Domestic Political Incentives, Congressional Support, and U.S. Mediation

James P. Todhunter
Dept. of Political Science, Troy University, 331 McCall Hall, Troy, AL 36082, USA
jtodhunter@troy.edu

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Abstract

Powerful states have numerous resources that can be mobilized in mediation processes. However, evidence suggests that such states are not more likely to be successful than other mediators. This article examines U.S. mediations through the lens of foreign policy decision making and argues that leaders make foreign policy decisions primarily with their domestic consequences in mind. Further, it contends that presidential administrations seek to build a record of success in order to improve their domestic political fortunes based on the policy options available to them. The study tests two explanations of foreign policy substitution based on domestic conditions and institutional configurations, the “party cover” and “policy availability” arguments, for U.S. mediations from 1945–1999. Results for the party cover argument are more robust, suggesting that domestic conditions play an important role in the decision to engage in mediation and imply that successful mediation is secondary to domestic politics.

Keywords

mediation – mediator motivation – congressional opposition – two-level games

* Jamie Todhunter is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Troy University. His research and teaching focus on the interplay between domestic politics and foreign policy.
Powerful state actors are the most common mediators of international conflict. They are also thought to possess unique and desirable capabilities as conflict managers as a result of their power and sovereignty: the ability to manipulate conflicting parties with credible commitments to provide rewards for compliance with negotiated settlements and credible threats of punishment for non-compliance. However, despite these special capabilities, mediation attempts by powerful states are not more successful than those attempted by less powerful states, intergovernmental organizations or private organizations and individuals. Such a puzzle suggests that powerful states are primarily driven to engage in mediation for payoffs other than those associated with successful resolution of conflict. As such, while powerful states have special capabilities when it comes to mediating conflicts and while they have incentives to do so, their commitment and resolve in such endeavors may be lacking due to political considerations on different dimensions.

One potential answer to this puzzle comes from the literature on the use of foreign policy for domestic political gains. A growing consensus in the international relations literature focuses on the notion that democratic leaders use foreign policy to improve their domestic electoral fortunes and those of their party. In some cases, leaders have incentives to substitute foreign policy for domestic policy to produce successful political outcomes at home. Much of the research exploring policy substitution in the context of foreign policy has focused on the political use of military force, expounding on traditional diversionary explanations of conflict. However, such examinations often do not take into account the fact that while the successful use of force can yield significant domestic benefits to a leader, the potential risks and costs of failure are high. To that end, leaders, who can be seen as wanting to maximize the benefits from a policy choice while minimizing the risks, are likely to be seen choosing policy options with lower potential costs when confronting such domestic conditions. This argument is tested by examining how domestic political conditions influence leaders’ decisions to engage in third-party mediation.

Scholars increasingly characterize mediation as foreign policy, especially from the perspective of the mediator. As such, third-party mediation is a policy option that can provide a leader with high-profile opportunities to appear successful and competent that is low-risk and low-cost, relative to the use of military force. Mediator motivation is a subject often overlooked in the mediation literature, but that has recently been argued to be increasingly relevant to the process and outcomes of such attempts (Wallerstein & Svensson 2014; Böhmelt 2013). However, given this concept that leaders seek to substitute foreign policy for domestic policy to achieve domestic ends, in concert with the notion that leaders seek to minimize potential risks and maximize rewards, engaging as
a mediator in overseas conflicts should be an attractive policy when they are faced with such domestic conditions.

This study tests two conjectures from the literature relating to foreign policy substitution as a result of domestic political conditions in the United States: the “party cover” hypothesis (Howell & Pevehouse 2007) and the “policy availability” argument (Brulé 2006; Marshall & Prins 2011). The former argues that presidents are likely to substitute foreign policy in response to poor domestic performance when they enjoy robust partisan support in congress. Such support mitigates the risk of failure by diluting blame across institutions. The latter, on the other hand, suggests that U.S. presidents should be seen engaging in more overseas mediations when confronted with poor domestic performance and an opposition congress. Due to the fact that an opposition legislature has incentives to see the president’s policy initiatives struggle, it is likely that presidents will seek to substitute foreign policy, a policy area in which congress exercises less control, when confronted with congressional opposition and deteriorating domestic performance. Empirical results show some support for both arguments, implying that congressional control plays less of a role in determining the supply of mediation than domestic performance does.

Such results support the argument that despite powerful states’ capabilities in resolving conflict, the fact that they are driven by domestic political considerations suggests that powerful states are limited in their abilities to successfully resolve conflicts through mediation. Similarly, “weaker” international political actors, such as middle powers, intergovernmental organizations, and even private individuals, for which domestic considerations do not outweigh the international reputational benefits of successful mediation, are likely to demonstrate greater commitment and resolve toward the creation of a peaceful settlement of conflict. Thus, while powerful state actors do indeed have a great deal of power and resources to contribute to mediation efforts, their ability to mobilize them is constrained and shaped by domestic political concerns.

The Market for Mediators and Their Motivations

Third-party mediation can be carried out by several different types of actors, ranging from private individuals to international organizations whose members comprise most of the sovereign states in the international system. Variation in mediator type largely determines the process of the mediation effort due to the fact that different types of mediators have different capabilities, in terms of the types of peaceful agreements they are able to broker, and in terms of the different motivations for agreeing to or seeking to engage in
mediation. Scholars suggest that nearly all mediators do so from some position of self-interest (Greig & Diehl 2006). However, the nature of that self-interest varies considerably across mediators. Private individuals are often motivated by personal convictions and commitments to peace and, perhaps secondarily, the reputational prestige that comes from being a peacemaker. Non-governmental organizations, especially religious institutions, have similar motivations, as their *raisons d’être* focus specifically on the promotion of peace from a moral perspective or that peace is necessary to achieve additional humanitarian goals. Thus, developing a reputation as an effective mediator can work to strengthen these actors’ abilities to achieve their international humanitarian goals. Examples of such mediators include Jimmy Carter, whose post-presidential career as a humanitarian diplomat has led to his involvement in numerous attempts to resolve conflict worldwide (Greig & Diehl 2006), and the Community of Sant’Egidio’s involvement in mediating in Mozambique and Kosovo, among other conflicts (Bartoli 2005). In both cases, deep moral commitment to achieving peace served as a motivator and a credible commitment to long-term involvement, while a track record of previous commitments made them appealing mediators to belligerents and enhanced their reputations as humanitarians in other areas.

Intergovernmental organizations (IGO), such as the United Nations, have a great deal of prestige in the international system as well as a great number of resources that can be brought to bear in guaranteeing the terms of peaceful agreements. However, IGOs are not unitary actors and therefore experience collective action problems when it comes to mediating. Because they are comprised of sovereign states, members have incentives to try to benefit from the actions of the organization, without contributing their own resources to those actions. As such, mediation attempts by international organizations often lack credibility from the perspective of guarantees and enforcement, although their ability to provide information and transparency may still be greater. Moreover, the range of potential mediation strategies and conflict resolution outcomes is often limited by strategic bargaining by member states through institutional structures, such as the veto power held by permanent members of the UN Security Council. Because the decision to mediate, the mediation strategy, and the choice of enforcement and guarantee mechanisms are all political in nature, actions that the organization takes are often watered-down after several rounds of political compromising. Thus, member states’ international political goals and concerns are likely to limit international organizations from putting their full weight behind peace efforts. Along these lines, Zartman and Amoo (1992: 131) argue that regional organizations “are under pressure to endorse rather than to mediate.” While the stated goal of the organization might be to
preserve peace and security in a region, its abilities to do so are subservient to its member states’ interests and the limited and diffuse reputational incentives for mediating. Accordingly, peace efforts by these international organizations are often cumbersome and rarely yield a full settlement of the conflict.

State actors are thought to occupy a special place in the market for mediators due to the characteristic of sovereignty (Bercovitch & Schneider 2000; Kleiboer 2002; Touval 1992, 2003). Sovereignty, on its face, allows states to overcome the collective action problems that international organizations face when seeking to induce conflicting parties to come to a peaceful agreement, and they possess more resources and thus greater capabilities to engineer such an agreement. However, because states are political actors and thus their primary motivations for mediating are unlikely to be entirely altruistic, it can be said that they have their own payoffs for mediating conflict, which exist on different dimensions than those of the disputing parties (Kleiboer 2002; Touval 2003; Yuen & Werner 2005). In fact, state actors often seek to engage in mediation, even if it appears that an attempt at conflict resolution will be unsuccessful from the outset (Greig 2005; Bercovitch 1992), suggesting that the motivation for doing so goes beyond conflict resolution.

Weaker state mediators play an important role in the conflict resolution dynamic. The non-superpower state mediator benefits from the international prestige that it gains as a peacemaker and the leaders thereof demonstrate competence handling difficult international problems (Beardsley 2010). Algeria’s mediation of the Iran Hostage Crisis demonstrates several of these aspects of small state mediation (Slim 1992). Since its independence, Algeria struggled to find its own national identity and sought to build strong relationships with strategic allies. By helping to negotiate the hostage crisis, Algeria forged a relationship with Iran that enhanced its position in OPEC as well as demonstrated to the world and to rank and file Algerians that it was a viable political entity on the international stage. Similarly, the mediation effort worked to improve relations between Algeria and the United States, opening several trade doors in the process. Finally, as a result of the international prestige Algeria gained from successfully managing conflict in a salient international crisis, President Chadli Ben Hadid bettered his domestic position by demonstrating managerial competence as a leader (Slim 1992; Tarar 2006).

A similar dynamic can be seen in Norway’s cultivation of its reputation as a peacemaker worldwide. Norway has several domestic and national characteristics that make it an appealing mediator to parties in conflict: it has a history of mediating tense international conflicts; there is considerable use of domestic support for international social responsibility; and it has the institutional capacity to mobilize its diplomats, its bureaucracy, and its academic
and humanitarian NGO communities in peace processes. Such characteristics allow Norway to be a resilient and committed mediator in the face of adversity and criticism, as was the case in its mediation of the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). To do so, the Norwegians mobilized their academic institutions and NGOs, provided humanitarian assistance, facilitated negotiations without using carrots and sticks, and guaranteed the necessary secrecy and discretion (Moolakkattu 2005). In turn, Norway can gain the ear and attention of more powerful international actors on issues of direct national concern and is included in high-level discussions about international peace and security issues, despite its relative lack of hard power (Ford 2000). Finally, the effort was popular domestically, as it externalized the existing national norm of peaceful conflict resolution.

Powerful state actors are the most common state mediators (the U.S. being most common by an overwhelming margin).1 They appeal to conflicting parties because of their ability to introduce guarantees and incentives to the conflict resolution process and change the landscape of negotiations. However, strong states commonly seek out mediation opportunities, rather than passively wait to be asked to do so (Bercovitch & Schneider 2000; Bercovitch & Fretter 2007). Such occurrences suggest that state actors see the potential for political gain through mediation. Thus, an understanding of how and where these actors expect to see political gains is necessary to fully understand whether or not the conflict resolution attempt will actually bring about peace and to understand the full dynamic of the conflict resolution process.

Powerful State Mediation and Domestic Politics

Much of the research on powerful states as third-party mediators focuses on characteristics of the mediator to explain the acceptance of mediation offers (Greig & Regan 2008), as well as the success of mediation (Anderson et al. 2001; Greig & Diehl 2006; Greig 2001). Where their motivations have been addressed, they have typically been cast in terms of state interests, focusing on strategic or

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1 Bercovitch and Schneider (2000) report that the U.S. mediated without help from other parties 84 times for the period 1945–1995, which accounts for roughly 31% of single-state mediation attempts. Permanent members of the UN Security Council account for roughly 42.5% of all single-state mediation attempts. However, China did not mediate on its own at all for that data period and the Soviet Union mediated only 5 times, accounting for less than 2% of all one-state mediations.
economic concerns or are driven by historical ties (Kleiboer 2002; Touval 1992; Greig & Regan 2008; Touval & Zartman 1985) or the less tangible reputational interests discussed above. Touval (2003) argues that the decision for a state to engage in mediation is driven by its foreign policy interests and agenda. The argument presented here takes a step further, however, by arguing that foreign policy decisions are the result of two-level calculations by political leaders, incorporating both international and domestic political interests (Putnam 1998).

There is an emerging consensus among international relations scholars that foreign policy, like domestic policy, is aimed at enhancing a leader’s domestic political fortunes (Ostrom & Job 1986; Morgan & Bickers 1992; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Yet, systematic studies of mediation, up to this point, have been largely silent on mediator motivations, suggesting that more attention is required (Touval 2003; Webb 1988; Beardsley & Greig 2009).

Because of the current approach, mediators have been coded as unchanged in their capabilities and resolve toward mediation success. However, if mediation is to be considered an instrument of foreign policy, then the factors driving leaders to engage in mediation should be taken into account when examining outcomes. Because of this strong consensus emerging in the foreign policy literature contending that leaders use foreign policy to enhance their own domestic political fortunes (and those of their party), structural and/or liberal explanations alone are not sufficient to explain leaders’ foreign policy behavior (Ostrom & Job 1986; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). These conclusions have primarily been tested in studies that examine the use of force (Brulé 2006; Marshall and Prins 2011; Foster and Palmer 2006), although their theoretical underpinnings suggest an application to the entire range of foreign policy options.

Despite the lack of focus on mediator motivations, there are several findings in the mediation literature that highlight the discrepancy between mediators’ goals and those of the belligerent parties in a conflict and thus indirectly suggest that mediators are using mediation as a tool to shore up their domestic political standing. For instance, mediators often initiate the mediation process: roughly 50% of all mediation exercises are initiated by third parties (Bercovitch & Schneider 2002; Bercovitch & Fretter 2007). Such activity on the part of leaders suggests that there is some political benefit to be gained by such action, especially given the primacy of political survival in leader’s decision calculus. However, mediator interest and commitment often varies over time, even within an administration’s or government’s tenure, despite the fact the conflict his persisted throughout. Moreover, mediators are most likely to
intervene when hostilities are at their peak, when the conflicting parties are likely furthest from a brokered agreement (Greig 2005). However, conflicts are most visible to the media and to political audiences during times of acute hostility. By initiating mediation at such times, it can be argued that leaders are focused primarily on the potential domestic benefits that can be gained from being seen as a peacemaking leader and less on a long-term, durable peace agreement, where the payoffs for doing so are more diffuse.

In instances where mediators have used their power and resources to manipulate the belligerents’ payoffs in the mediation process, resurgences in violence are often experienced (Yuen & Werner 2005; Beardsley 2011). Such a finding suggests that manipulative mediation strategies, most efficiently used by powerful state actors, are likely useful in creating a short-term settlement, but not sufficient to engineer a durable peace agreement. Short-term solutions are likely politically beneficial to the mediator, who has incentives to use mediation to focus on much shorter political horizons (those of the election cycle and domestic politics) than the belligerents, who have incentives to focus on the longer-term. Additionally, mediation may be embarked upon for numerous devious reasons, such as creating a ceasefire that allows the belligerents to regroup or reposition themselves in the conflict, or to appeal to international audiences in a way that is beneficial to achieving their optimal outcome over the long term.

This line of argument suggests that powerful states choose to become involved in conflict management efforts at times when conflicts are most visible to their respective domestic audiences, and that they use their many resources to induce a peaceful settlement, despite the fact that the mediation’s timing and the orientation of the disputants are likely to complicate successful agreement over the long term. Similarly, the discussion suggests that powerful state actors are less concerned with the international reputational benefits that drive weaker states, NGOs, and private individuals as mediators, and are more concerned with the endeavor’s domestic political implications.

Pruitt (1981) highlights the problems likely to stem from such mediator behavior in his analysis of Henry Kissinger’s work in the Middle East. He argues that because Kissinger, and later President Jimmy Carter, used the US’s resources to compensate both the Israelis and the Egyptians, they complicated the conflict resolution process. By compensating both sides for making concessions, the mediator assumes more responsibility for conflict resolution and each of the disputants gains incentives to try to improve their lot vis-à-vis the third party.
Choosing Mediation: A Political Decision

Because of the United States’ roles as a superpower and one of the most common mediators of international conflicts, an examination of how domestic factors influence leader behavior in mediation is an appropriate starting point for analyzing this argument empirically. However, it is also important to note that limiting the analysis to U.S. mediation behavior limits the extent to which empirical results can be generalized. The relationship between the presidency and congress, primary focus of the paper’s empirical analysis, is *sui generis*. To that end, the institutional relationships discussed and tested herein should not be generalized to all mediation efforts, but rather should be interpreted as one example of how such relationships can affect mediation behavior. Given that the ultimate goal of studying mediation processes is to better understand how to peacefully resolve conflict and that the United States engages in an overwhelming proportion of international conflict mediation attempts (Bercovitch & Schneider 2000), limiting analysis to just U.S. cases does not necessarily hinder the attainment of such a goal.

U.S. presidents and their surrogates enjoy considerable power resources that can be brought to bear in the resolution of a conflict. The extent to which these resources are marshaled in a mediation effort is influenced by the president’s willingness and ability to pursue diplomacy. Research on the presidential use of force (Ostrom & Job 1986; Fordham 1998) indicates that presidents are motivated to pursue foreign policy when the domestic political situation is bleak – poor economic performance or general dissatisfaction with the president’s administration. Under such conditions, a president has incentives to pursue foreign policy success in order to compensate for poor domestic outcomes. Such incentives are unique to the United States in its foreign

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3 Presidents themselves only act as mediators a small percentage of the time. Thus, the term “presidents” here can be interpreted as synonymous with “administrations.” Administrations can manipulate how a mediation effort is conducted and portrayed by determining who the functional mediator will be. However, the functional mediator’s performance will also play a critical role in the outcome as a result of his or her performance. There is also evidence suggesting that presidents’ choice of high-level surrogates to mediate yields greater domestic political payoffs and that such a decision is made strategically (Todhunter 2013).

4 Bercovitch and Schneider (2000) find that the U.S. is consistently the most successful mediator, followed by permanent members of the UN Security Council, due to the number of carrots and sticks they can use to manipulate the payoff structures of conflicting parties and entice them to seek a peaceful end to hostilities.
policy process. In a parliamentary democracy, such as the United Kingdom, the lack of separation between executive and legislative powers suggests that the government’s decision to engage in mediation is a stronger commitment to success, due to the fact that a failure could lead to votes of no confidence. In authoritarian states, such as the Soviet Union, the leadership is less concerned with broad domestic approval. However, mediation can still be used for domestic political purposes, in that it can curry favor with key political factions at home or extend the state’s influence overseas in ways that solidify the leader’s hold on power.

In the United States, the ability of presidential administrations to pursue foreign policy generally is also thought to depend on congress. When faced with a large opposition majority in either house of congress, the president’s foreign policy autonomy appears to be restrained (Clark 2000; Howell & Pevehouse 2007). The prevailing view in the research on congress’s role in presidential foreign policy making is that congress can impose constraints on the president’s options, undermining his credibility and ostensibly stopping his ability to address falling approval ratings through domestic policy (Howell & Pevehouse 2005; Schultz 2001). Under such conditions, an opposition congress can act as a veto player on presidential attempts to change domestic policy in such a way that might quell discontent (Mayer 2001; Howell 2003; Tsebelis 1995). But foreign policy proposals, unlike the president’s domestic agenda, are likely to enjoy broad support in congress regardless of the partisan makeup of that institution (Fleisher & Bond 1990; Stoll 1987). Indeed, if a foreign policy success, such as a mediation effort, is critical for the president’s political fortunes, the presence of an opposition congress may enhance his motivation because domestic policy success is likely to be unavailable.

Research has shown that legislative opposition alone is not sufficient to significantly alter presidential behavior (Foster & Palmer 2006). However, when there is congressional opposition and domestic conditions appear to be particularly bad, presidential action and success are necessary to maintain credibility as a leader and to help his electoral fortunes and those of his party. As a result, the president must go outside the domestic policy arena to demonstrate this competence (Brulé 2006). In this situation, policy choices must be made from the range of available policies, which often do not directly address the source of domestic discontent, but rather substitute opportunities for the president to make policy, build good will, and to be portrayed positively to the public. Foreign policy is a ripe policy area for such substitutions because of the president’s relative autonomy on policy-making (Howell 2005: 417; Johnson & McCormick 1977: 117–123; Mayer 2001).
Like any other policy choice, the offer of mediation is likely when a leader believes that such action will enhance domestic political fortunes. Based on the literature on the role of congress, we consider the institutional context facing the president: presidential support in congress may condition the policy choices available to a president facing deteriorating domestic conditions. The sources of public satisfaction with the president are likely to be myriad (Gronke & Newman 2003), but it is useful to assume that a president facing poor economic performance will seek to improve the situation. The standard avenue by which presidents seek to address the sources of low approval is legislative. For instance, if the economy is performing poorly – producing lower presidential approval ratings – the president is likely to propose an economic bill to congress. The implication is that legislative success should lead to higher approval ratings and ultimately better economic performance. Such payoffs are likely to be slow, however, and ultimately depend upon legislative cooperation. A short-term solution may be to substitute foreign policy. When the economy is performing poorly, leaders expect electoral punishment; but foreign policy success may reverse the leader’s dire political prospects if voters reward the leadership for competence in foreign affairs (Richards et al. 1993).

However, there are two plausible influences that congress may have on the process. First, the President is likely to explore foreign policy options when enjoying broad support in congress. Such support provides cover from criticism and ensures that policies will be durable (Howell & Pevehouse 2007). But when the president faces stiff opposition in congress, the prospects for legislative success are diminished, compelling the president to look to the foreign policy arena for policy success to enhance his political fortunes (Brulé 2006).

Much of the empirical literature on this substitution effect has considered the political use of force as the primary dependent variable. However, relative to other foreign policy alternatives, military force is risky. In the effort to reverse declining political fortunes, one would expect presidents facing the twin vulnerabilities of low approval and congressional opposition to minimize risks while pursuing policy success. Military force runs many risks likely to negatively affect the president’s domestic fortunes, such as the loss of lives, collateral damage, prolonged operations, and the perception of defeat. For example, in the case of the Iran Hostage Crisis, the failure of the military rescue mission eroded Carter’s chances of re-election. Military failures are likely to have dire consequences for a president.

In mediation efforts, however, presidents have less to lose. Mediation should be an attractive policy option for presidents due to the number of opportunities such engagement provides for high profile speeches, photo opportunities,
and other outlets to build a reputation for competence, as well as a chance to successfully create policy independent of an opposition congress. Moreover, by mediating, the administration can create the image that the president is an ambassador of goodwill, with the goal of boosting his approval ratings (Todhunter 2013). Unlike the use of force, mediation is a non-violent policy option that does not readily put American lives at risk, nor does it project violence toward another state or group, which could be negatively construed by the media or political opponents. Likewise, mediation is low-cost in terms of political capital. The president does not have to make significant compromises to serve as a mediator in overseas conflict. Moreover, failure to succeed is less likely to negatively affect a president’s fortunes. While the president may claim a policy victory for a successful mediation, a failure can be blamed on the unreasonable belligerent parties who are unable to come to an agreement.

Although it seems clear that domestic politics provides incentives for presidents to pursue international mediation, an opposition congress may either undermine or enhance a leader’s motivation to seek out mediation efforts. In the next sections, I examine the party cover and policy availability hypotheses, and detail the conditioning institutional arrangements under which low public approval may be expected to contribute to U.S. mediation. The argument presents a formulation of presidential motivations to use force for domestic purposes, which takes into account the president’s range of available policies as well as efforts to demonstrate leadership capacity (Richards et al. 1993).

**Party Cover, Policy Availability and Mediation**

Both of these theoretical arguments begin with the assumption that presidents attempt to establish a record of policies, proposals and positions that enhance their electoral fortunes or those of their party (Neustadt 1960; Bond & Fleisher 1990; Richards et al. 1993). When poor domestic circumstances arise, the president proposes remedial policies in an effort to curtail potential voter dissatisfaction. If a president succeeds in implementing policies that are credited with alleviating the problem, the success of his legislative initiatives are likely to contribute to his reputation as a skilled leader. However, such processes may involve other political costs or take a long time to pay off politically. Due to the institutional arrangement of the American government, the president enjoys a great deal of latitude to engage in foreign policy independent of congress. Thus, while congressional support is likely to be desirable, it may not be necessary to build such a record.
The party cover hypothesis suggests that while the president has incentives to substitute foreign policy to address deteriorating political conditions at home, such action is likely to occur when there is strong partisan support for the administration in congress. Although, the president is able to take the lead on foreign policy, doing so to offset problems at home is likely to draw significant criticism if the opposition is sufficiently strong. While broad congressional support suggests that the president should be able to move legislation, any such measures may be slow to pay off and involve other political costs. Thus, mediation attempts, which can be high profile and low risk, especially to a president enjoying congressional support should be appealing policy alternatives to presidents facing domestic turmoil.

The policy availability argument suggests that an uncooperative congress, however, reduces the number of remedial policies available (Bond & Fleisher 1990), compelling the president to look beyond the domestic arena for opportunities to demonstrate his competence (Richards et al. 1993). This greater focus on foreign policy issues and the international arena increases the likelihood that the president pursues mediation during periods of domestic hardship and congressional opposition.

When an opposition congress prevents the president from directly addressing dropping approval through legislation of domestic policy, the president may concentrate on problems that do not require the cooperation of congress. Success in addressing these types of issues may indicate to the public that the president is an adept manager of national problems (Richards et al. 1993). The president’s de facto ascendancy in foreign policy provides an obvious stage for such demonstrations (Hinckley 1994; Meernik 1994; Howell & Pevehouse 2005).

The president may focus intently on international affairs, taking positions and offering solutions for international dilemmas. Because foreign policy issues frequently transcend partisan and ideological lines (Stoll 1987; Schultz 2001), a legislative opposition may be unwilling or unable to block foreign policy proposals in the same manner as they oppose the executive’s socio-economic policy initiatives. Consequently, presidents should have a greater capacity to affect foreign policy than social or economic policy.

Hypotheses
Both the “party cover” and “policy availability” arguments suggest several testable hypotheses. Each argument can be tested using different measures of divided government. On one hand, divided government is often conceived of in partisan terms: one or both houses of congress being made up of majority of members from the opposing party to the president. Looking only at the partisan
makeup of congress, there is the potential that intra-institutional conflict has not significantly hindered the president’s ability to move legislation. Thus, a more direct measure of the extent to which inter-institutional conflict has constrained the president is the rate of success experienced in passing legislation. Because both arguments are based on the notion of policy substitution, it is appropriate to posit hypotheses that address both concepts. Hypotheses 1 and 3, posited below, test the “party cover” argument, while hypotheses 2 and 4 test that of “policy availability.” Hypothesis 1 tests the party cover argument using a partisan conception of divided government, while hypothesis 3 uses the more direct legislative success measure. Similarly, hypothesis 2 tests the policy availability argument using a partisan conception of divided government, while hypothesis 4 does so using the more direct legislative success measure.

First, according to Howell and Pevehouse’s (2007) party cover argument it is expected that presidents will pursue mediations in response to a deteriorating economy when they enjoy sufficient cover from allies in congress:

**Hypothesis 1:** Presidents are more likely to engage in mediation in response to decreased economic performance and when partisan support in congress is strong.

In other words, these presidents are likely to turn toward foreign policy, such as mediation, in order to enhance their domestic political fortunes when domestic conditions are bad, but only when the political risk is low. Second, the policy availability argument suggests a different relationship between domestic performance and mediation, based on the conditioning effects of congressional support.

**Hypothesis 2:** The partisan makeup of congress conditions the extent to which economic performance affects the decision to engage in mediation, such that presidents are more likely to engage in mediation in response to economic decline as their partisan support in congress decreases.

When presidents lack support in congress, they are unlikely to expect legislative success. Due to deteriorating economic conditions, however, the president requires a policy victory and cannot sit idle. Consequently, these presidents are likely to turn toward a foreign policy effort such as mediation in order to enhance their domestic political fortunes.

The second set of hypotheses concerning the frequency of mediation uses a different conception of divided government. These conjectures focus on the extent to which inter-institutional conflict has been realized. The assumption
underlying the concept of divided government is that the president will be constrained in the ability to pass legislation. As such, the rationale for presidents who are able to move legislation through congress to pursue mediation in response to economic downturn is driven by the fact that mediation can be a high-profile endeavor used to shore up domestic support.

Hypothesis 3: Presidents are more likely to engage in mediation in response to decreased economic performance and when their legislative support in congress is strong.

However, if congress demonstrates its opposition to the president’s legislative program by defeating bills he supports, the president is expected to resort to foreign policy to offset his inability to move legislation and build a record of policy successes:

Hypothesis 4: The extent of legislative support for the president’s policy agenda conditions the extent to which economic performance affects the decision to engage in mediation, such that presidents are more likely to engage in mediation in response to economic decline as their legislative support in congress decreases.

These hypotheses make explicit statements about the influence of congress on the president’s propensity to initiate mediation efforts in response to poor economic performance. The first argument suggests that presidents are likely to seek mediation to offset poor domestic performance when such a ploy is low-risk, due to broad congressional support. The second argument suggests that because domestic policy options are likely to be foreclosed in the face of congressional opposition, presidents are left with foreign policy to demonstrate their leadership competence. Disputing parties are likely to perceive mediation offers from a president in such a desperate situation as credible, increasing the likelihood that the offer is accepted and mediation is successful. In both cases, congressional support is conceived in both partisan and legislative terms.

Research Design

The primary source of data on conflict resolution behavior is Bercovitch’s International Conflict Management (ICM) dataset, which contains information about mediation and other types of conflict management from 1945–1999.
Additionally, several independent variables commonly used in the foreign policy and linkage politics literatures are introduced to measure how domestic politics is likely to influence leader behavior in the international sphere.

The ICM dataset observes conflict management attempts in conflicts from 1945–1999, with data collected from several sources. It contains data about the nature of the conflict, the belligerent parties, and the conflict management environment, including mediators. The dataset has several characteristics that make it especially good for testing propositions about the effect of domestic politics on mediation behavior. First, it focuses on process. Bercovitch (1986) developed his contingency framework of mediation process, which identifies roughly 50 variables that may affect mediation outcomes (Bercovitch & Fretter 2007). While some datasets, such as the International Conflict Behavior (ICB) dataset, choose to focus on the conflict as the level of analysis (Brecher & Wilkenfeld 2000), the ICM dataset allows scholars to look at mediation from the perspective of the mediator, as well as the conflict, and thus the perspective of two-level decision making. Similarly, the ICM dataset examines mediation behavior in both international and civil conflicts at the same time. Such a data structure allows for the testing of hypotheses concerning a leader’s decision calculus and not merely characteristics of the conflict environment.

In addition to having the appropriate focus of data, the ICM dataset also draws from a broader set of conflicts, including inter-state and intra-state conflicts in the same dataset. Bercovitch & Fretter (2007: 148) define a conflict as “an organized and continuous militarized conflict, or the demonstration of intention to use military force by at least one state.” This characteristic, which differs from both the ICB and Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID) datasets, recognizes that, from the perspective of the mediator, decisions of when and where to engage in mediation are likely to be similar across conflict type. While research has shown that civil conflicts are more difficult to mediate than international conflicts (Greig & Regan 2008), the tools that mediators have at their disposal in each case are the same. Moreover, excluding one type of conflict or the other introduces unnecessary selection bias, and interferes with the ability to test hypotheses pertaining to leaders’ decision making, as mediation in one type of conflict may preclude or otherwise influence the decision to mediate elsewhere.

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5 For a table listing data sources, see Bercovitch & Fretter (2007: 150–151).
6 Bercovitch and Fretter (2007) outline their rationale for including both inter-state and intra-state conflicts, including their goal of establishing data that lead to broad and generalizable analyses about conflict management. Thus, a wide number of conflicts are considered that vary in terms size/power of actors, international power structure, etc.
Additionally, the dataset has a lower threshold for an incident to be considered a conflict. As such, no minimum threshold for fatalities is used (Bercovitch & Fretter 2007: 153). This characteristic allows the examination of “conflict” where the resort to violence has not yet happened in addition to occasions where it has. Such a differentiation recognizes that all political “conflict,” begins as some political disagreement and escalates through various levels of animosity and violence, the highest of which is war, but also that there is at least some potential for mediation at all levels (Dixon 1996: 656).

From such a framework, descriptive data was collected and coded with the conflict management attempt being the primary unit of analysis. The data are divided into three primary subgroups, conflict management variables, party variables, and dispute variables. Conflict management variables deal with the conflict management process, including what type of mediator was involved, the strategies they employed, etc. Party variables describe characteristics of and relationships between the disputing parties. Dispute variables describe the nature of the dispute.

As Bercovitch & Fretter (2007) note in outlining and discussing the merits of the ICM dataset, analysis is largely limited to formal mediations and offers thereof. Due to the sometimes secretive nature of foreign policy, the number of mediations offered, but never accepted may be somewhat underestimated. Similarly, it could be argued that there was more or less a standing offer from the Clinton administration, to mediate between Israelis and Palestinians during his second term. As such, the data may be somewhat skewed, leaving out offers of mediation.

The analysis focuses on how constraints, and incentives created by domestic politics, influence the occurrence and strategy of mediation. Because these constraints and incentives vary over time, using times-series analytical techniques are necessary. Thus, a time series of U.S. quarters from 1945–1999 is created from which to analyze the variation in mediation behavior.8

In order to test the hypotheses, a new dependent variable is created, which measures U.S. mediation behavior. U.S. Mediations is an event count variable that counts the number of new mediation attempts that the United States

---

7 Each “line” of data in the original dataset is a conflict management attempt.
8 Of the 227 U.S. mediation attempts over the data period, only 6 last 3 months (1 quarter year) or longer. As such, the quarter is the most appropriate division of time to analyze. Because most mediation attempts last less than 1 quarter, it is most likely that quarterly measures of the key explanatory variables and controls will be valid in influencing the dependent variables within time period. For methodological reasons, some independent variables are lagged to ensure temporal precedence to the dependent variable.
becomes involved in or offers in a given quarter. Care was taken to ensure that the mediator was sent on behalf of the U.S. administration and was able to negotiate on its behalf. Offers are included along with actual attempts because the goal is to examine the extent to which the U.S. administration is focusing resources and attention on mediation.

Table 1 shows the distribution of U.S. Mediations. The modal value is 1 new mediation attempt per quarter, which occurs in 62 quarters from 1945–1999. The second-most common value is 0, no new mediations in a quarter. Frequency of values tends to decrease as the number of new mediation attempts/offers per quarter increases. Thus, while it is common for the United States to become involved in/offer new mediations regularly, it becomes progressively less common for it to do so as a number of mediations have already been offered/undertaken.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>US Mediations per quarter</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cum. Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>29.85</td>
<td>29.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>30.88</td>
<td>60.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23.88</td>
<td>84.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>93.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>96.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>98.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>98.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>99.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean = 1.40
Variance = 2.04

9 Thus, instances in which Americans served as mediators in a private capacity, such as Jimmy Carter’s work as head of the Carter Center, have been excluded. Conflicts in which the U.S. is a party are excluded as well, thus excluding mediation/negotiation attempts by the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

10 It should be noted that several attempts/offers can be made for the same conflict, within a given quarter.
The most basic regression model for examining event count variables is the Poisson regression model. The distribution of values for U.S. Mediations fits that of a Poisson distribution (Long 1997: 229–230). However, the Poisson regression model assumes the mean of the distribution is equal to the variance (Long 1997; Wooldridge 2006), an assumption not met in this case (mean = 1.40, variance = 2.04). Thus, the negative binomial regression estimator, which relaxes this assumption, is more appropriate.

For each model, the standard errors are clustered on presidential administration to account for variation in mediation across them. Such a technique is more efficient than using fixed effects, which limits the degrees of freedom and essentially concedes that each presidential administration is qualitatively different, without providing an explanation of those differences.

The frequency of mediation efforts is hypothesized to be a function of congressional support and economic conditions. As a measure of economic conditions, GDP growth is included. GDP growth is the quarterly/annual rate of growth in U.S. gross domestic product. Lower rates of GDP growth are expected to provide the motivation for presidents to seek policy success in the realm of foreign affairs when efforts to address the domestic economy are forestalled by congressional opposition.

The analysis considers the influence of three measures of congressional support. The first, Partisan support, takes account of congressional partisanship. As the number of seats held by the president’s co-partisans declines, congress should be less likely to support the president’s proposals, leading the president to respond to poor economic performance with a mediation attempt. Partisan support consists of the percentage of seats held by the president’s co-partisans in the chamber of congress in which the president’s co-partisans hold the fewest seats.

The second measure of congressional support is Cohesive partisan support. Partisanship alone is not always an appropriate indicator of shared preferences over domestic policy. Southern Democrats frequently opposed the policies of Democratic presidents during the period of study and supported the policies of Republican presidents (Bond & Fleisher 1990). Even when the president’s party constitutes a majority of members, a lack of cohesion among the president’s co-partisans in congress may complicate presidential efforts to gain approval for his initiatives. Similarly, a cohesive opposition majority

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11 The source for GDP is the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis (accessed at: http://www.bea.doc.gov/reports). In analyses not presented in this work, measures of inflation, the misery index, and unemployment are used as robustness checks. Each variable yielded similar results to GDP growth.
party in congress has the strength and incentives to thwart presidential initiatives (Fleisher & Bond 2000; Fiorina 1992). Cohesive partisan support is derived from the “legislative potential for policy change” (LPPC) scores (Brady, Cooper & Hurley 1977). LPPC scores are based on the size and cohesiveness of the two parties relative to each other.12 Like Partisan support, the score from the chamber with the lower cohesive partisan support score is included in the analysis.

The third measure captures a president’s legislative support in congress. Presidential success, corresponds to the percentage of congressional roll call votes that concurred with the president’s position.13 This is a relatively direct measure of the president’s ability to pursue remedial policy and most directly embodies the concept being tested when using measures of divided government (Foster 2006; Marshall & Prins 2011). Given that both chambers of congress must approve the president’s proposal, the score corresponding to the chamber in which the presidential success score is lower is used.

Because the policy availability hypothesis is conditional, the measures of executive-congressional relations are interacted with the presidential approval measure to assess the effect of low public approval on mediation efforts conditioned by congress. The marginal effects for the interaction terms should indicate a relationship between low public approval/low economic performance/impending elections and an increase in the propensity for mediation during periods in which congressional opposition is sufficient to block presidential domestic policy reform. Marginal effects should also indicate that approval is negatively associated with mediator rank when congressional support is low. Such conditional relationships are typically tested with a multiplicative interaction term.

Due to this conditional relationship, there are different effects of the conditioned variable (public approval/low economic performance/impending elections) on mediation/mediator behavior as a result of different levels of the conditioning variable (levels of congressional support). Because these hypotheses test conditional relationships using multiplicative interaction terms, the coefficients and standard errors are not sufficient for interpreting the results (Brambor, Clark, & Golder 2006; Braumeoller 2006; Kam & Franzese 2005). In order to interpret the models, the marginal effects are plotted along with the

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12 Following Howell and Pevehouse (2005), Cohesive partisan support is computed as follows: President’s party power = [(president’s party size in percent) X (cohesion of president’s party)] – [(opposition’s party size in percent) X (cohesion of opposition’s party)]. Party cohesion scores are from Cooper and Young (2002).

Table 2  Effects on GDP growth and partisan support in Congress on US mediations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP Growth</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.009)***</td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Support in Congress</td>
<td>2.531</td>
<td>2.661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.730)***</td>
<td>(0.821)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Growth x Partisan Support in Congress</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-0.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.096)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses of Force (1 lag)</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>-0.622</td>
<td>-0.618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.187)***</td>
<td>(0.185)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Year</td>
<td>-0.087</td>
<td>-0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.259)</td>
<td>(0.261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Disputes</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.442</td>
<td>-0.410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.474)</td>
<td>(0.447)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N 187 187

Note: Dependent variable is the quarterly count of new US mediation attempts. Negative binomial estimated with robust standard errors clustered on presidential administration in parentheses. (* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01, one-tailed test)

Empirical Results

Hypothesis 1 contends that as economic performance declines and in the presence of congressional support, presidents should seek to engage in more mediation attempts. This proposition is first tested in Model 1, shown in Table 2 above, using the proportion of the president’s co-partisans in congress as a
measures of the president’s ability to pass legislation. Model 1 shows the effects of both GDP growth and the partisan composition of congress on the number of U.S. mediations undertaken, independent of one another. With all other variables held equal, the negative binomial estimates show that, on average, GDP growth has a negative and statistically significant effect on the number of new mediations attempted. Partisan support in congress has a positive and statistically significant effect on the number of new mediations. Such a finding suggests that presidents see political value in engaging in mediation when the economy is performing poorly and when they enjoy broad partisan support in congress. It confirms the notion that the president seeks to demonstrate managerial competence by engaging in mediations. Additionally, the model suggests that presidents who enjoy broad support in congress are able to focus on diplomacy to enhance their domestic political fortunes. Such findings are also consistent with research suggesting that congress acts as a constraint on the president’s foreign policy behavior (Schultz 2001; Tsebelis 1995; Mayer 2001).

These two findings, taken together, pose an interesting question: if domestic policy avenues are available to presidents, why would they focus on diplomacy? Since diplomacy is likely to pay smaller political dividends than domestic policy, especially legislation addressing economic decline, it would seem rational for the president to focus on domestic policy if available. One possible answer is that the president is doing both, something not controlled for in this model. While economic legislation is likely to be complex and difficult for voters to understand, mediation provides a high profile avenue for the president to cast himself as a leader in rather simple terms. Payoff horizons might also be in play. The positive effects of any economic legislation may take time to reach voters, while the perception of strong leadership can be communicated through peacemaking more quickly.

The control variables in the model function largely as expected. Uses of force, short of war, do not have a statistically significant effect on the number of mediations initiated. However, quarters in which the U.S. is at war, significantly fewer new mediation attempts are undertaken. Because the President is likely to be focusing his efforts on winning a longer-term conflict, which likely has high stakes for his political longevity, he is less apt to seek out third-party mediation as a way to demonstrate his managerial competence. Similarly, the president’s approval rating is shown to have no statistically significant effect on the number of mediations undertaken. Such a result, coupled with the negative effect of GDP growth, suggests that presidents may seek to use diplomacy to address poor domestic conditions that will negatively affect him at the ballot box, independently support in congress. Moreover, the lack of correlation between approval and mediation, along with the presence of the negative correlation between GDP growth and mediation suggests that the president
is attempting to address poor performance, rather than merely divert public attention from scandals or other reputation damaging behavior. Similarly, the president is not more likely to engage in more mediation attempts in election years in order to engineer policy successes that might help him in the upcoming election.

Finally, perhaps the most interesting of null findings is that as the number of opportunities to mediate increases, the president is no more likely to engage in more mediation attempts. This result implies that the president and his administration are focusing mediation attempts strategically, likely on those conflicts in which diplomatic success would yield the greatest domestic political benefit. More generally, these results suggest that diplomacy is not necessarily a less preferential policy option for presidents seeking to shore up their domestic political fortunes than domestic policy.

Model 2 shows the negative binomial estimates testing the conditional relationship suggested by the policy availability argument posited in Hypothesis 2. Because interaction terms are most easily interpreted graphically, the marginal effects of Partisan Support in Congress on GDP Growth are plotted in Fig. 1 along with 90% confidence intervals. For values of Partisan Support in Congress from roughly 40 to 65%, the effect of GDP growth on the number of

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14 Because such a finding is widespread throughout the analysis, the implications are discussed in greater detail in the conclusions.
new mediations attempted is both negative and statistically significant. Thus, it can be argued that when the president has less than a majority of his co-partisans in congress, a declining economy is likely to induce the administration to engage in more mediation attempts. While the results in Fig. 2 suggest some support for Hypothesis 2, they do not completely conform as expected. First, given the weak-link justification for using the percentage of the presidents’ co-partisans that is the smaller of the two houses of congress, it should not be expected that a president has incentives to engage in more mediation attempts for values of the variable up to 65%. According to the model, when each house of congress is made up of at least 65% of the president’s co-partisans, declining economic growth should induce the administration to attempt more mediation. However, with 65% support from co-partisans in both houses of congress, the president should have more than sufficient capabilities to pass legislation that directly addresses poor economic performance and should not have to rely on the use of diplomacy to demonstrate competence as a leader. However, given that Model 1 suggests that presidents engage in more mediations when confronting poor economic performance, independent of

The weakest-link justification contends that because legislation must pass both houses of congress to become law, the house with the fewer of the president’s co-partisans is where legislation is likely to be blocked by the opposition. Thus, the value for the house of congress containing fewer of the president’s co-partisans is used.
congressional support, the conditioning effect of congress shown here may be less important.

A second peculiarity is the slope associated with partisan support’s conditioning effect. Higher levels of partisan support in congress, according policy availability theory, should decrease the extent to which a declining economy creates incentives for mediation. However, in Fig. 1, the slope of the conditioning effect declines as partisan support in congress increases, calling into question the extent to which the model supports Hypothesis 2.

Scholars have argued, however, that the simple measure of partisan support in congress does not accurately reflect the president’s ability to pass legislation efficiently. As such, two other, more refined measures of divided government are employed that should represent the president’s ability to move legislation through congress more accurately: Cohesive Partisan Support and the Presidential Success Score.

The variable Cohesive Partisan Support in congress, takes into account the extent to which the president’s co-partisans are likely to vote along with him. As previously discussed, Fleischer & Bond (1990) point out that southern Democrats in congress routinely voted against the policy initiatives of Democratic presidents, limiting their abilities to move legislation despite having a legislative majority. Similarly, a cohesive opposition has incentives to block presidential initiatives and the power to do so (Fleisher & Bond 2000; Fiorina 1992). Thus, such a measure should more accurately demonstrate the extent to which the president can move legislation through congress.

Models 3 and 4 (see Table 3) show the statistical results of testing Hypotheses 1 and 2 using the Cohesive Partisan Support variable. In Model 3, which, like Model 1 above, does not consider the conditioning effect of congress, GDP growth is inversely correlated with the number of new mediation attempts. Cohesive partisan support is positively correlated with new mediation attempts. Taken together these results suggest, as argued above, that presidents are seen focusing on mediation more when the economy is performing poorly, but also when they enjoy a broad base of congressional support. Thus, presidents use such policy options to address declining economic performance, when cohesive partisan support is high. Such results support Hypothesis 1.

Model 4, like Model 2 above, considers the conditioning effect that congress is hypothesized to have on presidential incentives to engage in mediation. The marginal effects of Cohesive Partisan Support are graphed in Figure 2 with a 90% confidence interval. The results support Hypothesis 2, in that where the president enjoys lower levels of cohesive partisan support in congress, the effect of GDP growth is negative and statistically significant. Additionally, the slope of the marginal effects curve behaves largely as expected, becoming less negative.
TABLE 3  Effects on GDP growth and cohesive partisan support in Congress on US mediations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP Growth</td>
<td>−0.022</td>
<td>−0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.009)***</td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesive Partisan Support in Congress</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>2.661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.005)***</td>
<td>(0.821)***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Growth x Cohesive Partisan Support in Congress</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.096)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses of Force (1 lag)</td>
<td>−0.006</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.048)</td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>−0.615</td>
<td>−0.618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.160)***</td>
<td>(0.185)***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Year</td>
<td>−0.107</td>
<td>−0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.273)</td>
<td>(0.261)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>−0.006</td>
<td>−0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Disputes</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.025)</td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.805</td>
<td>−0.410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.481)</td>
<td>(0.447)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: DEPENDENT VARIABLE IS THE QUARTERLY COUNT OF NEW US MEDIATION ATTEMPTS. NEGATIVE BINOMIAL ESTIMATED WITH ROBUST STANDARD ERRORS CLUSTERED ON PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION IN PARENTHESES. (* p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01, ONE-TAILED TEST)

as Cohesive Partisan Support increases. However, the slope remains negative and significant for higher values of Cohesive Partisan Support than the policy availability argument suggests. Although the marginal effects curve becomes statistically insignificant for extreme high values of Cohesive Partisan Support, the model shows an inverse effect on GDP Growth where the president would likely have the ability to move legislation through congress. As such, the results suggest a limited level of support for Hypothesis 2.

Finally, Hypotheses 3 and 4 were tested using the presidential success score, which is the percentage of roll call votes in congress that concurred with the president’s opinion. This measure is a fairly direct way of measuring the
The table below shows the effects of GDP growth and presidential success in Congress on US mediations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP Growth</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>-0.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Success in Congress</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)**</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Growth x Presidential Success in Congress</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses of Force (1 lag)</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>-0.511</td>
<td>-0.528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.129)***</td>
<td>(0.123)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Year</td>
<td>-0.142</td>
<td>-0.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.293)</td>
<td>(0.295)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Disputes</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.651</td>
<td>1.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.629)**</td>
<td>(0.760)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Dependent variable is the quarterly count of new US mediation attempts. Negative binomial estimated with robust standard errors clustered on presidential administration in parentheses. (* p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01, one-tailed test)

The president’s ability to move legislation efficiently and scholars have suggested that is perhaps the most appropriate measure to use when examining the presidential incentives to focus on foreign policy (Marshall & Prins 2011). Similar to the previous two analyses, Model 5 (Table 4), which only takes into account the independent effects of GDP growth and presidential success, behaves largely as expected. GDP growth is inversely correlated but has no statistically significant effects on U.S. Mediations; the presidential success score is positively correlated with U.S. Mediations and statistically significant. Such results suggest that, all other variables held equal, presidents and their administrations should be seen mediating overseas conflicts when they are able to move...
legislation through congress efficiently. Moreover, the control variables behave as expected and in similar ways to those discussed in the models above.

Model 6 (Table 4) shows the effect of GDP growth on U.S. Mediations, conditioned by the presidential success score. The marginal effects curve, plotted in Fig. 3, behaves as expected, becoming less negative as values of the presidential success score increase. However, despite the fact that the presidential success score is the most direct measure of the president’s ability to move legislation through congress, the model is only statistically significant for a small range of presidential success score values: roughly 45–55% success. Thus, the results only show limited support for the policy availability argument.

**Theoretical Implications of the Results and Conclusions**

Overall, the empirical analyses support the argument that serving as a third-party mediator is a tool used by presidential administrations to boost their domestic political standing. While there is some support for the notion that administrations use mediation in desperate attempts to create the perception of strong leadership and success when legislative avenues have been blocked by a hostile congress, there is considerably more robust support for
the argument that party cover argument: U.S. Presidents engage in mediation for domestic benefits, when they enjoy support in congress.

Up to this point, research on conflict resolution has largely been conducted independently of the foreign policy decision making research program. Because of its normative goal of finding ways to peacefully resolve conflict, mediators have largely been thought to be altruistic in their motives, or, at the very least, unchanging in their motives. However, a large literature has emerged that focuses on the motivations of state leaders (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Ostrom & Job 1986), suggesting that they use foreign policy in the same way they use domestic policy: to improve their domestic political fortunes. Such a rationale suggests that the motivations that a leader has to seek mediation are likely to influence how that mediation effort is carried out, the number of resources committed to it, and the extent to which the mediator is likely to see the effort through to a durable peace settlement. This argument also suggests that while states might have the greatest ability to engineer peace agreements through mediation, the incentives and constraints state leaders face from their domestic audience are likely to create incentives for engaging in mediation, but also limits the extent to which they likely to be committed to ensuring a long-term settlement. Thus, as leaders’ incentives and constraints change based on domestic political issues, mediation behavior should as well.

The empirics, taken together, strongly suggest that domestic politics is likely to affect the occurrence and practice of third-party mediation by state actors. As such, states cannot be considered unitary actors when attempting to construct theories about the likelihood that mediation will succeed in bringing about peace. Instead, leaders’ domestic political circumstances must be taken into account, as should the range of policy options that are likely to be available to the leader. The U.S. president is thus likely more driven by shorter-term, domestic political goals than durable long-term peace agreements overseas. Thus, he is likely to focus on mediating conflict when he sees it as politically advantageous to do so, but is also likely to shift his focus away from such efforts when policy options that pay higher political dividends become available or when he has achieved such goals as re-election, and thus can focus on other policy preferences.

Similarly, focusing on foreign policy, even in low-risk endeavors such as mediation involves an opportunity cost. The evidence shown here suggests that the president is more likely to engage in mediation when he has sufficient “party cover” in congress, meaning that his co-partisans can shield him from major criticism, or at, the very least, ensure that public criticism has minimal
politicaleffects. However, there is also some evidence for the policy availability argument. In extreme cases, where congress has essentially blocked the president’s ability to move legislation and poor economic performance, low approval ratings, or nearing elections require a policy success, the president becomes more risk accepting and engages in more diplomacy.

These findings, as previously mentioned, can also be applied to better explain what is already thought to be known about conflict resolution processes. For instance, Yuen and Werner’s (2005) finding that manipulated outcomes are likely to relapse into conflict can be explained by the fact that the mediating party was focused on generating a policy success in the short term to boost his domestic political fortunes, and thus less concerned with the longer-term ramifications of the effort. Similarly, and perhaps most clearly, the finding that mediators seek to intervene when conflict is most fierce, but also most visible internationally, can be explained by the fact that political leaders see the potential to benefit domestically from an attempt to quell the violence that is absent at lower levels of intensity and visibility. And, finally, the mere observation that most mediation attempts are unsuccessful, suggests that leaders engage in mediation with other political goals in mind. Otherwise, mediation would be carried out in ways more likely to guarantee long-term peace.

The results also provide support for the notion that the president’s goal in focusing his attention on foreign policy is much the same as that of domestic policy: to demonstrate his competence as a leader and build a record of policy success. The fact that presidents are seen using diplomacy to build support for themselves while domestic conditions are poor, cannot be explained by the rally-round-the-flag effect, which suggests that the president is attempting to divert the public’s attention from these poor conditions by invoking patriotism and shifting animosity toward an outside adversary. However, the mediation of international conflict does provide an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and competence.

More generally, the results suggest that a greater understanding of domestic political dynamics is necessary when examining powerful states and their mediation behavior. Somewhat unlike weaker states, non-governmental organizations, and private individuals, the international reputational benefits earned through mediation are clearly subservient to domestic political calculations. Such a finding suggests that despite the large number of resources that powerful state actors can bring to bear as mediators, domestic considerations constrain their ability to use them effectively. Moreover, these results suggest the need for further research, examining the effects of domestic institutional relationships on mediation in a comparative fashion. While the relationship examined here is unique the U.S. case, a comparative examination of
presidential and parliamentary systems and the range of institutional peculiarities across governmental structures combined with power and reputational considerations, will likely yield interesting insights into mediation processes.

References


