nuclear proliferation): India, Pakistan, Russia, China, or North Korea</li> <li>- Experiment 2 (democracy crackdown / terrorism): Iran, Cuba, Sudan, or Syria</li> <li>- Experiment 3 (democracy crackdown / narcotics trafficking): Mexico, Colombia, Myanmar, Afghanistan, or Morocco</li> </ul>

Table 1: Summary of attributes

*Note:* Secondary attributes are those about which we do not develop hypotheses but are included in the conjoint analysis.

policy is too costly to the US,” 2) “This policy advances US interests,” 3) “This policy will be effective in changing [Country]’s behavior,” 4) “This policy sends a strong message to the international community about US commitment to [reduce bad behavior],” and 5) “This policy demonstrates US strength.” While we present results only for the “support the proposed policy” outcome measure below, the appendix presents analysis of all of these DVs separately as well as a factor score from a factor analysis of these five outcome variables that, together, might underlie support.

After concluding the experiment, respondents were given an attention check (separate from the pre-treatment checks) and asked a series of demographic and background questions about factors like foreign policy interest, ideology, partisanship, employment status, and rural/urban status.<sup>25</sup> 97.5% of respondents passed the post-treatment attention check, which suggests very high attention rates among participants. We retained all respondents in our analysis even if they failed this post-treatment attention check, given concerns about post-treatment bias (see [Montgomery, Nyhan and Torres 2018](#)).

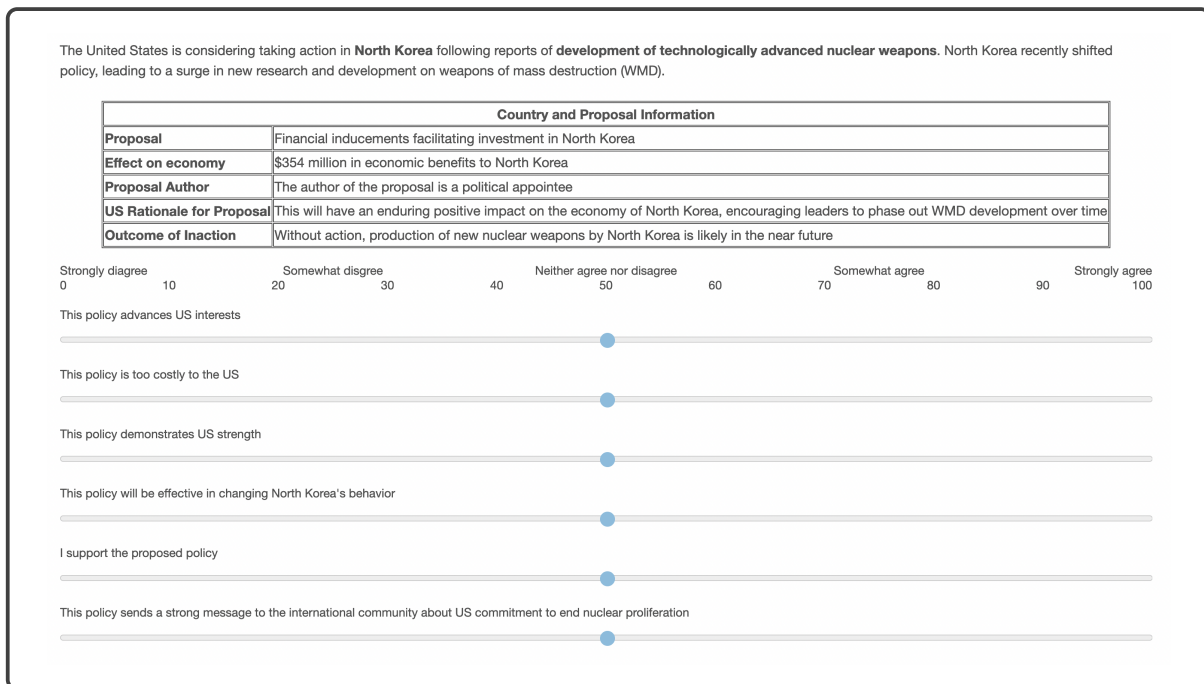


Figure 2: An example of the conjoint experiment task

## Estimation

We estimate average marginal component effects (AMCEs) following [Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto \(2014\)](#), as well as marginal means (MMs) following [Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley](#)

<sup>25</sup>Lucid also provides pre-collected demographic information; we asked for some of the same information to ensure consistency.

(2020). We specify additive linear models including each attribute to test our “unconditional” hypotheses: H1 and H4-H6. Given that H2 and H3 posit that the relative preference for sanctions vs. inducements could vary over values of other attributes, we also present AMCEs and marginal means subset by policy proposed (sanctions and inducements); and we present the difference in marginal means across the sanctions and inducement groups to test H2 and H3.<sup>26</sup> Given that the experiments were administered simultaneously and there are no overlapping respondents, we analyze the data as a single constrained design conjoint experiment. All models were estimated using the cregg package (Leeper and Barnfield 2020) in R version 4.3.1.

## Analysis

Figure 3 presents the AMCEs (left-hand plot) and the marginal means (right-hand plot) for the attributes, addressing hypothesis 1 (policy tool) as well as hypotheses 4 (issue), 5 (ticking clock), and 6 (policy author). The dependent variable is respondent support for the policy proposal on a 0-100 scale, as discussed above. While the model generating these estimates includes all attributes, we present only those relevant to the hypotheses in Figure 3, placing complete figures of results in the appendix (appendix Figures A-1 through A-3).

The first notable finding is that there is a statistically significant and substantively meaningful effect of the sanctions treatment. All else equal, when a policy proposal suggests sanctions, respondents are 11.9 points (on a 0-100 scale) more favorable towards the policy, relative to a counterfactual scenario in which inducements are proposed. The marginal means for support are 63.6 for sanctions and 51.7 for inducements. As such, hypothesis 1 is supported.

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<sup>26</sup>We do not present differences in AMCEs as these differences cannot be estimated within the cregg package for a constrained design (see Leeper and Barnfield 2020). However, as presented in the appendix, we obtain the AMCE differences for each of the three experiments separately, which further allows us to examine heterogeneity by issue (see appendix Figures A-22 through A-28).

Hypothesis 4 is only partially supported, as while we find that respondents demonstrate the least support for action in the event of a democracy crackdown, it is actually drug trafficking that is associated with the strongest (and statically significant) increase in support when compared to a democracy crackdown—a modest 2.6 points. Perhaps this follows because narcotics trafficking is perceived as a more local issue for US citizens, as the opioid crisis and the overdose deaths as well as other violence associated with drug trafficking might come to mind.<sup>27</sup> We also find that respondents are more supportive of action in the presence of a ticking clock scenario (H5), though the substantive magnitude of this effect is again quite modest at 2.1 points. The presence of the ticking clock is associated with an increase from 56.6 to 58.7 on our 100-point scale for support, in both cases only somewhat above the “neutral” level of support (50). While the estimated effects of policy author (H6) move in the right direction, with political appointee and appointees who are campaign donors associated with decreased support compared to a professional expert, these effects are not quite statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Presenting results addressing H2 (recent change vs. longstanding policy) and H3 (preexisting attitudes), Figures 4 and 5 plot the results for inducements and sanctions separately, with Figure 4 presenting AMCEs and Figure 5 presenting marginal means. As discussed above, Figure 5 also includes the differences in the marginal means. The figures offer no evidence for hypothesis 2, as the difference in support for sanctions and inducements does not vary in the presence of a recent shift in behavior relative to a long-standing behavior; sanctions are preferred in each case. Conversely, the prior attitudes hypothesis (H3) is strongly supported. Figure 5 indicates that sanctions are supported by a margin of 20 points (66 vs. 46) among respondents who are unfavorable towards the target. However, for respondents who hold a favorable impression of the target state, there is no statistically significant difference in overall support for sanctions vs. inducements. Specifically, support for sanctions

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<sup>27</sup>In the appendix, we further explore results in sub-samples by target country as well as issue.

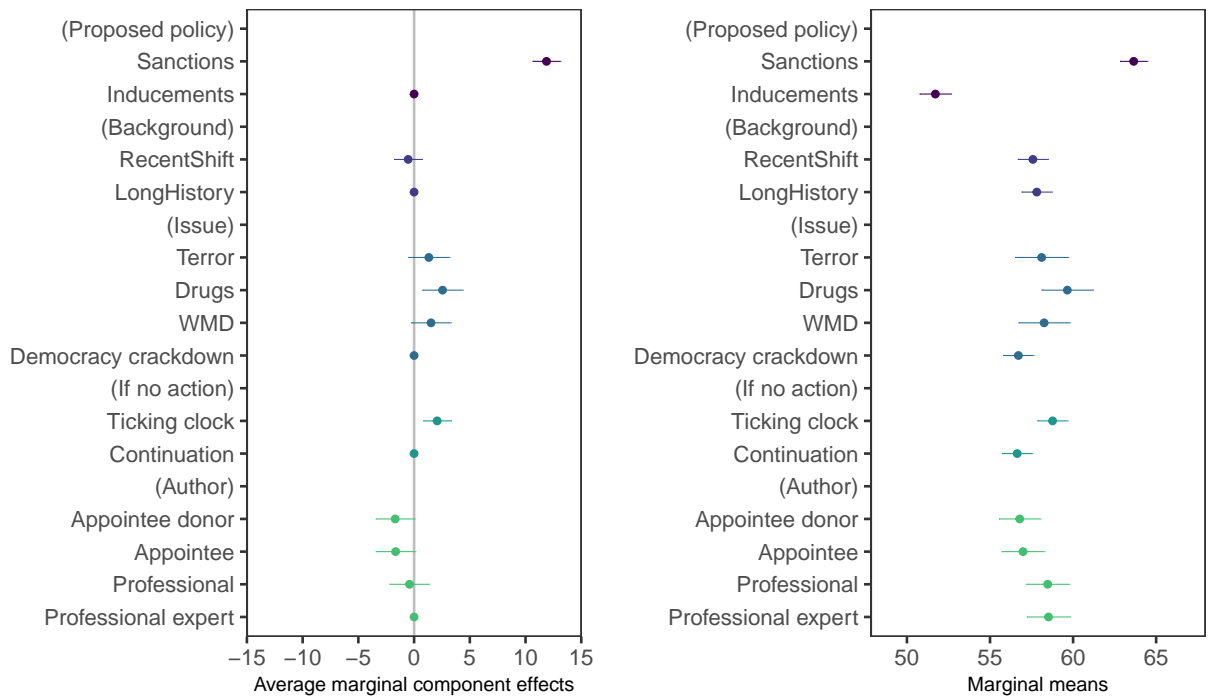


Figure 3: Estimates with 95% confidence intervals, H1, H4-H6; DV = support for policy (0-100)

is 65, and support for inducements is 63.7 (difference = 1.3, with a 95% confidence interval of -1.9 to 4.6). Respondents reporting neutral attitudes towards the target express slightly more support of sanctions compared to inducements (60 vs. 53), with a difference that is statistically significant (difference = 6.2, with a 95% confidence interval spanning 4.4 to 8.1). These differences are reflected in the AMCEs presented in Figure 4.<sup>28</sup>

Figure 4 also provides further context on our overall findings for the ticking clock hypothesis (H5), given that the AMCE is significant only for respondents who received the sanctions treatment. This indicates that compared to a continuation of behavior, a ticking clock increases support for sanctions but this effect is not significant when looking at support for inducements.<sup>29</sup>

The appendix presents the full figures of results including estimates and confidence intervals for attributes not presented here (e.g., country dummies, timeline for policy effectiveness, etc.). The appendix also presents additional models that test supplemental, preregistered hypotheses with more nuanced time horizons, as well as additional models that we did not preregister but might nonetheless provide a starting point for future researchers of economic statecraft. For example, in models subset by party identification (appendix Figure A-29 and A-30), we find partial support for hypothesis 4 (that action is preferred when the bad behavior is a security issue for the US) specifically among Republican identifiers but not Democratic identifiers or independents. We also find partial support for hypothesis 6 (policy author) among Democratic identifiers but not Republican identifiers or independents. Additionally, we find that while women and men both prefer sanctions to inducements, this difference is relatively smaller for women (appendix Figure A-31 and A-32). The appendix

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<sup>28</sup>Interestingly, we find that sanctions are supported more if a respondent is favorable or unfavorable towards a target state; the lowest support for sanctions occurs for respondents who report a neutral attitude. Conversely, with respect to support for inducements, respondents who report neutral attitudes lay in between those who are favorable and those who are unfavorable.

<sup>29</sup>The appendix presents differences in AMCEs by experiment, allowing a statistical test of difference in differences across sanctions vs. inducements. Results are in line with the discussion above (H2 is not supported but H3 is).

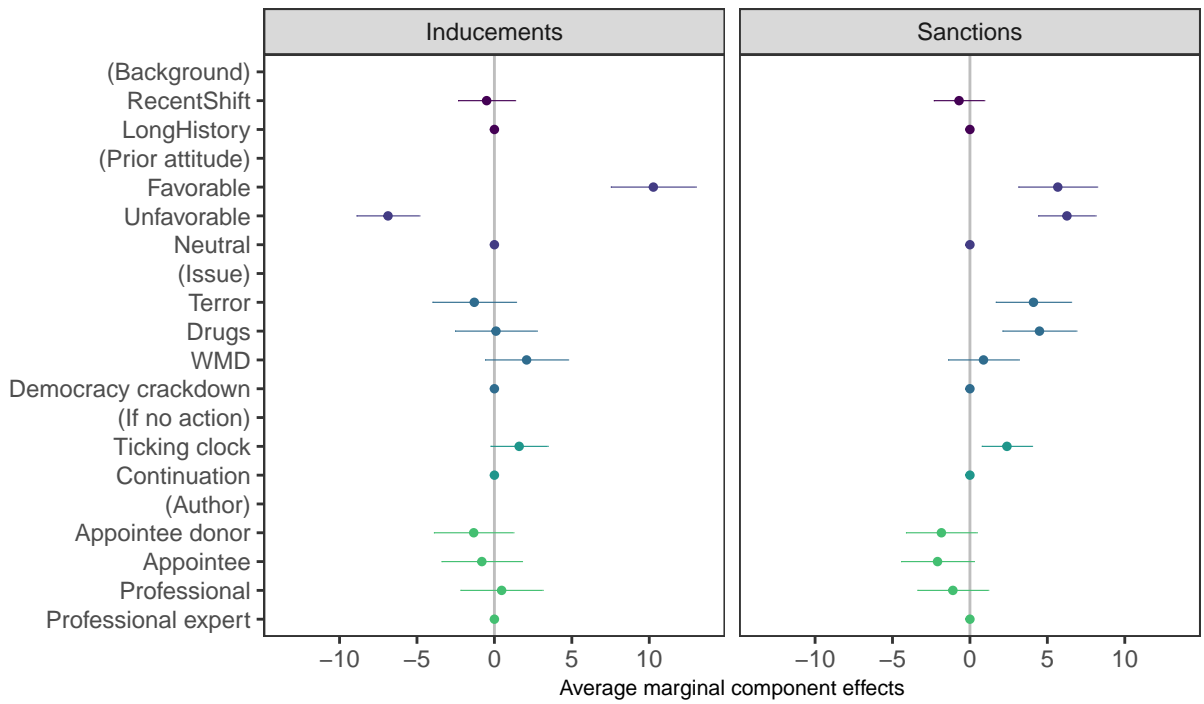


Figure 4: Average marginal component effects with 95% confidence intervals, H2 & H3; DV = support for policy (0-100)



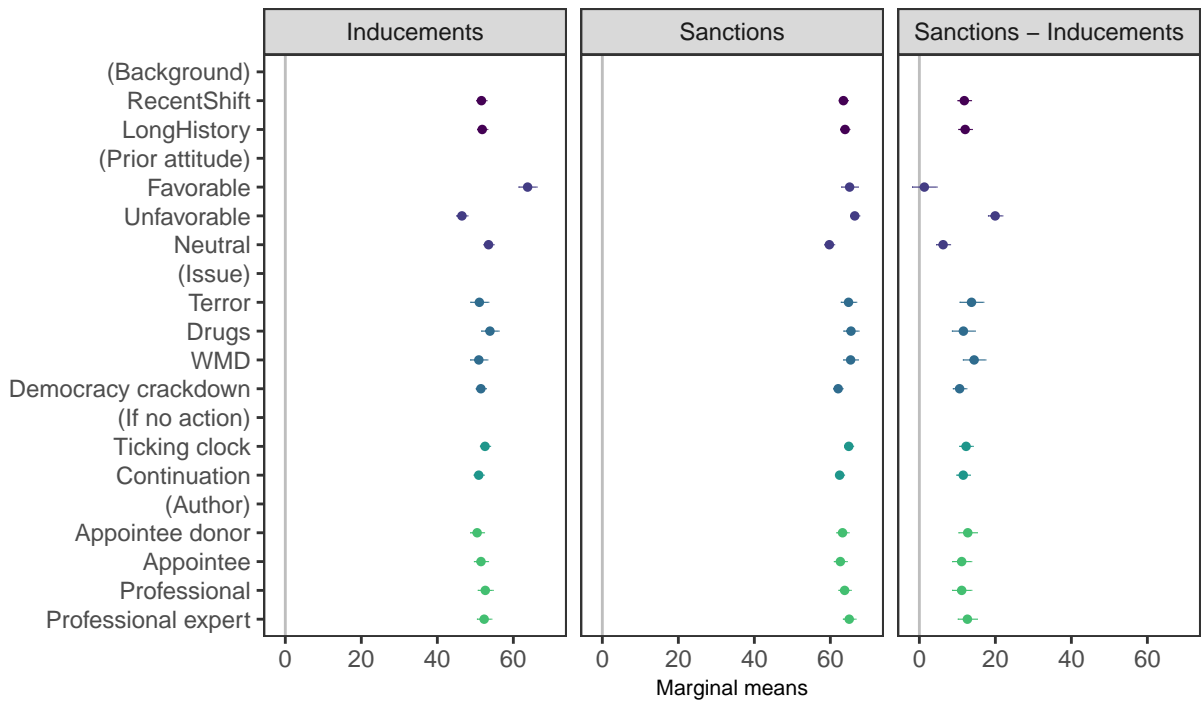


Figure 5: Marginal means and differences in marginal means with 95% confidence intervals, H2 & H3; DV = support for policy (0-100)

also demonstrates that we find largely similar results across the other outcome questions we asked respondents. When looking at responses for sanctions vs. inducements, these results suggest that respondents find sanctions to be more effective, less costly, more likely to signal US strength, more likely to serve US interests, and more likely to send a message to third parties considering bad behavior.

## Discussion and conclusion

Sanctions are one of the US's most relied upon foreign policy tools. However, as [Drezner \(1999\)](#) points out, sanctions are often used in situations in which inducements might be more palatable to the target and thus would be more effective if the sender values target policy change. Considering possible individual-level foundations for this behavior, we explore citizens' support for sanctions or inducements. To ensure direct comparability in the situations in which sanctions and inducements are proposed, we develop a conjoint experiment that varies a number of attributes that might affect whether and to what extent sanctions gain greater support compared to positive inducements. We find empirical evidence for the view that US citizens express greater support for sanctions compared to inducements in the attempt to influence target country behavior that is in violation of international norms. We are able to demonstrate that this pattern endures even when sanctions are not proposed in response to a dramatic, negative shock to the status quo that might lead to cognitive bias stemming from perceptions of provocation. We also find that background perceptions matter: respondents make judgments about proposed policies based largely on their preexisting affinity towards the target. This aligns with the idea that policymakers are concerned about public perceptions of appeasement, particularly for unfriendly states. And these patterns could form the micro-foundations underlying the paradox to which [Drezner \(1999\)](#) points.

We find that a ticking clock appears to increase support for action, particularly sanctions.

We find only partial support for the expectation that more security-focused issues (terrorism, WMDs, and drug trafficking) would elicit greater support for policy action compared to democracy crackdowns. While all effects for the security-focused issues are positive relative to democracy crackdown, the effect for drug trafficking is the only significant effect. This may highlight the salience of drug-trafficking, and the related violence and overdoses, for US respondents, which may seem more connected to daily life, while terrorism and WMDs, although extremely important, may seem more remote. Future research could extend our findings by adding more explicit variation in the direct security threat faced by the US from behavior abroad.

Another issue to explore in future work is our consideration of a recent shock vs. long-standing behavior by the target. Our “recent shock” treatment might be limited by the fact that we simply tell respondents that this is a recent shock or longstanding behavior, as opposed to having real time pass after being exposed to some behavior by a country. This might have undercut our intent to distinguish responses to changes in the status quo from more longstanding, “normal” conditions. This might account for our null results for the expectation that long-standing behavior would lead to increased (relative) support for inducements. Future work could build from our analysis by designing a panel study to track attitudes towards sanctions and inducements over time. Though it could be costly to implement, such a study could determine whether respondents support inducements relatively more if the continuing bad behavior is viewed as a steady state as opposed to when there is a sudden change.

Further, in all realizations of our vignette, the target state is engaging in proscribed behavior in violation of widely held international norms. Future research could expand upon our findings by considering scenarios in which target behavior is more benign but other countries would still like to see change. Alternatively, vignettes could be framed not to mention the current bad behavior but rather to emphasize an opportunity to encourage

good behavior (though this revision might be questionable from the standpoint of external validity). Future research could also replicate our design looking at territorial aggression as a proscribed behavior. Our survey experiments were conducted nearly a year before Russia invaded Ukraine, when a major inter-state war of conquest appeared unlikely to occur and thus unrealistic to include in our experiment. However, Russia’s aggressive behavior has likely made major war a less remote possibility in people’s minds.

Finally, future scholars should consider how the arguments expressed here might translate to non-US contexts. We make the case that US international leadership in the post-WWII period could result in a tendency of US citizens to support intervention abroad. Yet, the relationships we identify here could translate to other settings even if the baseline level of support for any kind of intervention were lower (see [Tomz and Weeks 2013](#), for findings along these lines). Conversely, we might find that other cultures are more open to the use of inducements, perhaps if their history involves less salient examples of failed “appeasement” such as the US (along with the UK and other allies) faced prior to the Second World War. In those settings, we might find more support for some of our hypotheses, such as the conditioning effect of a recent behavioral shift compared to a long history of the proscribed behavior (H2), than we see in the US context.

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