

When Do Visits Lead to Concessions? *Alliedness* and Host-State Responses to U.S. Presidential Visits

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This Draft: August 20, 2026

Abstract

When do U.S. presidential visits generate policy concessions from host states? Prior research has primarily focused on the downstream political consequences of high-level visits yet relatively less attention is given to the conditions under which host states reciprocate visits with concessions. We argue that the effectiveness of diplomatic visits in eliciting host-state concessions is conditional on the level of *alliedness* between the United States and the host state. Weakly aligned host states have stronger incentives to reciprocate because U.S. diplomatic attention is rarer and carries greater marginal value. This increases both host leaders' willingness to give something meaningful in return and their political opportunity to justify concessions to domestic audiences. Moving beyond formal defense pacts, we introduce a novel measure of interstate *alliedness* using a Bayesian latent measurement approach. Using data on U.S. presidential visits from 1977 to 2020 and a panel matching with difference-in-differences (DID) design, we find empirical support for our theoretical prediction. Across economic, diplomatic, and security domains, U.S. presidential visits consistently generate greater policy concessions among weakly aligned host states than among closely aligned ones. Our findings suggest that the existing status of the bilateral relationship is an important factor in determining whether diplomatic visits generate policy returns.

Total word count: 9,685 (reference list excluded)

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Introduction

As the first sitting U.S. president to visit Myanmar in 2012, President Obama was able to elicit initial policy reforms from the Burmese government, including the release of political prisoners, preliminary ceasefire agreements with ethnic minority insurgencies, and the lifting of media restrictions. By contrast, President Biden’s visit to Saudi Arabia in 2022 failed to persuade the Kingdom to immediately increase oil production to ease rising inflation in the U.S. market. Three months after Biden’s visit, Saudi Arabia led OPEC+ in announcing a production cut of two million barrels per day, prompting the Biden administration to vow consequences for the kingdom. More recently, Secretary Rubio’s visit to France in March 2026, during the U.S.-Israeli military campaign against Iran, failed to persuade reluctant G7 leaders to support efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. These examples raise an important puzzle: Why are some U.S. diplomatic visits more successful than others in eliciting policy concessions from host governments?

While existing literature has advanced our understanding of the causes ([Brace and Hinckley, 1993](#); [Lebovic and Saunders, 2016](#); [Ostrander and Rider, 2019](#); [Koliev and Lundgren, 2021](#)) and consequences ([Nitsch, 2007](#); [McManus, 2018](#); [Goldsmith, Horiuchi and Matush, 2021](#); [Malis and Smith, 2021, 2024](#); [Kim, 2024](#); [Oztig and Karluk, 2025](#)) of diplomatic visits, little attention has been paid to the conditions under which host governments reciprocate such visits with policy concessions. Existing research does not clearly establish whether diplomatic visits are purely complementary foreign policy tools—that is, whether their use and effectiveness are always dependent on the presence of other instruments, such as arms sales, foreign aid, or alliances. If so, how much independent influence do diplomatic visits

exert? Alternatively, do diplomatic visits serve at least partial substitutes for other foreign policy tools? If so, under what conditions do they most likely to elicit policy concessions from host governments?

We argue that the effect of diplomatic visits on policy concessions by host governments is conditional on the degree of *alliedness* between the United States and the host country. We conceptualize alliedness as the level of military, political, and diplomatic alignment between two states, capturing variation in the depth and institutionalization of bilateral relationships beyond formal alliance status. Because high-level U.S. diplomatic visits are a scarce and valuable diplomatic good, their political significance varies depending on the existing relationship between the United States and host countries. While visits to closely allied states are often routine features of established relationships, visits to weakly allied states represent rarer and more consequential signals of U.S. attention. As a result, diplomatic visits create stronger incentives and opportunities for reciprocity among weakly allied countries because host governments attach greater value to U.S. engagement and have more room to update their expectations about future cooperation.

To test this claim, we introduce a novel measure of interstate alliedness using a Bayesian latent measurement approach that captures the degree of security and diplomatic alignment between the United States and host states, moving beyond binary measures of alliance status based on formal defense pacts. Combining the latent measure of alliedness with cross-national data on U.S. presidential visits from 1977 to 2020 and a panel matching difference-in-differences (DID) design, we find empirical support for our theoretical expectation. Across economic, diplomatic, and security domains, U.S. presidential visits consistently generate greater policy concessions among weakly aligned countries than among closely aligned ones.

Specifically, U.S. presidential visits are associated with greater foreign direct investment (FDI) outflows from host countries to the United States, greater voting alignment with the United States in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), and greater arms imports from the United States by host countries, but only among weakly aligned host countries.

This article makes three contributions. First, we advance the literature on diplomatic visits by theorizing and testing the conditions under which such visits generate policy concessions that directly advance U.S. interests. Most existing research has focused on the visitors and the downstream political consequences of their visits in host states. We turn our focus to the other side of the story: how visits are perceived by host governments and how hosting a U.S. president shapes the politics of host governments, especially their perceptions about the value of the bilateral relationship and the political climate toward the United States. We show that the more distant the existing relationship between the visitor and the host country, and thus the rarer and less expected a diplomatic visit is, the greater its effect on creating a favorable political environment that increases host governments' willingness to provide policy concessions in return for the visit.

Second, this study contributes to the literature on alliance politics by introducing a new measure of bilateral alliedness that captures the degree of security and diplomatic alignment between the United States and secondary states. Rather than relying on a binary indicator based solely on the presence or absence of a defense pact, our Bayesian latent measurement framework combines multiple indicators of military and diplomatic cooperation to estimate a continuous measure of alliedness. This approach reveals substantial heterogeneity in the depth of bilateral alignment both across and within formal U.S. allies, providing a more nuanced characterization of interstate relationships than conventional alliance indicators.

Third, our findings have important implications for the strategic allocation of costly diplomatic travel. U.S. policymakers should expect the lowest policy returns from investing time and resources in visits to closely aligned countries. By contrast, directing diplomatic capital toward weakly aligned states is likely to yield greater policy returns in both the short and long run because these states have the strongest incentives to reciprocate visits with policy concessions. At the same time, visits to closely aligned countries may serve other important purposes, including deterrence and reassurance.

Visit for Policy

Existing literature has advanced our understanding of the strategic incentives behind high-level diplomatic exchanges in the context of deterrence and costly signaling. Diplomatic visits are perceived as ‘hand-tying’ and leader-specific costly signals of support that reveal credible commitment to protecting protégés against future aggression ([McManus and Nieman, 2019](#)) and reassuring allies ([DiGiuseppe and Shea, 2021](#); [Blankenship, 2020](#); [Kim, 2024](#)). Visits entail monetary, opportunity, and reputational costs that increase their deterrent credibility. [McManus \(2018\)](#) finds that diplomatic visits from major powers have a significant negative effect on the likelihood that weaker states will be targeted in a militarized interstate dispute. The deterrent effect of diplomatic visits is greater when the recipient is a formal ally to the major power. However, only U.S. presidential visits have a significant deterrent effect, while combined visits from the Vice President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense increase the risk of deterrence failure, especially when other signals of support are weak or absent ([McManus and Sending, 2025](#)).

Yet crisis management and patron-protégé relations are only one aspect of high-level

diplomacy. U.S. leaders visit not only major powers—where deterrence is unlikely to be the primary purpose of such visits given those states’ own capabilities—but also adversaries and undemocratic regimes, particularly when domestic popularity is low and government is divided ([Lee and Kim, 2024](#)). Visiting politically controversial or undemocratic regimes can entail hypocrisy costs for the visiting leader. Examples include the domestic backlash following President Trump’s visit to North Korea in 2019 and President Biden’s visit to Saudi Arabia in 2022, as democratic publics denounce the display of friendly relations with undemocratic leaders or when such visits contradict the leader’s prior public commitments.

However, these visits were not intended to signal support and commitment for recipients’ security, but rather to reap policy concessions related to North Korea’s nuclear development in the Trump case and to Saudi Arabia’s oil production in the Biden case. Regardless, the publicity of visiting undemocratic regimes can create public backlash; thereby, democracies are more likely to receive diplomatic visits from U.S. leaders compared to autocracies ([McManus and Yarhi-Milo, 2017](#)). On the other hand, U.S. presidential visits are generally associated with a short-term decrease in domestic approval rating, regardless of the recipient’s regime type ([Goldsmith, Horiuchi and Matush, 2026](#)). These examples suggest that leaders are willing to incur additional costs from diplomatic visits to achieve broader foreign policy objectives including policy concessions from the host states.

Building on the logic of costly signaling, diplomatic visits are also perceived as transactions that occur in the shadow of domestic political contestation and recipient leaders’ effort to survive in office ([Malis and Smith, 2019, 2021, 2024](#)). The signaling value of high-level diplomatic exchanges not only deters foreign aggression against weaker states but also domestic challenges against the incumbent. [Malis and Smith \(2021\)](#) find that a diplomatic visit

from the U.S. president substantially lowers the recipient leader’s risk of removal from office because the visit conveys the U.S. leader’s private assessment of the incumbent’s strength, thereby inhibiting the prospects of a successful challenge to the incumbent. [Shen and Yang \(2026\)](#) find a similar effect for Chinese high-level visits in countries most susceptible to Chinese influence. The visit’s signaling value is greater when the incumbent is ex-ante less stable in office ([Malis and Smith, 2021](#)), when the size of the negotiated concession is small, and when negotiations occur behind closed doors ([Malis and Smith, 2024](#)). Given that visits deter domestic challenges, the incumbent has an incentive to proffer a concession to the U.S. leader in exchange for a diplomatic visit, yet larger concessions undermine the visit’s signaling value regarding the strength of the incumbent ([Malis and Smith, 2024](#)).

Policy concessions from host governments following diplomatic exchanges are observed through a variety of indicators. [Malis and Smith \(2021\)](#) show that U.S. visits are reciprocated with concessions in the form of UNGA voting and increased imports from the United States. [Chen \(2023\)](#) similarly finds that Chinese state visits are reciprocated with greater vote alignment in the UNGA. Other studies show that visits are associated with increased trade flows ([Nitsch, 2007](#); [Šandor, Gurnák and Bilka, 2024](#)), and increased repression of groups targeted by the visiting state ([Oztig and Karluk, 2025](#)). On the other hand, visits are also associated with adverse outcomes, such as lower defense contributions by allies ([Kim, 2024](#)).

Diplomatic Visits, Alliedness, and Host-State Concessions

Existing research has generated important insights into how high-level diplomatic visits can function as signals of commitment, reassurance, or deterrence. Yet this literature has primarily focused on the downstream political consequences of visits, such as conflict behavior, defense spending, or leader survival, leaving the conditions under which host governments directly reciprocate diplomatic engagement largely undertheorized.

We shift attention from the visiting state to the host state. Diplomatic visits are not simply opportunities for great-power leaders to communicate signals. They are bilateral political events that create incentives and opportunities for host governments to respond. When a host state receives a visit from a U.S. president or other senior official, it gains an opportunity to strengthen ties with the world's most influential power. Such visits also bring international recognition, raise the country's profile and status in the international system, and generate potential domestic political benefits. These benefits may encourage host governments to reciprocate through foreign policy concessions that reinforce or further capitalize on the diplomatic engagement.

We define foreign policy concessions as discretionary actions taken by host governments that advance U.S. interests. Such concessions may take diplomatic, military, or economic forms, including support for U.S. initiatives, increased security cooperation, policy coordination, or other actions that signal accommodation toward American preferences. Importantly, these responses are not automatic consequences of diplomatic engagement. Rather, they are

political choices made by host governments after weighing the benefits and costs of cooperation.

We argue that the effectiveness of diplomatic visits in eliciting host-state concessions is conditional on the level of alliedness between the visiting and host states. The degree of existing alignment between the two countries shapes the value that host governments attach to each visit. On average, visits to weakly aligned states are rarer and less expected. When such visits do occur, they are therefore perceived as more valuable diplomatic goods.

This greater perceived value increases host leaders' incentives to reciprocate through two pathways. First, more valuable visits increase the willingness of host leaders to reciprocate because they have stronger incentives to provide meaningful policy concessions in return for receiving a valuable diplomatic good. Visits to weakly aligned states carry greater political significance and informational value, giving host leaders stronger incentives to sustain the positive momentum created by the visit and deepen the bilateral relationship.

Second, more valuable visits increase the opportunity for reciprocation by creating more favorable domestic political conditions for policy adjustments that benefit the visiting state. Providing policy concessions to a foreign major power can sometimes generate domestic political costs or backlash. However, a high-level visit from a major power leader can provide host leaders with a strong political justification for making such concessions. In the aftermath of a highly valued visit, leaders can present concessions as part of a mutually beneficial diplomatic exchange in which both sides give and receive something of value. The visit thus provides political cover for concessions that might otherwise be more costly to implement.

In the following sections, we first explain how alliedness shapes the perceived value of diplomatic visits. We then show how this perceived value influences both the willingness

and the opportunity of host governments to reciprocate through foreign policy concessions.

Alliedness and the Perceived Value of Diplomatic Visits

Alliedness is defined as the degree of military, political, and diplomatic alignment between two states. Unlike formal alliance status, which captures the presence or absence of a treaty commitment, alliedness reflects a broader and more continuous relationship encompassing defense cooperation, diplomatic engagement, institutional ties, and strategic alignment. States vary substantially in the extent to which they are integrated into U.S.-led security and diplomatic networks, and these differences shape the political meaning and perceived value of diplomatic visits.

Our argument rests on two assumptions about U.S. diplomatic visits. First, a visit from a U.S. leader is an internationally desirable diplomatic good for which demand consistently exceeds supply. Given the limited time and attention of U.S. leaders, not every country that desires such engagement can receive it ([Potter, 2013](#); [Lebovic and Saunders, 2016](#); [Cavari and Ables, 2019](#)). Second, because high-level U.S. diplomatic visits are widely desired but inherently limited, the perceived value of an individual visit depends on its scarcity ([Thaler, 1985](#); [Koford and Tschoegl, 1998](#)). The same visit should carry different value depending on whether it is a rare and unexpected event or a routine feature of bilateral relations. When U.S. visits to a country are scarce, each visit signals that the host has been selected for exceptional attention and occupies a place of priority on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. A visit that was otherwise unlikely to occur therefore represents a particularly valuable diplomatic opportunity for the host government. By contrast, when visits occur frequently and are widely expected, each additional visit conveys less exceptional attention and carries

lower marginal value. In this sense, cross-national variation in the scarcity of U.S. diplomatic visits produces corresponding variation in the value that host governments attach to each visit.

The level of alliedness between the United States and a host country systematically shapes this variation in scarcity. In highly aligned relationships, interactions between leaders are frequent and institutionalized ([Lebovic and Saunders, 2016](#)). Governments communicate through multiple diplomatic channels, and high-level meetings occur on a regular basis. Visits are more likely to be expected and treated as routine features of the bilateral relationship. Consequently, the marginal value of any individual visit is relatively low: it conveys less exceptional attention, generates limited additional political significance, and provides relatively little new information.

By contrast, diplomatic visits to weakly aligned states are considerably rarer and less expected. Because these countries do not ordinarily receive the same degree of high-level U.S. attention, a visit represents an exceptional moment of engagement and signals a level of U.S. interest that cannot be taken for granted. When such a visit does occur, host governments therefore attach greater value to it than do governments for which high-level engagement is routine. The visit may elevate the country’s international profile, generate greater attention from political leaders, the media, and the public, and create a valuable opportunity to strengthen bilateral relations ([Lee and Kim, 2024](#)). Thus, as alliedness decreases, high-level engagement becomes scarcer, hence the perceived marginal value of each individual visit increases.

This variation in perceived value of diplomatic visits determines how host governments respond to diplomatic engagement. When each visits are perceived more valuable, it increase

both the willingness and the opportunity of host governments to reciprocate through foreign policy concessions.

Willingness: Incentives to Reciprocate and Information Updating

The first mechanism operates through willingness. When receiving a valuable good, it is natural for recipients to have stronger incentives to reciprocate. As host governments attach greater value to a diplomatic visit, they are simply more likely to give something in return for what they have received. Such responses can also be strategically motivated and driven by national interests. By responding favorably, host leaders can acknowledge the great-power leader's decision to diplomatically engage with their country and increase the prospects for continued bilateral cooperation in future. To receive additional diplomatic visits from Washington, the host leader has an incentive to reciprocate visits with some concessions to signal broader convergence with U.S. agenda.

Visits can provide more meaningful new information when they are scarce and unexpected ([Malis and Smith, 2021](#)). For example, in weakly aligned states, where diplomatic interactions with the United States have been more limited, host governments generally have greater uncertainty about U.S. intentions and priorities. High-level visits and face-to-face meetings provide opportunities for direct and nonverbal communication, which is important for building of interpersonal rapport and trust ([Wheeler, 2018](#); [Holmes and Wheeler, 2020](#); [Wheeler and Holmes, 2021](#)). Because baseline levels of knowledge and information are lower, host leaders have more room to update their beliefs about U.S. intentions in ways that highlight the benefits of closer relations and increase expectations of future cooperation. By contrast, in closely aligned relationships, information flows are already dense and

continuous. Regular interactions through diplomatic, military, and bureaucratic channels reduce uncertainty, leaving less room for individual visits to provide new or consequential information. The informational effect of each additional visit, and therefore its ability to increase host leaders' willingness to make policy concessions, should be more limited.

Opportunity: Domestic Political Cover for Concessions

Willingness alone is not enough to produce foreign policy concessions. When incumbent leaders decide to make concessions to a foreign country, they may face domestic political backlash for giving away too much at the expense of the national interest. Leaders therefore need to justify the necessity of such concessions to two important domestic audiences: political opponents and the broader public. Even when host leaders are willing to respond favorably to the United States, opposition from these audiences can make concessions politically costly to implement.

Diplomatic visits can provide political cover against these domestic costs. Visits by U.S. presidents are highly visible political events that host leaders can present to the public as a major diplomatic and foreign policy success. This increases public confidence in incumbent leaders and their handling of foreign affairs ([Wang et al., 2023](#)). Visits by U.S. leaders can also improve public attitudes toward the visiting leader and the United States more generally ([Goldsmith and Horiuchi, 2009](#); [Goldsmith, Horiuchi and Matush, 2021](#)). These changes in public opinion can make it easier for host leaders to argue that subsequent policy concessions to the United States are beneficial for the national interest rather than simply giving something away to a foreign country.

More favorable public opinion can also give incumbent leaders stronger political cover

against their political opponents. When the public views the United States positively and sees the recent visit as a diplomatic success, political opponents may be more hesitant to criticize subsequent concessions because such criticism may face public backlash. The visit itself can also make opponents more cautious about criticizing the incumbent. Receiving a U.S. visit signals that the world's most powerful political figure views the incumbent as an important diplomatic partner, as U.S. leaders invest their limited time and attention in meeting with leaders they consider worth engaging (Malis and Smith, 2021). This external recognition strengthens the incumbent's political position and may make opponents more hesitant to openly challenge the incumbent.

More importantly, this political cover should be particularly strong in weakly aligned states, where a U.S. presidential visit is a relatively rare and valuable event. Because the visit itself represents an important diplomatic success, host leaders have a stronger justification for arguing that giving something meaningful in return is reasonable and serves the national interest. The public may also respond more strongly to such an unusual visit, making it more difficult for political opponents to criticize subsequent concessions. By contrast, in strongly aligned states, U.S. presidential visits occur more regularly and are more likely to be viewed as a normal part of the bilateral relationship. Host leaders have a harder time using another U.S. visit to justify new concessions, while political opponents can more easily question why the country should give something additional in return for diplomatic engagement it already receives regularly. This leads to the hypothesis:

Hypothesis: U.S. diplomatic visits are more likely to elicit foreign policy concessions from host states that are weakly aligned with the United States than from host states that are closely aligned.

Data and Measurement

Measuring Alliedness: Latent Variable Approach

Historically, alignment between states has largely been conceptualized through the lens of alliance politics, focusing on whether two countries are formal treaty allies ([Waltz, 1964](#); [Walt, 1985](#); [Snyder, 1991](#)). Consequently, studies examining how alignment shapes state behavior have typically operationalized alignment using formal alliance treaties. This approach has been applied to explain a wide range of outcomes, including interstate conflict ([Leeds, 2003](#); [Benson, 2011](#); [Johnson and Leeds, 2011](#); [Leeds and Johnson, 2017](#)), policy concessions ([Morrow, 1991](#); [Johnson, 2015](#)), nuclear proliferation ([Bleek and Lorber, 2014](#)), and defense spending ([Plümper and Neumayer, 2015](#); [Fuhrmann, 2020](#)).

However, formal alliances capture a significant, but only one, dimension of interstate alignment. States without alliance treaties may nevertheless maintain close security or diplomatic relationships with one another. For example, countries can exhibit strong strategic alignment through extensive arms transfers, military cooperation, or diplomatic coordination despite lacking a formal defense pact ([Beardsley et al., 2020](#)). Conversely, treaty allies often differ substantially in the depth of their actual security and political cooperation. More fundamentally, alliance treaties are highly durable institutions that change infrequently, whereas interstate alignment evolves continuously in response to shifting strategic interests, domestic politics, and international circumstances. As a result, relying solely on formal alliances for measuring security and diplomatic alignment risks overlooking meaningful variation in the strength of relationships both among allies and among non-allies.

Thus, we measure secondary states’ alliedness with the United States through the Bayesian approach as latent variable utilizing multiple factors from 1977 to 2020.¹ In particular, we use the Bayesian framework developed by [Quinn \(2004\)](#). For analyzing data that include

¹Because the availability of both the input indicators used to estimate the latent variable and the dependent variables differs across datasets, we estimate two versions of the latent variable covering different time periods. The first is estimated for 1977–2016, and the second for 1995–2020.

both ordinal and continuous variables, this model combines standard normal theory factor analysis for continuous indicators with item response theory for ordinal indicators while maintaining the benefits of a Bayesian framework.²

EMBASSY measures the level of diplomatic representation between the U.S. and secondary states. Maintaining higher levels of diplomatic representation reflects greater political importance attached to the bilateral relationship and facilitates communication and coordination. We compute the average level of EMBASSY representation between the two countries (Moyer, Meisel and Szymanski-Burgos, 2024). The logged number of SHARED INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION (IGO) MEMBERSHIPS captures the extent to which the two countries are embedded in common institutional frameworks (Moyer, Meisel and Szymanski-Burgos, 2024). Greater institutional overlap provides more opportunities for policy coordination, information sharing, and repeated interactions, thereby reflecting closer diplomatic ties (Ingram, Robinson and Busch, 2005; Kinne, 2013; Reinsberg and Westerwinter, 2023).

The remaining indicators capture different aspects of security cooperation. The logged number of JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES measures the frequency of operational military cooperation and interoperability between the two armed forces (Bernhardt, 2021). Frequent joint exercises enhance military readiness, improve coordination, and signal an ongoing commitment to defense cooperation.³ The logged number of US TROOP DEPLOYMENT measures the extent of the United States’ forward military presence in the secondary state from Kane (2024). Because overseas troop deployments entail substantial political and financial costs, they represent a particularly credible manifestation of U.S. security commitment.

Finally, three binary indicators capture formal and strategic aspects of the alliance relationship. The existence of a FORMAL DEFENSE PACT reflects a formal commitment to mutual defense (Leeds et al., 2002), US NUCLEAR DEPLOYMENT indicates a high degree of

²See Online Appendix B for details of the model.

³For the latent variable estimated over the 1995–2020 period, we replace JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES with the number of MILITARY COOPERATION events between two countries derived from the ICEWS Coded Event Data (Boschee et al., 2015).

strategic integration through extended deterrence,⁴ and MILITARIZED CONFLICT between the two countries reflects a conflictual security relationship from International Crisis Behavior (ICB) Project (Brecher and Wilkenfeld, 1997; Brecher et al., 2025). Taken together, these seven indicators capture diplomatic, institutional, operational, and strategic dimensions of a state’s alignment with the United States.⁵

Parameter estimates for the latent variables are based on summaries of the posterior distribution obtained from 100,000 MCMC iterations, following a burn-in period of 20,000 iterations, with every 50th iteration retained, resulting in 2,000 posterior draws used for inference.⁶ Along with the above input indicators, we add year dummies in the model. The addition of these dummies accounts for unobserved factors constant across units such as global events or systemic shifts.⁷

Table 1 presents the effects of indicators used for the estimation of the Alliedness. λ_1 is the factor loading/item discrimination parameter, analogous to a slope coefficient in regression settings.⁸ Variables with high λ_1 values indicate responsiveness to changes in latent alignment. All indicators load in the expected direction, suggesting that the latent variable captures security and diplomatic alignment with the United States. Among the continuous indicators, shared IGO memberships, U.S. troop deployments, and joint military exercises (Alliedness A) exhibit the strongest factor loadings, while military cooperation contributes relatively little in Alliedness B. Among the ordinal indicators, nuclear deployment and formal alliance are the strongest predictors of alliedness, whereas military conflict is negatively associated with the latent dimension as expected. Overall, the parameter estimates are highly consistent across the two specifications, indicating that the latent measure is robust despite differences in data availability.

⁴Data were obtained by Fuhrmann and Sechser (2014) and updated through 2020 by the authors.

⁵Our measure follows the Bayesian latent variable framework of McManus and Nieman (2019), capturing the level of major power support signaled to protégés, but incorporates different indicators to capture broader dimensions of security and diplomatic alignment and extends the measure through 2020.

⁶We use the MCMCpack package in R (Martin, Quinn and Park, 2011).

⁷Most of those dummies do not show meaningful influence on the latent trait.

⁸For interpretation of parameters, see Quinn (2004).

Table 1: Effect of component variables on Alliedness

Variable	Alliedness A (1977-2016)			Alliedness B (1995-2020)		
	λ_1	λ_0	ψ	λ_1	λ_0	ψ
EMBASSY	0.511 (0.013)		0.741 (0.014)	0.542 (0.014)		0.708 (0.015)
SHARED IGO COUNTS	0.691 (0.013)		0.525 (0.013)	0.945 (0.013)		0.113 (0.017)
JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES	0.685 (0.012)		0.534 (0.012)			
MILITARY COOPERATION				0.149 (0.015)		0.978 (0.020)
US TROOP DEPLOYMENT	0.701 (0.012)		0.512 (0.013)	0.470 (0.015)		0.781 (0.017)
FORMAL ALLIANCE	1.083 (0.038)	-0.655 (0.022)		1.240 (0.045)	-0.704 (0.026)	
US NUCLEAR DEPLOYMENT	1.270 (0.073)	-2.979 (0.118)		2.540 (0.287)	-4.431 (0.405)	
MILITARY CONFLICT	-0.221 (0.062)	-2.485 (0.058)		-0.125 (0.046)	-2.472 (0.062)	

Notes: Alliedness A is a latent measure of security and diplomatic alignment with the United States covering 1977–2016, while Alliedness B covers 1995–2020. λ_1 is the factor loading/item discrimination parameter (analogous to a slope coefficient), λ_0 is the negative item difficulty parameter for ordinal variables (analogous to an intercept), and ψ is the proportion of variance due to error for continuous variables. In parentheses are standard deviations.

Figure 1 displays U.S. allies alliedness with the United States with their 95% credible intervals. If alliedness were measured solely by formal alliance status, all U.S. treaty allies would be considered equally aligned. However, Figure 1 reveals substantial variation in alliedness among U.S. formal allies, suggesting that alliance ties alone overlook important differences in security and diplomatic alignment. The latent measure captures this additional variation by combining multiple indicators of bilateral relations. Moreover, Alliedness A (1977–2016) and Alliedness B (1995–2020) exhibit highly similar patterns, suggesting that the latent measure is robust across different time periods and data availability.

Dependent Variables

While policy concessions following a diplomatic visit may be context-specific—depending on what is signaled and offered prior or during the visit—we identify concessions from host governments across economic, diplomatic, and security domains. These concessions can be observed in the immediate aftermath of the diplomatic exchange or over the longer term,

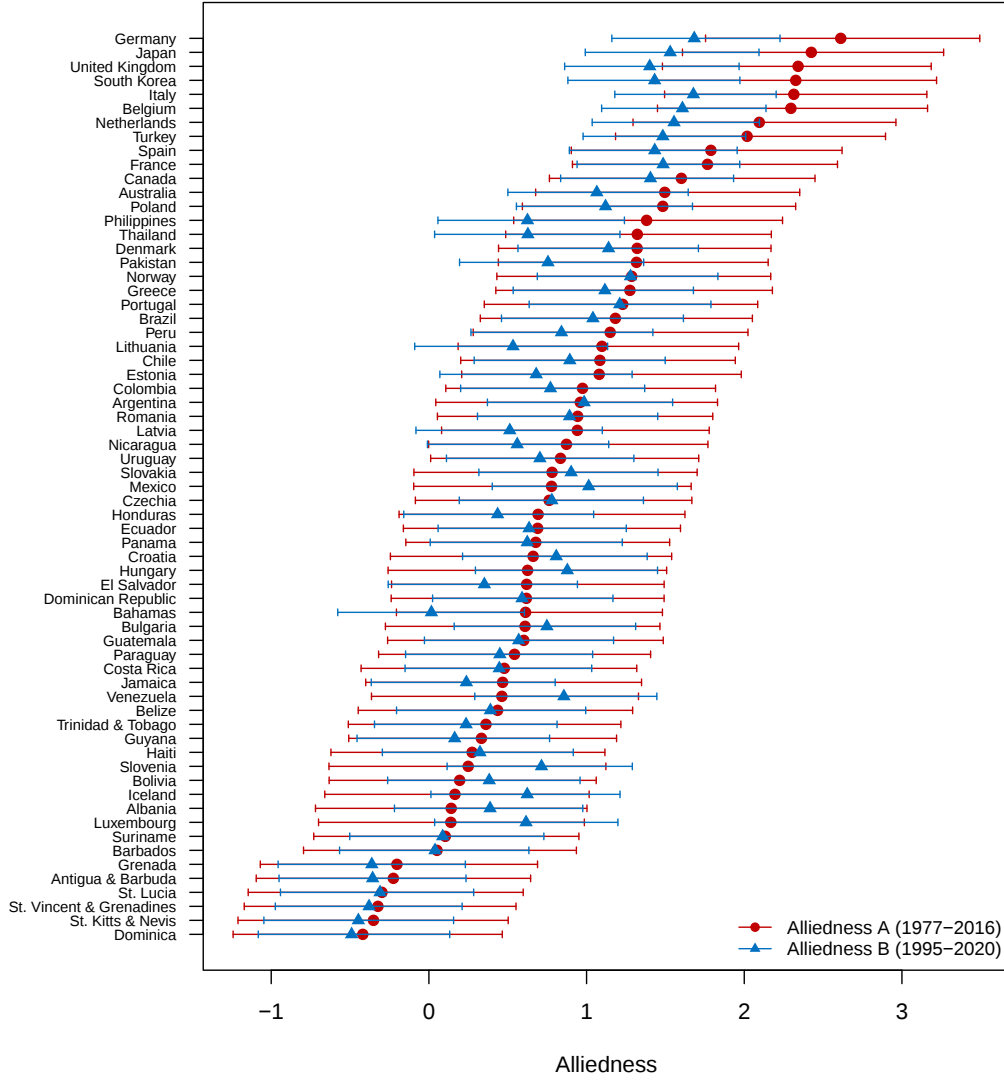


Figure 1: U.S. Allies' Alliedness with the U.S. in 2010

Notes: The figure displays U.S. allies alliedness with the United States with their 95% credible intervals.

and we examine both time frames.

For the economic outcome, we use outward foreign direct investment from the host government to the United States. Existing research shows that U.S. visits are associated with increased FDI inflows from the U.S. and other countries to the host government (Kodila-Tedika and Khalifa, 2024), while Chinese state visits are associated with greater FDI from Chinese firms that are centrally controlled or have two foreign affiliates to the host govern-

ment ([Stone, Wang and Yu, 2022](#)). However, whether diplomatic visits also affect outward FDI from the host country to the United States remains largely unexplored. Outward investment in the United States can be viewed as an economic policy adjustment that strengthens bilateral economic ties and signals confidence in the long-term relationship with the United States. Given that presidential visits reassure host governments about the stability and future of bilateral relations, they may encourage policies and investment decisions that facilitate greater outward FDI to the United States.

The diplomatic outcome measures the ideal point distance between secondary states and the United States based on voting in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) ([Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten, 2017](#)). UNGA voting provides an important opportunity for secondary states to signal their diplomatic alignment with a patron, thereby reinforcing political support and strengthening bilateral relations ([Kudo, 2025](#)). Accordingly, greater voting alignment with the United States can be viewed as a diplomatic policy adjustment through which secondary states accommodate U.S. preferences in return for the reassurance and political commitment conveyed by high-level diplomatic visits. This expectation is consistent with existing research showing that high-level diplomatic visits increase voting alignment between the visiting and host countries in the UNGA ([Malis and Smith, 2021](#); [Chen, 2023](#)).

The security outcome is arms deliveries from the United States to the host government, measured by the trend-indicator value (TIV) from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) ([Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2026](#)). Arms transfers can serve as a tool through which the United States induces cooperation or signals its security commitment, particularly when advanced weapon systems or sensitive technologies are involved ([Pierre, 1982](#)). At the same time, however, choosing U.S. arms over alternative suppliers can create hierarchical relationships and long-term dependence on the United States for training, maintenance, spare parts, and future upgrades ([Kinsella, 1998](#); [Beardsley et al., 2020](#)). Even when the decision to procure U.S. weapons primarily serves

the recipient’s own security interests rather than constituting a genuine policy concession, therefore, it may still be politically perceived as accommodating U.S. preferences because it strengthens U.S. influence over the recipient’s defense posture while reducing its flexibility to diversify security partnerships. Moreover, because closer security ties with the United States may generate domestic political opposition, host leaders can use high-profile presidential visits to justify or legitimize such procurement decisions before domestic audiences, consistent with the opportunity mechanism developed in our theory.

Treatment Variable

Our primary treatment variable is a binary indicator for U.S. presidential visits to country i at year t . Data on diplomatic trips are collected from the State Department’s Office of the Historian, and updated by (Malis and Smith, 2021).⁹ We include all visits where the President attended a summit or a meeting in the host country, met with host country’s leadership, or participated in public diplomacy activities. We exclude visits with quick stopovers where the President stops in a country en route to or from another destination. Figure 2 plots treatment distribution across space and time.

Research Design

To estimate the effect of presidential visits on our three outcome measures, we use Imai, Kim and Wang (2023)’s Panel Matching with Difference-in-Differences estimator to account for the staggered assignment of treatment (e.g., different countries receive diplomatic visits at different times), address issues arising from selection and endogeneity, and estimate long term effects of visits. Treated countries are those that switched from no visit to receiving a visit in the next year. For each treatment condition, the method constructs and refines a matched set that includes a number of potential control countries where no visit occurred in

⁹The data includes information on all Presidential and Secretaries of State foreign visits, in addition to information for hosted visits in the U.S., including specific dates and brief description of the purpose of the visit.

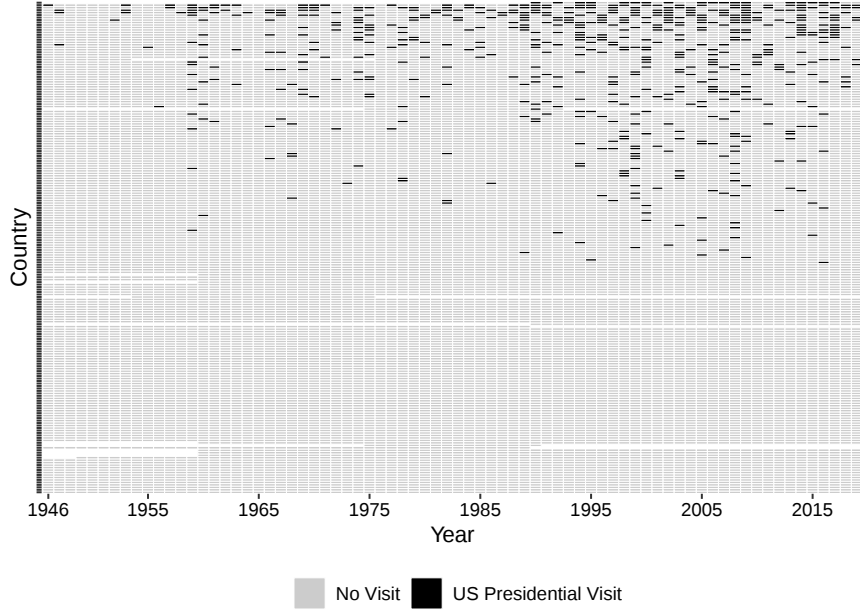


Figure 2: Treatment Assignment Over Time

the same year, and that also share similar treatment and covariate histories.¹⁰ Hence, the counterfactual outcome for each treated observation is estimated using the weighted average of the control units in the refined matched set. After, the method computes the DiD estimate of the ATT (average treatment effect of receiving a Presidential diplomatic visit) for each treated observation and then average it across all treated observations. Formally, the ATT estimator is given by the following equation:

$$\hat{\delta}(F, L) = \underbrace{\frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{t=L+1}^{T-F} D_{it}} \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{t=L+1}^{T-F} D_{it}}_{\text{Average over all treated observations}} \underbrace{\left\{ (Y_{i,t+F} - Y_{i,t-1}) - \sum_{i' \in M_{it}} w_{it}^{i'} (Y_{i',t+F} - Y_{i',t-1}) \right\}}_{\text{Treated observation-specific diff-in-diff estimate}}$$

We match treated and control units on a number of time varying covariates. First, we match on country specific characteristics including population, GDP per capita ([World Bank](#),

¹⁰The method refines the matched set, which includes control units with identical treatment history, to adjust for time-varying covariates in the pre-treatment period using matching and weighting methods.

2026), regime type (Coppedge et al., 2023), capabilities (Singer, Bremer and Stuckey, 1972), and leader ideology (Herre, 2023). Second, to isolate the effect of material leverage from the U.S., we match on imports from and exports to the U.S. (International Monetary Fund, 2026), foreign U.S. military and economic aid (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2022). Third, we match on diplomatic visits by the U.S. Secretary of State and visits in the U.S. by leaders of foreign governments. Lastly, we match on our alliedness latent variable to compare between closely aligned treated and control countries, who only differ on treatment status. To avoid post-treatment bias, all covariates in the refined matched set are lagged up to two years prior to treatment.¹¹

The next step is to select an appropriate distance measure to refine the matched set based on covariates history. We experiment with different matching and weighting techniques for each outcome variable until we find the optimal distance measure for covariate balance. We find that Propensity Score weighting (PSW) resulted in the best covariate balance between treated and control units across all three outcomes.¹² Online Appendix Figures C.1, C.2, and C.3 present the results for covariate balance in the specified two-years lag window for unrefined and refined matched sets for each outcome measure. We observe that refinement substantially improves covariate balance between treated and control units, raising the credibility of the causal inference.

After, we select the number of *lags* $L = 2$ to adjust for treatment history and match on treated and control units that did not receive a presidential visit in the two years window prior to treatment.¹³ Within each matched set after refinement, we specify 5 control units

¹¹See Online Appendix A for summary statistics.

¹²We replicate the main analyses using an alternative refinement method that produced the second best balance between treatment and control units, which is propensity score matching. The results are largely consistent with those obtained using propensity score weighting.

¹³The choice of L face a bias-variance tradeoff; higher values improve the credibility of the unconfoundedness assumption—the extent to which past treatment status could be a confounder influencing both the current treatment and current outcome—but reduces the number of potential matches which reduce the efficiency of the estimates. Since a single diplomatic visit occurs within 1-3 days in a given year, we consider two years without receiving a visit is good enough to isolate the effect of past treatment status while also substantially increasing the number of control units. We also consider different L values as a robustness check, and the results are largely consistent with those reported in the main analysis

(default) to be used for each treated observation.¹⁴ We also allow for treatment reversal in the specified lead window since treated countries can switch to control in the next year and vice versa.

After conditioning on the treatment, outcome, and covariate histories up to tow years in the lag window, the DiD estimator assumes parallel trends between treated and matched control units. Since unobserved time-varying confounders remain a challenge for the DiD estimator, it is difficult to directly test for the parallel trend assumption. However, we use placebo tests to explore the assumption of parallel trends, by evaluating the effect of the treatment at time t on the outcome difference between treated and matched control units in the pretreatment periods. Online Appendix Figures D.1, D.2, and D.3 plot the placebo tests for receiving a visit on each of the three outcomes in the pretreatment periods until $t - 4$. The placebo tests across all outcome measures show near zero estimates without significant differences between treated and control units or any upwards or downwards trends. These tests increase the credibility of the estimated results as they are less likely to be driven by past outcomes or treatment status.

Given that we are interested in the conditional ATT across levels of alliedness, we dichotomize our latent alliedness variables at zero to distinguish between weak and close alignment.¹⁵ We create two binary variables for *Alliedness a* (1977-2016) and *Alliedness B* (1995-2020) that take the value of 1 for close alignment and zero for weak alignment.¹⁶ We estimate the conditional ATT among weakly aligned treated and control units and among closely aligned treated and control units.

¹⁴The larger the size of the matched set, the higher the risk for biased estimates since additional control units may force the model to choose less similar ones.

¹⁵The PanleMatch estimator requires a binary variable for the moderator, thus we had to dichotomize the latent variables into two categories. We choose zero cutoff since both latent variables are centered around zero.

¹⁶We experiment with both variables to examine which moderator yields the largest number of matched sets (sample size) within each alliedness category for each outcome measure. We find that *Alliedness B* produces largest sample size for the FDI outcome, and *Alliedness A* produces largest sample size for the other outcomes. The overall sample size for each outcome measure depends on the number of matched sets rather than the temporal coverage. This is because adding more years does not necessarily mean adding new matched sets, simply because more recent years may not become appropriate counterfactual comparisons.

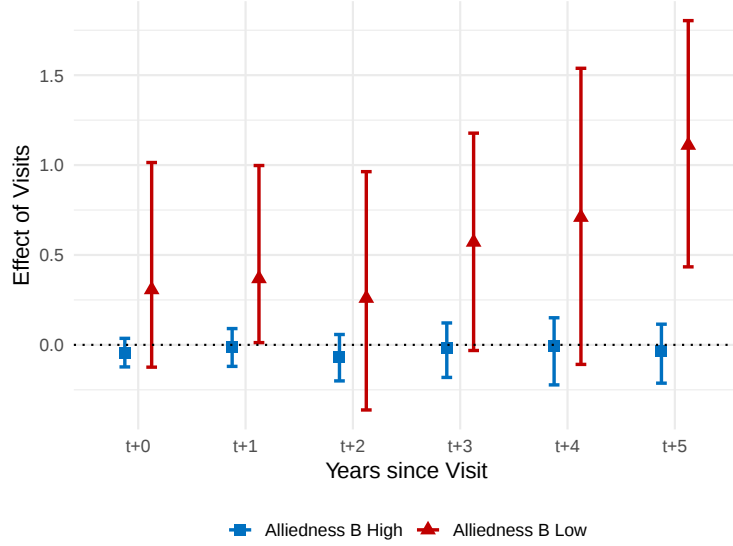


Figure 3: Conditional ATT of U.S. Presidential Visit on FDI

Results

We first examine our measure of economic policy concession by estimating treatment effect heterogeneity across alliedness subgroups using foreign direct investment (FDI) flows from the host country to the United States.¹⁷ Figure 3 presents the conditional ATT estimates over the five-year post-treatment period. Among weakly aligned countries, treated units are associated with a 0.31 to 1.11 unit increase in logged outward FDI flows to the United States over the five-year post-treatment window, with positive and persistent effects emerging from $t+0$ through $t+5$ and reaching statistical significance at $t+1$ and $t+5$, relative to matched control units. The estimated effect among weakly aligned states reaches a maximum of 0.3 standard deviations at $t+5$. The wider confidence intervals for weakly aligned countries reflect the relatively small number of treated and matched control units in this subgroup. Because presidential visits to weakly aligned states are considerably rarer than visits to close allies, greater uncertainty around these estimates is expected.

By contrast, the estimated effects of presidential visits among closely aligned countries

¹⁷For FDI, we employ *Alliedness B*, our latent measure of alliedness covering the 1995–2020 period, to maximize temporal coverage. Also, we report the unconditional ATT estimates in the Online Appendix Figure E.1. In general, the result shows no statistically significant treatment effect without subgroup analysis.

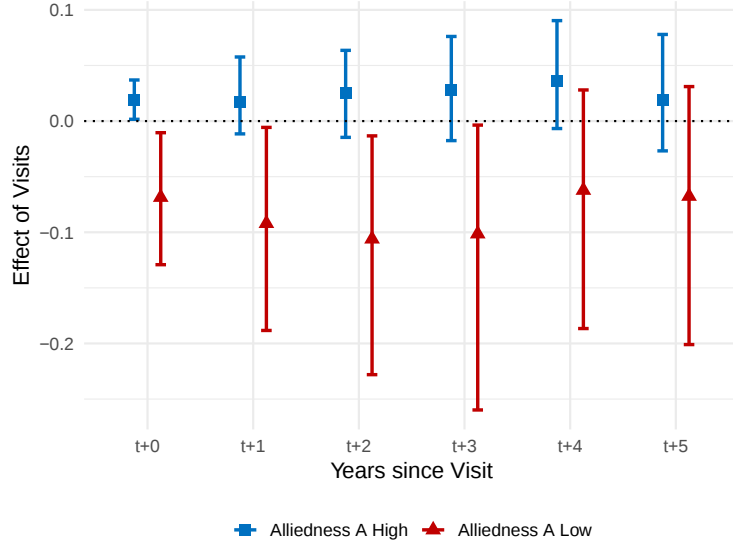


Figure 4: Conditional ATT of U.S. Presidential Visit on UNGA voting

remain consistently close to zero and are statistically indistinguishable from zero across both the short and long run. The relatively narrow confidence intervals further increase confidence in these null findings, allowing us to rule out substantively meaningful effects of presidential visits on outward FDI flows to the United States within this subgroup. Most importantly, the differences in treatment effects between weakly and closely aligned countries are statistically significant at $t + 5$. These results provide strong support for our theoretical expectation that diplomatic visits are more effective at eliciting economic policy concessions from weakly aligned countries than from closely aligned ones.

The pattern of heterogeneous treatment effects also helps explain the average treatment effect reported in the Online Appendix. While the unconditional ATT indicates a positive, albeit not significant, long-run effect of presidential visits on outward FDI flows to the United States, the conditional estimates reveal that this average effect is driven almost entirely by weakly aligned countries. Averaging across host countries therefore masks substantial heterogeneity in the effectiveness of diplomatic visits, underscoring the importance of accounting for alliedness when evaluating the policy consequences of high-level diplomacy.

We next examine our measure of diplomatic policy concessions by estimating treatment

effect heterogeneity across alliedness subgroups.¹⁸ Figure 4 presents the conditional ATT estimates for weakly and closely aligned countries over the five-year post-treatment period. Among weakly aligned countries, treated units are associated with a 0.07 to 0.11 unit decrease in *Ideal Point Distance* from the United States over the five-year post-treatment window, relative to matched control units, corresponding to a maximum decrease of 0.10 standard deviations at $t + 2$. This pattern suggests that weakly aligned host countries are more likely to support the United States in United Nations General Assembly voting following a presidential visit.

Moreover, The estimated effects are statistically significant from $t + 0$ through $t + 3$, suggesting that presidential visits induce an immediate improvement in voting alignment that persists for several years before gradually diminishing. Although the estimated effects become smaller and statistically indistinguishable from zero at $t + 4$ and $t + 5$, the overall pattern indicates that diplomatic visits generate meaningful, albeit temporary, diplomatic concessions among weakly aligned countries. This pattern contrasts with our findings for economic policy concessions, where the effects among weakly aligned countries maintain statistical significance in the longer run as well. As with the FDI analysis, the wider confidence intervals for weakly aligned countries reflect the relatively small number of treated and matched control units within this subgroup.

By contrast, the estimated effects of presidential visits among closely aligned countries remain negligible and are statistically indistinguishable from zero from $t+1$ through $t+5$. We therefore find no evidence that presidential visits meaningfully shift UNGA voting behavior among closely aligned countries. Moreover, the differences in treatment effects between weakly and closely aligned countries are statistically significant in the contemporaneous period $t + 0$. Taken together, these findings provide additional support for our theoretical expectation that diplomatic visits are more effective at eliciting diplomatic policy concessions

¹⁸For diplomatic concession, we employ *Alliedness A*, our latent measure of alliedness covering the 1977–2016 period, to maximize temporal coverage. Also, we report the unconditional ATT estimates in the Online Appendix Figure E.2. In general, the result shows no statistically significant treatment effect without subgroup analysis.

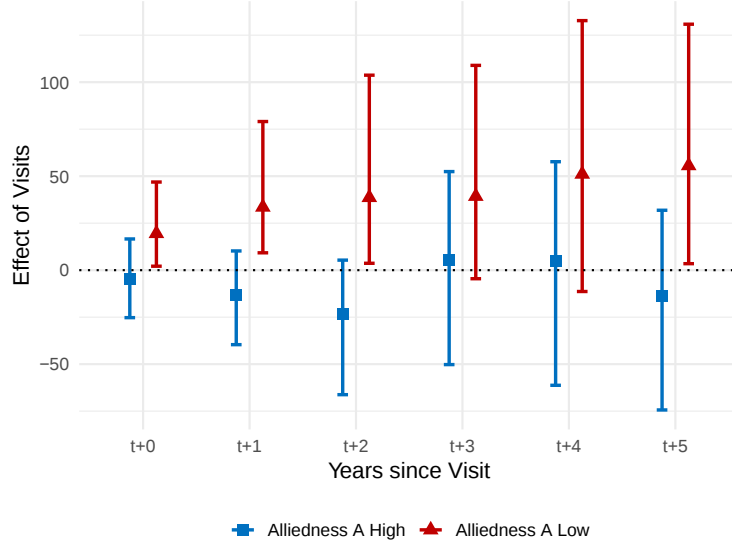


Figure 5: Conditional ATT of U.S. Presidential Visit on Arms Imports

from weakly aligned countries than from closely aligned ones.

Lastly, we examine our measure of security policy concessions by estimating treatment effect heterogeneity across alliedness subgroups.¹⁹ Figure 5 presents the conditional ATT estimates for weakly and closely aligned countries. Consistent with our theoretical expectation, presidential visits increase U.S. arms deliveries to weakly aligned host countries, while we find no statistically significant treatment effects among closely aligned countries. Among weakly aligned countries, treated units are associated with a 20 to 59 Trend Indicator Value (TIV) unit increase in U.S. arms deliveries over the five-year post-treatment window relative to matched control units, corresponding to a maximum increase of 0.27 standard deviations at $t + 5$. The estimated effects reach statistical significance at $t + 0$, $t + 1$, $t + 2$, and $t + 5$. Although the standardized effect appears modest, the substantive magnitude is meaningful because weakly aligned treated countries receive substantially larger arms transfers than the baseline levels observed for most recipient-years in the sample.²⁰ In addition, unlike UNGA

¹⁹For this outcome, we employ *Alliedness A*, our latent measure of alliedness covering the 1977–2016 period, to maximize temporal coverage. Also, we report the unconditional ATT estimates in Online Appendix Figure E.3. In general, the unconditional ATT estimates show no statistically significant treatment effects in the absence of subgroup analysis.

²⁰The SIPRI TIV data are highly right-skewed, so the standard deviation is driven largely by a small number of high-volume recipients (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Japan, Israel, Taiwan, and South Korea). By comparison,

voting, the positive effect on arms imports persists in the longer run through $t + 5$. This persistent pattern suggests that increased arms imports may generate longer-term dependence on U.S. weapons systems.

Among closely aligned countries, the estimated effects of presidential visits on U.S. arms deliveries are statistically indistinguishable from zero across the post-treatment period. In closely aligned relationships, security cooperation is already highly institutionalized, reducing the marginal value of a presidential visit in generating additional military concessions. Generally, the pattern of results is consistent with our theoretical expectation that presidential visits are associated with greater security policy concessions only among weakly aligned host countries. As additional evidence to the security concession, we show that visits by the U.S. Secretary of State increase the likelihood of host-country participation in U.S.-led military coalitions only among weakly aligned states. (This analysis is reported in section G from the Online Appendix and omitted here due to space constraints.)

The direction and magnitude of our findings are generally robust across a wide range of alternative specifications for all outcome measures, including different refinement methods, alternative lead and lag structures, varying matched-set sizes, matching on lagged outcomes, and alternative covariate specifications. The consistency of the results across these specifications further increases our confidence in the validity of our causal estimates.

Alternative Explanations

We consider two alternative explanations that could account for host countries’ policy concessions following a visit. First, concessions may result from direct U.S. pressure. U.S. leaders may use high-level visits to demand meaningful concessions from host governments, leaving little room for host leaders’ own decisions to reciprocate (Kim, 2024). Second, host leaders who value high-level U.S. visits may be willing to “purchase” them through policy concessions (Malis and Smith, 2024). Under this argument, the foreign leader and host

the estimated effect at $t + 2$ is equivalent to roughly 63% of the sample mean. The results are also robust to using the natural logarithm of one plus the SIPRI TIV.

incumbent bargain over concessions in exchange for a diplomatic visit. The observed concessions may therefore reflect a prior bargaining between the two leaders rather than the host government’s decision to reciprocate after receiving the visit.

These alternative explanations generate distinct empirical implications. If direct pressure drives the results, concessions should be concentrated in the period following a visit and weaken over time, particularly after the visiting U.S. leader leaves office, as such pressure is likely to be leader-specific (McManus, 2018; Kim, 2024). If the purchase argument drives the results, concessions should be strongest while the host leader who negotiated the visit remains in office and weaken once that leader leaves office, particularly if replaced by a political opponent who was not part of the original bargain (Malis and Smith, 2021, 2024).

To assess these alternative explanations, we conduct an additional analysis by extending the post-treatment lead window by two years for each outcome measure. We assume that longer leads potentially account for shifts in the U.S. president or the host leader. That is, the longer the lead, the less likely that the same President or host leader is still in office. To support this assumption, we calculated the average remaining tenure of the U.S. president and host-country leader after each visit. We find that U.S. presidents remain in office about 3 years on average and host leaders remain in office about 4.5 years on average following a diplomatic visit. Therefore, any significant effects beyond $t + 4$ would be harder to explain by these alternative explanations.

The results are reported in the Online Appendix H. With some variation across outcomes, we find that results do persist in the longer lead window for the FDI outcome only. On the other hand, we do not find significant effects at $t + 6$ and $t + 7$ for UNGA voting and arms imports. However, the $t + 5$ estimate for arms imports remains positive and significant, a period that reasonably falls after the U.S. president or host leader has left office. While these results do not completely rule out alternative explanations, the patterns for the economic and security concessions are difficult to explain solely through direct U.S. pressure or a prior visit-for-concession bargain. These patterns provide additional support for our argument

that diplomatic visits increase host governments’ willingness and opportunity to reciprocate.

Conclusion

This article asks why some U.S. diplomatic visits are more successful than others in eliciting policy concessions from host governments. We argue that visits are most likely to be followed by foreign policy concessions when they are directed toward countries with lower levels of alliedness, where such visits are rarer, more informative, and more politically valuable. Under these conditions, visits increase both the willingness and the opportunity of host-state leaders to reciprocate through policies favorable to the United States.

Employing a newly constructed Bayesian latent measure of alliedness that captures the degree of security and diplomatic alignment between the United States and secondary states, we find that U.S. high-level diplomatic visits are associated with policy concessions by host governments across economic, diplomatic, and security domains. Specifically, U.S. visits are associated with greater outward FDI to the United States, greater voting alignment with the United States in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), and greater arms imports from the United States, but only among weakly aligned states. By contrast, the estimated effects of U.S. visits among closely aligned states are indistinguishable from zero across all policy domains.

More broadly, our findings contribute to the growing literature on the interaction of foreign policy tools and alliance relationships, including diplomatic visits and alliances (McManus, 2018; Lee and Kim, 2024; McManus and Sending, 2025), joint military exercises and alliances (Kuo and Blankenship, 2022), and nuclear deployments and alliances (Fuhrmann and Sechser, 2014). We also contribute to the literature on alliance politics by introducing a new latent measure of alliedness that captures variation in the degree of security and diplomatic alignment between the United States and secondary states beyond formal alliance commitments. Beyond the present study, this measure offers a flexible approach for examining variation in bilateral alignment and its implications for alliance politics, interstate

cooperation, and the effectiveness of foreign policy instruments.

Our findings also have important implications for how U.S. diplomatic visits should be understood. Our theory and findings do not imply that visits to closely aligned states are ineffective or counterproductive. The absence of observable policy concessions following visits to close allies should not be interpreted as evidence of diplomatic failure. Rather, it reflects the fact that diplomatic visits can serve different strategic objectives depending on the nature of the bilateral relationship. In highly aligned relationships, visits may serve purposes such as reassurance, deterrence, and alliance management rather than eliciting immediate policy concessions.

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Online Appendix for

When Do Visits Lead to Concessions? *Alliedness* and Host-State Responses to U.S. Presidential Visits

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A Descriptive Statistics

Table A.1: Summary Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
UNGA Ideal Point Distance	11,135	2.583	1.066	0.0005	5.378
U.S. Arms Deliveries (TIV)	10,787	61.610	231.516	0.000	4,452.000
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)	4,133	5.536	3.654	0.000	13.804
Alliedness (A)	7,130	0.003	0.883	-2.981	3.129
Alliedness (A) Binary	7,130	0.434	0.496	0	1
Alliedness (B)	4,980	-0.00002	0.949	-6.538	1.773
Alliedness (B) Binary	4,980	0.505	0.500	0	1
Presidential Visit	14,325	0.042	0.201	0	1
Secretary of State Visit	13,729	0.130	0.337	0	1
Host Country Visit	14,325	0.040	0.195	0	1
Leader Ideology	10,127	-0.038	0.960	-1	1
Log Population	11,548	15.118	2.208	8.430	21.065
Log GDP per Capita	9,299	23.554	2.355	16.567	30.290
vdem Score	12,796	0.392	0.286	0.007	0.922
Military capabilities2	11,567	0.005	0.018	0.00000	0.238
Log Military Aid	13,838	6.782	7.648	0.000	23.445
Log Economic Aid	13,838	10.053	8.501	-19.912	24.319
Log Imports from U.S.	10,380	5.214	3.109	0.001	22.910
Log Exports to U.S.	10,661	5.147	2.478	0.002	12.652

B Measurement Model

The model assumes that the observed measures of security and diplomatic relations between the United States and other countries are imperfect indicators of an underlying latent alliedness. Let X denote an $N \times J$ matrix of observed variables, where $j = 1, \dots, J$ indexes the indicators and $i = 1, \dots, N$ indexes dyad-year observations, consisting of d dyads observed over t years, with one member of each dyad being either the United States or China. Each observed variable is either continuous or ordinal with at least two categories. If the j th variable is ordinal, it has $C_j > 1$ categories. The model assumes that the observed variables, X , are generated by the latent responses, X^* , and a collection of cutpoints, γ , as follows:

$$x_{ij} = \begin{cases} x_{ij}^* & \text{if variable } j \text{ is continuous} \\ c & \text{if } x_{ij} \in (\gamma_{j(c-1)}, \gamma_{jc}] \text{ and variable } j \text{ is ordinal,} \end{cases}$$

where c can take values in $\{1, \dots, C_j\}$ and $\gamma_{j0} \equiv -\infty$, $\gamma_{j1} \equiv 0$, and $\gamma_{jC_j} \equiv \infty$ for all j . The remaining cutpoints are free parameters to be estimated.

A factor analytic model is employed to capture the patterns of association among the observed variables in X , through the latent structure represented by X^* as follows,

$$X_i^* = \Lambda \phi_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where x_i^* is the J -dimensional vector of latent responses for observation i , Λ is a $J \times K$ matrix of factor loadings, ϕ_i is a K -dimensional vector of factor scores specific to observation i , and $\varepsilon_i \stackrel{\text{iid}}{\sim} \mathcal{N}(0, \psi)$ is a J -dimensional vector of disturbances, where ψ is typically assumed to be a diagonal covariance matrix. Thus, λ_j represents the effect of a given component on the latent factor, ϕ_i denotes the latent level of alliedness between two countries, and ψ_j represents the proportion of variance attributable to measurement error.

Assuming that the observed components are conditionally independent given the underlying latent variable, changes in the level of alliedness are expected to produce corresponding changes in the observed components. Under this assumption, we recover the parameters of interest by treating X^* as latent data and estimating the posterior density of the model as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} p(X^*, \gamma, \Lambda, \phi, \Psi | X) &\propto p(X | X^*, \gamma) p(X^* | \Lambda, \phi, \Psi) p(\gamma) p(\Lambda) p(\Phi) p(\Psi) \\ &\propto \left\{ \prod_{i=1}^N \prod_{j=1}^J \left\{ \mathbb{I}(x_{ij} = x_{ij}^*) \mathbb{I}(X_j \text{ continuous}) \right. \right. \\ &\quad \left. \left. + \sum_{c=1}^{C_j} \mathbb{I}(x_{ij} = c) \mathbb{I}(x_{ij} \in (\gamma_{j(c-1)}, \gamma_{jc}]) \mathbb{I}(X_j \text{ ordinal}) \right\} \right. \\ &\quad \left. \times p_N(X_i^* | \Lambda \phi_i, \Psi) \right\} p(\Lambda) p(\Phi) p(\Psi) \end{aligned}$$

where $\mathbb{I}(a)$ denotes the indicator function, which equals 1 if the condition a is true and 0 otherwise. The term $p_N(z | \mu, \Sigma)$ represents the multivariate normal density evaluated at z ,

with mean μ and variance-covariance matrix Σ . The functions $p(\Lambda)$, $p(\Phi)$, and $p(\Psi)$ denote the prior densities for the factor loadings Λ , the factor scores Φ , and the error covariance matrix Ψ , respectively. The prior for γ is omitted from the posterior expression because it is constant for all values of c and therefore does not affect posterior inference. The mean of the latent measure across all observations is normalized to zero for identification. Conditional distributions of the model parameters are obtained using Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) simulation implemented in the **MCMCpack** package in **R**. For additional details on the model specification and estimation procedure, see [Quinn \(2004\)](#).

C Covariate Balance

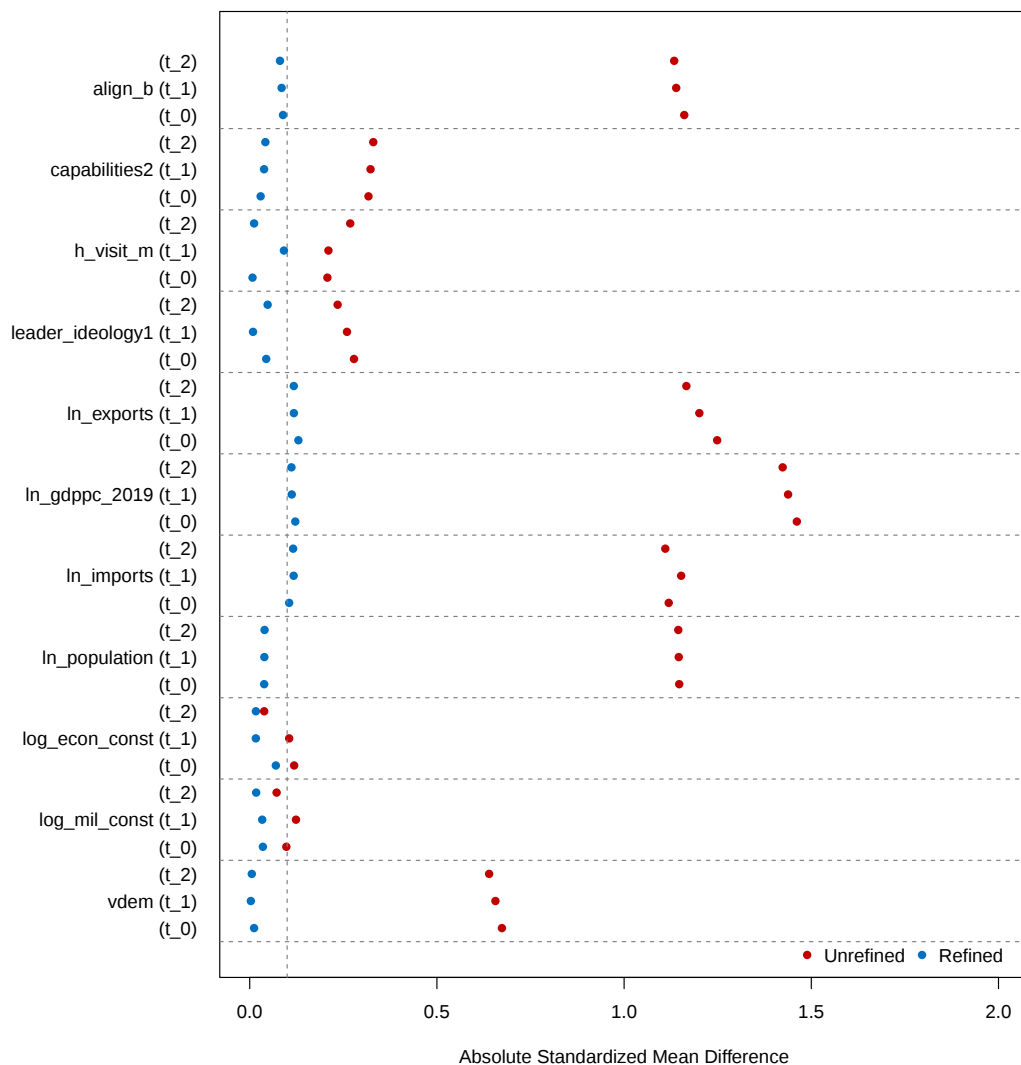


Figure C.1: Visualizing Covariate Balance Before and After Refinement for the FDI Outcome.

Covariate balance results for unrefined matched sets are shown in the top left panel. The top right panel presents the refined matched sets after propensity score weighting, and the bottom panel reports the corresponding standardized mean differences (SMDs). Refining the matched sets using propensity score weighting substantially improves covariate balance for all variables over the entire 2-year lag window.

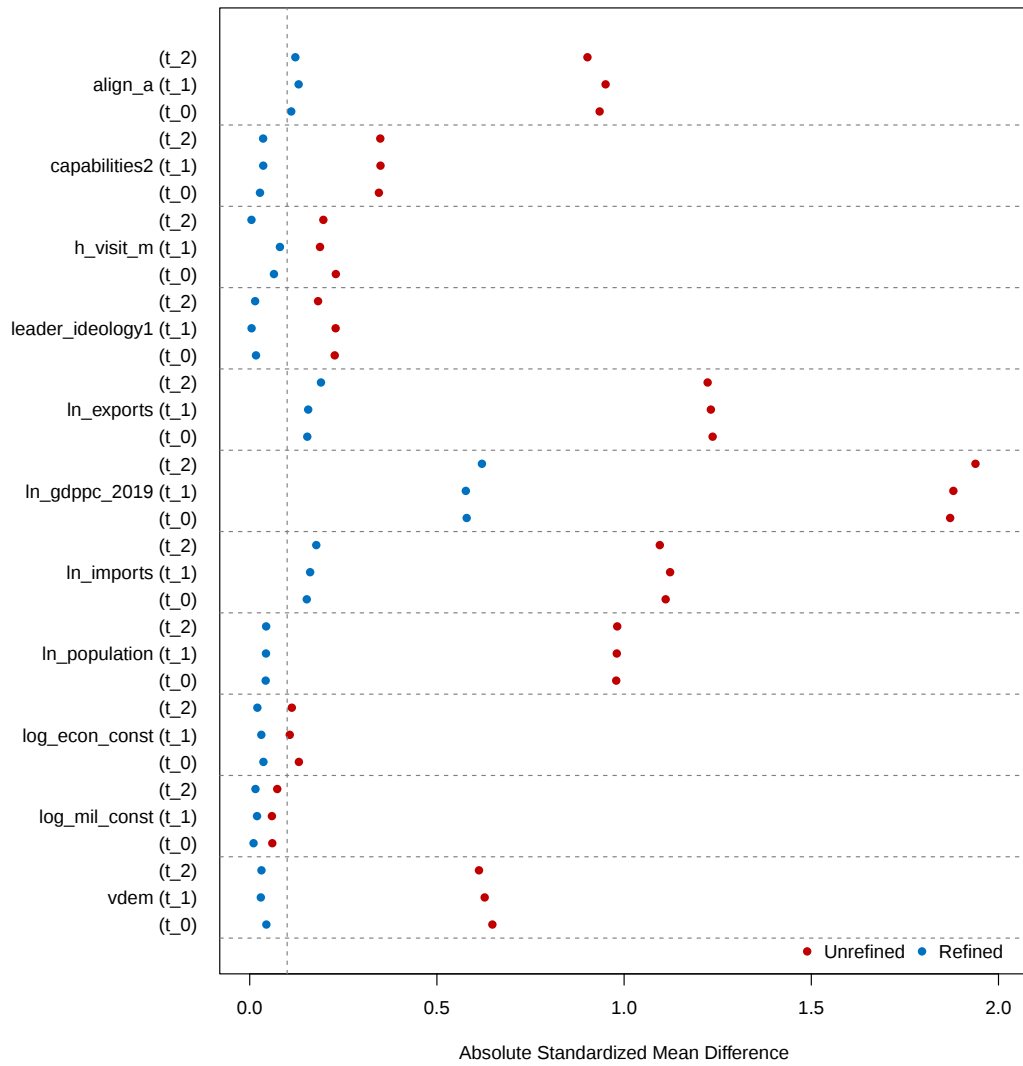


Figure C.2: Visualizing Covariate Balance Before and After Refinement for the Ideal Point Distance

Covariate balance results for unrefined matched sets are shown on the plot on the top left panel. Refining the matched sets using the propensity score weighting method substantively improves covariate balance for all variables over the entire 2-year lag window.

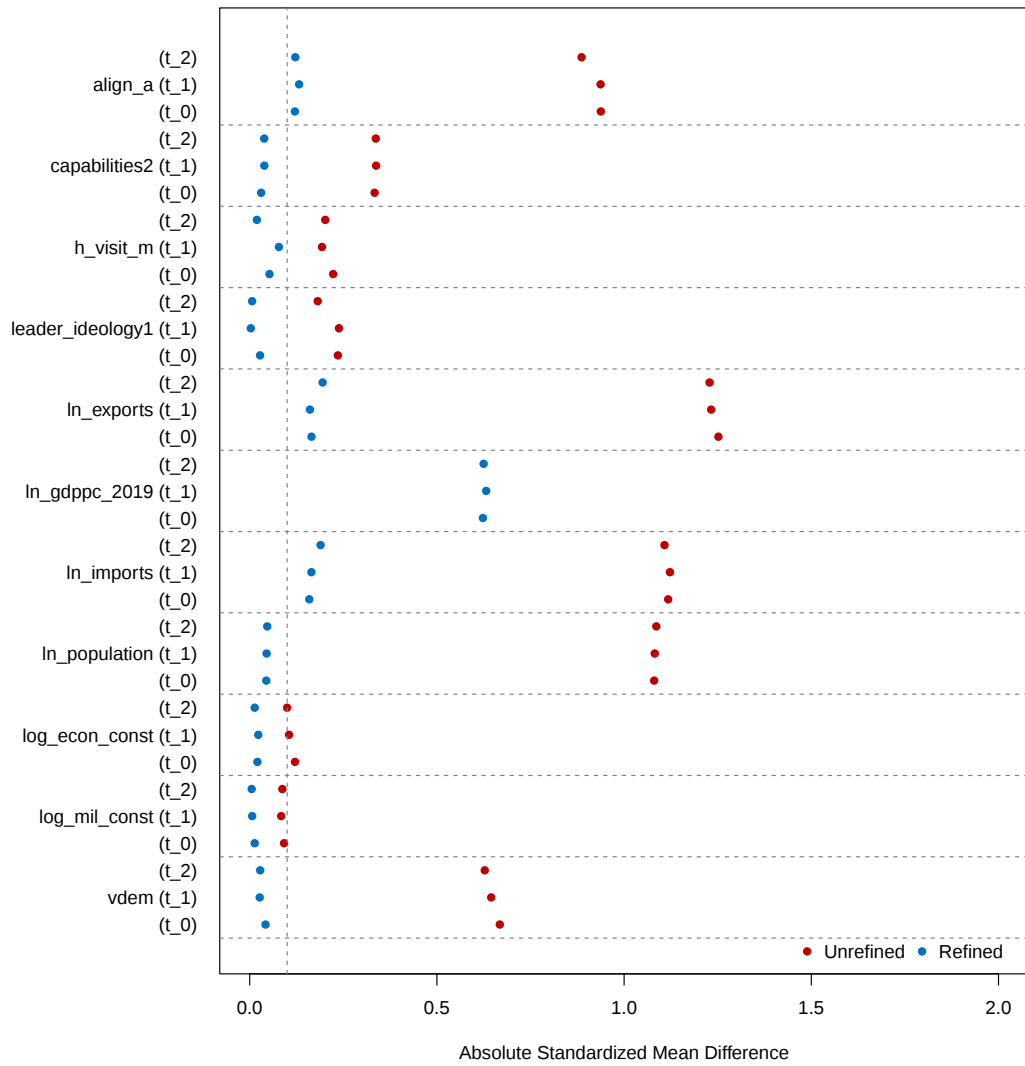


Figure C.3: Visualizing Covariate Balance Before and After Refinement for the Arms Imports

Covariate balance results for unrefined matched sets are shown on the plot on the top left panel. Refining the matched sets using the propensity score weighting method substantively improves covariate balance for all variables over the entire 2-year lag window.

D Placebo Tests (Parallel Trends Assumption)

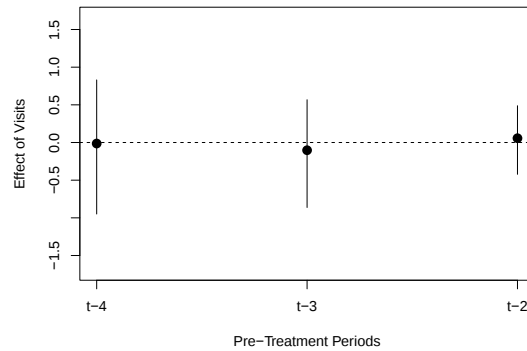


Figure D.1: Visualizing Results of Placebo Test for the FDI Outcome

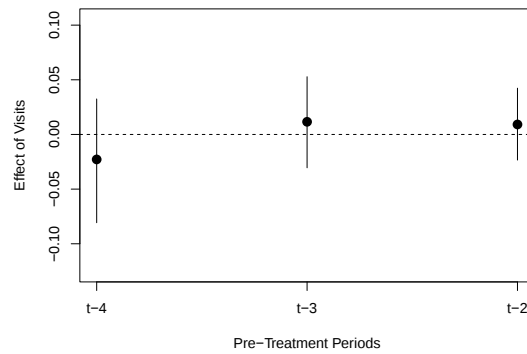


Figure D.2: Visualizing Results of Placebo Test for the UNGA Voting Outcome

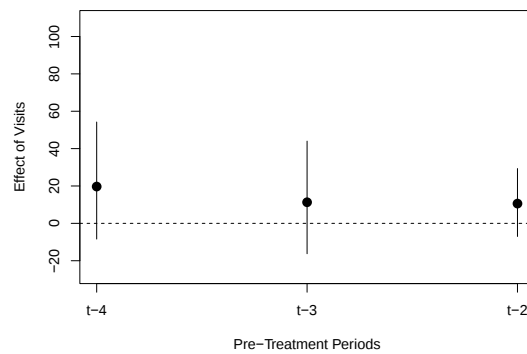


Figure D.3: Visualizing Results of Placebo Test for the Arms Transfer Outcome

E Unconditional ATT of Presidential Visits

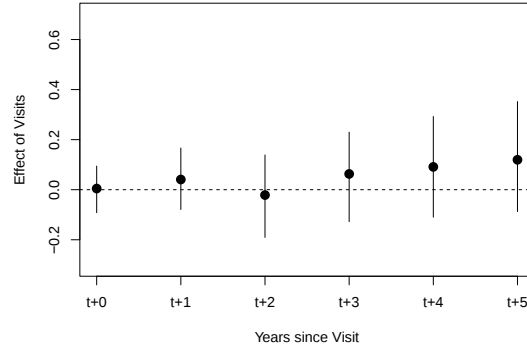


Figure E.1: Unconditional ATT of Presidential Visits (FDI)

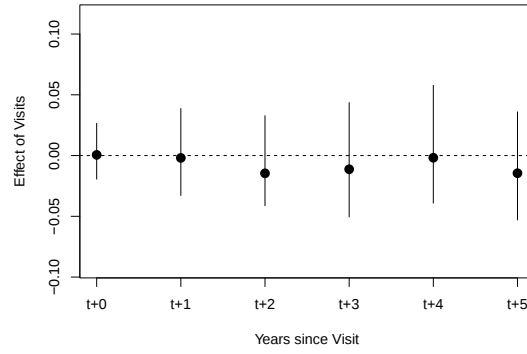


Figure E.2: Unconditional ATT of Presidential Visits (UNGA)

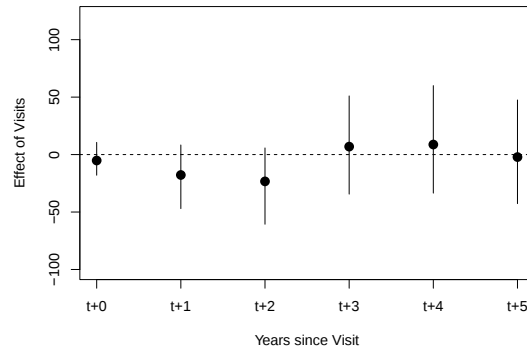


Figure E.3: Unconditional ATT of Presidential Visits (Arms Import)

F Alternative Refinement Strategies

F.1 Propensity Score Matching

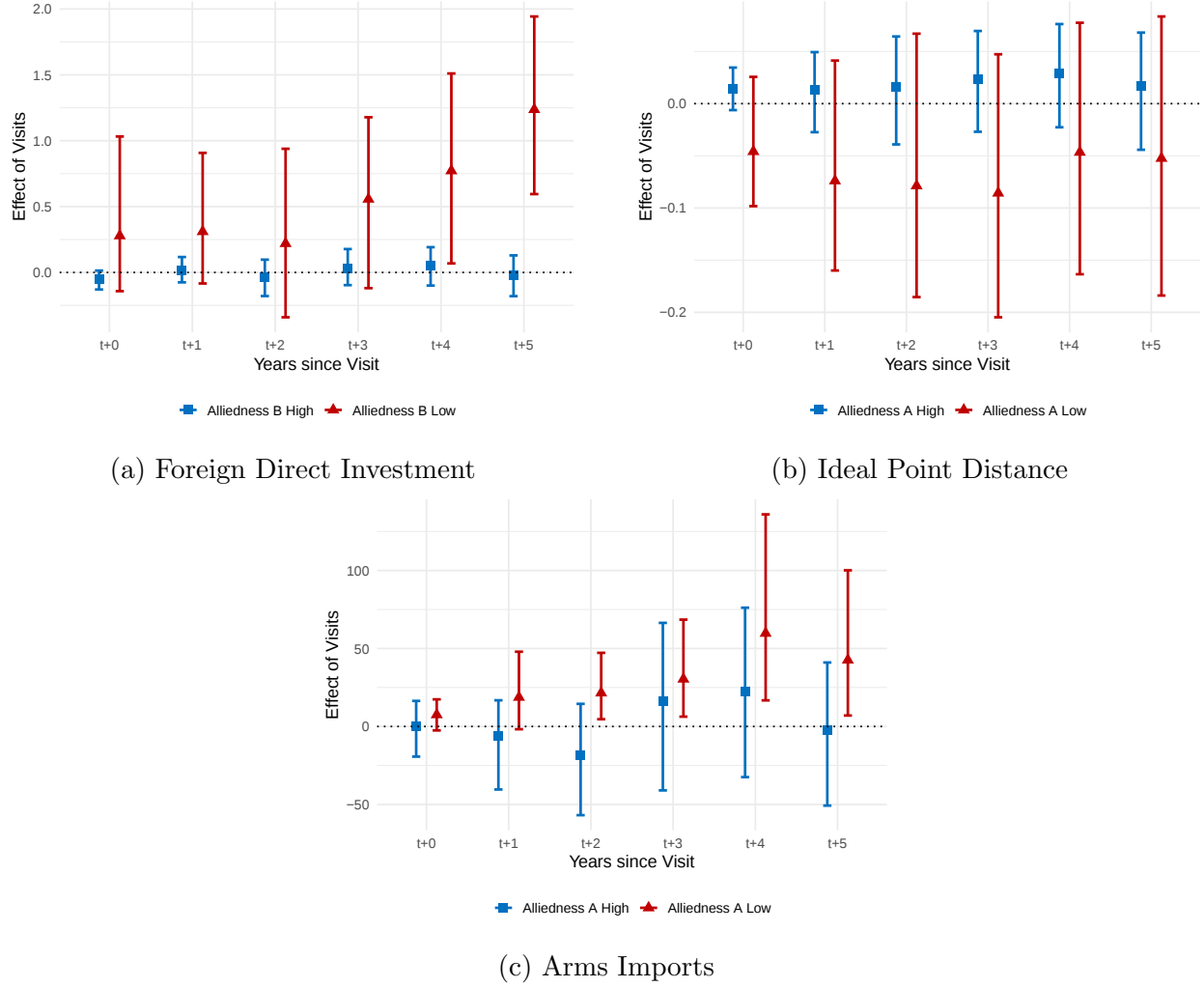
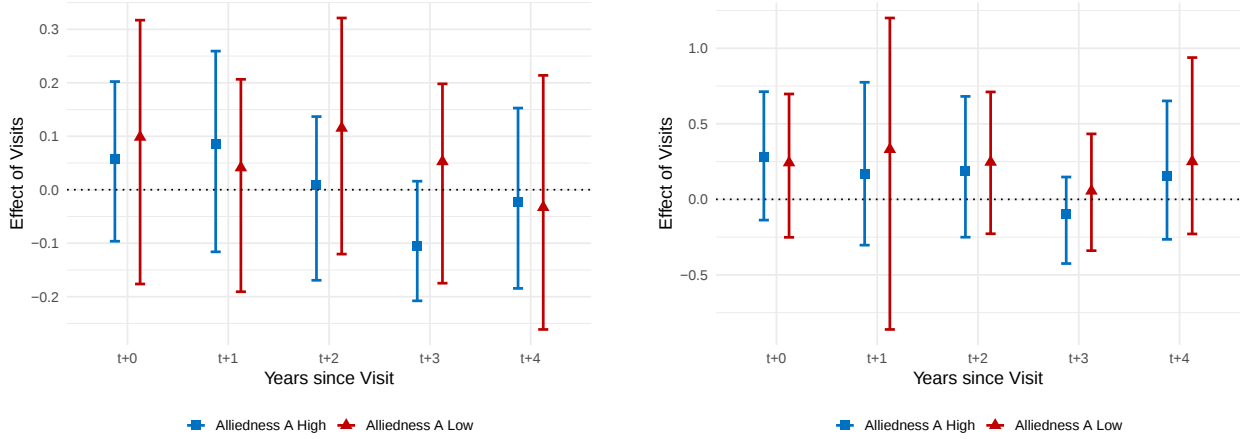


Figure F.1: Conditional ATT of Presidential Visit (Refinement: Propensity Score Matching)

G Alternative Security Outcome

We discuss the findings from our alternative security concession outcomes, a binary variable indicating whether a country participated at all in U.S. led military coalitions, or a count variable indicating the number of times each country participated in U.S. led military coalitions ([Henke, 2017](#)). Figure G.1 plots the conditional ATT among weakly and strongly aligned states. We find null but similar results across both subgroups for Presidential visits. We find no clear evidence that Presidential visits have bigger impact on troop deployment among weakly aligned states compared to closely aligned ones.



(a) Binary Measure of Troop Deployment

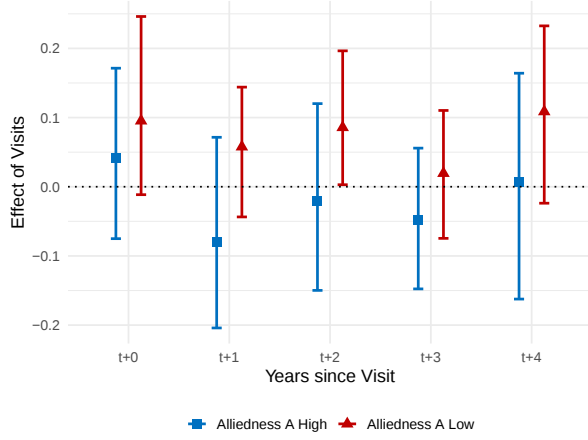
(b) Count Measure of Troop Deployment

Figure G.1: Conditional ATT on Troop Deployment (Presidential Visit)

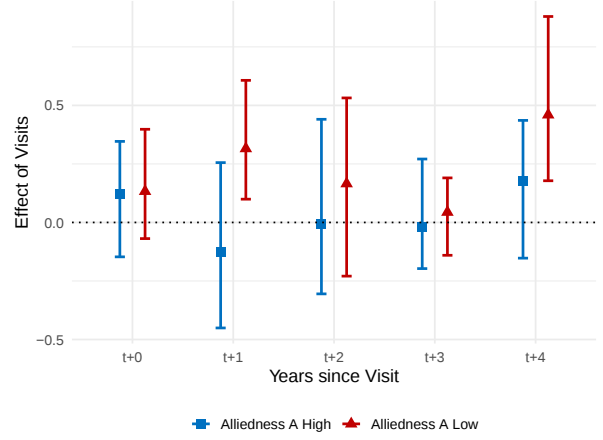
A number of reasons could account for these findings. First, troop deployment is more costly and salient than economic and diplomatic concessions, often requiring the approval of multiple institutional veto players within the host government. A single Presidential visit is less likely to serve as a tool for technical negotiations and lobbying pertaining to future military campaigns, especially among weakly aligned states. Second, prior research shows that only Presidential visits are effective in deterring military challenges against the recipient [McManus and Sending \(2025\)](#), suggesting that their primary function in crisis diplomacy is defensive reassurance rather than offensive coalition building.

To address these potential explanations, we examine the effect of Secretary of State visits on participation in U.S.-led military coalitions. Unlike Presidential visits, the Secretary of State's travel agenda is driven by specific security priorities [Lebovic \(2018\)](#), making such visits more suitable tools for substantive negotiations and targeted lobbying for future military campaigns. Secretary of State visits are also considerably less visible to the public than presidential visits, allowing for greater negotiation space for the host government or coordination of side payment in exchange for military commitments, especially among weakly aligned states where strong security ties are absent.

Figure G.2 plots the conditional ATT for Secretary of State visits among the two alliedness categories on two measures of troop deployment: binary outcome in the left panel and count outcome in the right panel. While all ATT estimates among weakly aligned countries



(a) Binary Measure of Troop Deployment

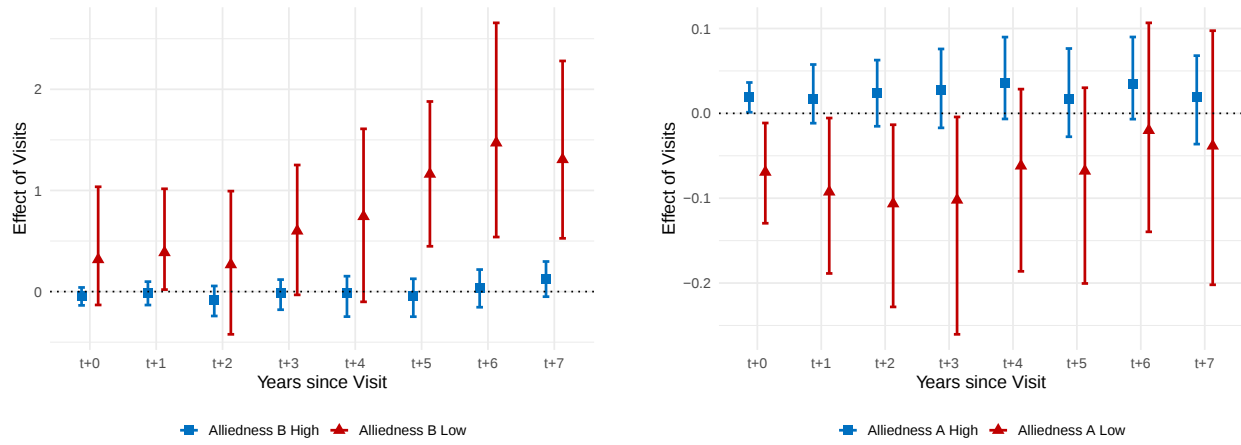


(b) Count Measure of Troop Deployment

Figure G.2: Conditional ATT on Troop Deployment (S.O.S. Visit)

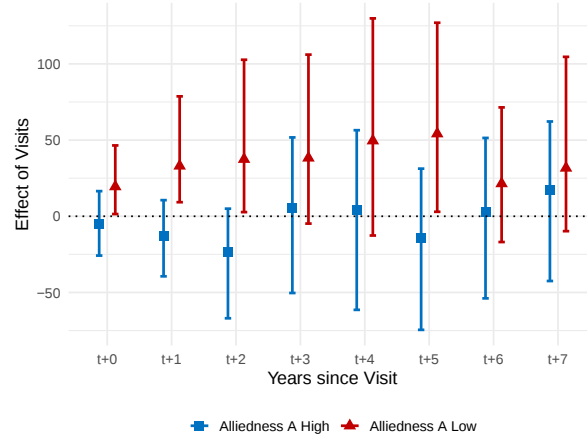
are positive, we find significant results in the $t + 2$ estimate for the binary outcome and the $t + 1$ and $t + 4$ estimates for the count outcome. In contrast, we find no significant effects of Secretary of State visits on troop deployment among closely aligned states. While the between-group differences are not significant in the lead window, the pattern of results provide suggestive evidence in line with our theoretical prediction: Secretary of State visits are associated with an increased likelihood of participation in U.S. led military coalition among weakly aligned host states, while the estimated effects among closely aligned states are not distinguishable from zero.

H Alternative Explanations



(a) Foreign Direct Investment

(b) Ideal Point Distance



(c) Arms Imports

Figure H.1: Conditional ATT of Presidential Visit (Long-term Effect)

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