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# RIVALRY AND PARTNERSHIP AS RELATIONAL FACTORS OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*Five studies examined how rivalry and partnership shape support for confrontation and cooperation between groups. Upon secondary analysis of publicly available, nationally representative data (Chicago Council on Global Affairs), Studies 1a-c (N = 5,212) found that Americans who perceived China as a rival consistently supported confrontational economic policies at rates above a neutral benchmark, whereas Americans who perceived China as a partner did not consistently support cooperation at comparable levels. This asymmetry suggests that rivalry's association with confrontation was not matched by an equally strong association between partnership and cooperation. Study 2 (N = 248 Americans) showed that rivalry's association with confrontation extended from economic policy to support for military action across 13 international target countries. Study 3 (N = 492 Americans) experimentally demonstrated that against rivals (rather than partners or non-rival competitors), people support military action more strongly because rivalries provide them with a source of meaning. Thus, while partnership may not make intergroup relations more harmonious, rivalry may increase support for confrontation by giving the relationship greater psychological meaning.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Confrontation, Cooperation, Psychological Meaning, Intergroup Conflict, Social Perception, Group Relations, Social Cognition, Motivation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Across the world, most nations are generally not in conflict with each other. Violence has generally been decreasing, while cooperation has been increasing and become more formalized over time (Pinker, 2011). As a successor to the League of Nations, the United Nations (UN) was created after World War II in order to maintain international peace and prevent conflict in the future. Today, a complex web of international partnerships exists, consisting of everything from international laws and treaties to formal multilateral organizations that significantly extend the reach of institutions to ameliorate international conflict (Cranmer, Desmarais, & Menninga, 2012; Hale, Held, & Young 2013). International partnerships can also be found in military and economic alliances, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

At the same time, however, conflict continues to be a mainstay of the human condition. Indeed, 78% of all the wars that occurred from 1823 to 2003 involved a small number of rival nations that share a deeply rooted history of notable conflict (Thompson & Dreyer, 2012). In the second half of the 20th century, parallel to the rise of international partnerships, this high proportion of interstate warfare involving entrenched rivals rose to 94%, making up almost all wars. These rival nations continue to cause extreme violence, both between themselves and with or between other nations via so-called “proxy wars” (e.g., the involvement of the US, Russia, Iran and Israel in the contemporary Syrian civil war; see Colaresi & Thompson, 2002; Thompson & Dreyer, 2012; for evidence on the contagion of inter-state violence see Li, Leidner, Euh, & Choi, 2016). It is therefore important to understand international rivalry, partnership, and how these relational dynamics influence support for confrontation.

As these examples illustrate, interactions between modern day nation-states rarely occur between non-rival competitors and strangers with little prior history or contact. Instead, we argue that relational dynamics of rivalry and partnership largely characterize many of the most important modern-day international interactions and institutions. The present work explores whether rivalry, beyond mere competition, is associated with greater support for confrontation and whether partnership can serve as a buffer. We examined how perceptions of international rivalry and partnership relate to support for confrontational economic policy decisions (Studies 1a-c), as well as whether rivalry is

related to support for military action (Study 2). We further examined whether non-rivals are psychologically similar to rivals or to partners (Study 3) and explored conflict-related meaning as a mechanism for rivalry’s hypothesized link to confrontation.

## 2. RIVALRY AND PARTNERSHIP

Competition refers to a single situation of parties having negatively linked goals (Deutsch, 1949). Going beyond that, rivalry is based on a shared history of notable competitions and is a subjective relational construct that exists in an individual’s mind (Converse & Reinhard, 2016; Kilduff, Elfenbein, & Staw, 2010). While social psychology and other social sciences have a similarly rich tradition in investigating competition as they do in investigating conflict, the study of rivalry as a distinct phenomenon has more recently begun (for social psychology see Converse & Reinhard, 2016; for Political Science see, Thompson, 2015; for business see Kilduff, Elfenbein, & Staw, 2010). Although Floyd Allport’s classic textbook *Social Psychology* (1924) and many other empirical articles since then contain the word rivalry, these works used the term as more of a synonym for competition and did not explore its potential as a unique psychological construct. Importantly, similar to rivalry, partnership is not constituted by two parties simply having (positively) linked goals, but by a relationship based on a shared history (of cooperation; Herrmann, Voss, Schooler, & Ciarrochi, 1997). Because prior work theoretically defined partnership as entailing the absence of conflict, it is currently unknown how partnership dynamics affect support for conflict – though it is widely assumed partnerships will help deescalate conflict or even prevent it from arising in the first place.

Many real-world conflicts have lasted for generations and are viewed as intractable (Bar-Tal, 2000, 2007; Coleman, 2014). Indeed, once conflicts between groups start, they can be difficult to end (Crescenzi, 2007; Houweling & Siccama, 1985; Kadera, 1998; Levy, 1982; Most & Starr, 1990; Siverson & Starr, 1991). Attempting to explain this difficulty, a wealth of research has examined psychological factors focusing on frustrated needs such as to economic security, physical safety, and moral identity (Staub, 1999, for an overview see Leidner, Tropp, & Lickel, 2013). Rivalry, understood as a shared history of notable competitions between groups, has not been examined yet, although it could possibly explain both why many intergroup conflicts are intergenerational in nature, and why they

become intractable and difficult to end.

In line with the recently developed social-cognitive view of rivalry (Converse & Reinhard, 2016), we define rivalry as a competitive relational schema that links representations of the other, the self, and the dyadic relationship between them with representations of competitive interactions over time (Baldwin, 1992). To differentiate between rival and partner relationships, we draw on international image theory in political science (Herrmann et al., 1997) and political psychology (Alexander, Brewer, & Herrmann, 1999), and on the emerging literature on rivalry in social psychology (Converse & Reinhard, 2016; Kilduff et al., 2010). Partnership is similarly a subjective relational construct that exists in an individual's mind, persisting beyond any specific cooperative episode (Alexander, Brewer, & Herrmann, 1999). Although rivalry and partnership are usually seen as polar opposites that have nothing in common, the unifying characteristic they share is that both types of relationships are based on a notable shared history between the two parties, instead of mere competition or cooperation which are based on more transient situations involving whether particular goals are negatively linked or not. By being in this way psychologically "embedded" in a narrative of ongoing, repeated competition (or cooperation, respectively), international relations and their corresponding histories can have a lasting impact on people's perceptions of their own country and other countries (Lui & Hilton, 2005). As such, in order to study international rivalry and confrontation, examining partnerships is an ecologically important comparison that further adds additional implications for intergroup relations.

Tangential support for our hypothesis that rivalry increases the potential for confrontation comes from research showing that rivalry can increase unethical behavior, partially due to the greater performance-approach goals that emphasize winning the competition at the expense of other concerns (Kilduff, Galinsky, Gallo, & Reade, 2016). This unethical behavior can occur even in contexts outside of direct competition against the rival and is due to the rivalry schema "crowding out" a person's moral identity that would otherwise influence their behavior in a different direction (Kilduff & Galinsky, 2017). Because rivalry increases unethical, norm-violating behavior, it may also make people more willing to support intergroup confrontation. Additionally, thinking about a rival can increase the use of more eager, less cautious decision-making strategies such as raising support for offensive (instead of defensive) strategies during competition (Converse & Reinhard,

2016). Relatedly, rivalry has been linked to increased risk-taking, caused by an increase in promotion-oriented goals (To et al., 2018).

### ***2.1. Rivalry And Meaning From Conflict***

We propose that rivalry promotes support for confrontation due to the greater subjective sense of meaning people derive from rival conflicts. Despite its many downsides, intergroup conflict can provide people with a source of meaning, satisfying a basic psychological need within the individual. This psychological benefit, however, can then increase support for prolonging the conflict to maintain it as a source of meaning in the future (Rovenpor et al., 2019). For example, being involved in intergroup conflict or simply bringing it to mind can enhance feelings of conflict-related meaning such as feeling a sense of importance, exhilaration, and purpose in life. Although this past work focused on ongoing, situationally based conflicts providing meaning, our account suggests that the rivalry relationship, independent of any "hot" or active conflict taking place, can provide people with a source of meaning in and of itself. That is, because rivalry involves a shared history, a conflict may not need to be actively present, or 'hot,' for the relationship to come to mind and provide meaning. For the same reason, rivalry may not only sustain ongoing intergroup conflict, but also increase support for renewed confrontation.

Some research provides indirect support for our hypothesis that rivalry provides greater meaning. For instance, higher levels of meaning are associated with linking events across the past, present, and future (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2014; Vallacher & Wegner, 1985, 1987), and many intergroup conflicts have existed for long stretches of time, being passed down to the next generation (Bartal, 2000, 2007; Coleman, 2014). This, we argue, creates opportunities for increased meaning and competitive relationships of a rival nature to develop. Moreover, initial definitions of rivalry focused on the increased psychological stakes the relationship creates independent of the competition's objective stakes (Kilduff et al., 2010), and these greater stakes are consistent with our proposed relationship between rivalry and increased meaning. While this past work did not formally identify the specific content of what was psychologically and subjectively at stake due to the rivalry relationship, increased legacy concerns in competitions against rivals (compared to non-rivals) was identified as at least one unique subjective psychological factor with increased stakes (Converse & Reinhard, 2016).

Other identified factors include greater status and

self-worth concerns against rivals (Kilduff et al., 2016). These increased legacy and status concerns are also consistent with the prediction that rivalry involves increased meaning, as identity concerns are likely greatly meaningful to the involved parties. However, this work does not speak to whether rivalry increases meaning more than partnership, because rivalry was exclusively compared to non-rivals. Yet, social relationships are a major source of meaning for people (King, Heintzelman, & Ward, 2016), and social exclusion in particular lowers people's sense of meaning in life (Stillman et al., 2009; Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004). Because partners are known to normally provide social support, any conflict that threatens that dynamic could further lower people's sense of meaning.

### 3. RESEARCH OVERVIEW

We employed experimental and correlational methods, including online experiments, surveys, and secondary analysis of publicly available data from nationally representative samples, to examine the relationship between rivalry, partnership, and support for international confrontation. Although secondary data analysis is common in other social sciences (e.g., political science), the vast majority of contemporary psychological research is based on experimental designs in laboratory studies, leading to a rather narrow methodological focus (Rozin, 2001). Using these two methodologies in combination allows for studying the robustness of the phenomena using representative, secondary data while examining its cause-and-effect nature and underlying mechanisms in surveys and experiments. Utilizing three nationally representative samples of Americans, Studies 1a-c examined the consequences of viewing another nation as either a rival or partner on support for different foreign policy approaches to economic confrontation (cooperation vs. confrontation). Study 2 examined American attitudes towards various countries around the world (e.g., China, North Korea, Russia) and whether perceived rivalry is associated with increased support for military action. Study 3 experimentally manipulated participants' reflections on a rival, partner, or non-rival nation, and examined whether rivalry would increase perceived meaning derived from conflict and support for military action, and whether partnership would decrease the same. We report all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures for all studies. Ethics approval for all primary data collections in this article (Studies 2 and 3) were granted by the University of Massachusetts Amherst Institutional Review Board (entitled, "The Perception

of Nations" and "International Attitudes", respectively).

#### 3.1. Statistical Power, Diversity, And Inclusiveness Across Studies

We aimed to maximize statistical power by improving measures for key variables (e.g., Studies 2 and 3 moving beyond Study 1a-c's dichotomous response options), including manipulation checks (Study 3), and ensuring adequate sample sizes. For Studies 1a-c, a sensitivity analysis (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) with  $\alpha = .05$  and 95% power indicated that with the sample size of  $N = 1,227$ , an effect size of  $d = .19$  or greater could be detected for Study 1a; with the sample size of  $N = 1,877$ , an effect size of  $d = .16$  or greater could be detected for Study 1b; and with a sample size of  $N = 2,108$ , an effect size of  $d = .14$  or greater could be detected for Study 1c. For Study 2, we recruited 250 participants because the typical correlation estimates investigated in psychology often stabilize by that sample size (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). A sensitivity analysis found the analyzable sample size was able to detect an effect size of  $r = .125$  with 95% power (Faul et al., 2007). The experimental design used in Study 3 was adapted from prior work (Converse & Reinhard, 2016) that used a similar rivalry manipulation with an effect size of  $d = .41$ . According to R's "pwr" package, for an effect size of  $d = .40$ , we needed to collect 163 participants per condition (rival, partner, and non-rival,  $N = 489$ ) to achieve 95% power; we therefore collected a final sample of  $N = 492$ .

We had different studies use different samples and recruitment strategies to increase the diversity and inclusiveness of our participants. Studies 1a-c include three separate nationally representative samples of Americans at different points in time (2006, 2012, 2014). Studies 2 and 3 followed up these highly generalizable samples with participant recruitment via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk). The distribution of the sample in Studies 1a-c closely tracked the distribution of United States Census counts for the United States population on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, among others. The Mturk samples were heterogeneous in terms of gender, ethnicity, and race.

### 4. STUDIES 1A-C

Studies 1a-c test a threshold-based question: whether perceiving China as a rival corresponds to support for confrontation at levels meaningfully above chance and whether perceiving China as a partner corresponds to support for cooperation at

similarly elevated levels. We examine this question in nationally representative American samples collected across multiple years, using perceptions of China, a rising global power and potential threat to the United States. Although these surveys broadly assessed American public opinion about foreign policy, our analyses focus on two variables central to our argument: whether respondents viewed China as a rival or partner, and whether they preferred that the United States respond with confrontation or cooperation.

#### 4.1. Method

We utilized three publicly available, nationally representative secondary data sets downloaded from the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). The Chicago Council on Global Affairs provided the data sets spanning three years, including 2006 (Study 1a,  $N = 1,227$ ; Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in the United States, China, India, Australia, and South Korea. Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Asia Society, and East Asia Institute (EAI)), 2012 (Study 1b,  $N = 1,877$ ; Chicago Council Survey on American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, Smeltz et al., 2012), and 2014 (Study 1c,  $N = 2,108$ ; Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy, Smeltz et al., 2014).

We focused our analysis on two survey questions from each year. The first asked whether respondents viewed China as mostly a rival or mostly a partner of the United States: "At present, are the following countries mostly rivals or mostly partners? [U.S. and China]." The second asked respondents to choose between cooperation and confrontation in response to China's rise: "In dealing with the rise of China's power, do you think the U.S. should: 1) undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with China or, 2) actively work to limit the growth of China's power." Respondents selected one of these two options. This structure allowed us to test whether perceiving China as a rival corresponded to support for confrontation at rates meaningfully above 50%, and whether perceiving China as a partner corresponded to support for cooperation at rates meaningfully above 50%.

#### 4.1.2. Results

We focused on whether rivalry and partnership each independently corresponded to preferences that crossed a substantively meaningful 50% threshold, where 50% indicates no clear directional preference between the two available options. Because that threshold logic is central to our argument, we focus

on those tests here and report the corresponding overall rival-versus-partner comparison in strategy choice in the Supplemental Materials.

Study 1a. Among respondents who viewed China as a rival, 64.44% supported confronting China, a proportion significantly greater than 50%,  $\chi^2 = 23.11$ ,  $p < .001$ . Among respondents who viewed China as a partner, 49.08% supported cooperating with China, a proportion that did not differ significantly from 50%,  $\chi^2 = .26$ ,  $p = .612$ . Thus, in 2006, rivalry corresponded to a directional preference toward confrontation, whereas partnership did not comparably correspond to a directional preference toward cooperation.

Study 1b. Among respondents who viewed China as a rival, 56.36% supported confronting China, a proportion significantly greater than 50%,  $\chi^2 = 8.02$ ,  $p = .004$ . Among respondents who viewed China as a partner, 52.89% supported cooperating with China, a proportion also significantly greater than 50%,  $\chi^2 = 4.22$ ,  $p = .040$ . Thus, in 2012, both rivalry and partnership crossed their predicted thresholds.

Study 1c. Among respondents who viewed China as a rival, 58.02% supported confronting China, a proportion significantly greater than 50%,  $\chi^2 = 15.55$ ,  $p < .001$ . Among respondents who viewed China as a partner, 51.88% supported cooperating with China, a proportion that did not differ significantly from 50%,  $\chi^2 = 1.96$ ,  $p = .162$ . Thus, in 2014, rivalry again crossed the predicted threshold for confrontation, whereas partnership did not cross the corresponding threshold for cooperation.

Combined Studies 1a-c. Across all three years, 58.66% of respondents who viewed China as a rival supported confronting China, a proportion significantly greater than 50%,  $\chi^2 = 42.62$ ,  $p < .001$ . In contrast, 51.63% of respondents who viewed China as a partner supported cooperating with China, a proportion that did not differ significantly from 50%,  $\chi^2 = 3.62$ ,  $p = .057$ . Relative to the 50% benchmark, rivalry showed an 8.66 percentage-point deviation toward confrontation, whereas partnership showed only a 1.63 percentage-point deviation toward cooperation. This combined pattern indicates that the overall relationship centered more strongly on rivalry's link to confrontation than on partnership's link to cooperation.

#### 4.1.3. Discussion

Studies 1a-c showed that perceiving China as a rival more consistently aligned with preferences for confrontation than perceiving China as a partner aligned with preferences for cooperation. Across samples, rivalry repeatedly crossed the threshold for

a clear directional preference toward confronting China, whereas partnership did not show an equally consistent tendency to cross the corresponding threshold for cooperation. These studies strengthen the external relevance of our argument by drawing on nationally representative American samples and by examining preferences tied to real-world policy choices.

## 4.2. Study 2

Study 2 used a within-participant design where participants were asked about their perceptions of 13 different countries around the world (North Korea, Russia, China, Cuba, Mexico, Iran, Germany, England, Switzerland, Nigeria, Costa Rica, Australia, Japan).

### 4.2.1. Method

The potentially eligible sample consisted of 270 participants recruited through TurkPrime. We excluded 22 participants for a final analyzable sample of 248 American adults, see the SM for more information. Our exclusion rate of approximately 8.1% ensures high data quality and is within the average acceptable range (Chandler, Mueller, & Paolacci, 2014).

Participants were presented with the names of the 13 countries they would be rating: We chose these countries based on their varied history of conflict, rivalry and partnership with the United States. Presentation order of the target nations was randomized such that each participant had their own individualized, random order; at the same time, this initially randomized order stayed consistent for the remainder of the study for each participant in order to mitigate cognitive load and survey fatigue. We used single-item measures for each perception dimension because filling out multi-item measures for all 13 countries would have been too cognitively taxing and too time-consuming, and therefore risked participant fatigue and questionable data quality. Participants first reported their perceptions of the various qualities of each target nation along with demographic information. All questions used a continuous visual analogue scale on a continuum from 1 to 9, and responses were assessed to the second decimal. At the end of the study, participants reported their demographic information and were fully debriefed.

Participants rated the degree of rivalry they felt as an American toward each country using a single-item measure ("As an American, do you feel a rivalry with each of the following countries?"; 1 = Not at all, 9 = Very much).

Participants rated the degree of support for military action using a single-item measure ("Two broad approaches the United States can take to resolving current issues related to terrorism involve diplomacy and the military, respectively. To what extent do you think the U.S. should take a diplomatic versus military approach to threats of terrorism from each of the following countries?"; 1 = Completely diplomatic approach, 9 = Completely military approach).

### 4.2.2. Results

We first examined the bivariate association between perceived rivalry and support for military action. Rivalry was significantly associated with support for military action,  $r(229) = .352$ , 95% CI [.234, .460],  $p < .001$ . To examine rivalry's unique contribution to military action support, we then ran a multiple regression with rivalry, liking, respect, and competition for being the world's top superpower. Rivalry remained a significant predictor ( $\beta = .20$ , 95% CI [.080, .400],  $p = .004$ ), along with respect ( $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p = .020$ ) and competition for being the world's top superpower ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Liking ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .326$ ) no longer remained a significant predictor.

### 4.2.3. Discussion

Study 2 found that perceived rivalry predicted support for military action toward a host of nations around the world, even when statistically controlling for other conflict-related covariates. However, causal conclusions are limited by the correlational nature of the study. Study 3 addressed this issue by experimentally manipulating rivalry and comparing it to partnership as well as non-rival competition. By having both a partnership and non-rival comparison, we created an opportunity to examine which relational factor (rivalry or partnership) may be primarily driving our observed effects. For instance, rivalry may increase support for military action above and beyond non-rival competition, or partnership may act as a buffer and decrease support for military action. Indeed, though partnership is often thought of as absence of conflict, in the international context even current partners (e.g., the US and Britain) have objectively more violent histories with each other (e.g., the War of 1812) than against current rivals (e.g., the US and China, which never had a violent military dispute). Though partnership was not associated with cooperation in Studies 1a-c, having the partnership comparison in Study 3 also served as a replication. Study 3 also examined conflict-related meaning as a potential

psychological mechanism explaining the link between rivalry and support for military action. Finally, Study 3 also offered methodological advantages, including a multi-item measure of both rivalry and support for military action, compared to single-item measures from Study 2 and dichotomous confrontation measures in Studies 1a-c.

### 4.3. Study 3

We predicted that participants who reflected on a rival nation, compared to those who reflected on a partner nation, would endorse greater support for military action. Further, we predicted that participants reflecting about a rival (vs. partner) nation would get an increased sense of meaning from conflict. Lastly, we predicted that this increased meaning would mediate the relationship between rivalry and support for military action.

#### 4.3.1. Method

The potentially eligible sample consisted of 624 potentially recruited through TurkPrime. We excluded 133 participants for a final analyzable sample of 492 American adults, see the SM for more information. Our exclusion rate of approximately 31% ensures better data quality and, while at the higher end, is still within a normal range for data collected online (Chandler, Mueller, & Paolacci, 2014).

Using a rivalry manipulation adapted from Converse and Reinhard (2016), in a between-subjects design we randomly assigned participants to reflect on a rival, partner, or non-rival nation to the US. The target nations that participants could choose from in each of the three conditions were selected based on rivalry ratings from Study 2. To increase reflection, participants answered an open-ended question about the target nation. In the rival and non-rival condition, we instructed participants to "Describe in a few sentences why it is important for the USA to beat [rival/non-rival target nation] when they compete (e.g., in trade, technology, military power)." Participants in the partner condition responded to a similar prompt regarding why it is important for the USA to have a partnership with the target partner nation.

All participants then answered (in randomly presented order) questions regarding their perceptions of previously identified antecedents of rivalry (i.e., perceived similarity, competitive parity, and frequency of competition with the opposing country) and perceptions of competitions being embedded in a historical narrative. Then, participants answered questions regarding support

for military action, perceived meaning in conflict, and rivalry (as a manipulation check). All questions used a continuous visual analog scale (1 to 9) measured to the hundredth decimal place.

We used a 7-item measure for military action support (e.g., "The USA should send diplomats to negotiate a peace deal that serves the interests of both sides" [reverse scored]; "Conflicts with [target nation] cannot be fully resolved without military action from the USA."), Totally Disagree to Totally Agree. Participants additionally reported whether they would support the US declaring war on the target nation (Yes/No) if conflict and tensions could not be resolved diplomatically.

Participants rated 7 different dimensions of conflict-related meaning (in randomly presented order). Each dimension was rated using 4 items (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree), except for meaning in life, which used 6 items (for a full list of items see Rovenpor et al., 2017). The dimensions included feeling a sense of: comprehensibility (e.g., "Although the conflicts we are facing with [target nation] are complex, I find it easy to wrap my head around why this is happening."); unity (e.g., "The national unity my country displays during times of conflict against [target nation] is very uplifting"); growth (e.g., "When [target nation] threatens our nation's resolve, it only makes our country stronger"); exhilaration (e.g., "It is exhilarating to see my nation fight back after being attacked or threatened by [target nation]"); transformed perspective (e.g., "The current conflicts with [target nation] help put other issues in my life into perspective"); importance (e.g., "When [target nation] opposes our nation, I feel that I am part of something larger than myself."); meaning in life (e.g., "The conflicts my country is engaged in with target nation have provided my life with a greater sense of meaning").

As a manipulation check, participants rated a 4-item measure of rivalry (e.g., "As an American...Do you feel a rivalry with [target nation]?"), Not at all to Very much.

#### 4.3.2. Results

There was a significant difference in rivalry ratings ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ ,  $\alpha = .85$ ) between conditions,  $F(2, 465) = 93.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2p = .286$ . Pairwise comparisons showed that the rival condition ( $M = 5.69$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ) had significantly higher rivalry scores than both the partner ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ,  $d = 1.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and non-rival ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ,  $d = 1.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ) conditions, suggesting that our manipulation of rivalry vs. partnership was

successful. There was no significant difference in rivalry ratings between the partner and non-rival condition ( $d = .12, p = .300$ ).

Examining the continuous measure of support for military action ( $M = 2.74, SD = 1.50, \alpha = .87$ ), we found a significant main effect of the experimental manipulation,  $F(2, 482) = 6.30, p = .002, \eta^2p = .025, 95\% \text{ CI } [.004, .057]$ . Importantly, pairwise comparisons showed the rival condition ( $M = 3.05, SD = 1.51$ ) had significantly higher support for military action than the partner condition ( $M = 2.45, SD = 1.43, d = .41, p < .001$ ). Additionally, the rival condition exhibited nearly significantly greater support for military action than the non-rival condition ( $M = 2.72, SD = 1.60, d = .21, p = .051$ ). The difference in support for military action between the partner and non-rival conditions was not significant ( $d = .18, p = .104$ ), indicating that partnership did not significantly buffer against confrontation.

With respect to participants' responses to the dichotomous measure of support for declaring war (Yes/No), we found a significant difference between conditions,  $\chi^2(2, N = 485) = 16.34, p < .001, V = .15$ . Importantly, participants supported declaring war significantly more for rival as compared to partner nations,  $\chi^2(1, N = 319) = 15.28, p < .001, w = .22$ . Similarly, participants supported declaring war significantly more for rival as compared to non-rival nations,  $\chi^2(1, N = 320) = 6.54, p = .011, w = .22$ . There was no significant difference between partner and non-rival nations,  $\chi^2(1, N = 331) = .71, p = .156, w = .22$ , again indicating that partnership did not significantly buffer against confrontation.

We computed an overall meaning score ( $M = 4.05, SD = 1.63, \alpha = .96$ ) by taking the average of all seven dimensions, as a one-factor solution yielded a factor

pattern where all items loaded strongly on the one factor. Accordingly, the item-total correlations in a test of internal stability were all above  $.390$ , indicating that the items can be used in one composite score.

There was a significant main effect of the experimental manipulation on the meaning in conflict composite score,  $F(2, 464) = 14.11, p < .001, \eta^2p = .057$ . Pairwise comparisons showed the rival condition ( $M = 4.61, SD = 1.51$ ) had significantly higher meaning scores than both the partner ( $M = 3.82, SD = 1.60; d = .50, p < .001$ ) and non-rival ( $M = 3.74, SD = 1.65; d = .55, p < .001$ ) conditions. There was no significant difference between the partner and non-rival conditions ( $d = .05, p = .650$ ).

To examine if the effect of the experimental manipulation on support for military action was mediated through conflict-related meaning, we used PROCESS software (Hayes, 2013; Model 4). Results of the causal modeling of the indirect pathways of condition on support for military action (a composite score of all seven items) through conflict-related meaning (a composite score of all thirty items) are presented below in terms of the unstandardized weight, using bias corrected bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples (see Figure 1). Importantly, the indirect effect of conflict-related meaning on support for military action was significant:  $b = .169, SE = .04, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.09, .25]$ . The direct effect of the experimental manipulation on military action did not reach significance,  $b = .129, SE = .08, p = .098, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.08, .22]$ , suggesting that the overall effect of perceived rivalry on military action is substantially driven by people's perception that the conflict has meaning and purpose for their group and themselves.

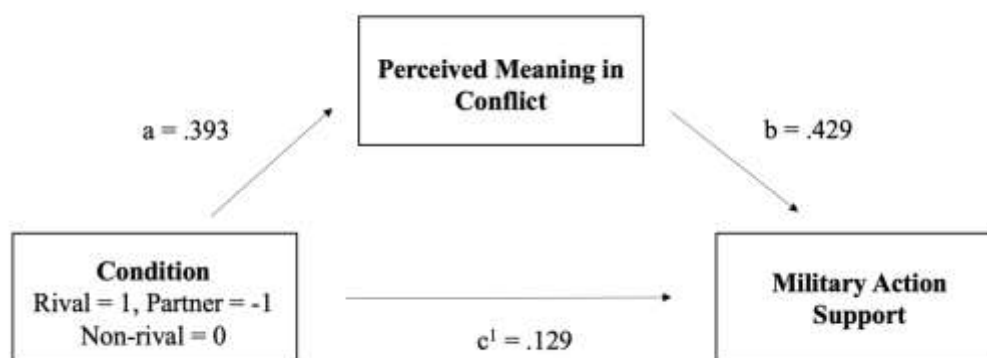


Figure 1. Meaning in conflict mediating the relationship between the experimental manipulation and support for military action (Hayes, 2013; Model 4).

#### 4.4. Discussion

Study 3 demonstrated that people supported military action more strongly against rival (vs.

partners and non-rivals) nations, whereas partnership did not significantly differ compared to non-rivals. Additionally, participants viewed conflict against rivals as significantly more meaningful,

whereas again there was no significant difference between partners and non-rivals. Further, the increase in meaning explained why people supported military action more strongly against rival (vs. partner) nations.

#### 4.5. General Discussion

Across five studies, we found that rivalry, compared to partnership, was associated with a greater sense of meaning from conflict and greater support for confrontation. In Studies 1a–c, Americans who viewed China as a rival were more likely to support confronting China, whereas those who viewed China as a partner were not consistently more likely to support cooperation. Study 2 extended this pattern across multiple target nations by showing that rivalry was associated with greater support for military action. Study 3 experimentally replicated this effect and showed that conflict-related meaning helped explain why people supported military action more strongly against rivals than against partners or non-rivals. Together, these findings suggest that rivalry can increase support for confrontation by making conflict feel more meaningful, whereas partnership does not consistently buffer against confrontation.

Our findings suggest that rivalry can shape public support for confrontational responses beyond direct competitive settings. These findings also clarify the ambivalent nature of rivalry as a competitive relationship. Rivalry appears to provide people with a greater sense of meaning, yet this same meaning is associated with increased support for military action. Although social relationships are a major source of meaning in people's lives (Hicks & King, 2009), this literature has focused primarily on cooperative rather than competitive relationships. Our work suggests that rivalry can also provide meaning, even though rivals typically block the advancement of one's goals. More broadly, our findings add to research showing that meaning can have a darker side: meaning in conflict may increase support for destructive or confrontational responses (Rovenpor et al., 2019).

#### 4.6. Limitations

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Notably, a major difference that follows from our conceptualization of rivalry is that the competitive relationship should not be considered static but fluid and malleable. The nature of an international relationship and its underlying relational schema can change based on new real-world events (such as the September 11 attacks). What was considered a rival yesterday has the potential for a different relational dynamic today or tomorrow. Nor should rivalries be considered monolithic. That is, relationships are complex and judgments about the target will depend on prior knowledge of the participant as well as what information is emphasized at the time of judgment. As such, one needs to consider both contemporary as well as historical factors and ultimately ask the people one is studying what they consider the relationship to be.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The social-cognitive view of rivalry we use here (Converse & Reinhard, 2016) is based on the relational schema framework more generally (Baldwin, 1992). The schema concept has deep roots in both social and cognitive psychology (Bartlett, 1932; for an overview see Fiske & Linville, 1980), and helped further advance research on social information processing as the limits of simpler associative models of memory were discovered (for overviews see Anderson, 1976; Simon, 1978). Many of the most important interstate competitions and conflicts across the world do not occur between strangers who happen to have negatively linked goals, but between countries that have a shared and deeply rooted history of notable competitions—that is, between rivals. As the 21st century continues to unfold and resources become scarcer, traditional partnerships may be challenged, old rivalries are likely to be renewed, and new rivalries to be created, providing fertile ground for relational international conflict (or cooperation). Going beyond investigations of isolated competitions by studying rivalry and its psychological underpinnings will make research on intergroup conflict more likely to apply and generalize to conflicts in the real world.

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