

# Are Liberal Governments More Cooperative? Voting Trends at the UN in Five Anglophone Democracies

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Journal of Conflict Resolution

1-30

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DOI: 10.1177/0022002718794848

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## Abstract

Among both elites and the mass public, conservatives and liberals differ in their foreign policy preferences. Relatively little effort, however, has been put toward showing that, beyond the use of force, these differences affect the day-to-day outputs and processes of foreign policy. This article uses United Nations voting data from 1946 to 2008 of the five major Anglophone democracies of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to show that each of these countries votes more in line with the rest of the world when liberals are in power. This can be explained by ideological differences between conservatives and liberals and the ways in which the socializing power of international institutions interact with preexisting ideologies. The results hope to encourage more research into the ways in which ideological differences among the masses and elites translate into differences in foreign policy goals and practices across governments.

## Keywords

cooperation, international institutions, dyadic conflict, foreign policy, foreign policy decision-making

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Since I saw treaties as essentially only political documents, and the whole debate over what was “legally binding” in “international law” as just another theological exercise, I didn’t care about the answer.

John Bolton (2008, 76)

Our enduring strength is also reflected in our respect for an international system that protects the rights of both nations and people—a United Nations and a Universal Declaration of Human Rights; international law and the means to enforce those laws.

Barack Obama (2014)

Conservatives and liberals are different. Not only with regard to politics, but they are also prejudiced for and against different groups and disagree on basic issues of right and wrong (Haidt 2012), even among elites (Holsti and Rosenau 1988). Yet there may at one point have been reasons to be skeptical of the idea that the more mundane day-to-day work of foreign policy varies based on who is in office in any predictable way in the United States and other similar democracies. Realism, the dominant paradigm in international relations for decades, says that state behavior is determined by the balance of power and other structural forces (e.g., Mearsheimer 2001). Foreign policy observers have often repeated the adage that “where you stand depends on where you sit” (Allison 1969, 711), which implies that circumstances will force whoever occupies a certain position of leadership to behave similarly to what others would do if they held the same office.

Yet, through the use of statistical methods as applied to large data sets, in recent years, scholars have shown the degree to which regime ideology shapes foreign policy, particularly with regard to issues of war and peace (Bertoli, Dafoe, and Trager 2017; Koch and Sullivan 2010). This article contributes to that literature, linking it to work on interest similarity as measured by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voting (Strüver 2016). Certainly, rhetoric surrounding that institution and international law more generally trends toward the idealistic side among liberal politicians, while more cynical and dismissive commentary is more often found on the right. Yet rhetoric is cheap in international politics, and so the question of how ideology shapes interactions between democracies and international organizations should be addressed in a more quantitative way.

This article investigates how ideology affects behavior at the United Nations (UN) in five major Anglophone democracies with a similar political culture. It finds that, across each one of these states, left-wing governments vote more in line with the rest of the world at the UNGA. Part I discusses what it actually means to say that two states share interests, including a discussion of the standard method used to measure interest similarity in the literature, and previous work that looks into its determinants. In Part II, I review the research showing that liberals and conservatives have different moralities and how this impacts foreign policy preferences among the general public and elites. I bring together the literatures on partisan morality and interest similarity to present theories on when we can expect administrations in the

five Anglophone democracies to vote more or less like the rest of the world in part III. The next two sections present the methodology and the results. We find that among the five major Anglophone democracies, left-leaning governments consistently vote more in line with other nations. The findings here can hopefully inspire future quantitative research on how ideology interacts with existing international institutions to produce foreign policy outputs of interest.

## Measuring Interest Similarity

What does it mean to say that two states share similar “interests”? As Wolfers (1952) already noticed over sixty years ago, the term “national interest” is endlessly flexible and means different things to different people. While some stress an objective standard that focuses on wealth and relative power (Mearsheimer 2001), there is a general recognition that states can pursue a wide variety of goals, including the fulfillment of moral ideals including greater international cooperation (Finnemore 1993; Risse 2015). Scholars interested in measuring state preference and similarity have therefore mostly focused on the subjective definition of national interest, where we say that two states share interests if they seek the same ends. Early work used security alliances as a proxy to gauge interest similarity (Bueno de Mesquita 1975, 1981; Stoll 1984). Unfortunately, such measures can be crude or misleading, as alliance profiles show relatively little variance over time, only capture interest similarity along one dimension of international affairs, and are often imposed by history and circumstance. Therefore, scholars have turned more and more to data from the UNGA, which often has hundreds of votes per year, in order to have a broader and more detailed picture of the structure of international politics (Signorino and Ritter 1999). Focusing on revealed preferences as measured by how states vote, if two countries tend to find themselves on the same side on a wide variety of international controversies, we can say that they share similar interests.

The UN affinity index has become standard as a proxy for interest similarity (Gartzke and Jo 2006; Gartzke 2006) and is often used as an independent variable in a wide range of literatures, most notably among those trying to explain which countries receive foreign aid (Strömberg 2007; McLean 2012; Kevlihan, DeRouen, and Biglaiser 2014; Alesina and Dollar 2000). Affinity scores, or *S*-scores, are calculated by dyad-year, on a scale from  $-1$  for two countries that are as far apart as possible to  $1$  for two countries that vote in perfect alignment (see Gartzke 2006; Signorino and Ritter 1999). They are based on an equal weighting of alliance commitments and voting at the UNGA. The more that two countries have similar alliance portfolios and tend to vote the same way at the UN, the more similar their interests are in any given year or the higher the *S*-score. As UN votes occur much more often than shifts in alliances, for all practical purposes, most of the variance that we see within dyads over time will be based on changes in voting patterns at that institution.

Although UNGA votes do not have binding influence as international law, they do occasionally result in the distribution of resources and states tend to treat even votes that do not as important. US law stipulates that foreign aid be tied to the voting records of developing countries, many of which regularly take stands against American positions regardless, showing that they are willing to give up tangible resources in order to take a symbolic stand (Carter and Stone 2015). Case studies reveal that governments and nongovernmental organizations regularly lobby and invest heavily in trying to induce other states to vote their preferred positions (Panke 2014; Reimann 2006, 57-58). Regarding the policy area of climate change, UN resolutions have allocated funds to study the problem and acted as catalysts for further action taken by states and other international organizations (Verheyen 2005, 46-53). Even votes that are purely symbolic can have deep consequences for international politics, as seen in the 2017 UN debate regarding what city should serve as the capital of Israel. Given that analyses of revealed preferences show that states care about such resolutions, scholars have used voting at the UNGA as a proxy for cooperation and other outputs that they are interested in.

This article uses higher affinity scores as proxies for “better” or “closer” relations. Of course, *S*-scores do not capture all dimensions of a relationship. However, because they are arguably the best measure we have of interest similarity, it is not imprecise to use them as proxies for what we are interested in. If two states are allied with the same countries and vote the same way, it is reasonable to expect to see more cooperation between them than we do in a dyad where the opposite is true. Therefore, for the purposes of this article, I will use terms such as “higher affinity score,” “more similar interests,” and “closer relations” interchangeably (see also Smith 2016).

While some scholars have taken interest similarity as a given and used it to predict other phenomena, there are two research traditions focused on interest similarity itself as a dependent variable of interest. First, scholars have for decades tried to find the fault lines in the international system and map the structure of international politics. An early analyst was Russett (1966) who used factor analysis to find seven different voting groups in the 18th Session of the UNGA. Iida (1988) showed that there was increasing agreement among developing world countries throughout the 1980s. Most importantly, using spatial models of distance to reveal clustering, scholars have found that during the Cold War, the world was indeed bipolar, with one group of states clustering around the United States and another more closely allied with the Soviet Union (Voeten 2000; Holloway 1990). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the East–West division has been eroded and replaced by a conflict with the United States and those that assent to the neoliberal order on the one side and a group of developing states that resist American hegemony on the other (Kim and Russett 1996; Voeten 2000, 2004; Carter and Stone 2015).

In addition to mapping the structure of international politics using behavior at the UNGA as a proxy, a second body of literature has used voting similarity to answer narrower and, in some ways, more fundamental, questions relevant to international

politics. Rather than simply examining the structure of international politics, this literature asks why states come to share similar interests in the first place. Because the United States has been central to international politics since the second half of the twentieth century, researchers have asked what makes other states come closer or pull further apart from that country. When there is a transition away from a non-democratic leader, there appears to be a regression to the mean effect, where countries that were close to the United States move further apart and those that were hostile become less so (Ratner 2009; Smith 2016). In democratic states, however, leader change does not appear to affect relations with the United States (Smith 2016). This may be due to larger and wealthier countries having more stable preferences with regard to issues at the UN (Brazys and Panke 2017). Other studies have found that countries with leaders who just came into power (Dreher and Jensen 2013), and, among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development states, those that have a right-wing government in office (Potrafke 2009), tend to be closer to the United States. In addition to research on the United States, Strüver (2016) finds that China has closest relations with states that are similar in regime characteristics and degree of sociopolitical globalization. As China continues to become a more important force in the international sphere, there are sure to be more studies examining the determinants of its voting patterns and who its allies tend to be.

While it is important to understand what determines closeness to the United States, researchers have thus far mainly focused on the qualities and changes of the other member of the dyad. There has yet to be a work on how changes within the United States affect its relationships vis-à-vis other countries. But focusing only on potential friends and enemies means that we are missing half the picture. As a more general matter, processes or changes within the United States that influence its relationships with other countries might have analogues in other Western democracies that share similarities in terms of culture, history, and institutions.

## **Conservatives, Liberals, and International Cooperation**

In order to show that research on ideological differences among the mass public can help make predictions about the foreign policies of leaders, two steps are necessary. First, elites of different parties must have divergent ideological preferences, likely reflecting the variation that we see among the broader population. Second, even if elites do differ ideologically, they must be shown to in fact act differently, in contrast to theories of international politics that put overwhelming emphasis on structure and power distributions determining behavior. Research must therefore establish connections between the ideological characteristics of an administration and foreign policy outputs.

In regard to the first requirement, scholars have established that many of the foreign policy differences that we see between conservatives and liberals among the general public also exist among elites of various ideological persuasions (Holsti and Rosenau 1988, 1990; Milner and Tingley 2013). Conservatives tend to be more

supportive of militant internationalism or the view that the United States should respond muscularly to threats, defend allies, and be prepared to use force in the international arena. Liberals, in contrast, are more partial to cooperative internationalism, which is characterized by more support for international institutions and active cooperation with other nations in matters unrelated to military affairs (Holsti and Rosenau 1990; Gries 2014; Rathbun et al. 2016). Milner and Tingley (2013) see aspects of foreign policy attitudes as reflecting a trade-off between control and the benefits of multilateralism, with Republicans preferring the former and Democrats the latter. Although most of the literature is focused on the United States, similar splits among the public also exist in other Western democracies (Dalton 2013, 122-28; Reifler, Scotto, and Clarke 2011).

Recently, scholars have connected these foreign policy orientations to more fundamental values about right and wrong (Rathbun et al. 2016; Kertzer et al. 2014). Political psychology reveals that conservatives and liberals differ in how they balance the interests of their “in-group” against the interests of outsiders. In the context of moral foundations theory, conservatives score higher than liberals on the loyalty/betrayal foundation. This means that they are more likely to morally disapprove when individuals are disloyal to their country or relevant in-group (Haidt 2012; Frimer, Gaucher, and Schaefer 2014; Bassett et al. 2015). While liberals do not necessarily approve of those who engage in betrayal, they are less likely to value loyalty highly when compared to other moral considerations such as treating people fairly and refraining from harming others. Similarly, the Schwartz framework of Universal Basic Values finds that people who vote for more left-wing parties score higher on universalism, defined as favoring “understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature” (Purko, Schwartz, and Davidov 2011, 539). These fundamental value differences, among other traits, seem to influence attitudes toward foreign policy just as they partially determine how citizens feel about domestic policy (Gries 2014; Kertzer et al. 2014).

Despite such research, however, it does not necessarily follow that replacing a conservative government with a liberal one, or vice versa, will lead to major predictable changes in foreign policy. Realists believe in the causal importance of the international balance of power, which, taken to its logical conclusion, would predict that those of differing ideologies will tend to react similarly given the same set of circumstances and constraints (Mearsheimer 2001). Seemingly with every turnover of administration in the United States, there is no shortage of ideologues on either side disappointed that the current president is acting too similarly to a disfavored previous leader (Buchanan 2007; West 2017). And even if leaders change in democracies, many decisions continue across time to be made by the same career bureaucrats, who may be able to either run circles around or directly influence the relatively few political leaders on top (Milner and Tingley 2015, 157-84). For these reasons, we may expect liberal and conservative administrations to behave similarly. One may make an analogy with regard to government spending in the United States. Although Republican elites and their voters favor a smaller role for the state, federal

spending increases at least as much under Republican administrations as it does under Democrats (McMaken 2016). On the issue of the size of the federal government, at least, institutional, political, and bureaucratic pressures appear to overwhelm the ideological convictions of those in power. We cannot be sure that the same is not true with respect to foreign affairs.

This leads to the need to establish a relationship between governing ideology and foreign policy outputs, the second requirement for showing that political psychology and the study of ideology has something to contribute to a foreign policy research agenda. Historical research into American foreign policy over the course of the twentieth century reveals that ideological differences between elites matter, with Republicans leaders being, relative to Democrats, more skeptical and less trustful of international institutions and this being reflected in their foreign policy behavior (Rathbun 2011; Dueck 2010). More quantitative work has similarly revealed important foreign policy differences between conservatives and liberals. Bertoli, Dafoe, and Trager (2017) use a regression discontinuity design and find that across the world, conservatives coming to power in democracies are associated with a higher likelihood of conflict. Their finding builds on work, usually focused on the United States, that investigates the ways in which regime ideology interacts with political and economic circumstances to shape decision-making regarding issues of war and peace (Koch and Sullivan 2010; Fordham 1998; Palmer, London, and Regan 2004). While ideology appears to influence American grand strategy and when and under what circumstances states opt to use force, open questions remain as to whether ideological differences also matter in the less consequential day-to-day activities of international politics and whether findings from the United States have more general implications across the world, at least in countries that are similar in their historical and political traditions.

## **Understanding International Cooperation through UNGA Voting**

For this to be done, one must find an empirical measure that is standard cross-nationally and can also be used to compare different administrations within individual states. Fortunately, voting at the UNGA provides such a metric, as every country in the world has hundreds of opportunities a year to express its preferences with regard to a wide variety of international issues. We may expect liberal government to have closer relations with most other countries. This is due to liberals' greater support for cooperative internationalism, which appears to be rooted at least in part in their tendency to more highly value the well-being and concerns of those that they have no political or social connection to (Rathbun et al. 2016; Kertzer et al. 2014). Sometimes, the best interests of a state and the best interests of the rest of the world diverge. Climate change, for example, tends to harm poorer and more tropical countries more than wealthy industrial states. At the same time, it is the largest economies that would need to bear much of the cost of any solution. Conservatives

and liberals on this issue, among others, are likely to differ in how they balance the interests of their own countries against those of the rest of the global community. One may therefore suspect that overall we would see conservatives vote less in line with other countries.

With regard to voting at the UNGA, however, one cannot expect ideologically based divergence in behavior to simply be rooted in differing concerns about the tangible interests of others. Indeed, if this analysis is restricted to tangible concerns, one may question the degree to which UNGA votes matter at all. Resolutions rarely allocate resources, and even when they do, the odds are very low that the vote of any particular state is going to decide the outcome. Yet there is no requirement that interests be tangible in nature, and in international politics, even purely symbolic votes often end up having a large impact. A wide literature finds that conservatives and liberals are divided over political symbolism, with liberals being more sensitive to the symbolic concerns of out-groups and conservatives caring more about symbolic gestures and actions that respect and flatter their in-group. Indeed, these symbolic concerns are better predictors of political attitudes and voting behavior than measures of tangible and objectively defined interest (Kinder and Sears 1981; McLaren and Johnson 2007). Foreign policy is seen by constructivists largely as an expression of national identity, or the seeking of “collective self-esteem,” which will differ among individuals based on ideological commitments and moral values (Wendt 1999, 235–42). Such a perspective must discount the immediate material influence of UN votes on international politics, otherwise states would only be expected to care about their votes in the very rare cases in which resources are distributed and their vote is expected to cause or break a tie. Yet governments nonetheless expend resources to influence UN votes, showing that they will sacrifice things of material value to affect outcomes that are “merely” symbolic (Carter and Stone 2015; Panke 2014). Even when the vote of a state is not determinative, voting a certain way can be seen as an expression of national identity, no different than individuals voting in a national election in which they have zero probability of influencing the results (Caplan 2011).

While UN voting may be symbolic, that should not be taken to mean that it is unimportant. A state can take an action that has no immediate security or economic effect but nonetheless has major consequences for international politics: for example, recognizing the state of Palestine or Taiwan or expelling the diplomats of a rival. Given the resources that are expended on influencing UNGA votes, the degree of interest similarity within a dyad is likely to both influence that relationship and reflect its current state. Left-wing governments are more likely to value cooperation for its own sake and take into account the symbolic interests of others (Ketzer et al. 2014), therefore pushing them closer to most of the rest of the world.

A second reason we may expect left-leaning governments to be closer to other countries is the ways in which socialization shapes actors participating in international institutions. Constructivists emphasize that states are social entities that are shaped by expectations, learning, and norms (Finnemore 1993; Hanania 2017a). In



particular, when participating in international organizations, representatives of states may find themselves morally persuaded by others and come to identify with the ideals and goals of the organization itself (Lewis 2005; Park 2005). In this framework, states do not simply begin to adopt the same preferences as others because they logically and systematically consider the payoffs to other parties of a given action. Rather, they adopt a “logic of appropriateness” that expands the very concept of the “self” and leads to an internalization of the assumptions, beliefs, and goals of those that they work with (Lewis 2005; Risse 2015). International organizations are effective in shaping behavior “in part because the rational-legal authority they embody is widely viewed as legitimate and good” (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001, 401). The degree to which UN representatives are prone to be affected by this socialization process determines the degree to which they can be expected to consent to the agendas of other member states (Pevehouse 2002; Flockhart 2005).

How a country votes at the UN is decided by the political appointees of a state, who work under the foreign ministry or an equivalent institution, with the leader of a nation having ultimate authority. Given that in some years, resolutions are passed on a near daily basis, there is little reason to believe that presidents or prime ministers give direct orders on how to vote most of the time, and decisions are usually delegated to those in the government who have regular direct contact with other members of the international community, a condition shown to facilitate socialization (Checkel 2005, 810-11). Representatives of conservative governments, for the most part politically conservative themselves, are more likely to be resistant to socialization by international institutions.

Gries (2014, 5-7) finds, of the twenty institutions and countries asked about, conservatives and liberals are most divided in how they feel about the UN. In that forum especially, then, the processes and institutions that facilitate socialization and a convergence of values and beliefs among some people may have the exact opposite effect among those prone to mistrust foreigners or international organizations, as conservatives are (Brewer, Gross, and Willnat 2004). In the political realm, we tend to selectively seek out information that confirms our worldview and ignore that which contradicts it (Garrett 2009). Being exposed to facts that go against ideological priors can sometimes even backfire, making individuals hold on more strongly to their set beliefs (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). Individuals who go to international organizations expecting them to be hostile to the national interest will be more likely to indeed find that to be the case.

Looking at recent history, we see that opposition to international organizations tends to be a characteristic of the political right. It was Republican resistance that torpedoed Woodrow Wilson’s attempts to bring the United States into the League of Nations (Cooper 2001, 330-75). Throughout the postwar era and up to the present day, American conservatives have expressed skepticism about the UN, as was perhaps clearest under the ambassadorship of John Bolton. In Europe, while Euroscepticism has occasionally been associated with the far left, the cause of championing national sovereignty against foreign influences has become a defining feature of

what is often referred to as the “far right” (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002). These left–right differences in behavior appear to be rooted in ideologically based disagreements regarding national identity (Dueck 2010, 27-32), a key concept determining how one defines the self in the international arena (Risse 2015). One may imagine that liberals go to international organizations primed for cooperation and predisposed to be convinced by arguments about what is good for the international community. Conservatives, being more skeptical of and hostile to the UN and its agenda, are likely to chart their own path. Whatever effects socialization has are likely to be muted or even reversed when those who are interacting with international organizations are politically conservative.

It is therefore not only that conservatives are more likely to prioritize the symbolic interests of their own country when they diverge from those of other nations. Rather, those on the right should be far less likely to internalize the perceived interests of the international community as their own. When political appointees go to the UN, any preexisting ideological differences with regard to preferences should increase through the process of socialization. Liberals, even when they use the language of “national interest,” should be more likely to internalize the idea that it is in the “national interest” to help citizens of other countries or defer to their concerns. In justifying the humanitarian intervention in Libya, for example, President Obama warned that a massacre in Benghazi would have “stained the conscience of the world” and that “[i]t was not in our national interest to let that happen (Remarks by the President 2011).” Others may have a less expansive definition of “national interest,” one that does not include preventing atrocities that do not in any way directly threaten their own country. The more that “national interest” is defined in this way, the more that the line between the interests of one’s own nation and those of the international community become blurred. Conservatives should both place less weight on the symbolic interests of other countries and be more resistant to a socialization process that expands the definition of national interest to include the agenda of the international community.

**Hypothesis 1:** Governments led by right-leaning parties will have lower affinity scores than those led by left-leaning parties.

At the same time, there may be certain countries with which conservatives have better relations than would be expected. First of all, conservatives may cooperate better with allies if they see them as part of the in-group to which loyalty is owed (Haidt 2012). American governments have often found that their ideals and interests come into conflict when allies are human right violators. Republicans have criticized Democratic presidents for allegedly betraying allies for the sake of ideals such as democracy and human rights (Schmitz and Walker 2004; Karsh 2016). In terms of moral foundations theory, the loyalty/betrayal foundation, which pulls conservatives away from the rest of the international community, may at the same time exert the opposite effect when they are dealing with allies, making them more likely to take

into account the symbolic concerns of their friends and be open to being socialized by them. Conservatives value staying true to in-group members, including when what they are doing is wrong according to the standards of other moral foundations.

This view of conservatives being friendlier to allies is supported by public opinion data. Gries (2014, 4-10) discusses the results of a feeling thermometer presented to a representative sample of the American public. He finds that liberals feel warmer toward every country asked about except Israel and the United States itself. As Israel is often condemned for human rights violations, this may be a reflection of conservatives' higher level of in-group loyalty. In addition, even among states that liberals are friendlier toward, countries with the smallest liberal-conservative gap tend to be allies such as England, Japan, and South Korea. The public opinion data suggest that the greater antipathy toward foreigners among conservatives is tempered or even reversed when the country in question is close to the United States. Therefore, I predict,

**Hypothesis 2:** Right-leaning governments will have higher affinity scores than would be predicted in relation to countries that are allies.

This does not mean that right-leaning governments will necessarily get along better with allies in an absolute sense. Rather, the effects of their ideological and moral values leading them to be less concerned with the goals of others and more resistant to socialization are counteracted by a feeling of loyalty to American allies. For the purposes of this article, I label as allies countries that are members of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in a particular year.

What about the enemies of a state? It may be reasonable to believe that any interaction effect would lead conservative governments to have worse relations with rivals, through the same psychological mechanisms that bring them closer to allies. The conservative embrace of militant internationalism (Rathbun et al. 2016) includes a commitment to taking a stronger stand against enemies of the state. While a certain country may be considered as an ally and therefore become an honorary member of the in-group, loyalty toward friends sometimes translates directly into more hostility toward enemies.

At the same time, liberal leaders may fear being criticized as weak and cozying up to the mortal enemies of the nation. Some have observed the "Nixon goes to China" effect, where right-leaning governments have more political room to find areas of cooperation with rivals (Cukierman and Tommasi 1998). Cowen and Sutter (1998) develop a signaling-based model that explains why leaders occasionally enact policies that are the opposite of what one would expect based on their ideology. In politics, some choices tend to present more political risks than others. Among these are liberalizing the economy, as opposed to enacting redistributive policies, and moving closer toward enemies, rather than taking a belligerent stance. This is why we see what has been termed the "Nixon paradox" in these two policy areas: leftist governments may be better able to move toward economic liberalization (Cho 2014;

Ross 2000) and conservative administrations may be in the best position to make peace (Cukierman and Tommasi 1998, 180-82).

We therefore have psychological theory and public opinion data implying that conservatives should be more hostile toward rival states, while certain economic models and historical observations point in the opposite direction. Not having strong reasons to choose one theory over the other, I present two exploratory hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 3a:** Right-leaning governments will have higher affinity scores than would be predicted in relation to enemy countries.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Right-leaning governments will have lower affinity scores than would be predicted in relation to enemy countries.

As the United States has historically stood against communism, I define enemy countries as those with a communist government. Occasionally, the United States has allied with communist governments against a common foe, as when it moved closer to Yugoslavia and China in response to those countries breaking with the Soviet Union. At the same time, considering having a communist form of government as a proxy for hostility should give us an objective definition of enemy country that will be accurate the vast majority of the time. Even after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the United States has continued to have strained relations with the few remaining communist states in the world such as Cuba and North Korea.

Finally, among the five Anglophone countries tested, we may expect the influence of ideology not to be constant across states. Rather, we may expect the effect of ideology to be larger in more powerful states, which are less constrained in their foreign policy behavior. History is filled with examples of less powerful countries outsourcing their foreign policies to great powers, and this concept is reflected in terms such as “puppet” and “vassal state.” Qualitative work also indicates that wealthier states are able to buy votes at international institutions (Panke 2014). In the case of the UN in particular, the United States is often said to be pulling the strings among its allied countries on account of its outsized influence (Kuziemko and Werker 2006).

The picture that emerges is one in which states that are economically and militarily stronger are less constrained by circumstances in deciding foreign policy. Having better arms makes one less likely to be bullied, and being wealthier than others reduces the effectiveness of bribery. This gives leaders of powerful countries more freedom to chart their own path, creating space for ideology to be influential. At one extreme, leadership would matter relatively little in a state that was completely dependent on another for protection or survival. In contrast, a total hegemon could indulge its preferences while having less reason to worry that doing so will lead to ruin. In strong states, parties can drift further apart on foreign policy as voters are given more stark choices.<sup>1</sup> An American politician can suggest a new path that will reshape international politics, as the last two elected presidents did during their

**Table 1.** Liberal and Conservative Parties by Country.

Country	Left Party	Right Party
United States	Democrats	Republicans
United Kingdom	Labour	Conservative
Canada	Liberal	Progressive conservative/conservative
Australia	Labour	Liberal
New Zealand	Labour	National

respective campaigns. A leader in New Zealand cannot credibly make such a promise. This leads to the final prediction of this section.

**Hypothesis 4:** More powerful countries will see greater variation in affinity scores based on party in power.

## Method

This article investigates the affinity scores of five major Anglophone democracies: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. These states were chosen because they have been stable democracies in the postwar period and share a common history and culture. The politics of these nations are contested according to the left-right divisions that form the background for studies on psychological differences between conservatives and liberals (see Talhelm et al. 2015; Haidt 2012).<sup>2</sup> They are also countries where the government as a whole belongs to a single party, meaning that the cabinet official in charge of foreign policy is a member of the same party as the head of government. This is unlike some countries in continental Europe, where the foreign minister often belongs to a different party than the chief of state. This can be seen in Germany, for example, where Chancellor Angela Merkel belongs to the center-right party but has had two foreign ministers that come from the main center-left party.

For every year between 1946 and 2008, each country was classified as liberal or conservative based on who the head of government was. In the United States, foreign policy is mostly determined by the president, while the other four countries have a parliamentary system. Table 1 lists the right-leaning and left-leaning party for each state. Table 2 shows the number of years each country was headed by a liberal or conservative party. For years during which there was a transition, I count the party that was in power for the majority of the year. Table 3 provides the first test of Hypothesis 1 and shows standardized affinity scores for each country under left- and right-leaning governments, and in total, using the *s3un4608i* variable from Gartzke and Jo (2006), which calculates affinity scores based on whether countries voted yes, no, or abstained on UNGA resolutions.<sup>3</sup> The affinity scores are standardized based on the mean and standard deviation of all affinity scores across the world between

**Table 2.** Summary Statistics.

Country	Years	Years	Years	Observation	Observation	Observation
	(Total)	(Liberal)	(Conservative)	Years	Years	Years
United States	63	27	36	8,960	3,616	5,344
United Kingdom	63	28	35	8,960	4,124	4,836
Canada	63	44	19	8,960	6,109	2,851
Australia	63	21	42	8,960	3,125	5,835
New Zealand	63	25	38	8,960	3,702	5,258

**Table 3.** Standardized Affinity Scores and Comparative Relations.

Country	Average Affinity				Better Relations			Lib Better* (%)
	Lib	Con	Total	Standard Deviation	Lib	Con	Ties	
United States	-1.96	-2.63	-2.38	1.32	182	7	0	96.3
United Kingdom	-.94	-1.36	-1.17	.96	171	17	0	91.0
Canada	-.64	-.79	-.69	.88	163	31	0	84.0
Australia	-.36	-.74	-.61	.92	165	29	0	87.7
New Zealand	-.25	-.49	-.39	.86	145	44	2	75.9

\*All results statistically significant,  $p < .001$ .

1946 and 2008. Table 3 shows, for each of the Anglophone countries, the number of countries that had affinity scores closer to that Anglophone country when liberal governments were in power and the number of states that had more interest similarity under conservative governments.

Despite the suggestive nature of these results, we cannot be certain that the ideology of the ruling party causes the disparities we see. Conservatives and liberal governments come to power at different times, and this might be driving the results. For example, if there are more countries allied with the West in certain eras, then whichever party was more likely to be in power during that time period will be expected to have better relations with most countries. Over the second half of the twentieth century, we saw the number of states admitted to the UN increase, due to, among other reasons, decolonization and the end of the Cold War. For each of the five states, then, I conduct an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with the unit of observation being the dyad-year and the universe of observations being all dyad-years involving that country from 1946 to 2008. The dependent variable is the standardized affinity score for the two states in the given year. The main variable of interest is *conservative* coded as 1 if for most of the year a conservative government is in power and 0 if the prime minister or president was from a liberal party for most of the year.

There are two categories of independent variables added to each regression. The first takes into account the nature of the states in the international system at any given time.

### *NATO and Communist*

The *NATO* variable is coded as 1 if the non-Anglophone country of the dyad is a member of NATO during the relevant year, 0 otherwise, and likewise for states that are *Communist*. Since NATO members are aligned with the West, and communist countries have tended not to be, these controls account for the possibility that parties of one ideology have tended to be in power when there are more natural allies in the world and fewer adversaries.

### *Polity*

Democracies are thought to share the same interests because they have the same values (Fuhrmann 2009; Lipson 2013). This means that any finding regarding ideology and cooperation could be accounted for by the possibility that there are more democracies when members of one party are in power. I therefore add a control for Polity score, measured between  $-10$  and  $10$ , taken from the Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research website (Marshall and Jaggers 2001).

A second category of variables addresses the changing nature of the international system as a whole.

### *Cold War*

This is a dummy variable coded as 1 if the dyad-year falls between 1947 and 1991. There is evidence that UN voting patterns changed after the fall of the Soviet Union, with more countries having become willing to oppose the United States and its closest allies in international organizations (Voeten 2000, 2004).

### *Volatility*

For every year between 1946 and 2008, I take the average affinity score across all dyads for that year and use that average as a control variable in each model. In other words, if in year  $y$  dyads were on average  $x$  standard deviations apart, then  $x$  is added as a control variable for every observation made in year  $y$ . This directly addresses the possibility that those of one ideology tend to come to power in times of greater international discord (see Voeten 2013).

Finally, the interaction variables *Conservative*  $\times$  *NATO* and *Conservative*  $\times$  *Communist* are added in order to test for Hypotheses 2 and 3, respectively.

It is not difficult to imagine, for example, that voters turn to more conservative parties in times of international turmoil (Hayes 2005). Controlling directly for international volatility, along with the Cold War period and the characteristics of states

themselves, helps to account for this possibility. As discussed in greater detail in the next section, other methods are used in order to ensure that the results are not time dependent, but rather driven by ideology itself.

## Results

As can be seen in Table 3, within each country, the left party tends to have closer relations with the vast majority of other states. In New Zealand, around 69 percent of states have better relations under liberal governments. That number jumps up to over 96 percent in the United States, where only 7 of the 182 countries have a higher *S*-score when Republicans are in power. The other countries have results that are not as extreme, but still reach statistical significance at the  $p < .001$  threshold when using a Bernoulli distribution framework testing against the null hypothesis.

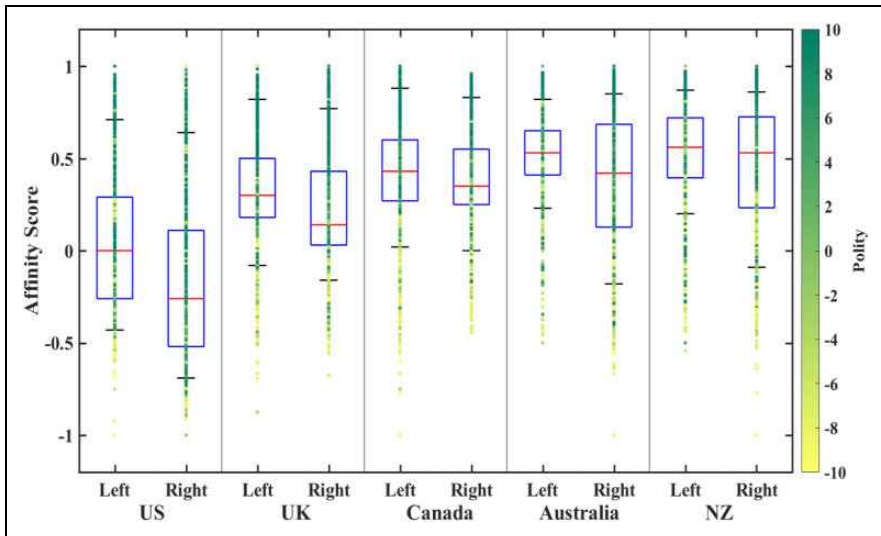
The analysis therefore begins with strong support for Hypotheses 1 and 4. In the United States and the United Kingdom, the conservative parties are farther apart from nearly every country in the world at the UN. While the results for Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are not as strong, the patterns are clear. This does not ensure, however, that having a liberal party in power actually leads to closer relations with the world. In order to see whether this is the case, models 1–5 below are OLS regressions for each of the five Anglophone countries, including the variables discussed above. Standard errors are in parentheses.

We find strong evidence for Hypotheses 1 and 2. In each of the five Anglophone democracies, having a conservative government in power is associated with more distant relationships with the rest of the world. The variable *Conservative*  $\times$  *NATO* is statistically significant in the expected direction in four of the five models, with the exception being in the model with the United States, where there is a null finding. While the effects of having a conservative government appear to be nearly universally bad for international cooperation, the impact is in most cases greatly mitigated where the other country is already an ally.

Both Hypotheses 3a and 3b find support, but in different countries. The coefficient for *Conservative*  $\times$  *Communist* is positive and statistically significant for the United States and Canada, negative and statistically significant for Australia and New Zealand, and not significant for the United Kingdom. The Nixon paradox appears to be real in the United States, from which the phrase comes, but there is little evidence for it elsewhere. This is not too surprising, since, as mentioned before, there are reasons to anticipate that conservative governments will get along better with enemies and other reasons to expect them to be more hostile than liberals. Which effect predominates in any given country may depend on the political context.

The variables *NATO*, *Communist*, and *Polity* behave in the ways expected. The United States generally had better relations with other countries during the Cold War, as is consistent with previous research on the growing isolation of the United States over time (Voeten 2004), while the collapse of the Soviet Union seems to have





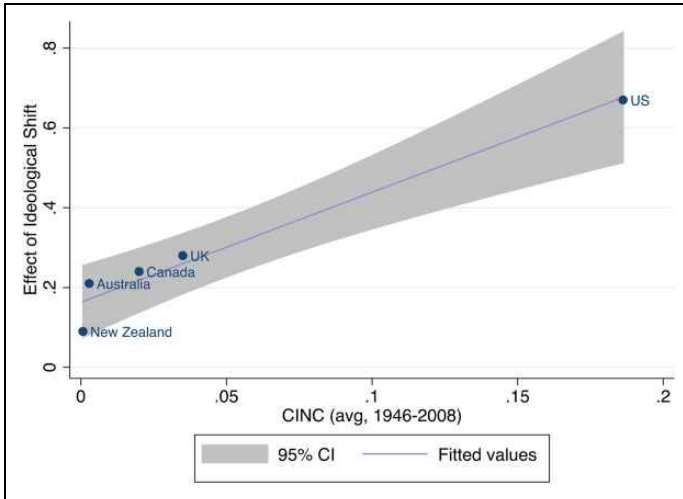
**Figure 1.** Affinity scores by state and ideology.

moved the other four countries closer to the rest of the General Assembly. It is also of note that the models do a very good job of explaining the data. No less than 35 percent of the variance in any model is explained by the included variables, with the number being as high as 52 percent in the case of the United States.

Figure 1 shows, for each of the five Anglophone countries, all data points reflecting affinity scores under left-leaning and right-leaning governments. Each dot is a dyad-year, with green representing more democratic states for that year and yellow less democratic states. The figure is a clear visualization of the finding that while Anglophone democracies have closer relations to more democratic states in general, when conservatives are in power, the average affinity score tends to go down regardless of the political characteristics of the other member of the dyad. For each country and governing ideology, the box plot marks the fifth, twenty-fifth, fifth, seventy-fifth, and ninety-fifth percentiles.

There appears to also be support for Hypothesis 4, with the largest effect of conservative being found in the United States. To test this theory statistically, I run a simple regression model with the effect of a conservative government as the dependent variable and with the independent variable being the average of the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) score across the time period studied for each nation. This model gives a result that is statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  threshold despite there being only five observations. Figure 2 shows the effect of ideology based on average CINC score for each of the five countries.

Although the results appear to be to a great extent driven by the United States, which is a great outlier in its power, when that country is dropped from the model,



**Figure 2.** Effect of ideology based on power.

the coefficient actually increases ( $p = .18$ ). Despite the small sample size, then, we see strong evidence for Hypothesis 4. This is consistent with the view that larger and more powerful states have more autonomy in their foreign policy, as those with less power are more subject to being heavily influenced by the international context in which they operate.

A few methods are used in order to conduct robustness checks on the main results presented in this section. First, I rerun the models in Table 4 with a new variable added called *lagged affinity* which is, for each dyad-year, the affinity score for that dyad from the previous year. This biases the model again the main claims made in this section, since there is no change in government for most years, meaning for any particular year  $y$ , the affinity score of  $y - 1$  is more likely than not to be driven by same party that is in power in year  $y$ . Despite this introduced bias, we still find the coefficient for conservative to be statistically significant in each model in the expected direction, albeit with reduced effects. I also rerun the models from Table 4 using robust regression in Stata, which eliminates large outliers (Cook's distance  $> 1$ ) and then performs Huber and biweight iterations. The variable conservative remains statistically significant in all models and the coefficient actually increases for the United States and the United Kingdom.

Another way to test for time dependency is to look at transition periods, or times when the government within a country changes hands from one party to another. Figure 3 shows the change in affinity score for every transition between 1946 and 2008. The numbers are calculated by taking the average of standardized affinity scores of the first two full years of the incoming administration and subtracting those of the last two full years of the outgoing administration. In a few cases, in the two

**Table 4.** Predictors of Voting Similarity.

Model	1 United States	2 United Kingdom	3 Canada	4 Australia	5 New Zealand
Conservative	−0.66*** (.02)	−.28*** (.02)	−.24*** (.02)	−.21*** (.02)	−.09*** (.02)
NATO	1.09*** (.05)	.97*** (.04)	.61*** (.03)	.31*** (.04)	.24*** (.03)
Communist	−1.23*** (.06)	−.52*** (.05)	−.65*** (.03)	−.30*** (.05)	−.31*** (.04)
Polity	0.04*** (0)	.04*** (0)	.04*** (0)	.03*** (0)	.03*** (0)
Cold War	1.08*** (.03)	−.14*** (.02)	−.05*** (.02)	.14*** (.02)	−.11*** (.02)
Volatility	−1.13*** (.03)	−.08*** (.02)	.22*** (.02)	.73*** (.02)	.66*** (.02)
Conservative × NATO	−0.10 (.06)	.12* (.05)	.23*** (.06)	.48*** (.05)	.36*** (.05)
Conservative × Communist	0.66*** (.08)	.03 (.06)	.24*** (.06)	−.39*** (.06)	−.36*** (.06)
Constant	−2.79*** (.02)	−.99*** (.02)	−.58*** (.01)	−.52*** (.02)	−.20*** (.02)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.52	.44	.38	.35	.36
Observations	7,853	7,853	7,853	7,853	7,853

Note: NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

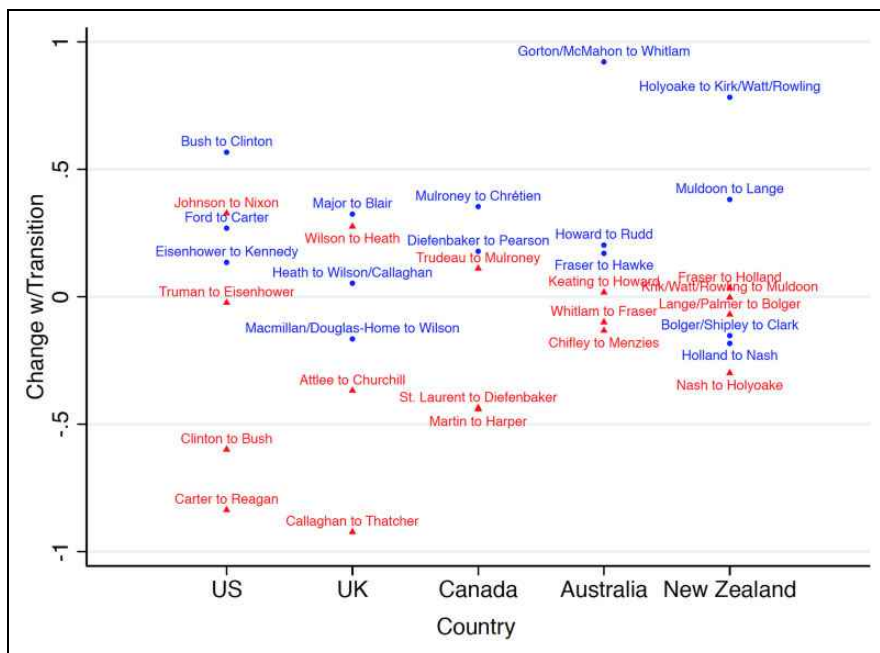
\**p* < .05.

\*\**p* < .01.

\*\*\**p* < .001.

relevant years that a party was in power, it was led by two or three leaders. Transitions to liberal governments are in blue with circles, transitions to conservative governments are in red and marked with triangles.

Of fifteen transitions to a liberal government (liberal transitions), twelve (75 percent) resulted in better relations with the world. Of seventeen conservative transitions, twelve (71 percent) are associated with an overall souring of relations. While Smith (2016) found no effect of leader change on US relations with other states using UNGA data, he did not account for ideology, which may have led to a canceling out between the improvement in relations with new Democratic administrations and the souring of relations that tends to accompany a new Republican president. Figure 3 appears to be consistent with what knowledgeable observers may have expected based on what we know about politics in the countries studied. Unsurprisingly, the largest souring of relations occurred during the transitions to Reagan and Thatcher, two figures that continue to inspire conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic. At the top of the graph, we see that the largest improvement in relations was the 1970s transition of Gorton/McMahon to Whitlam in Australia. Prime Minister Whitlam’s



**Figure 3.** Changes in affinity scores by transition.

Labor government was known for its “emphasis on closer relations with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region,” in a shift that “was both qualitatively and quantitatively different from the anti-communist thinking that had dominated” before (Ungerer 2007, 545). Among the changes made were a formal recognition of communist China and a movement toward the Non-Aligned Movement at the UN.

If it was the case that voters tended to choose conservatives during eras of international turmoil and liberals during more peaceful times, that would be reflected in the last few years of each outgoing administration and have a tendency to minimize differences between conservative and liberal governments during transition years. Yet we consistently see relationships between, on the one hand, the ideologies of the outgoing and incoming governments and, on the other, shifts in affinity scores. This gives credence to the theory that it is ideology itself that is influencing how these governments vote at the UN. Perhaps voters anticipate the degree of international turmoil in the coming years and vote accordingly. Such a theory, however, probably makes unrealistic assumptions about the sophistication of voters, especially considering research showing that the general public tends to lack basic knowledge about international affairs (Bennett et al. 1996).

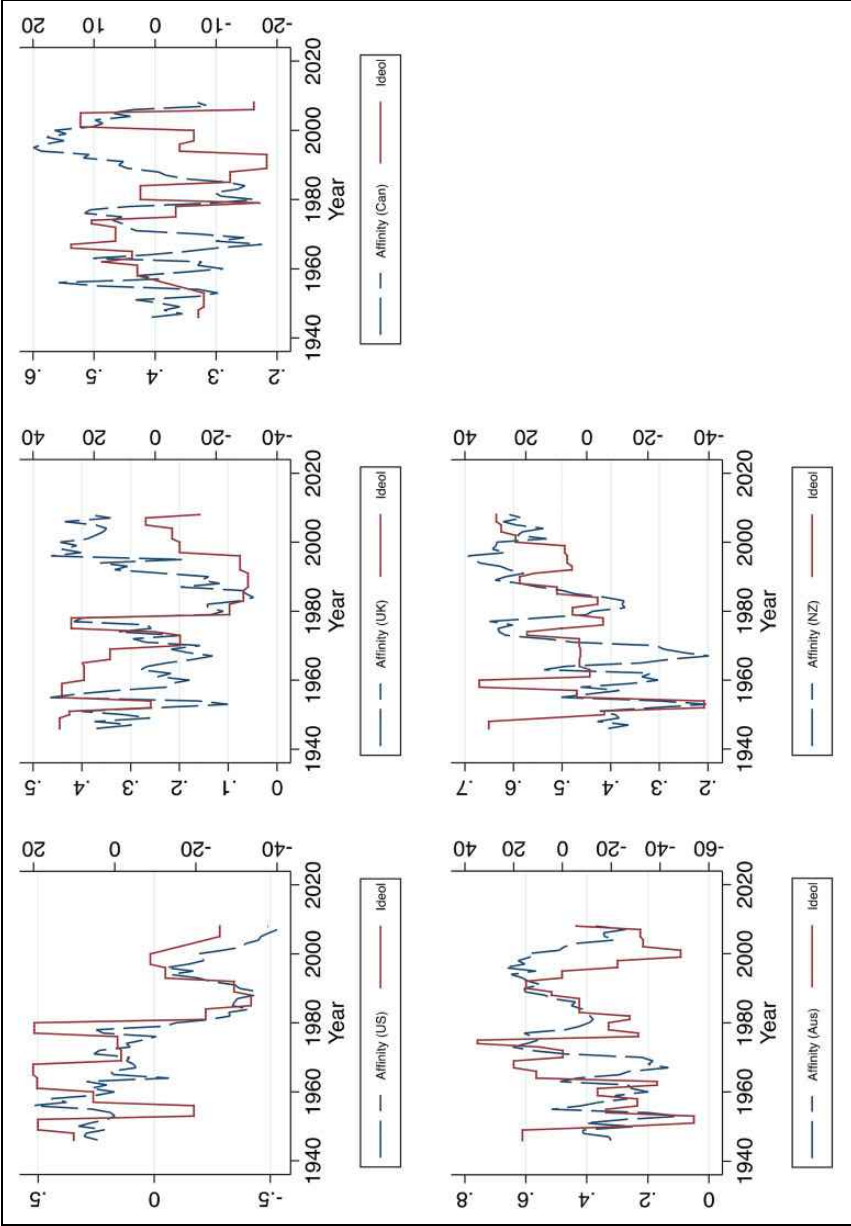
Finally, one may expect that if ideology influences voting at the UNGA, this can be shown through a more fine-grained analysis that takes into account not only whether the party in power in a particular year is center right or center left but also

the degree to which it deviates from the political center. Therefore, this article uses party platform data taken from the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) website (see Budge 1987, 2001) to create a final robustness check with the data. I rerun the regressions from Table 4, but, rather than conservative, use party platform from the MRG on the right–left axis as the variable of interest. For each year, the party platform score was created by determining the governing party and then finding the ideological score of its most recently released manifesto. I find that, consistent with Hypothesis 1, the further to the left that the platform of the party in power is, the more a state voted in line with other countries. The results are significant at the  $p < .1$  threshold for Canada and at the  $p < .001$  threshold for the other four countries. Figure 4 shows for each country the relationship between average affinity score and party platform, with higher numbers on the  $y$ -axis indicating better relations with the rest of the world (blue dashed lines, left side of axis) and more left-wing governments (red solid lines, right side of axis). The results are consistent with the earlier analysis that only uses a dummy variable to track ideology.

## Conclusion

Political psychology has greatly expanded our understanding regarding differences between conservatives and liberals both at the mass and elite levels and how these differences relate to foreign policy preferences (Holsti and Rosenau 1988; Rathbun et al. 2016; Kertzer et al. 2014). Yet previous analysis of voting patterns at the UN has generally been independent of this literature. Rather, it has focused on broad historical trends since the end of the Second World War (Voeten 2000) or relied on theories of ruling coalition formation to investigate how regime change influences the relations that a country has with the United States (Smith 2016; Dreher and Jensen 2013). This is the first work that investigates how ideology influences voting at the UN in developed democracies across practically all international relationships. By bridging work on UN voting patterns and research on how political psychology and ideology affect foreign policy preferences, this article hopes to inspire new avenues of research for both fields of study.

First of all, the literature on political psychology and foreign policy preferences, particularly on differences between conservatives and liberals, should do more to investigate the extent to which previous findings influence decision-making in the real world. In particular, does the prediction that liberals are better for international cooperation manifest itself in international forums other than the UN? And, other than voting patterns, are there other aspects of international politics where the liberal tendency for international cooperation might be expected to manifest? Given the amount of leader turnover we see and the variety of international institutions that have been created and continue to function since the end of the Second World War, it should not be too difficult to test theories about how we would expect the United States and other democracies to behave based on the ideology of those currently in power. In addition to this, there exists the possibility of greatly enriched qualitative



**Figure 4.** Relationship between party platform and affinity score.

work on how the ideologies and psychological predispositions of leaders affect relations with allies and enemies across the world.

Second, research on voting at the UN should do more to focus on how domestic politics influence patterns of cooperation, particularly in developed democracies. Previous work has mainly investigated how leader transitions affect relations with a particularly country such as the United States or China (Brazys and Panke 2017; Strüver 2016). There may, however, be political ideologies or predispositions that lead states to make broader changes and result in better or more strained relations with the vast majority of countries across the globe. Perhaps the most extreme example of this presented in this article is the finding that, in the United States, Republican administrations have closer relations with only 7 of the 189 countries for which voting data are available. While a turnover in leadership may be the most obvious influence on how relations with the rest of the world can change, it is unlikely to be the only factor researchers are able to discover.

Finally, the results presented can also add to the literature on the influence of leaders. Some of this work has tended to stress the importance of life experience (see, e.g., Horowitz, McDermott, and Stam 2005; Horowitz and Stam 2014), while a focus on ideology has shown us that revolutionary leaders are more likely to be involved in conflict abroad (Colgan 2013). In general, however, quantitative work has tended to overlook ideological differences between leaders in developed democracies, perhaps due to the assumption that such states have preferences that are relatively stable across time (see Smith 2016). Yet research shows us that conservatives and liberals differ in a plethora of ways both obvious and subtle (see, e.g., Carney et al. 2008; Hanania 2017b). While the results here support the idea that these differences matter at the UN, there are likely to be other outputs of international politics that people care about that are also influenced by ideology.

In addition to the contribution this article makes to the academic literature, its findings have implications for how we think about the foreign policy consequences of elections in developed countries. The election of President Trump has led to claims that the current administration is currently doing unique damage to American diplomacy (Farrow 2018). Yet the results here indicate that conservative governments have always been associated with more antagonistic relationships with other countries. While it may indeed be the case that the Trump administration is unique in this regard, until more evidence comes in we should perhaps be skeptical of claims that what is happening in American foreign policy is radically different from other transitions in our recent past.

Although the findings indicate that liberal governments increase international cooperation, the results do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that this is normatively desirable. To liberals, the findings here may reinforce previously held views on how politicians that share their ideological leanings are more likely to create a world of international harmony. Conservatives, however, may look at the same data and see right-leaning governments taking a stand for the interests and values of their people. In this view, a lack of international comity is not necessarily a bad thing,

particularly if unilateral action and the turmoil that it brings are needed to decisively deal with foreign policy challenges (see, e.g., Krauthammer 2002). How the results here are interpreted in the political realm and the normative implications that should be drawn from them are nonetheless beyond the scope of this article.

### **Acknowledgment**

The author would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing up this point.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Supplemental Material**

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

### **Notes**

1. Nonetheless, this does not have to translate into more parties competing for votes, as there will remain only two parties in countries with a first-past-the-post system, such as the United States (Riker 1982).
2. Although this article tends to use these terms interchangeably, for the hypotheses, I use “right leaning” rather than “conservative” and “left leaning” rather than “liberal.” This is to avoid confusion since the term liberal in the United States means something completely different in other contexts. For example, the right-leaning party in Australia is called the Liberals. Although it would be strange to call the Liberal Party the conservative one, few knowledgeable observers would doubt that the Liberals are the right-leaning party in Australia. When the terms conservative and liberal appear in this article, they are used in accordance with their definitions in the United States.
3. An alternative to affinity scores called ideal points has been developed by Bailey, Strezhev, and Voeten (2017). This measures the degree to which a state’s votes indicate that it is in favor of the neoliberal order. Although this measure is certainly suitable for some purposes, it does not generate clear predictions with regard to differences between conservatives and liberals and is therefore not used here. See Online Appendix, which includes further decision about the use of *S*-scores rather than ideal point estimations, along with an analysis that serves as a robustness check for the main results presented here through the use of ideal point estimates as the variables of interest. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.



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