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Mapping the Proliferation of Strategic Partnerships

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, states have increasingly resorted to the establishment of informal alignments, with “strategic partnerships” at the forefront, whereas the number of formal military alliances has been stagnating. In spite of the rapid proliferation of these partnerships—next to other forms of informal cooperation—the extant International Relations literature has paid only limited attention to this phenomenon. In this dissertation, I introduce and analyze the first dataset of Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnerships (BISPs) established by G20 members between 1993 and 2020. Utilizing insights from international alignment and institutionalist literature, I aim to: (1) provide the first empirical account of the extent to which strategic partnerships have proliferated among the G20 and over time; (2) identify factors driving states to form strategic partnerships; and (3) determine whether these partnerships operate primarily as complements to the existing alliance structures, or exist in place of them as “low-cost” alternatives. Firstly, I found that G20 members alone established approximately 382 strategic partnerships by the end of 2020, surpassing previous estimations. Secondly, I found that the onset of strategic partnerships correlates with factors such as economic interests, rising power status, and regime similarity. Finally, I found that despite the prevalence of complementary strategic partnerships in sheer quantity, states exhibit a notably higher inclination to establish such partnerships in situations where common threats exist but formal alliance ties are absent. This finding lends credence to the idea of strategic partnerships as low-cost alternatives to

formal alliances—at least in some cases. Beyond these main findings, I present the results of additional exploratory analyses utilizing the new dataset.

Abstrakt

Od konce studené války se státy stále častěji uchylují k vytváření neformálních spojení, v čele se „strategickými partnerstvími,“ zatímco počet formálních vojenských aliancí stagnuje. Navzdory rychlému šíření těchto partnerství—vedle jiných forem neformální spolupráce—věnovala dosavadní literatura o mezinárodních vztazích tomuto fenoménu jen omezenou pozornost. V této disertační práci představuji a analyzuji první soubor dat o bilaterálních mezivládních strategických partnerstvích (BISP) založených členy skupiny G20 v letech 1993 až 2020. S využitím poznatků z literatury o mezinárodních spojeních a institucionalismu se snažím: (1) poskytnout první empirický popis rozsahu, v jakém se strategická partnerství rozšířila mezi členy G20 a v průběhu času; (2) identifikovat faktory, které vedou státy k vytváření strategických partnerství; a (3) určit, zda tato partnerství fungují především jako doplněk stávajících aliančních struktur, nebo existují místo nich jako „nízkonákladové“ alternativy. Zaprvé jsem zjistil, že jen členové skupiny G20 do konce roku 2020 navázali přibližně 382 strategických partnerství, což překonává předchozí odhady. Za druhé jsem zjistil, že vznik strategických partnerství koreluje s faktory, jako jsou ekonomické zájmy, rostoucí mocenský status a podobnost režimů. A konečně jsem zjistil, že navzdory převažujícímu počtu doplňkových strategických partnerství vykazují státy výrazně vyšší sklon k navazování těchto partnerství v situacích, kdy existují společné hrozby, ale chybí formální alianční vazby. Toto zjištění dodává důvěryhodnost myšlence strategických partnerství jako nízkonákladové alternativy k formálním aliancím—alespoň v některých případech. Kromě těchto hlavních zjištění předkládám výsledky dalších exploračních analýz využívajících nový soubor dat.

Keywords

Strategic partnership; international cooperation; alliance; alignment; informal institutions

Klíčová slova

Strategické partnerství; mezinárodní spolupráce; aliance; spojenectví; neformální instituce

Length of the work: 63,960 characters

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I Fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on the of 2023

Ondřej Rosendorf

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¹ I stole this joke from Slavoj Žižek.

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1. Introduction

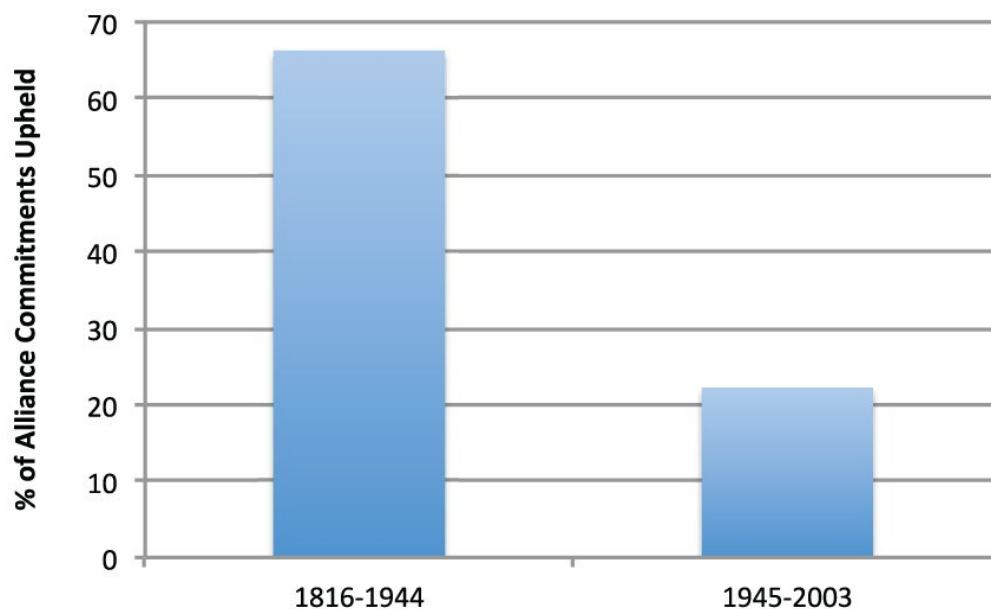
The nature of international security cooperation is changing (see Chidley, 2014; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Tertrais, 2004; Wilkins, 2012). According to many, there has been a shift in the post-Cold War world from formal alliances as the preferred instrument for strengthening national and regional security to new forms of “alignment,” with so-called “strategic partnerships” at the forefront (see Blanco, 2016; Deng, 2007; Envall & Hall, 2016; Fergusson, 2012; Kay, 2000; Nadkarni, 2010; Parameswaran, 2014; Strüver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008). These arrangements provide structured yet flexible framework “to take joint advantage of economic opportunities, or to respond to security challenges” (Wilkins, 2008, p. 363). The nature of strategic partnerships differs from that of other forms of security cooperation, such as formal alliances, in that strategic partnerships are informal and have a general (security) purpose.² Precisely this informality, which entails inherently low commitment costs, constitutes one of their most distinctive features. In this regard, the proliferation of such partnerships reflects a broader trend of proliferation of informal institutions (see Roger & Rowan, 2022; Vabulas & Snidal, 2021), the emergence of “hybrid institutional complexes” (Abbott & Faude, 2022) and growing “institutional overlap” (Reisenberg & Westerwinter, 2023).

Scholarly debate about security cooperation in international politics traditionally revolves around formal alliances (see Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979). However, at least since the early 2000s, governments rarely enter into new alliances, and the global alliance structures have remained fairly static (Kinne, 2018, p. 800). Moreover, although the number of new alliances briefly spiked after the end of the Cold War, the majority of these new alliances were “non-aggression pacts,” which represent a relatively less serious political commitment than the prototypical Cold-War-era “defense pacts,” such

² "The term “security” here must be understood in the broad sense, encompassing various sectors such as economic, political, environmental, societal, and other aspects of security (see Wilkins, 2018, p. 501). I expand on this conceptualization in the section titled “Form: Alignment.”

as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Warsaw Pact (Gilber, 2009; Small & Singer, 1969, p. 280).³ The drivers of these shifts are manifold. In practical terms, formal alliances have proved increasingly less reliable – many states simply do not honor their alliance commitments (see Berkmeier & Fuhrmann, 2018). As shown in Figure 1, there was a sharp decline in the share of alliance commitments upheld between the pre- and post-World War II period. In addition, many countries, including China and Russia, have come to view formal alliances as ineffective in addressing the emergent security challenges, and have turned to informal forms of security cooperation, such as strategic partnerships (Locoman & Papa, 2021; Zhang, 2012).

Figure 1. Comparing alliance treaty fulfillment in two eras



Source: Berkemeier & Fuhrmann (2018)

Informal security cooperation has become increasingly more common after the Cold War (see Vabulas & Snidal, 2021; Roger & Rowan, 2022). But why has this change occurred precisely during

³ I elaborate on the differences between these different types of formal alliances in the following chapters.

this period? The institutionalist literature suggests that informal institutions are well suited for security cooperation because the absence of legally binding commitments in them allows states to protect their autonomy, maintain a certain degree of confidentiality, and respond to new challenges more quickly. These features of informality have likely become more attractive for states in the post-Cold War era due to the rapid political and technological change that ensued, creating a more uncertain international environment, which disincentivized states from making clearly defined long-term commitments (Vabulas and Snidal, 2021, pp. 863–64). Consequently, the growing number of informal forms of security cooperation, including strategic partnerships, raises a challenge for our thinking about international alignments – or “expectations of states about whether they will be supported or opposed by other states in future interactions” (Snyder, 1997, p. 6) – more broadly. Some authors believe that strategic partnerships should be understood as a distinct category of alignment besides formal alliances (Wilkins, 2008, 2012), some disagree (Chang-Liao, 2023).

In theory, strategic partnerships should be a prominent subject of research in the field of International Relations. Yet, this is not the case because the current state of research on this subject faces several challenges. First, the extent to which these partnerships have proliferated across countries and over time is largely unknown. Consequently, it is difficult to assess the significance of this phenomenon for international politics writ large. With the exception of some case studies (e.g., Strüver, 2017), “no study or database has ever attempted—or been able—to provide an exact account” (Renard, 2021, p. 313). Second, although the conceptualization of strategic partnerships as a distinct form of informal alignment (see Wilkins, 2008; 2012) constitutes a promising direction of research, we lack empirical evidence that links the formation of these arrangements to common security interests beyond specific cases. Strategic partnerships come in different shapes and forms, and the rationale behind their establishment equally differs case by case. In general, however, the relative importance of the different factors behind the proliferation of these arrangements remains elusive (cf.

Strüver, 2017). Following from this are two research questions. For reasons explained in the methodological section, I only intend to focus on partnerships formed by G20 countries.

Research question 1: What is the extent to which strategic partnership have proliferated among the G20 and over time?

Research question 2: What factors explain the formation of strategic partnerships?

Finally, if strategic partnerships play a similar role to traditional alliances in enhancing national and regional security, as argued by many authors (see Envall & Hall, 2016; Fergusson, 2012; Wilkins, 2008), a question arises: do they operate primarily as complements or as “low-cost” alternatives to the latter?⁴ To date, the literature on informal institutions has addressed the question of complementarity and substitution only marginally, despite the fact that many authors recognize that the proliferation of informal institutions has led to increasing complexity in global governance, with overlapping memberships in formal and informal arrangements that often focus on solving similar substantive issues (see Abbott & Faude, 2022; Reinsberg & Westerwinter, 2023). Informal institutions could potentially play a complementary role in relation to their formal counterparts, for instance, by acting as vehicles for activities that might be excessively complex or costly to achieve within formal frameworks (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 212), and by offering swifter, more flexible, and cost-efficient means to address procedural and political hinderances within these frameworks (Abbott & Faude, 2020, p. 19). Nevertheless, they could also play a substitutive role by acting as “low-cost” alternatives

⁴ I acknowledge that the assumption of strategic partnerships playing a similar role to formal alliances is not entirely unproblematic. The informal nature of strategic partnerships arguably makes them ill-suited for addressing certain collective action problems that require “credible commitments.” Consequently, partnerships cannot act as a “full” substitute for alliances, but merely a “low-cost” alternative or the second-best arrangement. I use this widely held assumption as the initial point of departure for the subsequent analysis, and elaborate on it in the theoretical chapter.

to their formal counterparts, for instance, in situations where negotiating a formal treaty would prove difficult or costly (Roger, 2020, p. 64; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 195).

Some authors have suggested that states might form strategic partnerships as either a new form of alliance that requires less commitment or as a means to enhance existing alliances (e.g., Michalski, 2019). As alliance complements, strategic partnerships could act as “add-ons” to formal alliances that enable states to broaden the scope of their cooperation to other areas besides those encompassed in the formal treaty, and by acting as a means of reassurance by providing insecure allies with economic and limited security aid (Chang-Liao, 2023; Kay, 2000; Paul, 2018). On the other hand, as “low-cost” alternatives to alliances, strategic partnerships could exist “in place of” formal alliances or as the “second-best arrangement” to formal alliances that allows states to pursue modest balancing goals, including soft- and limited-hard-balancing measures such as entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and arms and technology transfers (Fergusson, 2012; Kay, 2000; Paul, 2018). The empirical evidence suggests that both are possible, yet we do not know which of these rationales is prevalent. Determining whether partnerships operate as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to alliances is, therefore, pertinent with respect to improving our understanding of the fundamental purpose of these informal arrangements.

Research question 3: Do strategic partnerships complement or substitute for formal alliances?

There are three important caveats regarding this dissertation’s approach to answering the question of complementarity and substitution that need to be acknowledged. First, the dissertation builds on the assumption that the complementary/substitutive role of informal institutions vis-à-vis their formal counterparts can be measured in a mechanical fashion, by looking at the configuration of states’ interests and institutional membership. Specifically, when strategic partnerships emerge under conditions where states share common security interests but lack membership in the same alliance, I

assume that they act as a “low-cost” alternatives, or the “second-best” arrangement, to a hypothetical alliance. Conversely, when strategic partnerships emerge under conditions where states already share membership in the same alliance, I assume that they serve as complements, or “add-ons,” to their formal counterparts. This approach is imperfect because it relies on a fairly strong assumption that may not apply across all cases. However, it offers a way to analyze the question in a systematic and quantifiable fashion.

Second, while this dissertation departs from the widely held view that strategic partnerships can be seen as informal counterparts to military alliances (Envall & Hall, 2016; Fergusson, 2012; Wilkins, 2008), this assumption is not entirely without problems either. Formal alliances are typically defined by cooperation in response to a military threat, a defining feature not necessarily shared by strategic partnerships, which tend to have a broader purpose. Wilkins (2018, p. 501), for example, argues that strategic partnerships constitute security arrangements in so far as we adopt a broader definition of “security,” encompassing economic, political, environmental, societal, as well as other security aspects. Third, it is important *not* to assume that strategic partnerships—or any form of informal cooperation, for that matter—can fully substitute for their formal counterparts. This is due to the specific governance benefits and weaknesses of such informal arrangements. For instance, the inherently low commitment costs of strategic partnerships make them less suitable for establishing “credible commitments,” rendering them unfit for certain collective action problems compared to formal alliances (Abbott & Faude, 2020, p. 400).

In summary, the exploration of the third research question is thus influenced by three fairly strong assumptions. Firstly, that we can determine whether strategic partnerships operate as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to alliances simply through empirical observation of the configuration of states’ interests and institutional membership. Secondly, that strategic partnerships

serve as counterparts to formal alliances when we consider security in its broader sense. Thirdly, that strategic partnerships, at best, can function as “low-cost” alternatives or the “second-best” arrangement to formal alliances, but cannot entirely replace them.

This dissertation aims to fill the above-identified research gaps by developing and analyzing the most extensive database of strategic partnerships to date – the “Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnerships (v1.0)” dataset of strategic partnerships with the involvement of G20 states as one of the members for the period of 1993–2020.⁵ This data collection effort is heavily inspired by similar research projects, such as the “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions” (Leeds et al., 2002), “Defense Cooperation Agreement Dataset” (Kinne, 2020), and datasets on “Informal Intergovernmental Organizations” (Roger & Rowan, 2022; Vabulas & Snidal, 2021). Although limited in scope, the new dataset on strategic partnerships represents the most significant empirical contribution to the existing literature on the topic. It contains 100,300 observations for 3,515 undirected dyads from 1992 to 2020, registering 382 occurrences of strategic partnership formation. Previous efforts at mapping the proliferation of strategic partnerships suffer from serious limitations, including problems with limited country coverage and timeframe, as well as the absence of transparent and reliable coding procedures (Costa Vaz, 2014; Hall, 2016; Hamilton, 2014; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Michalski, 2019; Renard, 2021; Strüver, 2017; Zhongping & Jing, 2014).

While this data collection effort provides the most extensive empirical account of strategic partnerships to date, there are notable limitations that require acknowledgment. Firstly, focusing on G20 members proves beneficial since powerful countries tend to be attractive partners and more inclined to initiate cooperation. Hence, this data collection procedure likely captures a significant portion of all existing strategic partnerships. However, the selection process may introduce bias by

⁵ To learn about the rationale behind this case selection, please refer to the methodological chapter.

primarily capturing partnerships characterized by significant power asymmetry. Secondly, the data collection procedure records membership in strategic partnerships without distinguishing between different design features of partnership, including formality and policy scope, which likely leads to unobserved heterogeneity. In other words, there may be non-trivial qualitative differences between different partnerships unaccounted for in the analysis. These limitations impact the interpretation of subsequent analyses. Specifically, the findings presented here apply specifically to the universe of cases of dyads involving G20 countries as one of the members rather than to the entire population of all possible dyads. Moreover, the results are conditioned by the assumption that one can treat all partnerships as a single category. I elaborate on these limitations in the methodological chapter.

Developing and using the new “Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnerships (v1.0)” dataset, I employ a time-series cross-section analysis of *BISP onset* – the dependent variable that captures the formation of strategic partnerships at the undirected dyadic level. Consistent with the previous research on similar topics, such as the research on alliance formation and the onset of militarized interstate disputes, I rely on the use of the logistic regression method (e.g., Bennett & Stam, 2000). To ensure the robustness of my findings, I additionally employ controls for temporal dependence in line with the approach advocated by Carter and Signorino (2010), and conduct additional analyses with dyadic cluster-robust standard errors (Aronow et al., 2015; Carlson et al., 2023). This estimation strategy allows me to test competing hypotheses regarding whether strategic partnerships operate primarily as complements to or “low-cost” alternatives to formal alliances, as well as a host of additional hypotheses derived from previous contributions on military alliances (e.g., Gibler & Rider, 2004; Gibler & Wolford, 2006; Lai & Reiter, 2000) and informal institutions (e.g., Reinsberg & Westerwinter, 2021; Roger, 2020; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013).

Much like Roger (2020) and Westerwinter, Abbott, and Biersteker (2021), I have broadly categorized the additional hypotheses into three categories: functionalist, power-oriented, and domestic-politics explanations. Functionalist explanations focus on addressing substantive collective action problems, encompassing factors like shared security and economic interests, as well as preference homogeneity/heterogeneity. Power-oriented explanations center on the preferences of both strong and weak actors, including factors such as power imbalances among parties and the involvement of major and emerging powers. Domestic-politics explanations revolve around the interactions between different regime types and the influence of domestic veto players. In summary, the results of my analysis make contributions to three distinct strands of scholarly literature: the small but growing literature on strategic partnerships (e.g., Blanco, 2016; Envall and Hall, 2016; Struver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008), the literature on informal institutions (e.g., Abbott and Faude, 2020; Roger, 2020; Vabulas and Snidal, 2013), and the broader scholarship on international alignment (e.g., Locoman and Papa, 2021; Snyder, 1997; Wilkins, 2012).

On balance, my findings suggest that informal strategic partnerships can serve as both complements and “low-cost” alternatives to formal alliances depending on the particular configuration of two other factors: the presence of (pre-)existing alliance ties and common threats. More specifically, I show that the onset of strategic partnerships is particularly likely when non-allied states face a common threat (i.e., “low-cost” alternative to a formal alliance) and when states are members of the same “low commitment” alliance, such as a consultation and/or neutrality/non-aggression pact (i.e., complement to a formal alliance). In contrast, states are significantly less likely to form strategic partnerships when they neither share joint alliance membership nor common threats, as well as when they are members to the same “high commitment” alliance, such a defense pact. Therefore, the formation of strategic partnerships is contingent on a specific configuration of common threats and alliance commitments. These findings hold significance in terms of our understanding of the

relationship between formal and informal institutions. They further suggest that, in general, new informal institutions are more likely to emerge when common interests coincide with the absence of pre-existing formalized high-level commitments, such as “defense pacts” in the context of strategic partnerships.

Besides these findings, the results provide further insights into other factors that impact the establishment of strategic partnerships and informal institutions in general. The analysis reveals that a pair of states is more inclined to form a strategic partnership when they engage in significant bilateral trade, when both countries within a dyad are democracies, or when at least one of them is a rising power. Conversely, the likelihood of strategic partnership formation decreases when there are substantial domestic political constraints. The latter finding suggests that countries with relatively low constraints on the executive are actually more likely to engage in informal cooperation (cf. Roger, 2020). Among the various explanations for strategic partnership formation, including functionalist, power-oriented, and domestic-political approaches, no single explanation emerges as definitively more or less important than the others. Instead, the analysis highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon. To substantiate these findings, I provide many illustrative cases throughout the empirical section, demonstrating their plausibility and providing further contextual support.

To illustrate the utility of the newly compiled dataset and investigate the impact of strategic partnerships on state behavior, I conducted several supplementary exploratory analyses. First, I assessed whether strategic partnerships facilitate or hinder the development of formal cooperation, particularly military alliances. The analysis revealed that while partnership ties increase the likelihood of alliance formation, the resulting alliances are consistently of the “low commitment” variety, like non-aggression pacts, leaving existing commitments largely unchanged. This challenges the idea of informal institutions as “stepping stones” to formal cooperation (e.g., Abbott & Snidal, 2000; Vabulas

& Snidal, 2013). Second, I examined the influence of partnership ties on state behavior in two domains: armed conflict and bilateral arms trade. The results showed that strategic partners are equally likely to engage in armed conflict as other state pairs, but they engage in significantly higher levels of arms trade. Lastly, I investigated disparities in partnership formation among individual G20 members using a monadic research approach. This analysis underscored the impact of factors such as trade dependence and membership in international organizations.

Because strategic partnership have received relatively limited attention in the International Relations literature so far, however, it is important to establish why they matter in the first place. First, since the end of the Cold War, strategic partnerships have become one of the most common forms of security cooperation. Wilkins (2012, p. 68) goes as far as to describe them as a staple of the “21st-century alignment,” which reflects the international system in transition (Kuchins, 2001, p. 2). Major and rising powers must navigate the new international environment under unprecedented levels of uncertainty about others’ intentions and the future distribution of capabilities. The flexible nature of informal institutions, such as partnerships, provides one way for states to manage the related power shifts (Vabulas & Snidal, 2021). It is no coincidence that states such as China and Russia, which have experienced rise and decline since the end of the Cold War, are among some of the most prolific originators of these arrangements. Both countries have established a sizeable portfolio of strategic partnerships, yet their alliance structures have remained largely static since the early 2000s (see Locoman & Papa, 2021; Strüver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008).

Second, strategic partnerships are durable. For example, China and Russia have maintained and continuously updated their strategic partnership from its establishment in 1996 to the present. Under it, the two parties meet regularly to address common security, trade, and other challenges. The meetings are held at the highest executive level, often with the presidents in attendance (Strüver, 2017,

p. 36; Wilkins, 2008, p. 360). The recent elevation of the partnership to “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for a New Era,” demonstrates that Beijing and Moscow continue to benefit from their bilateral cooperation (Maull, 2022), which is ultimately driven by a common interest in promoting multipolarity and an anti-hegemonic (anti-United States) world order (Locoman & Papa, 2021, p. 19). The enduring nature of this partnership is further evident from the fact that it has so far remained unaffected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In fact, the two countries have since deepened their cooperation (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Some analysts go so far as to describe the Sino-Russian partnership as “alliance-like” (Ye, 2022), despite the fact that it does not entail any legally binding commitments to provide military support.

Finally, governments attach a special importance to strategic partnerships. For example, in an op-ed for the Chinese news agency Xinhua, Russian President Putin praised the current Sino-Russian relations as a “comprehensive strategic partnership” and stated that they had reached “an unprecedented level” (Putin, 2022). Chinese President Xi Jinping later said that the partnership with Russia is “superior to any Cold War-era alliance” (Munroe et al., 2022). The two sides also signed a joint statement emphasizing that the partnership has “no limits” and that there are “no forbidden areas of cooperation” in it (Kapetas, 2022). While some experts rightfully suspect these statements to be merely rhetorical (see, e.g., Denisov, 2022; Kim, 2023), they illustrate that the two countries view their partnership as special. In summary, since the end of the Cold War, strategic partnerships have become an increasingly common form of international cooperation that has proved enduring and is seen by governments as an important foreign policy tool. Therefore, it is pertinent to explore what could explain the proliferation of strategic partnerships and what their role is vis-à-vis other forms of security cooperation, including formal military alliances.

Since this exploration depends on the assumption that strategic partnerships do, in fact, represent a distinct category of alignment (Wilkins, 2008, 2012), I will further demonstrate the plausibility of this conceptualization with an empirical example – the role of strategic partnerships in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. One peculiar aspect of this conflict, which also illustrates the changing nature of international security cooperation, is that neither side enjoys significant material and diplomatic support from formal allies with defensive commitments. Instead, the primary “allies” of Ukraine and Russia in this war have been their strategic partners. Despite the fact that the majority of countries that ultimately provided assistance to Ukraine had some form of formal alliance with the victim of Russia’s aggression, such as consultation or neutrality/non-aggression pacts, none of these existing agreements included explicit expectations of military support in the event of an armed conflict. When we look at the list of countries who delivered or promised to deliver military aid to Ukraine, we find that some of the most significant donors, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Poland, and Turkey, are Ukraine’s strategic partners (see Table 1).

In each case, Ukraine has concluded a strategic partnership agreement containing political commitments to uphold its territorial integrity and support its NATO candidacy, as well as provisions for cooperation in security and defense. For example, the 2021 “U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership” contains an entire section dedicated to countering Russian aggression, including “by maintaining sanctions against or related to Russia and applying other relevant measures until restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders” (U.S. Department of State, 2021a). The 2020 “Political, Free Trade and Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Ukraine” specified that the aim of the strategic partnership was to develop a close relationship in the field of security and defense to tackle threats to peace and stability, including with respect to Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea (U.K. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Joint declarations on strategic partnerships between Ukraine

and Poland and Ukraine and Turkey issued before the war contain similar political commitments (President of Ukraine, 2021; Ukrainian Embassy in Poland, 2020).

Table 1. The list of countries with military commitments to Ukraine as of May 31, 2023

| Ranking | Country | Military commitments (billion USD) | Formal alliance obligations | Strategic partnership |
|---------|----------------|------------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| 1 | United States | 46.555 | Non-aggression | Yes |
| 2 | Germany | 8.1535 | Non-aggression | Expression of intent |
| 3 | United Kingdom | 7.149705 | Non-aggression | Yes |
| 4 | Poland | 3.2604 | Neutrality, non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| 5 | Netherlands | 2.699068 | Non-aggression | No |
| 6 | Denmark | 1.705274 | Non-aggression | No |
| 7 | Canada | 1.630007 | Non-aggression | No |
| 8 | Sweden | 1.615637 | Non-aggression | No |
| 9 | Finland | 1.211456 | Non-aggression | No |
| 10 | Norway | 1.101343 | Non-aggression | No |
| 11 | Italy | 0.774847 | Non-aggression | No |
| 12 | Slovakia | 0.725982 | Neutrality, non-aggression, consultation | No |
| 13 | Czech Republic | 0.614545 | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| 14 | Lithuania | 0.533619 | Neutrality, non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| 15 | France | 0.484427 | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| 16 | Estonia | 0.457863 | Neutrality, non-aggression, consultation | No |
| 17 | Belgium | 0.418474 | Non-aggression | No |
| 18 | Latvia | 0.402116 | Neutrality, non-aggression, consultation | No |
| 19 | Australia | 0.389815 | None | No |
| 20 | Spain | 0.35688 | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| 21 | Bulgaria | 0.260058 | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| 22 | Greece | 0.203068 | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| 23 | Croatia | 0.16605 | Non-aggression | No |
| 24 | Luxembourg | 0.099551 | Non-aggression | No |
| 25 | Portugal | 0.082039 | Non-aggression | No |
| 26 | Turkey | 0.067094 | Non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| 27 | Slovenia | 0.061286 | Non-aggression | No |
| 28 | Japan | 0.032452 | None | No |
| 29 | New Zealand | 0.020858 | None | No |
| 30 | Iceland | 0.009944 | Non-aggression | No |
| 31 | Ireland | 0.004184 | Non-aggression | No |
| 32 | Romania | 0.00409 | Non-aggression, consultation | Expression of intent |
| 33 | Austria | 0.003587 | Non-aggression | No |
| 34 | South Korea | 0.00358 | None | No |

Note: The data on military commitments come from the “Ukraine Support Tracker” database of military, financial, and humanitarian aid to Ukraine (Kiel Institute, 2023). The data on formal alliance obligations come from the “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions v5” dataset (see Leeds et al., 2002). Note that this dataset only extends to the year 2018. See Appendix 1 for ATOP IDs. The data on strategic partnerships come from the author of this dissertation (see Appendix 2).

On the other side of the conflict, Russia has also received support from some of its strategic partners, with China being particularly noteworthy. However, this support has not primarily manifested as direct military assistance, as seen in the case of Ukraine. Instead, many countries have chosen not to condemn Russia’s actions. For instance, a significant number of Russia’s partners either voted against, abstained, or were absent during the United Nations General Assembly voting on resolution ES-11/1, “Aggression against Ukraine,” which condemned the invasion (see Table 2). Out of the 51 countries that did not vote in favor of the resolution, 19 were strategic partners of Russia. Additionally, during the voting period, Russia was actively pursuing the establishment of a “strategic partnership” with Angola and Iran, both of which abstained from voting (see Appendix 4). The latter country has provided Russia with significant military support, including through the delivery of loitering munitions and other military equipment (Gramer, 2023). Moreover, out of the 51 countries, 7 maintained a “defense pact” with Russia, representing the archetype of Cold-War-era alliance, and 17 maintained a consultation or neutrality/non-aggression pact with it.

Table 2. The list of countries that did not vote in favor of the UNGA resolution ES-11/1

| Country | Vote | Formal alliance obligations | Strategic partnership |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Algeria | Abstain | None | Yes |
| Angola | Abstain | Non-aggression, consultation | Expression of intent |
| Armenia | Abstain | Defense, non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Azerbaijan | Absent | Defense, non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Bangladesh | Abstain | Non-aggression | No |
| Belarus | Against | Defense, non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Bolivia | Abstain | None | No |
| Burkina Faso | Absent | None | No |
| Burundi | Abstain | None | No |
| Cameroon | Absent | None | No |
| C.A.F. | Abstain | None | No |
| China | Abstain | Non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Congo | Abstain | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| Cuba | Abstain | None | Yes |
| El Salvador | Abstain | None | No |
| Equatorial Guinea | Abstain | None | No |
| Eritrea | Against | None | No |
| Eswatini | Absent | None | No |
| Ethiopia | Absent | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| Guinea | Absent | None | No |
| Guinea-Bissau | Absent | None | No |

| | | | |
|--------------|---------|---|----------------------|
| India | Abstain | Non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Iran | Abstain | Neutrality, non-aggression, consultation | Expression of intent |
| Iraq | Abstain | None | No |
| Kazakhstan | Abstain | Defense, neutrality, non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Kyrgyzstan | Abstain | Defense, neutrality, non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Laos | Abstain | Non-aggression | Yes |
| Madagascar | Abstain | None | No |
| Mali | Abstain | None | No |
| Mongolia | Abstain | Non-aggression | Yes |
| Morocco | Absent | Non-aggression | Yes |
| Mozambique | Abstain | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| Namibia | Abstain | None | No |
| Nicaragua | Abstain | None | Yes |
| North Korea | Against | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| Pakistan | Abstain | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| Senegal | Abstain | None | No |
| South Africa | Abstain | None | Yes |
| South Sudan | Abstain | None | No |
| Sri Lanka | Abstain | Non-aggression | No |
| Sudan | Abstain | None | No |
| Syria | Against | Non-aggression, consultation | No |
| Tajikistan | Abstain | Defense, neutrality, non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Tanzania | Abstain | None | No |
| Togo | Absent | None | No |
| Turkmenistan | Absent | Non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Uganda | Abstain | None | No |
| Uzbekistan | Absent | Defense, non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Venezuela | Absent | None | Yes |
| Vietnam | Abstain | Non-aggression, consultation | Yes |
| Zimbabwe | Abstain | None | No |

Note: The data on formal alliance obligations come from the “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions v5” dataset (see Leeds et al., 2002). Note that this dataset only extends to the year 2018. See Appendix 3 for ATOP IDs. The data on “strategic partnerships” come from the author of this dissertation (see Appendix 4). The data on country votes come from Al Jazeera (2023).

Even though the majority of Russia’s pre-war strategic partnership agreements were less specific on security and defense matters, they often emphasized the coordination of positions within international organizations. For example, the 2000 “Declaration on Strategic Partnership Between the Republic of India and the Russian Federation” committed both parties to closer cooperation at the United Nations, long-term defense and military-technical cooperation, and non-participation in any associations or armed conflict directed against the other side (Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000). The 2013 “Joint Declaration on the establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Africa” contains the same passages

(President of Russia, 2013). The founding documents of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership also share these components (Wilkins, 2008). Notably, China and Russia expanded their partnership shortly after the invasion (Kapetas, 2022), and subsequent joint statements on the Sino-Russian strategic partnership emphasized the legitimacy of Russia's security concerns in Ukraine while condemning the involvement of NATO members (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war serves as a compelling example of how strategic partnerships embody “expectations of states about whether they will be supported or opposed by other states in future interactions” (Snyder, 1997, p. 6). Despite the fact that strategic partnerships entail merely political rather than legally binding commitments, countries attach considerable importance to these expectations. In the case of Russia and Ukraine, these expectations have largely materialized in various forms. Ukraine's strategic partnerships have entailed commitments from its partners to provide security assistance and protect its territorial integrity against Russian advances. This rationale has driven the current provision of military aid by over 30 countries, none of which were legally obligated to do so, as would be the case with typical “defense pacts.” Similarly, Russia's strategic partnerships have involved commitments from its partners to refrain from interfering in its military affairs and engage in policy coordination within international organizations. These commitments have been evident at the United Nations and other forums, as Russia's strategic partners continue to abstain from condemning its actions against Ukraine.

On the following pages, I will delve into the mechanisms behind the rapid proliferation of these informal arrangements. The theoretical chapter will provide an overview of previous contributions on this topic, discussing the conceptualization of strategic partnerships as a distinct form of alignment, their specific functions, and institutional design. Furthermore, I will formulate hypotheses regarding their role in relation to alliances—whether they are complementary or serve as

a “low-cost” alternative. In the methodological chapter, I will discuss the research design and data structure, summarize previous attempts to map the proliferation of strategic partnerships, describe the data collection process, and explain how the dependent and independent variables are operationalized. I will also outline the specific statistical methods of analysis employed. Moving on to the descriptive chapter, I will offer preliminary insights into the major temporal and geographical trends observed in strategic partnership formation. In the analytical chapter, I will test the main argument regarding the role of strategic partnerships vis-à-vis alliances, while also examining the influence of other factors. Finally, I will conclude by summarizing the main findings, discussing their implications, and identifying any limitations and potential avenues for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter delves into the existing scholarly literature surrounding strategic partnerships, explores their conceptualization as a novel form of alignment and informal institutions, examines their distinct functions, and formulates hypotheses on their formation. In the “Review of the Existing Scholarship” section, I discuss and critically assess the current state of knowledge about strategic partnerships, while identifying specific research gaps. In the “Form: Alignment” section, I provide a more in-depth discussion of the conceptualization of strategic partnerships as a new form of alignment next to alliances, coalitions, and security communities. In the “Design: Informality” section, I discuss the conceptualization of strategic partnerships as a specific type of an informal institution next to concepts such as “soft law,” “Informal Intergovernmental Organizations,” and “low-cost institutions.” In the “Function: Balancing, Issue-Linkage, Reassurance” section, I discuss the specific functions of strategic partnerships. In the “Hypotheses on Complementarity and Substitution” section, I formulate the main hypotheses, and in the “Additional Hypotheses on Strategic Partnership Formation” section, I discuss other potential factors, drawing on functionalist, power-oriented, and domestic-political explanations of (informal) international cooperation.

2.1. Review of the Existing Scholarship

Over the past decade, the phenomenon of “strategic partnerships” has garnered increasing scholarly attention within the field of International Relations (see, e.g., Blanco, 2016; Envall & Hall, 2016; Fergusson, 2012; Ferreira-Pereira & Vieira, 2016; Maher, 2016; Parameswaran, 2014; Renard, 2016; Smith, 2016; Song & Hall, 2019; Tallis & Šimečka, 2017; Yiqi, 2017; Yu, 2015). Primarily focused on examining individual instances of these partnerships, such as those forged by China and the European Union, existing scholarship has often sidestepped the substantive exploration of their theoretical and conceptual underpinnings. Importantly, a generalized understanding of the conditions, which incentivize the formation of these cooperative arrangements remains noticeably absent. Some noteworthy exceptions to this observation include the contributions by Nien-Chung Chang-Liao (2023), Thomas S. Wilkins (2008), and Georg Strüver (2017).⁶ Particularly, Strüver’s (2017) study represents the single quantitative examination of hypotheses pertaining to strategic partnerships formation, albeit limited in scope to China’s partnership portfolio. As a result, a distinct gap in the existing literature persists, while strategic partnerships continue to proliferate.

The lack of a shared understanding regarding the purpose of strategic partnerships can be largely attributed to the inherent ambiguity of the term and significant variations observed in the characteristics of specific partnerships. As Legvold (2009, p. 82) aptly expresses, the concept has been “thought through too little and tossed about too lightly.” In contemporary diplomatic discourse, the designation of a “strategic partnership” not only serves to denote a specific form of international cooperation but also functions as a rhetorical device, occasionally misused by the media and public officials (Blanco, 2016, p. 36; Kay, 2000, p. 16). This issue is further exacerbated by the usage of similar

⁶ While other authors have made efforts to construct theoretical-conceptual frameworks for analyzing strategic partnerships, their attempts have fallen short in producing testable hypotheses suitable for large-*N* analysis (e.g., Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019; Michalski & Pan, 2017).

labels such as “partnership,” “comprehensive partnership,” “strategic alliance,” or “security partnership” (see Envall & Hall, 2016, p. 90; Parameswaran, 2014, p. 264; Wilkins, 2008, p. 362). Simultaneously, the substantive content and form of individual strategic partnerships can exhibit striking disparities. Some partnerships concentrate on specific issues, while others are quite broad. Some are based on written agreements, whereas others are implicit (Šimečka & Tallis, 2016, p. 3). Some develop mechanisms for regular interaction, whereas others are more decentralized. The frequency and intensity of interactions also varies across such partnerships (Renard, 2012, p. 308).

The complex nature of these issues has presented a considerable challenge for scholars to reach a consensus on even the fundamental elements that define a strategic partnership. It is widely acknowledged that the term originated in the private sector and only entered the realm of international politics relatively recently, during the 1990s, when Chinese and Russian diplomats popularized it as a means to characterize the new dynamics in their bilateral relations after the Cold War (Kay, 2000, p. 15). In business literature, the term signifies structured collaboration between organizations that falls short of a legal partnership, involving the pursuit of mutual goals that could not be achieved in isolation, along with information-sharing, resource pooling, and joint risk-taking (Wilkins, 2008, p. 365; cf. Stumbaum & Xiong, 2012, pp. 159–60). Building upon this understanding, Wilkins (2008, p. 383) defined strategic partnership as “[...] structured collaboration between states (or other actors) to take joint advantage of economic opportunities, or to respond to security challenges more effectively than could be achieved in isolation.” While some authors offer alternative definitions, many refrain from aligning themselves with any specific definition. Table 3 below presents an overview of some of the competing definitions.

Table 3. Sample definitions of strategic partnership

| Author | Definition |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Kay (2000, p. 15) | A new institutional form of post-cold war international relations that “[...] enhances or justifies a close relationship between two states that seek mutual gains but whose interests may be competitive rather than shared.” |
| Vahl (2001, p. 4) | A goal-oriented relationship based on shared values and interests, mutual understanding, and equality in size. |
| Wilkins (2008, p. 383) | “[...] structured collaboration between states (or other actors) to take joint advantage of economic opportunities, or to respond to security challenges more effectively than could be achieved in isolation.” |
| Nadkarni (2010, pp. 48-49) | A flexible type of bilateral relationship between countries that are neither allies nor adversaries characterized by formalized agreements, formal institutional links at various levels, and mechanisms for summit meetings, with an emphasis on military, economic, and cultural cooperation. |
| Renard (2011, pp. 5–6) | A type of bilateral relationship that is comprehensive in scope, based on reciprocity and common understanding of mutual values and objectives, and where the cooperation is oriented toward the long term and goes beyond bilateral issues. |
| Parameswaran (2014, pp. 263–64) | “[...] loose but structured framework of collaboration between parties to address common challenges and to seize opportunities in several areas.” |
| Strüver (2017, p. 36) | “[...] structured framework for the collaboration between two or more parties which is organized in a loose and non-binding way and which aims to enable the pursuit of shared interests and the addressing of common challenges in different issue areas and facilitate (future) cooperation.” |
| Michalski (2019, p. 5) | “[...] a specific form of bilateral relations between states and between states [and] non-state actors which through their presence shape the social structures of the international system and provide venues for bilateral interaction and the realization of international roles.” |
| Chang-Liao (2023, p. 234) | A distinct category of foreign policy instrument situated between alliances and alignments characterized by its informality, equality, and inclusivity. |

Note: The list of above definitions is not exhaustive.

An overview of the aforementioned definitions highlights a common understanding among most authors that strategic partnerships involve cooperative endeavors based on mutual gains and shared interests, serving as goal-oriented relationships with specific purposes or objectives. However, there is notable disagreement regarding other defining characteristics. Kay (2000) suggests that interests between the parties may be competitive rather than shared, while others emphasize shared values, interests, and objectives. Vahl (2001) and Chang-Liao's (2023) definitions specifically mention equality in size as a characteristic of partnerships, which is not explicitly mentioned in other definitions. Renard's (2011) definition emphasizes that strategic partnerships have a comprehensive scope, while other definitions do not explicitly address the scope. Nadkarni's (2010) definition emphasizes formalized agreements and institutional links, while other definitions highlight their loose and non-binding nature. Wilkins (2008), Strüver (2017), and Parameswaran's (2014) definitions discuss the structured framework of collaboration, while other definitions may not explicitly address the structure. Overall, these divergences reflect the diverse perspectives surrounding the conceptualizations of strategic partnerships.

The majority of contributions on strategic partnerships take a non-paradigmatic approach or do not explicitly subscribe to a specific paradigm. Nevertheless, we can identify two mainstream theoretical perspectives, realism and constructivism, and a host of others, including critical security studies, organizational studies, and (historical) institutionalism (see Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019, pp. 32–37; Michalski & Pan, 2017, pp. 21–26). One of the early attempts at theorizing strategic partnerships comes from Wilkins (2008), who draws on the organizational studies literature. This perspective corresponds to the origin of the strategic partnership concept as an input from organizational and international business studies, wherein the term usually refers to a formal “alliance” between two or more commercial enterprises (Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019, pp. 32–22). Wilkins (2008, pp. 363–67) proposes a three-phase model of organizational development: formation,

implementation, and evaluation. In this model, the primary driving force for states to seek strategic partners is the uncertainty in the international environment. They seek partners who share compatible interests and capabilities. Once a suitable partner is identified, a common purpose, or a “system principle,” becomes solidified in a framework of mutual agreement, and specific goals are defined.

Wilkins (2008), like other authors influenced by realism, considers strategic partnerships as a form of “alignment” – defined by Snyder (1997, p. 6) as “expectations of states about whether they will be supported or opposed by other states in future interactions.” Strategic partnerships enable states to pursue shared security objectives, similar to military alliances, coalitions, and security communities (see Envall & Hall, 2016; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Nadkarni, 2010; Parameswaran, 2014; Wilkins, 2008, 2012). However, these partnerships diverge from other alignment forms in significant ways. Unlike military alliances, strategic partnerships are not necessarily “threat-driven” but are goal-oriented, implying that they do not require identifying specific enemies as threats. Additionally, partnerships are informal arrangements with relatively lower commitments compared to formal agreements found in military alliances. While alliances primarily focus on security matters, partnerships typically encompass various functional areas (Wilkins, 2008, pp. 360–61). Envall and Hall (2016, p. 91) further note that partnerships do not necessarily rely on shared identities and values like security communities. Furthermore, unlike ad hoc coalitions formed to address specific challenges, partnerships tend to be open-ended and evolving (see, also, Wilkins, 2012, pp. 59–72).

Strategic partnerships align well with the realist paradigm – both structural and neoclassical – as instruments through which states can pursue their security interests (Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019, p. 35; Michalski & Pan, 2017, pp. 21–24). From the perspective of structural realism, Kay (2000) argues that these partnerships can be understood as tools of statecraft utilized to establish primacy or balance against perceived threats. He notes that states may employ them to reassure allies, reinforce existing

alliance commitments, manage great-power decline, justify cooperation with competitors, as well as to join forces in the traditional “balance of threat” sense (see Walt, 1987). From the perspective of neoclassical realism, which additionally accounts for the role of norms and soft power, Fergusson (2012, p. 200), argues that strategic partnerships allow for “soft balancing,” and that they can be understood as “[...] nonmilitary alignment of at least two states that are designed to reduce or remove the military presence and external influence of an outside power from a specific region” (cf. Paul, 2018, p. 21).⁷ Other authors draw attention to certain aspects of partnerships that fit within a broader realist perspective, such as their potential to facilitate the establishment of zones of influence, manage rising powers, or legitimize great power status (Michalski & Pan, 2017, p. 22).

The conceptualization of strategic partnerships as a new form of “alignment” has sparked lively scholarly debates and garnered criticism, particularly due to concerns raised by several authors regarding the overemphasis on security cooperation as a defining feature of these partnerships (see, e.g., Chang-Liao, 2023; Strüver, 2017). A recent non-paradigmatic contribution proposes an alternative perspective, suggesting that strategic partnerships should be viewed as a distinct category of foreign policy instrument situated between alliances and alignments. According to Chang-Liao (2023, pp. 230–234), three defining characteristics shape these arrangements: informality, equality, and inclusivity. From this viewpoint, the informality of such partnerships allows states to circumvent the formal structures associated with alliances, partly achieved through issue-linkage across various areas of cooperation. This informality, the author argues, fosters a more balanced relationship in which both states stand on equal footing. However, what truly sets strategic partnerships apart from both alliances and alignments, in a broader sense, is their inclusivity. Chang-Liao (2023, p. 233) asserts that states

⁷ For Paul (2018), strategic partnerships constitute somewhat of an in-between category between “soft” and “hard” balancing, wherein partnerships allow joint efforts and sharing of resources, but no offensive warfare and operation coordination as would be the case with formal military alliances.

can establish multiple partnerships concurrently, even with rival states, as they are not directed against any third party.⁸

Constructivism offers another prominent theoretical approach to conceptualizing strategic partnerships. In this view, these partnerships are understood as social constructions that not only enable states to pursue their foreign policy interests but also facilitate the promotion of specific configurations of the international system that align with states' worldviews and normative orientations. Additionally, strategic partnerships provide states with a means to pursue individual image- or status-related goals (Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019, pp. 35–36; Michalski & Pan, 2017, pp. 25–26). For example, Blanco (2016) argues that the language of these partnerships allows states to differentiate and hierarchize their relations with other actors, advance normative foreign policy, and establish or modify the rules constituting the bilateral relationships. Šimečka and Tallis (2016) see strategic partnerships as “transformative endeavors,” which shape actors' identities through peer socialization. In a similar vein, contributions by Song and Hall (2019) and Ying (2018) emphasize the role of identity construction through discursive association. On balance, scholars inspired by constructivism argue that the foundations of such partnerships are ideational, and that they are “what states make of it” (see Wendt, 1992). Yet, their insights are typically idiosyncratic.

A relatively smaller number of authors have approached the analysis of strategic partnerships through the lenses of critical security studies and historical institutionalism (Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019, pp. 34, 36–37). Authors in the former group have drawn on scholarship advocating for a broader understanding of “security.” For example, Envall and Hall (2016) propose viewing strategic partnerships as a novel “security practice,” which signifies the emergence of alternative forms of “security governance” that depart from traditional statist and institutional approaches. In a recent

⁸ I will delve into the nuances of the alignment debate in greater detail in the following sub-section.

contribution, Wilkins (2018) argues that strategic partnerships should be understood as security alignments in a broader sense, acknowledging the existence of security issues across and within various sectors such as economic, political, environmental, and social dimensions. Authors in the latter group have drawn on scholarship emphasizing the importance of historical memory. For example, Wang (2017) argues that successful strategic partnerships develop, in part, as a result of a long history of positive bilateral interactions. Gilson (2016), on the other hand, explores how “path dependency” may lead to the emergence of partnerships that fail to generate positive outcomes when underlying issues between parties remain unresolved.

Interestingly, the empirical literature on strategic partnerships has generally overlooked analysis drawing on rational institutionalism. However, an exception to this trend can be found in the research conducted by Strüver (2017, p. 38), who observed that certain features of these partnerships bear resemblance to those commonly associated with intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). Just like IGOs, strategic partnerships facilitate cooperation by providing a structured framework for collaboration, establishing channels of communication, and framing expectations. The enduring structure of these partnerships, reminiscent of the institutional framework of IGOs, reduces transaction costs and uncertainty. This reduction is achieved by establishing communication channels that enhance the availability of information to all involved parties. Similarly to IGOs, strategic partnerships incorporate loose transparency mechanisms aimed at monitoring compliance and detecting instances of defection. Moreover, both IGOs and strategic partnerships possess the capacity to regularize interactions among participating entities, thereby mitigating the risk of defection by internalizing the values embedded within shared institutions (see also Abbott & Snidal, 1998, 2000; Koremenos et al., 2001).

On careful consideration, the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of strategic partnerships remain a subject of ongoing debate, characterized by uncertainties surrounding the validity of different conceptualizations. Realism, as a prominent approach, offers a valuable lens to reframe these partnerships as a specific form of “alignment.” However, it falls short in explaining why states would opt for establishing them instead of other forms of (institutionalized) cooperation. Constructivism, another influential perspective, recognizes the ideational dimension of strategic partnerships and their role in shaping actors’ values and identities, although its findings are predominantly limited to specific empirical cases. Additionally, alternative approaches like critical security studies, historical institutionalism, and organizational studies contribute to a more nuanced analysis, yet their insights also have limitations in pinpointing the specific conditions that prompt states to establish these arrangements. The institutionalist literature stands out as a promising but relatively unexplored theoretical perspective that holds potential in capturing the intricate nature of strategic partnerships as informal alignments. Moreover, given the multifaceted nature of these partnerships, incorporating insights from multiple paradigms appears particularly advantageous.

Arguably, the current absence of a general model of strategic partnership formation is, in part, a function of the limited scope of case selection in the existing literature. As pointed out earlier, most contributions focus on specific cases, such as the Sino-Russian strategic partnership (on this particular partnership alone, see Chang-Liao, 2023; Charap et al., 2017; Dittmer, 2010; Kaczmarek, 2016; Krickovic, 2017; Li, 2007; Menon, 2009; Wilkins, 2008). Several authors have compiled lists of partnerships established by specific countries, including Brazil (Costa Vaz, 2014), China (Zhongping & Jing, 2014), India (Hall, 2016), and the United States (Hamilton, 2014), but they have not attempted to analyze the factors contributing to their proliferation in a systematic fashion. The only study, which comes close is the study by Strüver (2017), which analyzes the onset of strategic partnerships forged by China between 1990 and 2015. The author formulates hypotheses around interests and ideology,

drawing largely on previous findings of the quantitative research on military alliances. The results of his statistical analysis indicate that China chooses strategic partners based on higher market potential, higher share of regional capabilities, and higher trade dependence (Strüver, 2017, p. 51). Yet, the hypotheses are underdeveloped and certain key factors missing.

An overview of the literature reveals the following. First, our empirical knowledge of the phenomenon of strategic partnerships is still quite limited. Most contributions tend to focus on specific cases of individual partnerships, such as those forged by the EU (Blanco, 2016; Ferreira-Pereira & Vieira, 2016; Renard, 2016; Tallis & Šimečka, 2017), Russia (Fergusson, 2012; Legvold, 2009; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Lynch, 2004; Wilkins, 2008), India (Blank, 2007; Brewster, 2010; Burns, 2007; Joshi & Pant, 2015; Hall, 2016), and China (Chang-Liao, 2023; Deng, 2007; Maher, 2016; Strüver, 2017; Ying, 2018; Yu, 2015). The extant literature would benefit from a more systematic descriptive account of the phenomenon. Second, most publications on the topic shy away from adopting an explicit theoretical-conceptual framework, which poses a challenge when it comes to making predictions about strategic partnership formation. The only notable attempts at addressing this gap have been made by Wilkins (2008) and Strüver (2017). Third, we lack a comprehensive quantitative examination of hypotheses regarding the factors that influence the formation of strategic partnerships (cf. Strüver, 2017). The current state of research would benefit from a clearer understanding of the conditions under which countries resort to their establishment.

2.2. Form: Alignment

The majority of contributions in the empirical literature on strategic partnerships departs from the assumption that these informal arrangements entail an element of security cooperation (e.g., Envall & Hall, 2016; Fergusson, 2012; Kay, 2000; Wilkins, 2008). It is partly because of this observation that many authors draw comparisons between strategic partnerships, on the one hand, and formal alliances and other forms of “alignment,” on the other hand. However, the assumption that strategic partnerships constitute an example of security cooperation is not entirely without problems. While formal alliances are typically defined by cooperation in the face of a common threat, partnerships tend to have a more general purpose and encompass various functional areas of cooperation (e.g., Wilkins, 2008, pp. 360–61). Consequently, Wilkins (2018, p. 501) argues that strategic partnerships can be conceived of as security arrangements in so far as we adopt a broader definition of the term “security,” encompassing economic, political, environmental, societal, and other aspects of security. Therefore, when labeling strategic partnerships as instances of security cooperation, it is important to acknowledge that this classification hinges on a broader conceptualization of security, extending beyond traditional military cooperation.

As hinted above, much of the empirical work on strategic partnerships revolves around their conceptualization as a new and distinct form of “alignment” (see Envall & Hall, 2016; Chang-Liao, 2023; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Nadkarni, 2010; Parameswaran, 2014; Wilkins, 2008, 2012). However, to understand the plausibility and significance of this conceptualization, we need to examine the historical context, in which the debate is taking place. The observation by various authors (Chidley, 2014; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Tertrais, 2004; Wilkins, 2012) that the collapse of the bipolar system has led to a dramatic change in the nature of international security cooperation has sparked an academic debate about one of the key concepts in the field of International Relations – military

alliances. The problem at the outset was that the existing literature on this topic focused almost exclusively on formal military alliances as a tool for enhancing national security through which states could prevent and manage wars (Rynning & Schmitt, 2018, p. 1). The leading contributions to this literature were largely written and developed during the Cold War (see Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979), and the sorts of arrangements that the authors observed and theorized, including NATO and the Warsaw pact, were products of that time.

Yet, this predominant focus on formal military alliances has effectively limited the field of research to a very specific form of security cooperation (Chidley, 2014; Wilkins, 2012), and this entailed moving away from the broader concept of alignment, which Snyder (1997, p. 6) defined as “expectations of states about whether they will be supported or opposed by other states in future interactions.” Snyder’s (1997) definition is particularly valuable in that it acknowledges that formal alliances are but one type of alignment. According to the author, states can form alignments both “against” and “with,” identifying potential opponents as well as friends, whereas archetypal Cold-War-era military alliances are aimed “against” a third party. Expectations of support can stem from the perceived interests, capabilities, observed behavior, common ideologies, or similar ethnic makeups. Furthermore, these expectations may be created through various means, including joint military exercises, diplomatic statements, and agreements, such as (but not limited to) formal military alliances. The totality of these expectations create a “pattern of alignment.” Although patterns of alignment may be relatively informal and vague in the absence of formal alliance commitments, they nevertheless entail certain expectations of state behavior (Snyder, 1997, pp. 6–8).

Many authors have come to realize that traditional conceptualizations of alliances no longer necessarily reflect the new security environment and the full range of security cooperation in the nascent multipolar world. Increasingly, countries are resorting to more informal arrangements

(Chidley, 2014; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Wilkins, 2012). Wilkins (2012) thus argued for a return to the concept of alignment as an umbrella term for different forms of security cooperation, including military alliances, coalitions, security communities, and strategic partnerships, which he defined as “structured collaboration between states (or other actors) to take joint advantage of economic opportunities, or to respond to security challenges” (Wilkins, 2008, p. 383). Whereas alliances are based on formal agreements that bind their members to cooperate militarily in the face of a common threat (Leeds, 2020, p. 6), strategic partnerships are based on informal agreements organized around a general (security) purpose, or a “system principle,” such as championship of a multipolar world (Wilkins, 2008, pp. 360–61). In addition, unlike security communities, partnerships are based on shared interests rather than values, and unlike coalitions, they are open-ended and evolving rather than ad hoc solutions to specific problems (Envall & Hall, 2016, p. 91).

Alliances are by far the most well-documented form of alignment. Snyder (1997, p. 4) defines them as “formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership” (see, also, Leeds, 2020, p. 6). They are “exclusive institutions” usually aimed against a specific enemy that poses a threat. Formal alliance agreements may be bilateral or multilateral, and they can entail defensive or offensive obligations, as well as provisions for neutrality, non-aggression, and consultation (Leeds, 2020, pp. 11–12; Leeds et al., 2002; Wilkins, 2012, p. 60). So-called “defense pacts,” or alliances that include promises of active military assistance in the event of an armed conflict such as NATO or the Warsaw Pact, constitute the prototypical Cold-War-era alliance (Tertrais, 2014, p. 143; Wilkins, 2012, p. 60). The most prominent contributions to the alliance literature (Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979) have been predominantly centered around this specific type of alliance. Yet, several scholars have questioned whether the findings of this literature can be applied to alliances writ large, advocating for disaggregating the

alliance category instead (see Wilkins, 2012, p. 60). Moreover, evidence from recent studies suggests that different factors motivate the formation of different types of alliances (Edry et al., 2021).⁹

While alliance structures themselves have been changing since the end of the Cold War, as evidenced by the rise of nonaggression pacts (Gilber, 2009), on balance, they still differ in important ways from strategic partnerships. The two most distinctive features of partnerships, in comparison to formal alliances, are (a) their general (security) purpose and (b) informality. I argue that other features highlighted by previous authors are not necessarily distinctive. With regard to the former feature, most authors agree that, whereas alliances typically focus on cooperation in the area of security and defense, strategic partnerships are multidimensional, often spanning a wide range of functional areas, including diplomacy, defense, trade, and culture (see Kay, 2000, pp. 15–16; Michalski, 2019, pp. 4–5; Wilkins, 2008, pp. 360–361). Security cooperation is not the sole, and sometimes not even the most prominent, area of cooperation under these partnerships. This is also why Wilkins (2018, p. 501) qualified his classification of strategic partnerships as security alignments by arguing that “security” must be understood in the broad sense as security within military, economic, and other sectors. The general (security) purpose is solidified in a “system principle,” such as championship of a multipolar world, rather than a specific threat (Wilkins, 2008, p. 360).

Concerning the latter aspect, the prevailing consensus among authors is that strategic partnerships are considerably more informal when juxtaposed with alliances, as the latter hinge on formal agreements. These partnerships involve solely a political commitment, as expressed in joint statements, declarations, or executive documents, all devoid of any legally binding obligations (Chang-Liao, 2023, pp. 231–32; Parameswaran, 2014, p. 264; Strüver, 2017, p. 36; Wilkins, 2008, p. 361). The

⁹ For instance, Edry, Johnson, and Leeds (2021) found that while external threats motivate the formation of defense pacts, internal threats encourage the formation of neutrality/non-aggression and consultation pacts.

inherent informality of strategic partnerships enables states to enjoy moderate benefits of cooperation, including economic and security assistance, without the risk of compromising their autonomy (Parameswaran, 2014, p. 264). While alliance members are constrained by formal rules, strategic partners maintain greater flexibility and can readily adjust their agreements. As a result, should the outcomes of a specific cooperative endeavor prove less advantageous, strategic partnerships have the ability to be renewed or modified on a case-by-case or temporary basis (Chang-Liao, 2023, pp. 231–32). However, the informality is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, strategic partners need not fear entrapment or abandonment (Paul, 2018, p. 187). On the other hand, states cannot rely on their partners to provide military assistance in times of need.

Indeed, strategic partnerships stand apart from alliances due to their multidimensional and informal nature. However, authors have proposed additional distinctive features that further differentiate these two forms of alignment. Most notably, Chang-Liao (2023) argues that the two other distinctive features include equality and inclusivity. The author argues that, in part due to their informality, strategic partnerships enable states to establish a more equitable footing, whereas the presence of power disparities within alliances often results in an unequal distribution of security obligations and may limit the autonomy of certain member states (Chang-Liao, 2023, pp. 232–33). This assumption is problematic as all the informality accomplishes is enabling states to preserve a facade of equality while significant power disparities and imbalances persist beneath the surface. Powerful states tend to favor informality as it allows them to preserve greater autonomy while still exerting influence and coercing weaker states to comply with specific policies without the constraints of formal rules (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, pp. 213–14). Moreover, the notion of equality in strategic partnerships does not align with empirical reality, as asserting that partnerships like the one between China and Fiji are characterized by equality would be fundamentally inaccurate.

In addition, Chang-Liao (2023, p. 233) posits that strategic partnerships exhibit a distinct feature in their inclusivity, setting them apart from alliances. Unlike alliances that typically target third parties perceived as threats, strategic partnerships have a broader (membership) scope, often encompassing both friends and enemies, as they are not directed specifically against any external actors. The problem with this characterization is twofold. Firstly, it relies on the definition of alliances as “exclusive institutions.” However, it is worth noting that many modern-day alliances exhibit a more inclusive nature. For instance, some prominent data projects, such as the one by Leeds et al. (2002), consider non-aggression pacts as alliances. Under this broader definition, even major power rivals such as the United States and Russia can be considered “technically” allies due to their joint membership in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Secondly, it is essential to recognize that while strategic partnerships have the potential for inclusivity, this does not imply that they are always inclusive in practice. For example, the 2021 “U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership” quite explicitly identifies Russia as a threat (U.S. Department of State, 2021a). The inclusivity may be relatively common but it is not unique to strategic partnerships.

Strategic partnerships also differ substantially from security communities. Developed by Deutsch (see Deutsch, 1961; Deutsch et al., 1957) and later refined by Adler and Barnett (1998), the concept of a security community captures “the attainment, within a territory, of a sense of community and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a ‘long’ time, dependable expectations of peaceful change” (Deutsch et al., 1957, p. 5). Under this logic, states align with one another in order to eradicate the reliance on violence as a means of foreign policy and collaborate to transform mutual perceptions, ultimately establishing a collective identity, such as in the case of the European Union. Security communities can take on either a “pluralistic” or an “amalgamated” form, depending on whether states maintain their individual entity status or delegate authority to a supranational institution. Constructivist scholars Adler and Barnett (1998) expand upon

Deutsch's original concept, refining it to incorporate the notions of "shared identities, values, and meanings." The distinction between security communities and strategic partnerships lies precisely in their lack of commitment to peaceful change based on shared identities and values (Envall & Hall, 2016, p. 91; Wilkins, 2012, pp. 65–66).

Furthermore, strategic partnerships differ from coalitions, which are "groupings of like-minded states that agree on the need for joint action on a specific problem at a particular time with no commitment to a durable relationship" (Pierre, 2002, p. ix). The concept of a coalition is relatively more contentious than alliance or security community. Most scholars concur that coalitions are relatively informal, focused on specific objectives, and short-lived compared to other forms of alignment. States typically form coalitions based on a single common interest that justifies joint action, differences on other matters notwithstanding. Unlike alliances, which are established in anticipation of addressing long-term threats, coalitions are formed on an ad hoc basis to tackle immediate and often unforeseen issues. Moreover, cooperation within coalitions often centers around non-traditional security threats such as insurgency and terrorism (Nielsen & Prete, 1983; Pierre, 2002; Rice, 1997). In contrast, strategic partnerships deviate from coalitions in that they are not ad hoc arrangements aimed at specific issues. Instead, they involve broader cooperation across multiple functional areas, and this cooperation is characterized as "open-ended and evolving" rather than confined to a particular period (Envall & Hall, 2016, p. 91; Wilkins, 2012, pp. 63–64).

Strategic partnerships are not the sole "new" form of security cooperation that has experienced a surge since the conclusion of the Cold War. Kinne's (2018, 2020) data project shows that the post-bipolar era has witnessed a rapid proliferation of "Defense Cooperation Agreements" (DCAs), which are formal bilateral agreements establishing institutional frameworks for regular defense collaboration (Kinne, 2018, p. 803). Remarkably, nearly 2,000 of these formal agreements

have been signed by countries around the world since 1980, with a significant spike observed in the early 1990s (Kinne, 2020). These DCAs are inherently part of “patterns of alignment” (see Snyder, 1997, p. 7), enabling states to express their affinity with specific partners by establishing close defense ties (Kinne, 2018, p. 813). In fact, the author shows that pre-existing DCA ties significantly reduce the likelihood of parties engaging in an armed conflict with one another and increase the volume of bilateral arms trade. Strategic partnerships and DCAs diverge in their nature and scope of cooperation. Strategic partnerships are characterized by their informal nature and encompass collaboration across various functional areas (see, e.g., Chang-Liao, 2023, p. 234; Wilkins, 2008, pp. 360–361). In contrast, DCAs are formal agreements that specifically focus on defense cooperation.

The conceptualization of strategic partnerships as a new form of alignment has not been without controversy. Chang-Liao (2023, p. 324) argues that partnerships should be understood as a category of foreign policy instrument being situated between alliances and alignments. Specifically, the author argues that partnerships fit neither category because they are not targeted against any third party, and even contain expectations of engaging with enemies, whereas both alliances and alignments “are directed against specific threats and are exclusive in membership form” (Wallender & Keohane, 1999, p. 28 cited in Chang-Liao, 2023, p. 324). Yet, a closer reading of Wallender and Keohane (1999, p. 28) reveals that the authors conceptualize alignments in opposition to military alliances as “minimally institutionalized,” arguing that NATO in its early days constituted one such example. Therefore, for these authors, the difference between alliances and alignments lies mainly in the degree of institutionalization. From this standpoint, Chang-Liao’s (2023, p. 324) statement that informal strategic partnerships fall in the middle of the spectrum from decentralized alignment to formal alliance makes sense. Nevertheless, it is nonsensical with respect to Snyder’s (1997, p. 6) definition, which does not require alignments to be informal or targeted against a third party.

The above discussion underscores the complexity of strategic partnerships, revealing that they do not neatly conform to conventional archetypes of alignment, such as alliances, security communities, or coalitions. Instead, they warrant recognition as a distinct and independent category of alignment (Wilkins, 2008, 2012), requiring a unique framework for analysis and understanding in the realm of international relations. Notwithstanding the wealth of existing literature on strategic partnerships, it is evident that the insights regarding the implications of their distinctive features remain somewhat limited in scope. To remedy this limitation, a promising approach lies in exploring an alternative strand of literature that investigates the underlying conditions influencing states' decisions to establish informal institutions. While strategic partnerships may be deemed a form of alignment, they are, at their core, international institutions, and these concepts are not inherently mutually exclusive. In the following section, I will lay out the complementary conceptualization of strategic partnerships as informal institutions, delving into the intersections with concepts such as “soft law” (Abbott & Snidal, 2000), “Informal Intergovernmental Organizations” (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013), and “low-cost institutions” (Abbott & Faude, 2020).

2.3. Design: Informality

The fundamental insight of neoliberal institutionalism is that “institutions” – defined by Keohane (1988, p. 383) as “[...] persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations” – facilitate cooperation between rational self-interested actors under conditions of international anarchy. In particular, institutions facilitate cooperation by reducing transaction costs, lengthening the shadow of the future, and increasing the flow of information (Axelrod & Keohane, 1985; Keohane, 1984). This functionalist logic of institutions applies to different forms of cooperation, but it is typically associated with the subject matter of international regimes (see Keohane, 1982; Krasner, 1982) and international organizations (see Abbott & Snidal, 1998; Koremenos et al., 2001). Another key insight of this scholarship is that differences in forms of institutionalized cooperation – including the variation in membership rules, scope of issues covered, centralization of tasks, rules for controlling the institution, or flexibility of arrangements – is not spurious, but rather a consequence of purposeful choices of states designing them, who are ultimately interested in the pursuit of joint goals (Koremenos et al., 2001, p. 763).

Despite the observed differences in forms of institutionalized cooperation, the majority of scholarship has focused almost exclusively on “Formal Intergovernmental Organizations” (FIGOs), such as the United Nations, European Union, and NATO (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 194). FIGOs are formal entities with state members that possess a permanent secretariat or headquarters and/or permanent staff (Pevehouse et al., 2004, p. 103). In their seminal work on FIGOs, Abbott and Snidal (1998) identified two key functions of these organizations. First, FIGOs allow for the centralization of collective activities by providing a stable organizational structure with a supporting bureaucratic apparatus. And second, the independence of FIGOs gives them the ability to act autonomously in certain pre-defined spheres of activity. Both centralization and independence enhance the efficiency

of cooperation (Abbott & Snidal, 1998, pp. 9–23). On a glance, strategic partnerships possess neither one of these qualities – at least not to the same extent – but neither do many other examples of informal forms of cooperation, including “soft law” agreements (see Abbott et al., 2000; Abbott & Snidal, 2000), “Informal Intergovernmental Organizations” (IIGOs) (see Vabulas & Snidal, 2013), and “low-cost institutions” (LCIs) (see Abbott & Faude, 2020).

For a long time, informality was overlooked by researchers, even though Charles Lipson (1991) highlighted its significance for world politics as “a device for minimizing the impediments to cooperation at both the domestic and international levels” (Lipson, 1991, p. 500). The difference between formality and informality is perhaps best described by Roger (2020, p. 38), who identified five functional properties of formal and informal organizations: flexibility, agility, confidentiality, independence, and scale and scope. Firstly, informal organizations are more flexible than formal ones because they are based on nonbinding agreements, which are more malleable than treaties. Secondly, informal organizations are more agile because the absence of formal rules and procedures in them allows for faster decision-making. Thirdly, informal organizations offer a greater degree of confidentiality because they have smaller institutional footprints than formal organizations. Next, formal organizations enjoy greater independence because they generally have bodies that are separate from their members and may be granted a high degree of autonomy. Finally, formal organizations have a larger scale and scope, owing partly to their bureaucratic structures, which are able to handle a wider range of more complex tasks (Roger, 2020, pp. 31–34).

In their special issue in *International Organization*, Abbott et al. (2000) introduced the concept of “legalization,” elucidating how international institutions demonstrate diverse levels of institutionalization across three dimensions: obligation, precision, and delegation. Obligation pertains to the extent to which states are bound by rules or commitments, precision relates to the level of

unambiguous definition of these rules, and delegation concerns the degree to which third parties have been vested with the authority to implement the rules. When all three dimensions exhibit a high degree, it corresponds to the ideal type of “hard” legalization, while a low degree on all three dimensions corresponds to the ideal type of “soft” legalization. An example of the former is the World Trade Organization. An example of the latter is the G7 group (Abbott et al., 2000, pp. 401–402, 406). While Abbott et al. (2000) were not the first to acknowledge the distinction between highly and minimally institutionalized, or legalized, forms of cooperation (cf. Lipson, 1991), their theoretical-conceptual framework and analysis provide valuable insights into the rationale behind states’ decisions to engage in formal cooperation in certain instances and opt for informal cooperation in others.

Abbott and Snidal (2000, p. 423) advance the argument that states often opt for softer forms of legalization when they present distinct advantages over the alternatives. In their analysis, “soft law” entails lower “contracting costs” associated with negotiation and adoption, as well as reduced “sovereignty costs” linked to the loss of decision-making authority, in comparison to “hard law.” Under circumstances of high uncertainty, “soft law” often emerges as a preferred option, granting states greater flexibility to adapt to changing conditions. Moreover, it facilitates compromise between parties with diverse preferences, enabling them to navigate situations where negotiating elaborate and legally binding agreements would be excessively costly. Furthermore, “soft law” serves as a means to facilitate compromise between weaker and more powerful states. It provides a middle ground wherein weaker states can address their concerns regarding certain minimum commitment by powerful states, while the powerful states can avoid the constraints on their freedom of action imposed by formal rules (Abbott & Snidal, 2000, pp. 434–48). States encounter analogous dilemmas when deciding between the establishment of “hard law” alliance or “soft law” strategic partnership.

While early research on informal cooperation primarily focused on the degree of legalization as an attribute of international institutions (see Abbott & Snidal, 2000), more recent contributions have embraced a paradigm shift, regarding informal institutions as a discrete class of international entities (see Abbott & Faude, 2020; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013).¹⁰ This shift reflects a broader empirical trend, as observed by numerous scholars, that the post-Cold War era has witnessed a remarkable surge in the proliferation of informal institutions, with IIGOs taking center stage (see Roger & Rowan, 2022; Vabulas & Snidal, 2021). Using the definition of FIGOs developed by Pevehouse et al. (2004) as a starting point, Vabulas and Snidal (2013, p. 197) identified the following three definitional features of IIGOs: (1) explicitly shared expectations but no formalized agreement; (2) explicitly associated members but no formal membership; and (3) regular meetings but no independent secretariat or headquarters and/or permanent staff. The authors acknowledge that IIGOs represent one ideal type of cooperation within a spectrum of formality, spanning from decentralized cooperation to supranational organizations (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 197). Examples of IIGOs include the Missile Technology Regime or BRICS (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, pp. 206–208).

Strategic partnerships can arguably be considered a specific case of an IIGO. Firstly, the organizing principle of both IIGOs and strategic partnerships finds expression in explicitly shared expectations (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 198). Similarly to IIGOs, strategic partnerships are typically established through joint declarations or memoranda of understanding that articulate such shared expectations without constituting a legally binding commitment (Holslag, 2011, pp. 295–96; Parameswaran, 2014, p. 264). Secondly, membership in both IIGOs and strategic partnerships is characterized by explicit association (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, pp. 198–99). Strategic partners are explicitly associated through the recognition of the partnership, but the membership is not formal

¹⁰ It is pertinent to highlight that a closely related line of research on informal cooperation, as expounded by Stone (2011), delves into the intricacies of informality within international institutions.

since states do not sign or ratify legally binding treaties to become formal members of a strategic partnership.¹¹ Finally, the organizing structure of both IIGOs and strategic partnerships revolves around regular meetings (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 199). Strategic partners typically develop mechanisms for regular interaction, such as “strategic dialogues,” between ministers or heads of state/government to discuss common goals, share information, build consensus, and agree on joint action (Parameswaran, 2014, pp. 264–65; Strüver, 2017, pp. 37–38).

If strategic partnerships fit the definition of an IIGO, what makes them unique? I argue that partnerships can be conceived of as a special case of an IIGO, which is distinct due to two common features partially covered in the preceding section. First, strategic partnerships are almost invariably bilateral. In contrast, the vast majority of contributions and data collection efforts related to IIGOs highlight multilateral institutions (see Roger & Rowan, 2022; Vabulas & Snidal, 2021). Second, the scope of issue areas covered under strategic partnerships is typically very broad, corresponding to a “general purpose” organization, compared to many IIGOs, which tend to be rather “task specific.” “General purpose” IIGOs, such as the various G-groupings, tend to be an exception rather than the rule. What appears to be “special” about strategic partnerships is that, whereas “general purpose” organizations are typically associated with more authoritative institutional design—due to complexity arising from managing a broad policy portfolio—there is a complete absence of delegation in them (on “general purpose” and “task specific” organizations, see, e.g., Hawkins et al., 2006; Hooghe & Marks, 2014; Lenz et al., 2014). Strategic partnerships, thus, arguably stand out due to the specific configuration of limited membership and general purpose, not commonly found in many IIGOs.

Similarly to Abbott and Snidal (2000), Vabulas and Snidal (2013, p. 200) observe that states deliberately choose IIGOs over other forms of institutionalized cooperation to best suit their

¹¹ Some strategic partnerships may exist without explicit state acknowledgment. Yet, due to this lack of acknowledgment, observing such instances empirically becomes challenging, if not impossible.

purposes. The authors posit that the flexibility inherent in IIGOs makes them a more favorable choice in situations where states are averse to undertaking firm commitments due to high uncertainty about future states of the world and/or severe distribution problems. In instances where the prevalence of common interests supersedes the temptation to defect, states may prefer to establish IIGOs over FIGOs since, by doing so, they sacrifice less autonomy and incur lower sovereignty costs. Moreover, IIGOs are preferable when states seek to safeguard a certain degree of confidentiality or find themselves confronted with exigent circumstances demanding prompt action. Additionally, states may prefer IIGOs over FIGOs when faced with high uncertainty about others' preferences and/or unforeseen problems, as the rigid structure of FIGOs is better suited for dealing with routine situations, whereas IIGOs can help states establish common understandings and coordinate their positions in dynamic situations (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, pp. 209–212).

Owing to their distinctive attributes, IIGOs have emerged as an increasingly favored instrument for effectively tackling “high politics” matters, including peace and security. Security issues constituted 32% of IIGOs' focus by the end of 2015, contrasting with FIGOs' mere 4% (Vabulas & Snidal, 2021, p. 863). Vabulas and Snidal (2021) identify three possible explanations of IIGOs' preeminent focus on security issues. First, security is an area where states are especially sensitive to sovereignty costs since the loss of autonomy in this domain may have severe consequences, imperiling states' survival. Cooperation through IIGOs enables states to maintain their autonomy, whereas cooperation through FIGOs implies a (partial) relinquishment of autonomy. Second, as cooperation in the realm of security involves sensitive information, states often prefer to keep it confidential. The absence of formal transparency mechanisms in IIGOs, therefore, facilitates information sharing. Finally, IIGOs are better suited to the post-Cold War international environment, which is characterized by high uncertainty stemming from rapid political and technological changes. This

uncertainty has made it more challenging for states to make clearly defined long-term commitments (Vabulas & Snidal, 2021, pp. 863–64).

Another closely related concept concerns so-called “low-cost institutions” (LCIs). This is a broader class of international institutions, which encompasses IIGOs as well as other forms of informal cooperation, including trans-governmental networks and transnational public-private partnerships. Abbott and Faude (2020, p. 401–402) identify two definitional features of these institutions: (1) informality based on non-binding agreements and decision-making formalities, which are less elaborate than those of treaty-based institutions; and (2) participation by executive, bureaucratic, and societal actors, either in conjunction with or instead of states. Examples of LCIs include the Proliferation Security Initiative or Financial Action Task Force (Abbott & Faude, 2020, pp. 397–98). The main appeal of LCIs, as the name suggests, lies in their significantly lower costs compared to treaty-based institutions. Creating LCIs entails comparatively lower transaction costs – that is, the costs associated with searching for partners, acquiring information, bargaining, and contracting – and low domestic approval costs – that is, the costs associated with authorizing and engaging in cooperation faced by its proponents vis-à-vis the domestic opposition – as well as lower operating, change, exit, and sovereignty costs (Abbott & Faude, 2020, pp. 403–404).

The low-cost nature of LCIs yields distinct governance benefits, including heightened malleability and flexibility of the structures, procedures and rules, reduced risk that cooperation will result in a net negative outcome, and fewer constraints on state action. Furthermore, the participation of executive, bureaucratic, and societal actors contributes governance competencies, enhancing LCIs’ ability to target and engage infra- and non-state actors effectively. Additionally, LCIs provide states with general governance benefits, such as reducing transaction costs of cooperation and fostering productive working relationships among officials. Lastly, LCIs empower their infra-state and non-

state participants, creating incentives for these actors to actively support their establishment (Abbott & Faude, 2020, pp. 404–406). On balance, LCIs are suitable for cooperation problems characterized by high uncertainty and dynamism. However, treaty-based institutions are superior at creating credible commitments (Abbott & Faude, 2020, p. 400). This logic extends to the choice between “low-cost” strategic partnerships and treaty-based alliances. Strategic partnerships may enable modest cooperation in situations where negotiating a treaty-based alliance would be otherwise too difficult, but the level of commitment in them is inherently lower.

Because of their informality, strategic partnerships can be conceptualized as “soft law” agreements, IIGOs, as well as LCIs. They can be regarded as “soft law” agreements due to their low obligation and minimal delegation. Interestingly enough, strategic partnerships vary considerably on the precision dimension. Certain founding agreements, such as the 2021 “U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership,” are quite elaborate and precise (U.S. Department of State, 2021a), while other, such as the 2008 memorandum of understanding on “Establishing a Framework for a Strategic Partnership” between Brazil and Switzerland (Government of Switzerland, n.d.), are quite vague and imprecise. Strategic partnerships perhaps best fit the category of IIGOs due to sharing the same definitional features of explicitly shared expectations, explicitly associated state members, and regular meetings. It bears noting, however, that whereas IIGOs are typically associations of three or more states (Vabulas & Snidal, 2021, p. 861), strategic partnerships are almost always bilateral (e.g., Strüver, 2017, pp. 62–65). Exceptions to this rule include certain partnerships between states and FIGOs, such as the European Union (e.g., Renard, 2011). Due to their close resemblance to IIGOs, they inevitably fall under the category of LCIs, which represents a broader class of informal institutions.

Research on informal cooperation has generated different sets of explanations for why states choose to cooperate through informal institutions. Roger (2020, pp. 9–13, 51–71) and Westerwinter

et al. (2021, pp. 10–16) usefully distinguish between three such sets of explanations: functionalist, power-oriented, and domestic politics explanations.¹² Firstly, functionalist explanations center on the advantages of informal institutions, emphasizing their flexibility and low costs in more effectively addressing collective action problems. States tend to opt for informal institutions, for example, when they offer a superior fit for cooperation problems characterized by high uncertainty and/or preference heterogeneity. Secondly, power-oriented explanations highlight the role of powerful actors in driving informality. In this view, powerful states prefer informal institutions as they impose fewer constraints on their autonomy, enabling them to exert greater influence over policy decisions by leveraging their superior agenda-setting and bargaining power. Furthermore, domestic politics explanations focus on the interests of domestic-political actors. According to this perspective, executives may pursue informal institutions when faced with opposition from domestic veto players, as a means to bypass protracted ratification processes.

Examining the drivers behind the proliferation of informal institutions lends crucial context to the study of strategic partnerships. Given that both the general (security) purpose and informality constitute prominent features of this form of cooperation, it is perhaps best to conceptualize them as informal alignments. This perspective accentuates the value of such partnerships in engendering expectations of support in future interactions amid conditions of heightened uncertainty and/or heterogeneous preferences. The rapid political and technological change witnessed after the end of the Cold War undoubtedly contributed to their proliferation, much like other informal institutions. However, it is worth considering that the informality, while facilitating flexibility, adaptability, speed, and confidentiality, may also impose limitations on the outcomes of cooperation that states can

¹² Westerwinter et al. (2021) additionally consider the role of non-state actors as a driving force behind the proliferation of informal institutions. This perspective is useful in the specific context of transnational public-private governance initiatives, which they examine, but it is less relevant in the context of strategic partnerships, which are characterized by high-level executive exchanges.

reasonably anticipate. For instance, as strategic partnerships, being informal institutions, lack the ability to create credible commitments, expecting the same outcomes as with formal alliances would be unreasonable. In the following section, I will discuss three potential functions of strategic partnerships, encompassing “soft” and “limited hard balancing,” issue-linkage, and reassurance, by integrating insights from the literature on international alignments and informal institutions.

2.4. Function: Balancing, Issue-Linkage, Reassurance

The conventional wisdom of realism in International Relations suggests that states establish military alliances as a means to balance against the influence of the most powerful or threatening state (Snyder, 1997; Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979). Many scholars concur that strategic partnerships serve a similar purpose to military alliances, as one of the primary motivations for states to form strategic partnerships is to bolster national and regional security (Envall & Hall, 2016, p. 87; Parameswaran, 2014, p. 264; Wilkins, 2008, p. 360). Kay (2000, p. 16) posits that strategic partnerships can also be indicative of states engaging in balancing behavior. For example, countries such as Russia and China employ strategic partnerships as a mechanism to counter the dominance of the United States. These partnerships are built on a commitment to fostering a “multipolar” global order, aiming to prevent the dominance of any single country or a bloc of countries (Kay, 2000, p. 16, 21). In a similar vein, Michalski (2019, p. 7) observes that strategic partnerships can be set up as “new (less-demanding) types of alliance [...] with the specific purpose of bolstering a particular world view or the international positions of like-minded powers.” For instance, certain partnerships, such as the South Korea-Australia partnership, have been set up to balance China’s assertiveness in the region.

While many authors agree that security interests drive the formation of strategic partnerships, there is some disagreement as to whether their formation is motivated by the presence of external threats, as is the case with military alliances. This is because strategic partnerships tend to be goal-driven rather than threat-driven. They are useful for policy coordination because they allow states to share information, resources, and risks (Wilkins, 2008, p. 361), but not for the aggregation of power to counter threats militarily since – due to their informal nature – they lack mechanisms to make commitments credible. Arguably, this property does not detract from their utility in addressing threats indirectly, such as through “soft” or “limited hard balancing” (Fergusson, 2012; Kay, 2000; Paul,

2018). In the mid-2000s, the concept of “soft balancing” emerged as a strategy employed by second-tier powers, to counter U.S. unilateralism under unipolarity. The authors have since argued that second-tier powers concerned about U.S. unilateralism – recognizing the limitations of traditional hard-balancing¹³ under U.S. preponderance – have employed soft-balancing measures such as *territorial denial*, *entangling diplomacy*, *economic strengthening*, and *signals of resolve* to delay, complicate, or increase the cost of threatening actions by the unipole (Pape, 2005; Paul, 2005).

Proponents of the soft balancing concept contend that nonmilitary instruments such as these possess a tangible albeit indirect impact on the military prospects of a unipolar leader. Some even argue that soft balancing can lay the groundwork for potentially more forceful hard-balancing measures in the future (Pape, 2005, p. 17; Paul, 2005, p. 47). Arguably, states can leverage strategic partnerships to enact soft-balancing measures or use them as a soft-balancing measure in and of itself. In particular, states may use these partnerships as: (1) tools for *entangling diplomacy*, by coordinating their positions against the threatening state within other international institutions such as the United Nations; (2) vehicles for *economic strengthening*, by bolstering bilateral trade relations with the ultimate aim to exclude the threatening state from regional and global markets; and (3) *signals of resolve* in and of themselves, by demonstrating the willingness to cooperate against the threatening state in the long run (see Pape, 2005, pp. 36–37). These observations are echoed in the existing literature on strategic partnerships. At least several authors have highlighted the potential of these informal arrangements to frustrate or undermine the threatening state’s, especially the United States’, foreign policy ambitions (Kay, 2000; Fergusson, 2012; Paul, 2018).

¹³ These include, for instance, military buildups, war-fighting alliances, and transfers of military technology (Pape, 2005, p. 9).

For instance, both Kay (2000, pp. 21–22) and Fergusson (2012, p. 199) suggest that the Sino-Russian partnership serves primarily as a means to undermine U.S. foreign policy ambitions by promoting a multipolar world through international institutions like the United Nations. According to Fergusson (2012, p. 200), strategic partnerships align well with the logic of soft balancing as “[...] nonmilitary alignments of at least two states that are designed to reduce or remove the military presence and external influence of an outside power from a specific region.” The author argues that the two countries achieve these goals by leveraging their normative, rather than military, power to challenge U.S. dominance across military, economic, and other dimensions (Fergusson, 2012, p. 200). In theory, some strategic partnerships may go even beyond such soft-balancing measures. Paul (2018, p. 21) asserts that some partnerships with a pronounced security element of cooperation can be considered examples of “limited hard balancing,” which additionally relies on measures such as limited arms buildup, joint exercises, and technology transfers, short of activities commonly associated with formal military alliances – especially mutual pledges to come to each other’s defense (see also Kay, 2000, p. 17).

Critics of soft balancing contend that it is a flawed concept that encompasses various unrelated issues, such as conflicting economic interests, policy disagreements, and diplomatic tensions, all under a single category. In their view, this categorization lacks coherence as a viable foreign policy strategy (He & Feng, 2008, p. 364; also see Brooks & Wohlforth, 2005; Friedman & Long, 2015). For instance, Brooks and Wohlforth (2005, pp. 83–84) observe that Russia’s strategic partnerships with India and China perhaps exemplify the strongest case of soft balancing, as they enable shifts in relative power through arms sales. Yet, there is limited evidence supporting the notion that U.S. unilateralism, rather than pragmatic defense industry interests, propels these partnerships. Others have sought to refine the concept. He and Feng (2008, pp. 364–65, 374) propose that soft balancing is not exclusive to unipolarity but rather a logical response to threats shaped by power disparity and economic

dependence. In this context, both strong and weak states find soft balancing advantageous. Powerful states, remaining sensitive to threats from weak states, avoid excessive hard-balancing measures. Meanwhile, weaker states do not just surrender their security and sovereignty. However, they recognize that hard balancing is unfeasible.¹⁴

In summary, strategic partnerships are arguably an ideal tool for soft balancing for the powerful and weak alike. The suitability of these arrangements for soft balancing is accentuated by their distinguishing characteristics as informal alignments. The informality and inherent lack of legally-binding obligations in them circumvent some of the problems associated with military alliances, including entrapment and abandonment (Paul, 2018, p. 187). To be sure, countries may resort to soft balancing through other means, such as FIGOs, to achieve the same goals (Wivel & Paul, 2020). Yet, formal rules and diverse memberships in FIGOs complicate reaching an agreement, while partnerships do not have to suffer from these limitations. The multidimensional nature of strategic partnerships can also aid in soft balancing as it seeks to reduce the influence of a hostile outside power not only in the military, but also in the economic, cultural and normative sphere (Fergusson, 2012, p. 200). These advantages are likely to render partnerships an appealing choice for states as they confront shared security challenges. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that one of the primary functions of these agreements is balancing, particularly in its “soft” and “limited” form.

Strategic partnerships can also serve as a means to facilitate (future) cooperation through issue linkage. Chang-Liao (2023, pp. 231–32) highlights that these partnerships enable states to pursue cooperation within different areas such as trade, arms and technology transfers, and cultural exchanges. By broadening issue linkages, the author argues, states with different viewpoints on certain

¹⁴ While much of the existing literature on soft balancing has focused on second-tier powers, some research indicates that weaker states also engage in soft balancing (Whitaker, 2010).

matters can find common ground in other areas and resolve differences over time. For instance, the Sino-Russian strategic partnership agreements exemplify this approach, showcasing a range of intergovernmental connections spanning economic, security, energy, cultural, and technological spheres (see also Wilkins, 2008, p. 365). Arguably, these linkages can help foster cooperation beyond the strategic partnership agreement. For instance, Michalski (2019, p. 7) observes that strategic partnerships may serve as “[...] devices to strengthen existing alliances set up as a complement to existing alliances in order to broaden the social interaction of the alliance partners, to widen the scope of cooperation to non-military areas/sectors or to broaden the alliance to a wider set of participants/stakeholders.” Partnerships that coincide with alliances may thus allow for diversifying collaboration and solidifying diplomatic commitments (Michalski, 2019, p. 9).¹⁵

In this context, it is perhaps important to distinguish between issue linkage and the broadening of scope of cooperation. While the broadening of scope occurs when issues are explicitly connected in the final treaty text, an essential aspect of issue linkage lies in the requirement that linkage should occur between matters that could have been dealt with through separate negotiations (Poast, 2013a, p. 288; see also Koremenos et al., 2001, p. 770). According to Sebenius (1983, p. 283), issue linkage is a bargaining strategy, which occurs “when [issues] are simultaneously discussed for joint settlement.” Scholars have long recognized issue linkage as a crucial instrument for securing agreements by creating benefits for all parties that might otherwise find an agreement of little value. Issue linkages vary in nature, with some being implicit, such as when two parties sign separate agreements for each issue, and others explicit, as seen when issues are directly linked within a single agreement (Poast, 2012, pp. 278–280). Haas (1980) further distinguishes between tactical and substantive linkages, with the latter

¹⁵ Numerous strategic partnerships, including the one between the United States and Turkey, have extended the range of collaboration beyond the (pre-)existing alliance – in this case, NATO – to goals such as the promotion of regional stability, better mutual economic and trade relations, and cooperation on global issues like terrorism and anti-narcotics efforts (Kay, 2000, pp. 16–17).

emerging from intellectual coherence among issues. On balance, issue linkage facilitates cooperation by redistributing benefits among parties with different preferences and reinforcing commitments (Poast, 2012, pp. 282–83).

Indeed, previous research has found evidence that issue linkage – particularly linking security and trade issues – increases the likelihood that alliance negotiations will result in the adoption of a treaty (Poast, 2012) and that issue linkage increases the credibility of an agreement – in particular, states violate commitments under alliances with trade provisions less frequently (Poast, 2013b). All in all, states experience greater benefits from agreements that link different issues. It is plausible that, owing partly to their informality, strategic partnerships, allow states to link issues more effectively. The flexibility and adaptability of these informal arrangements arguably enables states to more readily embrace issues that could benefit the other party and adjust the scope of cooperation over time more easily, either by adding, modifying, or removing specific issues as preferences evolve. These properties suggest that states may be able to reach a strategic partnership agreement even in situations where their preferences differ significantly.¹⁶ The empirical evidence suggests that issue linkage occurs frequently under strategic partnerships. For instance, the 2021 “U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership” clearly combines issues that benefit one side disproportionately – U.S. security assurances and Ukrainian democratization (U.S. Department of State, 2021a).¹⁷

¹⁶ On these properties of informal institutions, see, e.g., Roger (2020).

¹⁷ While a comprehensive empirical analysis is necessary to investigate whether and how strategic partnerships facilitate cooperation through issue linkage, it is theoretically conceivable that connecting diverse issues to foster cooperation, potentially extending beyond a particular partnership agreement, represents one of their potential functions. I contend that the informality of strategic partnerships creates new avenues for cooperation through issue linkage, especially in scenarios where formal agreements (even through issue linkage) would prove challenging or costly. For instance, envisioning the United States signing a defense pact with Ukraine – even after adding issues that disproportionately benefit the U.S., such as Ukrainian democratization and trade liberalization – seems unlikely. Nevertheless, issue linkage can still help states attain at least a limited or informal agreement, such as the aforementioned strategic partnership.

At least some scholars have recognized the potential of strategic partnerships to operate as a form of “reassurance” (Kay, 2000; Paul, 2018). This perspective underscores how countries like the United States employ such arrangements to compensate for denied full alliance membership or more formal non-allied security relationships. For instance, Romania and Ukraine, having been denied NATO membership, sought strategic partnerships with the United States as a means to address their security concerns and access economic aid (Kay, 2000, pp. 18–19). Paul (2018) similarly contends that strategic partnerships can signal reassurance, exemplified by the numerous partnerships established by the United States, as a patron, and India, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia, as clients. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these arrangements entail a substantively lower commitment compared to alliance membership, prompting questions about the credibility of such signals, especially in relation to (pre-)existing alliance commitments. The impact of designating bilateral relations as strategic partnerships on the strength of alliance commitments remains a subject of debate. Kay (2008, p. 18) suggests that the widespread adoption of strategic partnerships by the United States has, in some cases, eroded the significance of traditional alliances.

In the International Relations scholarship, diverse forms of assurances with varying underlying rationales are recognized. Assurances, generally, involve promises that convey a commitment to take specific actions or refrain from them in the future. They can be understood as endeavors by one state to persuade another that they either will not cause harm to their security or will prevent such harm (Knopf, 2012, p. 376). The former, also known simply as “reassurance,” is a strategy with the aim to convince the counterpart that the sender harbors no aggressive intentions toward it (Knopf, 2012, p. 383; see also Midford, 2002; Yarhi-Milo, 2013). China’s “peaceful rise” approach reaffirmed since 2012 by Xi’s approach of “rejuvenation” exemplifies this strategy, as it seeks to reassure other nations that China’s growing strength does not pose a threat (Goldstein, 2020, p. 165). This aligns with China’s strategic partnership diplomacy, which aims at “building stable relations without targeting any third

party” (Goldstein, 2005, p. 134). States, particularly those perceived as aggressive, are motivated to provide reassurance about their intentions to discourage others from forming alliances against them or to attract others to consider the state as a favorable and sought-after alliance partner (Midford, 2002, p. 20).

An alternative variant of assurance, also known as “alliance reassurance,” places emphasis on the commitment to protect other states rather than refraining from attacking them (Knopf, 2012, pp. 381–82; see also Blankenship & Lin-Greenberg, 2022; Blankenship, 2020). Alliance reassurance is commonly defined as “an attempt to increase an ally’s feeling of security from external threat” (Blankenship & Lin-Grenberg, 2022, p. 93). It encompasses various strategies, including the deployment of fighting forces, transient demonstrations, offshore presence, as well as signals like alliance treaties and arms sales (Blankenship & Lin-Greenberg, 2022, p. 100). Diplomatic visits and public statements also serve as a means of reassurance, effectively tying hands and signaling commitment and resolve (Blankenship, 2020, p. 1022). The primary objective of alliance reassurance is typically to deter allies from seeking alternative alliances or paths to independence, such as seeking reconciliation with adversaries or partnering with third parties. This approach allows the patron (or senior partner) to more effectively control its alliances and “lock-in” its leverage, while simultaneously enabling the client (or junior partner) to mitigate the risk of abandonment by allies or patrons (Blankenship, 2020, p. 1018).

It is plausible that strategic partnerships may, in some cases, serve as signals of “reassurance” or “alliance reassurance” (see Kay, 2000; Paul, 2018), particularly where states believe that others see their intentions as aggressive, such as in the case of China, or where formal allies fear abandonment, such as in the case of the United States. In a certain sense, the informality of these arrangements may enable states to seek/pursue assurances – whether of a negative or positive nature – by affording them

the means to communicate such signals in confidence.¹⁸ Indeed, assurances frequently occur in secrecy, ensuring that they remain concealed from public scrutiny. This approach is favorable when the costs of assurances, if disclosed, would lead to domestic repercussions for the initiator (see Yarhi-Milo, 2013).¹⁹ At the same time, however, the informality of strategic partnerships also hinders their utility for seeking/pursuing assurances. For a signal to reassure, Kydd (2000, p. 326) argues, it has to be adequately costly, so that the other party perceives it as credible and does not dismiss it as baseless (see also Midford, 2002, pp. 22–23). In this sense, the low-cost nature of partnerships appears to be detrimental to reassurance. It should, therefore, be expected that strategic partnerships will be able to reassure in some but not all instances.²⁰

Ultimately, the specific function of a particular strategic partnership will depend on the context of bilateral relations. Strategic partnerships enable states to employ soft-balancing measures, such as entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and signals of resolve, to frustrate or undermine the adversary's foreign policy ambitions (see Pape, 2005; Paul, 2005), potentially substituting for hard-balancing measures, such as formal alliances. They also facilitate cooperation through issue linkage, allowing states to overcome divergent preferences and problems with distribution by diversifying the scope of their collaborative endeavors, as well as solidify political commitment (see Poast, 2012), potentially acting as complements to existing alliance structures. Finally, their role could also be viewed as complementary in the context of reassurance (see Knopf, 2012) – allowing for the signaling of non-threatening intentions to adversaries or mitigating allies' concerns of abandonment.

¹⁸ On this property of informal institutions, see, e.g., Roger (2020).

¹⁹ The effectiveness of such measures is likely contingent on whether the opposing party is genuinely persuaded that the initiator would encounter domestic repercussions should the imitator's concessions be disclosed to their domestic audience (Yarhi-Milo, 2013, p. 407).

²⁰ I elaborate on the conditions under which strategic partnerships can reasonably serve as a means of reassurance in the following section.

In practice, it is likely that strategic partnerships may serve multiple functions or even none of the above. In this context, it is important to note that while the three functions described above are widely acknowledged in empirical literature, this list is not exhaustive. For example, Strüver (2017, p. 38) observes that strategic partnership cooperation may also function as a trust-building exercise, fostering and deepening trust between parties, thus facilitating future cooperation. Chang-Liao (2023, p. 232) further suggests that partnerships can function as “equalizing arrangements of asymmetrical bilateral relations,” as the absence of unequally distributed obligations in them—frequently found in formal alliances—puts the parties on a more equal footing. In addition, post-positivist contributions on the topic suggest that the term “strategic partnership,” as a rhetorical device, serves functions such as “differentiation” and “hierarchization” of interstate relationships or even as a normative instrument to advance certain foreign policy goals (Blanco, 2016). The breadth of possible functions of strategic partnerships goes far beyond the three functions of balancing, reassurance, and issue-linkage. Often, these functions depend on a particular theoretical perspective.

The specific focus on the three above functions relates to the theoretical argument explained in the following section. On the one hand, the potential of strategic partnerships to serve as tools of balancing—albeit in its “soft” and “limited hard” variant—suggests that these arrangements could conceivably operate as “low-cost” alternatives, or the “second-best option,” to formal alliances. From this perspective, partnerships may present a good functional fit for situations where non-allied countries face a common threat, but the costs of establishing a formal alliance are perceived as prohibitively high. On the other hand, the functions of reassurance and issue-linkage underscore the potential complementary role of strategic partnerships alongside formal alliances. From this stance, partnerships might be a suitable functional choice when junior alliance members seek an additional layer of (modest) security guarantees from their patrons or when allied countries aim to expand cooperation beyond the boundaries outlined in their formal agreements. The functions covered here

thus serve mainly to illustrate the concrete ways in which partnerships could plausibly operate as either “low-cost” alternatives or complements to formal alliances.

2.5. Hypotheses on Complementarity and Substitution

Thus far, the preceding sections highlight the following key points. Firstly, there is widespread agreement in the literature on strategic partnerships that these arrangements constitute a distinct form of alignment (Envall & Hall, 2016; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Nadkarni, 2010; Parameswaran, 2014; Wilkins, 2012). They differ from other forms of alignment, particularly due to their general (security) purpose and informality, as compared to formal alliances; lack of commitment to peaceful change, as compared to security communities; and long-term and evolving nature of cooperation, as compared to coalitions (Wilkins, 2008, pp. 360–61; Envall & Hall, 2016, p. 91). Secondly, the rapid proliferation of strategic partnerships since the end of the Cold War is part of a broader pattern involving the spread of informal institutions (Vabulas & Snidal, 2021; Roger & Rowan, 2022). In some ways, these institutions are better suited to the current international environment characterized by high uncertainty. Thirdly, as informal alignments, strategic partnerships fulfill specific functions that both *substitute* for and *complement* existing alliance structures. For instance, states may utilize them as tools for balancing, as add-ons that incorporate other issue areas, or as a means of reassurance (Chang-Liao, 2023; Kay, 2000; Michalski, 2019; Parameswaran, 2014; Paul, 2018).

In this section, I zoom in on the latter point. Insofar as strategic partnerships serve a similar purpose of enhancing national and regional security—broadly defined—as military alliances, the question arises whether they function as *complements* to or *substitutes* for the latter. This conundrum goes even beyond the alignment debate since the recent proliferation of informal institutions has led to increasing complexity in global governance, with overlapping membership in formal and informal arrangements that often focus on solving similar substantive issue (see Abbott & Faude, 2022; Reinsberg & Westerwinter, 2023). These patterns are all the more difficult to decipher given that some countries, such as China, have established dozens of partnerships while maintaining only a limited

portfolio of military alliances, whereas other countries, such as the United States, have pursued the establishment of both simultaneously (see Strüver, 2017; Parameswaran, 2014). By the mid-2000s, virtually all the major powers had established strategic partnerships with their counterparts at the regional and global levels (see Tallis & Šimečka, 2017; Envall & Hall, 2016, p. 90), but the number of military alliances appears to be stagnating. In principle, partnerships could be operating as both *substitutes* for and *complements* to military alliances (see, e.g., Michalski, 2019).

The existing institutionalist literature has given only limited attention to the concepts of *complementarity* and *substitution*. At a general level, scholars recognize the growing complexity of the international institutional landscape, which has become densely populated with a diverse array of rules and institutions (Abbott et al., 2016; Clarke, 2019; Raustiala, 2012). Abbott and Faude (2022, p. 263) emphasize that contemporary global issue areas are often governed not solely by individual institutions or regime complexes composed of formal interstate institutions, but by what they term “hybrid institutional complexes.” These complexes encompass a diverse mix of interstate, infra-state, public-private, and private transnational institutions, encompassing both formal and informal components. In line with this, Reinsberg and Westerwinter (2023, p. 5) observe that the proliferation and coexistence of these varied forms of cooperation have led to significant “institutional overlap.” Vabulas and Snidal (2013, p. 200) highlight that states frequently employ overlapping FIGOs and IIGOs within the same issue area. These instances of overlapping institutions and regime complexes underscore how states occasionally utilize distinct institutional forms to pursue interconnected objectives. Yet, the way in which these diverse components relate to each other is undertheorized.

To the author’s best knowledge, there is currently no systematic review of the role of informal institutions vis-à-vis their formal counterparts – whether *complementary*, *substitutive*, or other. One exception to this observation is the article by Helmke and Levitsky (2004). The authors present a

typology of informal institutions, although their focus is mainly on informal cooperation within formal organizations at the domestic level. The typology encompasses *complementary*, *competing*, *substitutive*, and *accommodating* informal institutions. These categories are determined by whether institutional outcomes converge or diverge from established formal rules, and by the degree of effectiveness exhibited by these pre-existing rules. Informal institutions that are *complementary* serve to “fill in gaps,” either by addressing contingencies not covered by formal rules or by facilitating individual goal pursuit within the formal institutional framework. *Accommodating* informal institutions induce behavior that alters the substantive impact of formal rules, yet avoids direct violation. In contrast, *competing* informal institutions create incentive structures incongruent with formal rules, while *substitutive* informal institutions are utilized by those aiming for outcomes in harmony with formal rules and procedures (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, pp. 728–29).

In the field of International Relations institutionalist scholarship, there has been a predominant focus on recognizing the *complementary* and *competing* functions, with comparatively less attention given to the *substitutive* and *accommodating* functions. One prominent strand of scholarship recognizes that the growing complexity of the institutional landscape has generated opportunities for forum shopping and regime shifting (see Helfer, 2004; Drezner, 2009), which have resulted in what some authors call “contested multilateralism” – that is, using and establishing new institutions to challenge the status quo institutional order (see Zürn, 2018; Kreuder-Sonnen & Zangl, 2016; Morse & Keohane, 2014). This scholarship is predicated on the notion that many institutions are set up or used to *counter*, *contest*, and *compete* (often used interchangeably) with the existing institutional order. The literature on informal institutions similarly acknowledges that “soft law,” IIGOs and LCIs may be set up as competitors to FIGOs (Abbott & Faude, 2020, pp. 26–27; Schaffer & Pollack, 2010, pp. 743–52; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 195). For instance, states have frequently used G7 and G20 as

platforms to challenge existing FIGOs (see Stone, 2011, 2013). In some cases, such competition may even result in the weakening of FIGOs' authority (Abbott & Faude, 2020, pp. 26–27).

The research on informal institutions further acknowledges that in the current densely institutionalized and complex international environment, states often create “soft law,” IIGOs, and LCIs as *complements* to the existing treaty-based institutions (Abbott & Faude, 2020, p. 19; Schaffer & Pollack, 2010, pp. 721–27; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 212). In some cases, FIGOs and IIGOs may sponsor transgovernmental networks to perform *complementary* governance tasks, such as when the G8, an IIGO, sponsored the Nuclear Safety and Security Group to *complement* the activities of the International Atomic Energy Agency with technical advice (Abbott & Faude, 2022, p. 283). In other cases, IIGOs play a more direct and long-term *complementary* role vis-à-vis FIGOs, as exemplified by the Australia Group – an informal export control regime – which *complements* the efforts of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 212; see also Abbott & Faude, 2020, p. 19). Similarly, Prantl (2005, p. 562) underscores how informal “groups of friends” and contact groups increasingly act as *complements* (and sometimes competitors) to the original functions of the United Nations Security Council, allowing states to avoid deadlock in formal procedures.

What prompts states to establish or employ new informal institutions when formal treaties already govern the underlying issue? Vabulas and Snidal (2013, p. 212) suggest that *complementary* IIGOs play a crucial role as vehicles for activities that might be excessively complex or costly to achieve within formal frameworks. These *complementary* institutions can either have close affiliations with existing FIGOs or function independently from them. Similarly, Abbott and Faude (2020, p. 19) observe that the creation of *complementary* institutions often stems from the necessity to navigate procedural and political hindrances within established treaty-based systems. Informal *complementary* institutions offer

swifter, more flexible, and cost-efficient means to address these challenges. In a sense, an institutional landscape that combines treaty-based institutions with *complementary* informal institutions, such as LCIs, can be even more effective than either type in isolation (Abbott & Faude, 2020, p. 20). *Complementary* informal institutions might expand governance functions and membership, facilitating information exchange, trust-building, and interaction with non-state actors, while aspects unsuited to informal institutions, such as credible commitments and enforcement, remain within the realm of treaty-based institutions (Abbott & Faude, 2020, p. 26).

The institutionalist scholarship has devoted significantly less attention to the concepts of *substitution* and *accommodation*, as identified by Helmke and Levitsky (2004). Vabulas and Snidal (2013, p. 195) acknowledge that states may also use informal institutions to *substitute* for FIGOs. As an example, the United States advocated for collaboration through the International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation initiative, active from 1977 to 1980. This initiative served as a temporary *substitute*, standing in for a FIGO that would have concentrated on non-proliferation facets of civilian nuclear programs – a more challenging entity to establish. In a broader context, Roger (2020, p. 64) proposes that specific characteristics of informal institutions, including their capacity to circumvent prolonged ratification processes, render them appealing options, effectively serving as *substitutes* for FIGOs when domestic limitations render the adoption of formal structures impractical. If we view informal institutions as alternatives to formal treaties aiming to achieve analogous cooperative outcomes, any institutions that emerge when states choose an informal design to oversee a novel issue area could be seen as having a *substitutive* character. This perspective highlights the specific governance benefits of “soft law,” IIGOs, and LCIs compared to their formal counterparts.

Vabulas and Snidal (2013, 2020) further note that states utilize IIGOs such as the G7, G20, and BRICS to *accommodate* the preferences of those—especially weak but rising powers—that face

disadvantages under the existing formal rules. For instance, they use such IIGOs to navigate power shifts, redistribute benefits from cooperation, and incorporate members that may be disadvantaged by FIGOs. As Helmke and Levitsky (2004) assert, the distinction between *accommodating* and *complementary* informal institutions lies in the outcomes of cooperation: The former seek outcomes that deviate from those of their formal equivalents, while the latter strive for convergent outcomes. This differentiation also extends to *competing* and *substitutive* informal institutions, mirroring divergent and convergent outcomes respectively. Additionally, the authors argue that *complementary* and *accommodating* informal institutions emerge when formal rules are effective—meaning they are enforced and adhered to—while *substitutive* and *competing* informal institutions arise when formal rules prove ineffective. While this conceptual framework proves valuable, it underscores the varying interpretations authors attribute to these terms. For instance, Vabulas and Snidal (p. 195) clearly use *substitution* to denote informal institutions that function “in place of” FIGOs.²¹

In this dissertation, I adopt an interpretation of *complementarity* and *substitution* that slightly diverges from Helmke and Levitsky’s (2004) conceptual framework. I assume that the complementary/substitutive role of informal institutions vis-à-vis their formal counterparts can be determined by looking at the particular configuration of states’ interests and institutional membership. In the specific case of strategic partnerships, I assume that when they emerge under conditions where states share common security interests but lack membership in the same alliance, they operate in a *substitutive* fashion. Conversely, when strategic partnerships emerge under conditions where states already share membership in the same alliance, I assume that they operate in a *complementary* fashion. This approach to complementarity/substitution is imperfect, as it relies on a fairly mechanical criteria, and may misattribute the role of partnerships vis-à-vis formal alliances in some cases, but it allows for

²¹ See also Roger (2020, p. 64).

a systematic measurement in a quantitative setting. While strategic partnerships could potentially exhibit *competing* and *accommodating* roles in relation to military alliances, assessing these roles within Helmke and Levitsky's (2004) framework would require distinguishing between informal institutions that aim for convergent or divergent outcomes compared to their formal counterparts. For clarity, I confine the theoretical framework to encompass only *complementarity* and *substitution*.

Two further caveats should be acknowledged in this context. Firstly, the conceptualization of partnerships as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to formal alliances makes sense to the extent that we accept the widely held assumption that partnerships *can* be thought of as informal counterparts to formal alliances (see, e.g., Envall & Hall, 2016; Fergusson, 2012; Wilkins, 2008). Secondly, it is important *not* to assume that strategic partnerships—or any form of informal cooperation—can “fully” substitute for their formal counterparts. This is due to the specific governance benefits and weaknesses of such informal arrangements, such as the inherently low commitment costs of strategic partnerships, which make them ill-suited for establishing “credible commitments” (see, e.g., Abbott & Faude, 2020, p. 400). This arguably renders partnerships a poor fit for certain cooperation problems, including a coordinated military action, compared to military alliances. Thus, partnerships can merely provide a “low-cost” alternative, or the “second-best” option to formal military alliances.

Ultimately, the results of a test of hypotheses on strategic partnership formation may lead to misinterpretation of the function of these partnerships in relations to military alliances – whether *complementary* or *substitutive* – if we fail to account for the underlying rationale of enhancing national and regional security by addressing external threats. The mere presence or absence of existing alliance ties may prove to be a poor indicator of the hypothesized *complementary* or *substitutive* role. If the function is *complementary*, we should see partnership onset especially between countries that share membership in the same alliance and face a common threat. Alternatively, if the function is *substitutive*,

we should see partnership onset especially between countries that do not share membership in the same alliance but face a common threat. In other words, the relationship between partnership formation and existing alliance ties (or lack thereof) could thus be conditional on the presence of a common threat. This leads us to two competing hypotheses.

H1a: Two states without joint membership in a formal alliance are more likely to form a strategic partnership when they face a common threat.

H1b: Two states with joint membership in a formal alliance are more likely to form a strategic partnership when they face a common threat.

Based on the discussion above, we can identify four different types of strategic partnerships with different underlying functions. The classification, presented in the table below (see Table 4), reflects ideal types based on two variables: The presence of alliance ties and common threats. In practice, strategic partnerships may, and often do, serve multiple functions at the same time. For simplicity, I attribute one likely function, discussed in the previous section, to each of these categories. Cell 1 corresponds to the ideal type of “strategic partnership in name only.” These types of arrangements emerge in the absence of alliance ties and common threats. Many authors have observed that the term “strategic partnership” is often used as a rhetorical device (Blanco, 2016, p. 36; Wilkins, 2012, p. 67; Kay, 2000, p. 16). Such partnerships are likely to focus on a limited number of substantively “low politics” issues – for instance, cultural exchanges and environmental politics. In the absence of common threats, states lack the incentives to cooperate in “high politics” areas, such as defense and security. As they lack the formal structures to build upon, their cooperation is also likely to be more limited in terms of issue areas covered, resulting in a limited policy scope.

Table 4. Classification of Strategic Partnerships

| | No common threat | Common threat |
|--------------------|--|--|
| No alliance | 1. “strategic partnership in name only”; low politics and limited policy scope (e.g., United States – South Africa) | 2. “strategic partnership as a tool of soft balancing”; high politics but limited policy scope (e.g., Russia – Venezuela) |
| Alliance | 3. “strategic partnership as an extension of alliance ties”; low politics but broad policy scope (e.g., Turkey – Romania) | 4. “strategic partnership as a reassurance tool”; high politics and broad policy scope (e.g., China – Russia) |

Cell 2 corresponds to the ideal type of “strategic partnership as a tool of soft balancing.” As noted by Michalski (2019, p. 7), these *substitutive* partnerships can be created as “[...] new (less-demanding) types of alliances [...] with the specific purpose of bolstering a particular world view or the international positions of like-minded powers.” Cell 3 reflects the ideal type of “strategic partnership as an extension of alliance ties.” These *complementary* partnerships can be used “[...] to broaden the social interaction of the alliance partners, to widen the scope of cooperation to non-military areas/sectors or to broaden the alliance to a wider set of participants/stakeholders” (Michalski, 2019, p. 7). Finally, cell 4 reflects the ideal type of “strategic partnership as a reassurance tool.” These *complementary* partnerships are likely to be used as a means of alliance reassurance with the aim of increasing the allies’ feeling of security (e.g., Blankenship, 2020; Blankenship & Lin-Greenberg, 2022), for instance, by offering limited security guarantees and/or economic aid (e.g., Kay, 2000, p. 18–19). The presence of common threats may motivate states to forge partnerships with a focus on “high politics,” while the presence of (pre-)existing alliance structures may motivate them to expand the scope of cooperation to achieve broader policy scope (see Table 4).²²

Although some authors recognize the value of strategic partnerships in signaling reassurance (see Kay, 2000; Paul, 2018), it is likely that such a *complementary* function would depend on the level of

²² I offer a discussion of illustrative cases of these ideal types in the descriptive chapter.

(pre-)existing alliance commitment. Some military alliances only oblige their members to take part in consultations or uphold principles of neutrality and non-aggression, whereas others include a more serious commitment to active military assistance (see Leeds, 2020). The low commitment costs of strategic partnerships could prove detrimental to reassurance in cases where the countries involved already share membership in high commitment alliances, such as defense pacts, because the establishment of such arrangements could be seen as scaling back the alignment (see Lim & Cooper, 2015). As mentioned previously, for reassurance to be effective, the signal needs to be perceived as credible (Kydd, 2000, p. 326). Strategic partnerships, however, are unlikely to be perceived as costly signals due to their inherent informality and low-cost nature. I, therefore, expect that the benefit in utilizing strategic partnerships for purposes of reassurance will be predominantly limited to (pre-)existing low commitment alliances, such as consultation, neutrality, and non-aggression pacts.

Ultimately, the classification of partnerships into the four ideal types—“strategic partnership in name only,” “strategic partnership as a tool of soft balancing,” “strategic partnership as an extension of alliance ties,” and “strategic partnership as a reassurance tool”—serves primarily illustrative purposes. The identification and examination of these distinct ideal types in the empirical analysis stage will later facilitate the assessment of the plausibility of assumptions regarding the complementary and substitutive roles of partnerships in comparison to their formal counterparts.

Table 4. Classification of Strategic Partnerships

| | No common threat | Common threat |
|--------------------|--|--|
| No alliance | 1. “strategic partnership in name only”; low politics and limited policy scope (e.g., United States – South Africa) | 2. “strategic partnership as a tool of soft balancing”; high politics but limited policy scope (e.g., Russia – Venezuela) |
| Alliance | 3. “strategic partnership as an extension of alliance ties”; low politics but broad policy scope (e.g., Turkey – Romania) | 4. “strategic partnership as a reassurance tool”; high politics and broad policy scope (e.g., China – Russia) |

Examining whether strategic partnerships predominantly assume a *complementary* or *substitutive* role in relation to formal alliances holds significance for scholars interested in both the empirical phenomenon of strategic partnerships and the study of informal institutions. While conceptualizing these partnerships as a distinct form of alignment has sparked insightful discussions about security cooperation in the post-Cold War era, the interplay between distinct alignment forms remains insufficiently understood. Some viewpoints propose that the rapid spread of these arrangements indicates the substitution of traditional alliance structures, while others regard strategic partnerships as add-ons to such structures at best. One empirical study by Andonova, Hale, and Roger (2017) suggests that, although states occasionally adopt informal institutions, like transnational governance initiatives, to *substitute* ineffective national regulations, the prevailing trend tends to be *complementary* in nature. On balance, however, our knowledge of how formal and informal institutions interact remains limited. Aside from these considerations, the formation of strategic partnerships is likely to be influenced by a myriad of additional factors, discussed in the next section.

2.6. Additional Hypotheses on Strategic Partnership Formation

As outlined in one of the preceding sections, scholars have delineated various sets of explanations for why states choose to establish informal, as opposed to formal, forms of cooperation (Roger, 2020, pp. 9–13, 51–71; Westerwinter et al., 2021, pp. 10–16), including functionalist, power-oriented, and domestic-politics explanations. In this chapter, I identify additional factors, apart from complementarity and substitution, that potentially contribute to the emergence of strategic partnerships as informal alignments. These factors broadly align with the three sets of explanations established by prior researchers. In this pursuit, I will incorporate insights from the literature on informal institutions (e.g., Roger, 2020; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013; Westerwinter et al., 2021), which specifically explores drivers of informal cooperation, alongside findings from research on military alliances (e.g., Gibler & Rider, 2004; Lai & Reiter, 2000; Morrow, 1991) and strategic partnerships (e.g., Kay, 2000; Strüver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008), which delve into broader determinants of international alignment. Although the list of alternative potential explanations is not all-encompassing, it does encompass some of the most frequently cited factors.

The first set of explanations pertains to the substantive cooperation problems for which international institutions in general, and informal institutions in particular, may offer effective solutions (see Roger, 2020; Westerwinter et al., 2021). In essence, strategic partnerships provide states with a structured framework for collaboration “to take joint advantage of *economic opportunities* [emphasis added], or to respond to *security challenges* [emphasis added] more effectively than could be achieved in isolation” (Wilkins, 2008, p. 383). Therefore, at a general level, we should expect states to establish these arrangements when they share common economic and security interests. Moreover, in certain contexts, informal institutions, such as strategic partnerships, offer specific advantages—such as flexibility, agility, confidentiality, and low costs—that make them a superior functional fit compared

to formal institutions or the absence of institutionalized cooperation. Consequently, functionalist accounts predict that, as rational actors, states will typically opt for informal institutions when dealing with cooperation problems characterized by high uncertainty and/or preference heterogeneity (Roger, 2020, pp. 52–54; Westerwinter et al., 2021, pp. 11–12).

Firstly, as argued earlier, one assumption about strategic partnerships as a new form of alignment is that they play a similar role in enhancing national and regional security as military alliances. The conventional wisdom of realism in International Relations posits that states form military alliances to balance against the most threatening states (see Walt, 1987; Snyder, 1997). Quantitative studies on the formation and duration of military alliances largely support this assertion (see Gibler & Rider, 2004; Gibler & Wolford, 2006; Lai & Reiter, 2000).²³ The standard approach in this literature has been to account for the presence of a common threat by examining whether the states participated in a militarized interstate dispute against the same enemy within a certain timeframe (e.g., Lai & Reiter, 2000, p. 214). However, in the empirical literature on strategic partnerships, there is some disagreement about the applicability of this argument. For instance, Wilkins (2008, p. 364) argues that, even though security is one of the key areas of cooperation under strategic partnerships, these arrangements are not necessarily driven by threats as military alliances are. They do not require designating certain states as enemies; rather, they focus on common goals.

Common security threats, however, can still serve as a compelling motivation for states to engage in cooperation through strategic partnerships. States can leverage strategic partnerships to pursue “limited” or “soft balancing” strategies (see Fergusson, 2012; Paul, 2018). For example, they can coordinate their positions within international institutions like the United Nations or signal

²³ Recent study by Edry et al. (2021) found that while external threats motivate the formation of defense pacts, internal threats encourage the formation of neutrality/non-aggression and consultation pacts.

reassurance (see Kay, 2000). Furthermore, cooperation through strategic partnerships allows states to address the broader uncertainty of the international environment by establishing stable expectations for future interactions. Given their multidimensional nature, these partnerships are arguably better suited to today's complex security challenges, which demand a holistic approach (Locoman & Papa, 2021, p. 275). The inherent informality of strategic partnerships can also be advantageous for security cooperation. It provides a more suitable institutional framework for the post-Cold War era, characterized by heightened uncertainty about the future distribution of power. This informality helps states avoid sovereignty costs and maintain a degree of confidentiality on sensitive matters (Vabulas & Snidal, 2021, pp. 863–864).

H2: Two states that face a common threat are more likely to form a strategic partnership.

Secondly, common economic interests could constitute a prominent factor for states to establish strategic partnerships. In the empirical literature, many authors highlight the significance of economic cooperation as one of the key issue-areas covered by these partnerships (see Nadkarni, 2010; Strüver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008). Strüver's (2017) study further provides statistical evidence that China tends to establish partnerships with important trading partners. There is also some evidence that important trading partners are more likely to ally (see, e.g., Lai & Reiter, 2000; cf. Gibler & Wolford, 2006). Lai and Reiter (2000, p. 210) speculate that this is because economically interdependent states are more likely to be concerned with each other's security since a threat to one's partner threatens one's own material interests. Moreover, states may form alignments, such as formal alliances and informal partnerships, to reduce trade volatility by developing stable political expectations (see Fordham, 2010; Bagozzi & Landis, 2015).²⁴ Like security, trade issues are also characterized by high

²⁴ Economic interdependence may also stimulate institutionalized cooperation at a more general level since sub-national groups often pressure governments to align with trading partners to protect their investments abroad (Moravcsik, 1997; see also, Keohane & Nye, 1977).

sovereignty costs and uncertainty (at least in the early stages), increasing the attractiveness of the informal institutional choice (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 212).

H3: Two states that have higher levels of bilateral trade are more likely to form a strategic partnership.

Finally, foreign policy preferences can also drive states to establish strategic partnerships. Interestingly enough, institutionalist scholars disagree on whether states are more likely to establish informal institutions, such as strategic partnerships, under conditions of preference heterogeneity (e.g., Abbott & Snidal, 2000; Hawkins et al., 2006) or homogeneity (e.g., Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2009; Whytock, 2005). Some argue that when state preferences are in conflict, informal institutions allow the actors to reach a certain minimum level of cooperation, instead of becoming deadlocked in negotiations over formal agreement (e.g., Westerwinter et al., 2021, p. 12). According to Abbott and Snidal (2000, p. 451), “[d]ivergent preferences increase transaction costs, uncertainty, and bargaining problems, making soft legalization [and informality] more valuable.” Others speculate that when state preferences are in harmony, states only need a limited, or less formal, institutional framework to facilitate cooperation (Stein, 1982, p. 303; see also Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2009; Whytock, 2007). Furthermore, preference similarity can work as a general catalyst of cooperation. States with similar foreign policies are, arguably, more likely to have a reason to cooperate in the first place.

The empirical evidence to support either one of these claims is, nonetheless, mixed.²⁵ For instance, some quantitative studies on IIGOs and transnational public-private governance initiatives

²⁵ One possible explanation for the disagreement about the causal direction of preferences in the literature may lie in the lack of specification regarding the type of cooperation problem for which the institution is being designed. Dilemmas of common interest, which have the structure of the prisoner’s dilemma game, typically involve fears of opportunism that require developing mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement to avoid defection. Dilemmas of common aversion, which have the structure of the stag hunt game, are relatively easier to deal with, because opportunistic behavior leaves actors individually worse off than if they were to cooperate (see Stein, 1982). Heterogeneous preferences in dilemmas of common interest clearly require greater formalization. Informal institutions in such cases cannot produce credible commitments, which would disincentivize defection, and are unlikely to emerge in the first place. In the case of dilemmas

find that the informal design is associated with heterogeneous foreign policy preferences (see Roger, 2020; Reinsberg & Westerwinter, 2021). However, this does not automatically imply that heterogeneous preferences *per se* motivate states to establish these arrangements. Several quantitative studies on military alliances find that states are more likely to become allied when their foreign policy preferences coalesce (Crescenzi et al., 2012; Fordham, 2010; Gibler & Rider, 2004). In one study, the authors show that both states with very similar and very dissimilar foreign policy preferences are unlikely to become allies (Gibler & Rider, 2004). Although the study by Gibler and Rider (2004) pertains to formal alliances, it is plausible that a similar non-linear relationship between the onset of cooperation and preference similarity exists in the case of strategic partnerships. Arguably, states are more likely to establish strategic partnerships when their foreign policy interests are neither in complete conflict nor harmony.²⁶

H4: Pairs of states with both very similar and very dissimilar foreign policy preferences are less likely to form a strategic partnership.

The second set of explanations pertains to the interests of the powerful and weak actors involved in cooperation and the balance of power among them (see Roger, 2020; Westerwinter et al., 2021). According to Stone (2011) powerful states have an interest in establishing and using informal governance mechanisms to safeguard their interests, favoring informality due to its ability to avoid constraints on their “structural power” and utilize “informal power” for influence outside traditional

of common aversion, the problem of credible commitments need not be as severe. States may hedge their bets on cooperation and compromise on formality if it turns out to be too costly. Hence, heterogeneous and homogeneous preferences may both give rise to informal cooperation, contingent on the cooperation problem.

²⁶ On the one hand, if preferences are in harmony, states do not need to form new institutions since such institutions would merely reflect the status quo. In other words, such institutions would not significantly alter the behavior of states, rendering them redundant. On the other hand, if preferences are in conflict, states may lack an incentive to cooperate in the first place. Moreover, in such situations, informal institutions are unlikely to alleviate concerns about cheating, as they lack formal monitoring and enforcement mechanisms that would make commitments credible. Consequently, a combination of shared and conflicting preferences is more likely to incentivize the formation of strategic partnerships. Some shared preferences in certain areas are likely to incentivize states to cooperate initially, while informality allows states to overcome conflicting preferences in other areas.

communication channels. The preference for informality stems from the costs of formal cooperation, which can limit a state's autonomy by restricting outside options. Powerful states, therefore, predominantly opt for informal institutions, as they impose fewer constraints on power and hence increase the "returns to power" (Reinsberg & Westerwinter, 2021, p. 8). Weaker states, on the other hand, often accept institutional arrangements that benefit the powerful in exchange for stability (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 213). These insights largely resonate with empirical research on strategic partnerships – major powers, such as the United States, strategically employ such partnerships to assert their dominance and maximize their influence (Kay, 2000, p. 16).

H5: Two states are more likely to form a strategic partnership if one or both states are major powers.

Research on informal institutions further suggests that power disparities often drive the emergence of these arrangements (see Reinsberg & Westerwinter, 2021; Roger, 2020; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013). The degree of formality/informality of a negotiated agreement reflects a compromise between the powerful and weak, with formalization granting disproportionate control to weaker states (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013; Abbott & Snidal, 2000, p. 448). Power imbalance tends to amplify informality, while balanced distribution leans toward formality (Manulak, 2017, p. 497; Roger, 2020, pp. 55–56; Stone, 2011, pp. 22–31; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 213). As described above, powerful states prefer informality since it only minimally affects their freedom of action, and even enhances their power, whereas less powerful states prefer formality to bind stronger counterparts while occasionally accepting informality to ensure the participation of the powerful (Roger, 2020, p. 72). Similarly to (asymmetric) formal alliances, the decision to establish a strategic partnership could also be driven by the security-autonomy tradeoff, where the weaker state offers concessions that bolster the more powerful states' freedom of action in return for security benefits (Morrow, 1991).

H6: The greater the power differential between two states, the more likely they are to form a strategic partnership.

Vabulas and Snidal (2013) contend that weak but rising powers, exemplified by BRICS, often choose to establish informal institutions instead of renegotiating formal arrangements that might put them at a disadvantage. These informal institutions prove particularly appealing to such powers as they provide a flexible avenue to align institutional outcomes with shifting power distributions, avoiding the immediate overhaul of partially outdated formal structures until more suitable changes become feasible. In this view, informal institutions serve as tools to navigate uncertain periods, postponing commitments to formal arrangements until long-term power relations crystalize. Vabulas and Snidal (2013, 2020) further argue that the adaptability of informal institutions to power shifts motivates both weaker but rising *as well as* established powers to form these arrangements. Established powers might pursue such partnerships for integrative purposes, collaborating with rising powers to develop solutions that accommodate evolving power dynamics while safeguarding their existing privileges. Arguably, these insights find empirical support in the practices of rising powers like China, Russia, and India, which are among the most prolific originators of strategic partnerships (Locoman & Papa, 2021; Strüver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008).

H7: Two states are more likely to form a strategic partnership if one or both states are rising powers.

The last set of possible explanations pertains to domestic-political drivers of (informal) cooperation. In particular, prior research indicates that states with similar political regimes are more inclined to cooperate, including through military alliances (see Leeds, 1999; Crescenzi et al., 2012; Lai & Reiter, 2000). Building on the theory of credible commitments developed by Leeds (1999), the argument that politically similar countries are more prone to cooperate is rooted in the idea that countries select partners based on the expectations whether they will fulfill their commitments.

Democracies, benefitting from accountability mechanisms that discourage agreement breaches, offer more credible commitments, whereas autocracies possess policy flexibility that makes commitment easier but less credible. Consequently, democracies tend to cooperate with other democracies, while autocracies tend to cooperate with other autocracies. Mixed-regime dyads are least likely to cooperate as autocracies have fewer incentives to adhere to agreements, and democracies are less inclined to tolerate defection (Leeds, 1999). However, the empirical evidence on the plausibility of this argument is mixed.

For instance, whereas Lai and Reiter (2000) find that politically similar – and especially jointly democratic – dyads are more likely to be allied in the long run, Gibler and Wolford (2006) find that they are not necessarily more likely to establish alliances in the first place. Across the different studies on regime similarity and international cooperation, researchers consistently find that jointly democratic dyads exhibit especially high cooperation rates than other regime combinations due to the constraints democratic leaders face, making their commitments more credible and leading to more secure and sustainable cooperation. Carlson and Koremenos (2021) additionally argue that informal cooperation benefits both jointly democratic and autocratic dyads, albeit the existing evidence for the latter is limited to pairs of absolutist monarchies. The limited evidence from the empirical literature on strategic partnerships suggests that China, an autocratic regime, has predominantly pursued such partnerships with democracies, illustrating the appeal of democracies as credible cooperation partners (Strüver, 2017). With these caveats, I formulate the following two hypotheses.

H8: Two states with similar regime type are more likely to form a strategic partnership.

H9: Two democratic states are more likely to form a strategic partnership.

Another argument in the literature on informal institution relates to the domestic-political constraints as a driver of informality (see Roger, 2020; Westerwinter et al., 2021). States, especially democratic ones, facing challenges in ratifying formal bilateral agreements may find informality appealing due to its reduced demands on the domestic policy process. Roger (2020) argues that the preference for informality stems from domestic-political constraints, notably the presence of veto players in a polity (esp. legislature), which can hinder executive support for formal agreements. While politicians generally prefer formal agreements for policy stability and demonstrating leadership, these often entail protracted and uncertain ratification processes. Informality circumvents these challenges, enabling policy-makers to reach agreements that are closer to their preferences vis-à-vis domestic opposition without ratification. Moreover, informality is also associated with reduced visibility, reducing the likelihood that domestic opponents will take note of and respond to the executive's actions (Westerwinter et al., 2021, pp. 14–15). States with a high level of domestic-political constraints should, therefore, be more likely to establish informal arrangements.

H10: A pair of states where one party has a high level of domestic-political constraints are more likely to form a strategic partnership.

In summary, these hypotheses collectively address various factors that could influence the onset of strategic partnerships, with a particular emphasis on the informal nature of these cooperative arrangements. While some factors, such as shared security and economic interests, can be seen as variables that (hypothetically) trigger the onset of strategic partnerships, other factors like power disparity and regime similarity may be understood as variables that (hypothetically) contribute to the onset but do not necessarily trigger it – for instance, a mere fact that two regimes are politically similar arguably does not necessarily explain why they should cooperate through a strategic partnership in the first place. The additional hypotheses (**H2–H10**) serve primarily the purpose of addressing the omitted

variable bias. The forthcoming analysis will involve a large-N quantitative approach, utilizing a newly compiled dataset on strategic partnerships. The subsequent chapter will delve into the specifics of the research design, data structure and collection, variable operationalization, and the application of specific statistical methods of analysis.

Table 5. Overview of Hypotheses

| Theoretical foundations | Hypothesis | Description |
|---|-------------------|--|
| Complementarity and substitution | H1a | Two states without joint membership in a formal alliance are more likely to form a strategic partnership when they face a common threat. |
| | H1b | Two states with joint membership in a formal alliance are more likely to form a strategic partnership when they face a common threat. |
| Functionalist explanations | H2 | Two states that face a common threat are more likely to form a strategic partnership. |
| | H3 | Two states that have higher levels of bilateral trade are more likely to form a strategic partnership. |
| | H4 | Pairs of states with both very similar and very dissimilar foreign policy preferences are less likely to form a strategic partnership. |
| Power-based explanations | H5 | Two states are more likely to form a strategic partnership if one or both states are major powers. |
| | H6 | The greater the power differential between two states, the more likely they are to form a strategic partnership. |
| | H7 | Two states are more likely to form a strategic partnership if one or both states are rising powers. |
| Domestic-political explanations | H8 | Two states with similar regime type are more likely to form a strategic partnership. |
| | H9 | Two democratic states are more likely to form a strategic partnership. |
| | H10 | A pair of states where one party has a high level of domestic-political constraints are more likely to form a strategic partnership. |

3. Methodology

This chapter summarizes the research design and data structure, data collection process, operationalization of variables, and specific statistical methods of analysis. In the “Research Design and Data Structure” section, I explain the rationale behind the chosen research design – i.e., time-series cross-section analysis of undirected dyadic data with a binary dependent variable – and how it affects decisions connected to other aspects of the analysis. In the “Building the Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnership (BISP) Dataset v1.0” section, I provide an overview of the previous attempts at mapping the proliferation of “strategic partnerships” and describe the data collection procedure behind the creation of the new dataset. In the “Independent Variables” section, I summarize the operationalization of variables used to test hypotheses **H1a–H10**, including alternative operationalizations. Next, in the “Quantitative Analysis” section, I describe the specific statistical estimation techniques used – i.e., logistic regression with dyad clustered standard errors and controls for temporal dependence – caveats related to the use of this technique, and other estimation techniques.

3.1. Research Design and Data Structure

Before going into more detail about the process of data collection, operationalization of variables, and the use of specific statistical methods, it is important to describe the structure of the data, which determines the former. In quantitative International Relations, large-*N* analysis, such as this one, typically follows one of the three archetypal research designs, which include: (1) cross-section (CS), (2) time-series (TS), and (3) time-series cross-section (TSCS) designs. The CS design is appropriate for analyzing the variation in the dependent variable across units, while the TS design is appropriate for analyzing the variation in the dependent variable over time with a single unit. The TSCS design combines elements of both the CS and TS design, and is, therefore, appropriate for analyzing the variation in the dependent variable across units and over time. In practice, this approach involves observing a set of units, such as nation-states, over a pre-defined period, such as every year for 20 years (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, p. 163). Given that the aim of this dissertation is to analyze what factors can help explain why states have formed strategic partnerships since the end of the Cold War until today, the TSCS design is appropriate.

Within the archetype of the TSCS design, we can further identify a subtype of TSCS with a binary dependent variable, or BTSCS (see, e.g., Beck et al., 1998; Carter & Signorino, 2010). Studies in quantitative International Relations using this approach analyze the occurrence or non-occurrence of events amongst a set of units and over time. Examples include research on alliance formation and duration (see, e.g., Lai & Reiter, 2000) or the onset and incidence of militarized interstate disputes (see, e.g., Oneal & Russett, 1999) where the dependent variable takes a binary form, with “1” indicating the occurrence of an event, and “0” indicating the non-occurrence. Equally, the dependent variable under study – the onset of a strategic partnership – can be defined in binary terms. As the dissertation is primarily interested in examining under what conditions states do (“1”) or do not (“0”) form strategic

partnerships, the BTSCS approach is appropriate. Distinguishing the BTSCS design from other TSCS approaches is not only useful but necessary because BTSCS data require the use of specific estimation techniques, such as logistic regression with controls for temporal dependence (see Carter & Signorino, 2010).

In addition, data in quantitative International Relations typically come in monadic or dyadic format. The former consists of observations for an individual unit, while the latter consists of observations in which two individual units form a pair, or a “dyad” (see Neumayer & Plümper, 2010, p. 150). State-to-state dyad years, in particular, have become the dominant research design in quantitative International Relations (Poast, 2016, p. 369) because they allow for the analysis of patterns of state-to-state interaction over time. This approach is applicable in all three archetypal research designs, including the CS, TS, and TSCS designs, and it is equally applicable in the BTSCS design. For instance, studies on alliance formation or the onset of militarized interstate disputes, which work with BTSCS data, typically use state-to-state dyad years as the unit of analysis. Since this dissertation aims to analyze patterns of state-to-state interaction – namely, whether pairs of states form strategic partnerships – this requires the use of data in a dyadic format. The most appropriate unit of analysis is, thus, a state-to-state dyad year. However, researchers must further decide whether to employ directed or undirected dyads.

In directed dyadic data, there is a source and a target – for example, in studies on interstate conflict, one can distinguish between aggressors and victims. In undirected dyadic data, on the other hand, the distinction between the source and the target is either empirically unclear or theoretically unimportant. Consequently, while it makes sense to distinguish between dyads ij and ji in directed dyadic data, dyads ij and ji in undirected dyadic data carry the same information. Researchers, thus, keep only one of the two to avoid the issue of “double counting.” Whether to use data in a directed

or undirected format then depends on the theory (Neumayer & Plümper, 2010, p. 150). If the theory specifies the conditions under which one state interacts with another, directed dyads are appropriate. However, if the theory merely predicts that some pairs of states are more prone to interactions than others, undirected dyads are appropriate (Bennett & Stam, 2000, p. 656). As the dissertation aims to analyze the “onset,” rather than “initiation,” of strategic partnerships, undirected dyads are more suitable.

Taken together, the structure of the data corresponds to the BTSCS design with undirected dyads. This structure has a direct impact on all other aspects of research design. First, with respect to data collection and operationalization, the data must be compatible with the state-to-state dyad year as the main unit of analysis. This means collecting the data for all dyads of case selection for each year within the selected time frame. Furthermore, using undirected dyads requires operationalizing the variables in a way that avoids assigning directionality (see Bennett & Stam, 2000, pp. 656–57). Second, with respect to the use of specific statistical methods in large- N analyses, the binary nature of the dependent variable requires employing appropriate estimation techniques, such as logistic regression. Additionally, the TS element of the BTSCS data requires the use of controls for temporal dependence (see Carter & Signorino, 2010) and the dyadic element of the design requires the use of dyad clustered standard errors. Recent advances in quantitative International Relations scholarship potentially also merit the use of dyadic cluster-robust standard errors, which are more suitable for addressing the issue of “dyadic clustering,” to ensure that the findings are robust (see Aronow et al., 2015). I discuss these specific adjustments and their implications in detail on the following pages.

Table 6 below illustrates the structure of BTSCS data with undirected dyads. Observations are recorded at the state-to-state dyad year level. *ID* stands for the unique dyad identifier, which consists of the combination of Correlates of War Project (COW) country codes for the respective pair of

countries – *country A* and *country B*.²⁷ Each country has a unique identity number, or code, ranging from 2 to 990. Because entries for a particular state-to-state dyad year appear precisely one time in undirected dyadic data, the combination of country codes always takes the form of a sequence of the lower number followed by the higher number. In the illustrative example, Brazil (“140”) and China (“710”) form a pair, or a dyad (“140710”) – this is the cross-section element of the data. Observations for the Brazil-China dyad are then recorded for each *year* from 1990 to 2020 – this is the time-series element. Combining both of these elements results in the TSCS data structure. The dependent variable is a binary, *onset*, indicating whether an event has (“1”) or has not (“0”) occurred. In the illustrative example, Brazil and China form a strategic partnership in the year 1993. Once an event occurs, the observations for the following years of the same dyad are coded as missing (see McGarh, 2015). I explain the reasoning behind this coding decision in the section “Data Collection and the Dependent Variable.”

Table 6. An Illustrative Example of BTSCS Data with Undirected Dyads

| ID | Country A | Country B | Year | Onset |
|--------|-----------|-----------|------|-------|
| ... | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| 140705 | 140 | 705 | 2016 | 0 |
| 140705 | 140 | 705 | 2017 | 0 |
| 140705 | 140 | 705 | 2018 | 0 |
| 140705 | 140 | 705 | 2019 | 0 |
| 140705 | 140 | 705 | 2020 | 0 |
| 140710 | 140 | 710 | 1990 | 0 |
| 140710 | 140 | 710 | 1991 | 0 |
| 140710 | 140 | 710 | 1992 | 0 |
| 140710 | 140 | 710 | 1993 | 1 |
| 140710 | 140 | 710 | 1994 | N/A |
| ... | ... | ... | ... | ... |

Note: N/A stands for missing data.²⁸

²⁷ See <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/cow-country-codes-2/>

²⁸ When the analysis has the “onset” of an event as its dependent variable, ongoing years should be set to “missing,” rather than “0” (see McGarh, 2015). I discuss the rationale for this adjustment in detail in the “Data Collection and the Dependent Variable” section.

Overall, the chosen research design closely follows the design of previous studies on alliance formation and the onset of militarized interstate disputes (see Bennett & Stam, 2000). This choice is deliberate, as I expect that the same design template—the undirected dyadic BTSCS approach—used for analyzing what factors lead states to form formal alliances is equally applicable to analyzing what factors lead states to form strategic partnerships. However, this does not necessarily mean that other research designs are invalid—for instance, one could construct panel data composed of undirected dyads measured in particular intervals (e.g., once in five years), rather than each year, or cross-section data composed of undirected dyads measured at a single specific point in time (e.g., the year 2020).²⁹ The reason I opted for the more data-intensive undirected dyadic BTSCS approach is that, similar to studies on alliance formation, I expect that the event under study is time sensitive—at least in some cases. For instance, certain factors, such as regime change or armed conflict, can significantly impact the prospects of two states forming an alliance or partnership from one year to another.

Furthermore, the chosen research design is specifically tailored to analyze the “onset”—that is, whether two states have formed a strategic partnership at a particular point in time—rather than the “incidence”—which determines whether a strategic partnership exists between the two states at a particular point in time. The latter could arguably be analyzed using a more straightforward CS design. This differentiation is crucial as these two phenomena are *qualitatively* distinct. Previous research on military alliances suggests that the effect of factors motivating states to form an alliance as opposed to maintaining it may differ. For instance, Gibler and Wolford (2006) found that when “onset” is the dependent variable, democratic dyads are unlikely to ally. However, when the dependent variable shifts to the “incidence” of an alliance tie, democratic dyads are likely to be allied. I have formulated my theoretical expectations around the former, aiming to explain what leads states to form strategic

²⁹ I thank the reviewer, Jan Karlas, for this suggestion.

partnerships rather than focusing on why they maintain such partnerships in the long run. In the end, the undirected dyadic BTSCS approach most accurately aligns with these aims.

3.2. Building the Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnership (BISP)

Dataset v1.0

In this section, I provide a detailed description of the rationale and process behind creating the new “Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnership Dataset v1.0.” I start with the overview of the previous attempts at mapping the proliferation of SPs by other authors (Costa Vaz, 2014; Hall, 2016; Hamilton, 2014; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Michalski, 2019; Renard, 2021; Strüver, 2017; Zhongping & Jing, 2014), identifying some of the common issues and lessons learned from these efforts. In the following subsection, I describe the specific steps of data collection for the dependent variable, its operationalization, data sources, and coding criteria. In so doing, I draw on the best practices in data collection discussed by Salehyan (2015) and the basic principles of quantitative content analysis (see Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2012). In the final subsection, I discuss the operationalization of independent variables, addressing the adjustments required for the analysis of undirected dyads (see Bennett & Stam, 2000, pp. 656–657). Additionally, I discuss the alternative operationalization of these variables, which will serve as a robustness check for the later statistical analysis.

3.2.1. Previous Attempts at Mapping the Proliferation of Strategic Partnerships

Although this dissertation represents the most extensive attempt to map the proliferation of strategic partnerships, attempts to collect data on partnerships of specific countries or groups of countries have been made by other authors in the past. Most of these attempts consist of compilations of lists of the existing partnerships – hereafter referred to as “datasets” for simplicity. The second most comprehensive dataset to date compared to the BISP dataset v1.0 comes from the article by Strüver (2017) and covers all bilateral “partnerships” established by China between the years 1993 and 2016. The dependent variable has three levels, including (1) “partnership,” (2) “strategic partnership,” and (3) “comprehensive strategic partnership.” According to the author, these categories correspond to different levels of symbolic significance the Chinese government attaches to its bilateral relations, with “partnerships” at the lowest end of the spectrum, “strategic partnerships” in the middle, and “comprehensive strategic partnerships” at the highest end of the spectrum (Strüver, 2017, p. 45). The author summarizes the difference between the three categories as follows:

“In general, partnerships are characterized by a relatively low level of interaction. They are not about impact but rather a diplomatic attempt to see whether or not future collaboration might be feasible. [...] In comparison, the labels ‘strategic partnership’ and ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ generally go hand-in-hand with broader agendas and more formalized mechanisms of cooperation. While strategic partnerships are still limited to cooperation in some important areas, and often confined to closer economic cooperation, agreements in the latter group often include rather detailed agendas for bilateral collaboration and provide for the establishment of specific communication channels to facilitate regular exchanges between the heads of state and high-level representatives of different government units.” (Strüver, 2017, p. 45)

Strüver's data show that the so-called "partnership diplomacy" has become an increasingly important tool of Chinese foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. In fact, by 2016, the country had a total of 21 "partnerships," 26 "strategic partnerships," and 34 "comprehensive strategic partnerships" with counterparts from all major regions. Initially, China focused on partnerships with major powers and regional neighbors, but since the mid-2000s, the geographical scope and the sheer number of partnerships have expanded significantly (Strüver, 2017, p. 42). The data also show that bilateral relations often start as "partnerships" and evolve over time into "strategic partnerships" or "comprehensive strategic partnerships." For example, China's relations with Mongolia evolved from a "good-neighborly and mutual trust partnership" in 2003 into a "strategic partnership" in 2011 and, eventually, a "comprehensive strategic partnership" in 2014. However, not all bilateral relations follow the same pattern. For example, China established a "comprehensive strategic partnership" with Malaysia in 2013 without a previous "partnership" at the lower level (Strüver, 2017, p. 63).

As for the data collection procedure, the author relies on a range of sources in English and Chinese, including the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, websites of news agencies, such as Xinhua and BBC, and open web searches for all countries in the international system (Strüver, 2017, p. 42). In addition, Strüver cross-validates his data with several previously compiled lists of Chinese partnerships, including the list compiled by Zhongping and Jing (2014) described below. In spite of the comprehensive description of sources used, however, this data collection effort still suffers from some significant limitations. First, the author does not discuss coding rules in detail and does not refer to specific sources for each case of partnership identified in the dataset. These discrepancies raise questions about the reliability of measurement and the replicability of findings (see Salehyan, 2015). Second, the dataset is available only as a table in the appendix of the original article, which means that any researcher interested in using the data has to transcribe it into a more appropriate format first. Unfortunately, these issues pervade all other "datasets" discussed in this subsection.

Similar efforts to collect data on country-specific partnerships have been made by the authors of working papers published as part of the European Strategic Partnerships Observatory Project (ESPO). First, the working paper by Zhongping and Jing (2014) provides a less comprehensive list of Chinese partnerships, covering a total of 50 strategic partnerships established between 1993 and 2014 (Zhongping & Jing, 2014, pp. 18–19). Unlike Strüver (2017), the authors do not distinguish between different levels of partnerships. Nevertheless, a glance at the table in the appendix reveals that the list includes only bilateral relations at the level of “strategic partnership” and “comprehensive strategic partnership.” The authors acknowledge that most such relations build on previous (lower-level) “partnerships,” which are not on the list (Zhongping & Jing, 2014, p. 9). The sources used for data collection include the official Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, reports from news agencies, and open web searches. Even in this case, however, the authors do not discuss coding rules or point to specific sources for individual cases of strategic partnerships.

Second, the working paper by Costa Vaz (2014) provides a list of Brazilian partnerships that includes a total of 22 of these arrangements established roughly between 1988 and 2012. The timeframe goes further back in time compared to other datasets due to the broader conceptualization and operationalization of the dependent variable, which does not rely on the “strategic partnership” label. The author argues that strategic partnerships have been an important instrument of Brazilian foreign policy, but they have not been formally called such until recently (Costa Vaz, 2014, p. 6).³⁰ A fundamental limitation of this dataset is that it is not based on any specific definition of “strategic partnership,” which makes it difficult to assess the reliability and validity of measurement. Additionally, the year of establishment of the partnerships on the list is not clearly stated, making the

³⁰ For instance, the dataset includes an SP between Brazil and Argentina, which has also been called a “strategic alliance.” The “basic document” underlying the SP according to the author is the 1988 Treaty of Integration, Cooperation and Development (Costa Vaz, 2014, p. 19). The document does not contain any reference to “strategic partnership” per se.

data unsuitable for time-series analysis. Instead, the dataset contains information on the year in which the partner country agreed to the “basic document” – whether an action plan, bilateral agreement, memorandum of understanding, or a joint communiqué – on which the strategic partnership is based (Costa Vaz, 2014, pp. 18–19).

Despite these limitations, the data reveals some intriguing temporal and geographical trends in Brazil’s approach to strategic partnership diplomacy. While Brazil was one of the first countries to embark on the practice of establishing such partnerships with other countries, its activity in this regard has slowed down significantly by the end of the 2000s. Moreover, the geographical scope remained limited for the most part to Europe, with over half of strategic partnerships between Brazil and European counterparts. Compared to other datasets, the dataset by Costa Vaz (2014) additionally provides information on “major issue areas” covered by the specific partnerships. Some of the most frequently cited areas of cooperation include, for example, political dialogue, trade, energy, education, technology, and security (Costa Vaz, 2014, pp. 18–19). Yet, the information on areas of cooperation does not appear to be compiled in a systematic fashion, which detracts from its utility. Similarly to the previously mentioned datasets, the main source of data is the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Again, however, a more elaborate description of the data collection procedure is missing, raising questions about reliability.

Lastly, the working paper by Hamilton (2014) provides a list of U.S. partnerships. Even though this dataset sheds some light on the geographical distribution of these arrangements established by the United States – more than 30 strategic partnerships with counterparts predominantly in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region – it does not provide any information on the temporal coverage or the year of establishment of specific partnerships (Hamilton, 2014, pp. 22–23). This, in turn, significantly reduces the utility of the dataset, making it unsuitable for time-series analysis. In addition to “strategic

partnerships,” the dataset also contains information on so-called “strategic dialogues.” According to the author, these “strategic dialogues” perform a similar function to strategic partnerships in that they constitute an instrument for regular high-level official meetings. Hamilton (2014, pp. 18–19) observes that the US “[...] uses ‘strategic dialogue’ with some countries to signal its interest in moving the relationship towards a more formal ‘strategic partnership,’” and notes that “strategic dialogues” often coexist with strategic partnerships and other security arrangements, such as alliances, at the same time. There were approximately 40 such “strategic dialogues” as of 2014.

As for the coding of the dependent variable, the author additionally differentiates between a “formal strategic partnership” and “strategic partnership” as a mere label. He argues that officials frequently refer to their treaty-based allies as “strategic partners.” Nevertheless, the use of this term does not automatically imply the existence of a “formal strategic partnership.” For instance, the United States often refers to countries such as Canada, France, and Germany as “strategic partners” not because they have a stand-alone partnership arrangement, but due to the closeness of their alliance ties (Hamilton, 2014, pp. 22–23). This observation highlights the need to examine the context in which the term is used to separate merely rhetorical statements from references to factual strategic partnerships. In practice, one way to address this issue at the stage of data collection would be to treat references to the term “strategic partner” as borderline cases, or to ignore them completely, because they are relatively more ambiguous than references to the term “strategic partnership.” Beyond this observation, however, the data collection effort by Hamilton (2014) suffers from the same limitations as described earlier.

In addition to Strüver (2017) and the ESPO working paper series, several other publications provide partial coverage of country-specific partnerships. First, the article by Hall (2016) provides a list of these arrangements established by India between 1997 and 2015. Temporal trends in the data

indicate that, while India was one of the first countries to engage in establishing strategic partnerships, the majority of these arrangements emerged only in the mid-2000s. Geographical trends show that India initially focused predominantly on building bilateral relations with major powers such as France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United States, and only gradually expanded its portfolio to other important regional players across the globe, yielding a total of 28 strategic partnerships by the year 2015 (Hall, 2016, p. 278). This data collection effort – albeit serving more of an illustrative purpose – also suffers from significant limitations. The author does not discuss the conceptualization and operationalization of “strategic partnership” in depth, the substantive description of the data collection procedure is missing, and so is the information on the sources used in compiling the list.

Second, the article by Locoman and Papa (2021) includes a figure depicting the number of documents – be it a treaty, joint statement, or a declaration – containing in-text references to the term “strategic partnership” signed by Russia and its respective partners during the period between 1992 and 2019. Based on these data, we can estimate that Russia established approximately 26 strategic partnerships by 2019, mostly with major powers and regional neighbors. While the authors usefully distinguish between “partnerships” and “strategic partnerships” – the former denoting a lower foreign policy priority, more selective nature of cooperation, or less stable relations – an analogous figure with the number of documents containing the term “partnership” is missing (Locoman & Papa, 2021, pp. 19–24). Similarly to others, Locoman and Papa (2021, p. 21) observe that some “partnerships” eventually evolve into more fleshed-out “strategic partnerships.” In compiling the list, the authors relied on information from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, but a more elaborate description of the data collection procedure and coding is missing.

Third, the working paper by Michalski (2019) offers a list of strategic partnerships established *among* 12 “major players” in the international system, including members of G7 and BRICS, during

the period from 1993 to 2017.³¹ By looking at the dyadic level in the universe of cases of the 12 actors, the author finds that 36 out of the possible 44 bilateral relationships were labeled as “strategic partnerships” by the actors involved. The data show that countries such as China and India were amongst the most active proliferators of these arrangements with other major players, as they had at some point established partnerships with virtually all other major players (Michalski, 2019, p. 18). In addition to providing information on the year of establishment, the dataset includes a number of variables indicating the breadth and depth of cooperation, or frequency and intensity of interaction (Michalski, 2019, pp. 19–20). Unfortunately, the author does not discuss the conceptualization or operationalization of these variables in the text. Again, there is a general lack of description of the data collection procedure, and the limited nature of case selection further makes the data unsuitable for large-*N* analysis.

Lastly, the chapter by Renard (2021) contains a figure with a list of strategic partnerships of Brazil, China, India, Russia, the EU, and the United States. The figure consists of data from previously published datasets updated by the author based on information from the U.S. Department of State, U.S. White House, and Russian and Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs websites. The data reveals that the six actors alone have established nearly 200 strategic partnerships since the end of the Cold War. Additionally, the figure contains information on which of these partnerships are currently “on hold,” which highlights the need to address the issue of partnership suspension/termination. While capturing the event of suspension/termination may be technically infeasible at the stage of data collection – not least because of the non-transparent nature of these arrangements – one could plausibly capture it indirectly, such as through the onset of an armed conflict between the two parties

³¹ The full list of actors surveyed includes China, the US, EU, Russia, India, South Africa, Brazil, Japan, Australia, Mexico, Canada, and South Korea (Michalski, 2019, p. 8).

or through the collapse of the state authority on part of one of the parties.³² Beyond this distinction between strategic partnerships “in force” and “on hold,” however, the data compiled by Renard (2021) are similarly limited in terms of their utility and reliability as previous datasets.

What, then, can we take away from these past data collection efforts? First and foremost, the extent of our empirical knowledge about strategic partnerships is currently limited to only a few countries, including China, Brazil, the United States, India, and Russia. As Renard (2021) notes, “[...] no study or database has ever attempted—or been able—to provide an exact account [of strategic partnerships worldwide]” (Renard, 2021, p. 313). The extent of temporal coverage is an even greater issue as many of the existing datasets are already outdated or simply do not provide information on the year of establishment of individual partnerships (see Costa Vaz, 2014; Hamilton, 2014; Locoman & Papa, 2021). Second, the conceptualization and operationalization of strategic partnerships differ across publications. Some authors differentiate between different levels of bilateral engagement (see Locoman & Papa, 2021; Strüver, 2017; Zhongping & Jing, 2014), some distinguish between rhetorical and factual partnerships (see Hamilton, 2014), and others subsume all bilateral relations labeled as “strategic partnership” into one category (see Hall, 2016; Michalski, 2019). The existing datasets are, therefore, fundamentally incompatible with each other.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, none of the above-described datasets comes with a codebook or coding scheme to provide an explicit rationale for individual coding decisions, which negatively affects the reliability of measurement and replicability of findings. This issue is further compounded by the fact that several publications do not cite any specific sources (see Hall, 2016; Hamilton, 2014; Michalski, 2019). Data collection in most cases relies mainly on information from official websites of government agencies, such as ministries of foreign affairs, national and global news

³² I address the issue of coding strategic partnership suspension/termination in the following subsection.

agencies, such as Xinhua or BBC, and open web searches (see Costa Vaz, 2014; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Strüver, 2017; Zhongping & Jing, 2014). To improve upon the existing empirical account of the phenomenon of strategic partnerships, the new dataset should, therefore: (1) expand the temporal and geographical coverage, (2) offer an unambiguous operationalization of the dependent variable, and (3) provide a detailed and transparent description of the coding procedure, including with respect to sources used for individual coding decisions.

3.2.2. Data Collection and the Dependent Variable

In the broadest sense, the term “data” refers to “[...] any sort of evidence that serves as the empirical basis for understanding and explanation” (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, p. 245). Data can be qualitative or quantitative, and it can be obtained from primary or secondary sources by either the researcher or another person. Data-gathering methods can be broadly classified as obtrusive or unobtrusive. Obtrusive methods involve interference with the subjects under study, such as when researchers collect data through surveys or interviews. Unobtrusive methods, on the other hand, do not interfere with the subjects and typically involve the recording of observations about their past behavior without their awareness (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, p. 245). While obtrusive data-gathering methods have gained popularity in the quantitative International Relations field in recent years, especially in the use of surveys to study public and elite attitudes toward various domestic and foreign policy issues (e.g., Press et al., 2013), unobtrusive data-gathering methods remain the standard for collecting data about the behavior of nation-states and international organizations (e.g., the Correlates of War Project). This data collection effort, similarly, relies on the use of such unobtrusive methods.

The collection of data on strategic partnerships described in this sub-section relies on the use of the specific type of *ex-post*, or after-the-fact, unobtrusive data gathering. This method is typically employed where the event of interest – in this case, the onset of a “strategic partnership” – has already been broadcasted, published, or otherwise distributed. Although there are many potential sources for such *ex-post* data, it is important to distinguish between two basic types: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources refer to materials produced by the subjects under study, such as minutes from meetings, memoranda of understanding, government documents, and reports by international organizations. Secondary sources, on the other hand, are produced by those who study the subject of

interest and typically include previous studies or datasets by other researchers. Different sources can provide varying accounts of the event, and researchers must, therefore, assess their quality based on factors such as relevance, authenticity, and validity (Gerring & Christenson, 2017, pp. 266–72). For reasons described on the following pages, I intend to rely mainly on primary sources, including the websites of governments, parliaments, and ministries of foreign affairs.

Before elaborating on the specific data collection procedure, it is worth reviewing some of the best practices developed by the quantitative International Relations scholarship aimed at improving data quality. Salehyan’s (2015) special section in the *Journal of Peace Research* helpfully summarizes some of these practices. First, researchers should be systematic and transparent about their sources, whether news media or reports by NGOs and government agencies. In this context, it is important to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each source and explain why specific sources were chosen. Second, researchers should address what may be missing from the sources since some sources may be more prone to non-detection of certain events. Third, potential biases in the sources should be considered and biased sources should be excluded. Fourth, clear and reliable coding rules should be developed and strictly adhered to when extracting and converting information into numeric values. Automated methods can be useful for analyzing large amounts of source material. Finally, researchers should make their data easily accessible to others (Salehyan, 2015, pp. 106–08). I will briefly address these points throughout this sub-section where relevant.

To collect the data on the event of interest – the onset of a strategic partnership – I relied partly on the principles of content analysis (see Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2012). This method can be described as “[...] a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 24). In practice, this process typically involves analyzing the texts and noting occurrences of specific words based on an *a*

priori coding scheme (Marying, 2014, p. 12). When applying this method, researchers should adhere to the principles of an *a priori* design, reliability, validity, generalizability, and replicability. An *a priori* design means that researchers should develop coding criteria in advance. Reliability means that the procedure should yield the same results on repeated trials. Validity means that the data should adequately reflect the concept under study. Generalizability means that the findings should be applicable beyond the specific sample of observations under study – in this case, beyond the universe of cases of G20 partnerships. Lastly, replicability means that the procedure should be applicable to other cases beyond such a sample of observations (Neuendorf, 2012, pp. 40–41).

As mentioned earlier, the dependent variable of interest is the onset of a strategic partnership. However, I only intend to focus on the onset of “bilateral intergovernmental strategic partnerships,” hereafter “BISPs,” with the involvement of G20 countries as one of the members, established between 1993 and 2020. The decision to focus on BISPs has been made for a number of reasons. First, from an empirical standpoint, multilateral strategic partnerships are relatively rare. For instance, officials occasionally refer to BRICS as a “strategic partnership,”³³ and a number of countries have formed these arrangements with some IGOs, including the EU³⁴ and ASEAN.³⁵ Overall, however, these examples represent the exceptions rather than the norm. Second, from a theoretical standpoint, there is a reason to believe that multilateral partnerships are qualitatively different from bilateral ones. For example, findings from the institutionalist literature suggest that organizations with a large number of members have a different institutional design on average (e.g., Hooghe & Marks, 2014). Finally, from a statistical perspective, the dyadic data structure is inappropriate for analyzing multilateral events

³³ See https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202206/t20220623_10709037.html

³⁴ See Ferreira-Pereira and Smith (2021).

³⁵ See <https://asean.org/tag/strategic-partnership/>

(Poast, 2010, 2016).³⁶ To avoid these empirical, theoretical, and statistical pitfalls, I only focus on BISPs.

Furthermore, the scope of coverage is limited to BISPs involving G20 countries as one of the members, within the timeframe of 1993 to 2020. Although it is technically possible to gather data for all countries worldwide, the process would be excessively time-consuming. This is partly due to the chosen data-gathering method, which involves human coding rather than computer-aided coding (see, e.g., Neuendorf, 2012, p. 66). Employing automated content analysis would likely result in frequent false positives and false negatives – as far as capturing the onset of BISPs is concerned – since mentions of “strategic partnerships” often depend heavily on the context. The selection of G20 countries as the sample provides a solid starting point for data collection, considering that these countries generally possess greater influence and engage in more proactive foreign policies than others. By focusing on BISPs involving G20 countries as one of the members, we can reasonably capture a significant portion of BISPs worldwide. Regarding the timeframe, according to the literature review, the first known BISP is the 1993 SP between China and Brazil (see, e.g., Strüver, 2017, p. 33). Therefore, data collection begins in 1993 and extends until the recent past.

Importantly, the decision to focus on dyads with the involvement of G20 countries as one of the members presents certain limitations, which require acknowledgment. First, although this case selection is still likely to capture a significant portion of all strategic partnerships in existence, it is also prone to a certain bias. Namely, the instances of BISPs captured through this procedure are likely to be characterized by a significant power asymmetry among their members because one of the dyad

³⁶ While, in practice, scholars often divide multilateral events into a series of dyadic relations, such as ij , this approach inevitably leads to model misspecification and statistical bias because it disregards i and j 's relations with outside actors, k (Poast, 2010, pp. 403–04; Poast, 2016, p. 371). Post (2010, p. 403–04) provides a convincing example in this regard: “[...] should one portray the European theater of World War II as a bilateral war between Germany and Greece? Probably not, given this was a minor campaign in a much larger conflict [...] In short, empirical scholars cannot treat [...] Greece and Germany as having fought an isolated bilateral war [...]”

members is always a G20 country. Moreover, as powerful countries, the G20 members are arguably more prone to participating in armed conflicts and military alliances.³⁷ Consequently, these aspects of case selection are likely to lead to an estimation bias, particularly when it comes to testing hypotheses related to factors such as power differentials or alliance membership. This, in turn, limits the generalizability of findings. Although the results may provide some hints about the mechanisms underlying the formation of strategic partnerships in general, they must be understood as pertaining to the universe of cases of dyads with the involvement of G20 countries as one of the members.

Moreover, this selection procedure operates on the fairly strong assumption that there exists a possibility for all other countries to form a strategic partnership with a G20 country. While certain countries, like the least developed countries, small island nations, or “rogue” states, are likely to be consistently underrepresented in the strategic portfolios of G20 members, there is no evidence to suggest that the emergence of partnerships among any pair of states is entirely impossible. For instance, Strüver (2017, pp. 62–63) notes that even major powers, such as China, have established strategic partnerships with countries like Equatorial Guinea, Maldives, or Myanmar. In essence, this assumption appears to be unproblematic in principle. Because other data collection efforts on informal cooperation have been made in the past, it is worth noting some of the limitations related to collecting data on this specific subject. Examples of the existing datasets include the dataset on IIGOs by Vabulas and Snidal (2021) and Roger and Rowan (2022), and the dataset on “informal cooperation” by Carlson and Koremenos (2021). By and large, the authors mention the issue of false negatives, or false instances of “non-occurrence” of the phenomenon, as one of the major limitations. This is because informal cooperation is opaque by design. However, researchers are limited to data collection on “observable” state behavior (Carlson & Koremenos, 2021, p. 114). Even if the cooperation is not

³⁷ I thank the reviewer, Jan Karlas, for pointing out this limitation.

entirely secretive, the data collection effort is more likely to capture instances of cooperation that leave a more noticeable “paper trail,” such as when the cooperation is long-term, has a greater internet presence, and involves developed countries (Vabulas & Snidal, 2021, p. 862; Roger & Rowan, 2022, p. 10). Similarly, collecting data on BISPs will likely result in some and perhaps a non-trivial proportion of false negatives. I address this issue partly by drawing on multiple primary sources and cross-validation with secondary sources.

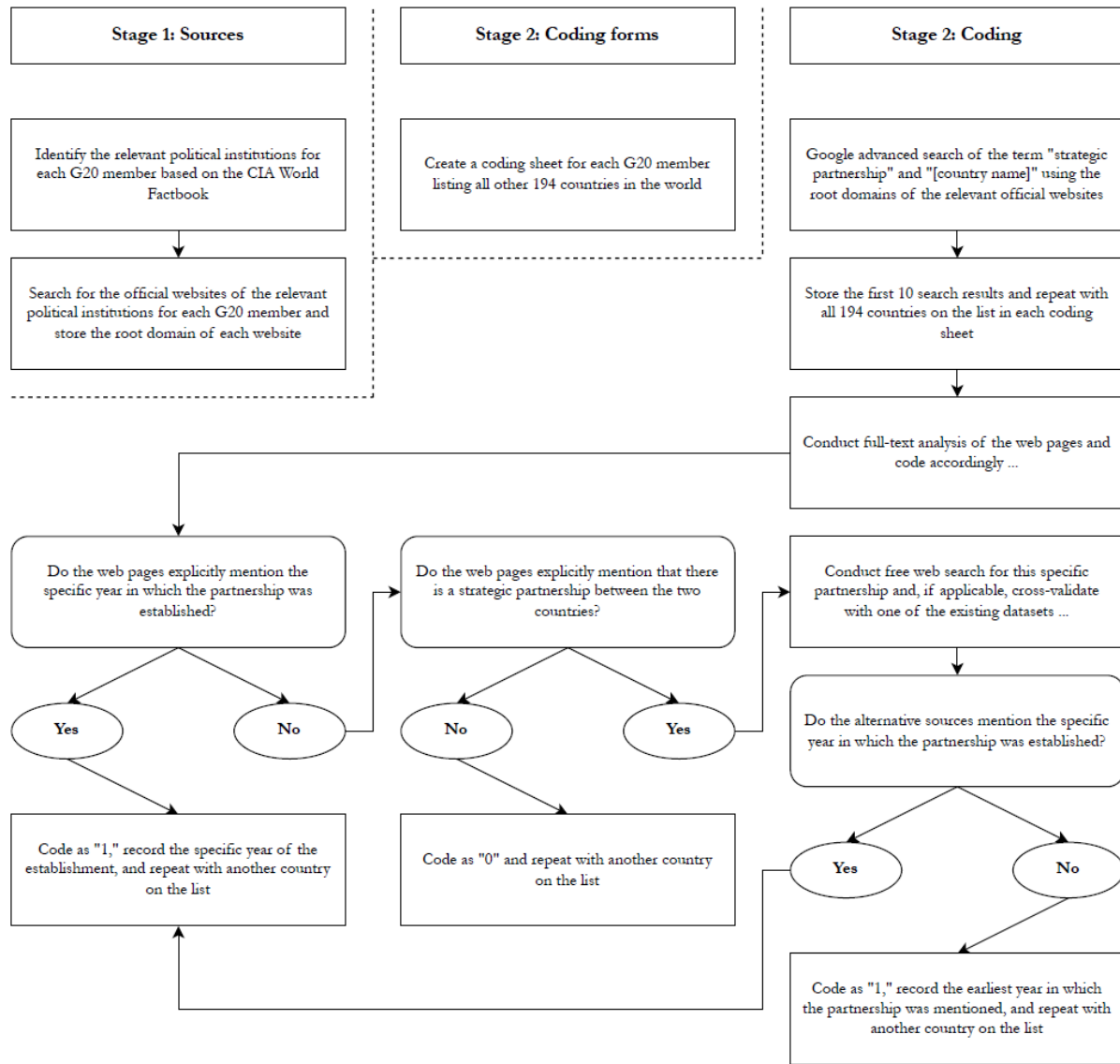
Similar to previous data collection efforts on informal institutions, one additional limitation of the “BISP dataset v1.0” is its inability or lack of ambition to capture variations in the design elements of specific partnerships, such as the level of formality, scope of issues covered, and other aspects. This absence of differentiation among partnership “types” based on such design features likely leads to unobserved heterogeneity. In essence, there might be non-trivial differences among various partnerships, unaccounted for in subsequent analyses, potentially introducing further bias to the results. This limitation could pose issues, considering empirical evidence of significant disparities among partnerships—some focusing on specific issues, while others have broader scopes; some relying on formal agreements, while others are implicit; and some establishing regular interaction mechanisms, while others do not (see, e.g., Šimečka & Tallis, 2016, p. 3; Renard, 2012, p. 308). However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I proceed under the assumption that treating all strategic partnerships as a single category is feasible, similar to other researchers analyzing informal institutions using quantitative methods (Vabulas & Snidal, 2021; Roger & Rowan, 2022).sThe data collection procedure was divided into three stages, as depicted in Figure 1. In the first stage, I carefully identified the sources from which to extract the data. Due to the incomplete and inconsistent geographical and temporal coverage in the existing “datasets” of partnerships, alongside variations in the definitions of “strategic partnership” employed by different authors, it became necessary to construct a new dataset from the ground up, utilizing primary sources. When selecting primary

sources, I focused on the official websites of the chief political institutions in G20 countries. I chose to focus on these official websites rather than the websites of news agencies due to concerns about reliability. To identify the relevant political institutions, I first consulted the CIA World Factbook.³⁸ This resource provides concise country profiles that outline the key political institutions within the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of all countries worldwide. I used this information to compile a list of relevant political institutions for each G20 country.³⁹ Subsequently, I searched for the official websites of ministries of foreign affairs (or equivalent) and these other relevant institutions using a free web search and collected the root domains of their websites.

³⁸ See <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/>

³⁹ I excluded the judicial branch since foreign policy remains at the discretion of the other two branches.

Figure 1. Diagram of the Data Collection Procedure



The comprehensive list of the aforementioned websites for each G20 country, along with their corresponding root domains, can be found in Appendix 5. It bears noting that the list of relevant political institutions excludes chiefs of state who hold purely ceremonial and symbolic powers, such as in the case of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Japan. Whenever applicable, I collected the root domains of websites for both the upper and lower chambers of parliament. However, in

certain cases, the relevant political institution did not have a designated official website, such as in the case of the President of China. Additionally, some political institutions shared an official website with other institutions. For instance, the root domain of the official website of the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom are identical. During the collection of root domains, I ensured that the domains led either to the general directory of the website or its English version. Since all official websites had an English version, this allowed me to conduct a preliminary search and exclude websites with an overall low number of mentions ($N < 50$) of the term “strategic partnership.” I was left with roughly 2–3 root domains for each G20 country.

In the second stage of data collection, I prepared the coding sheets for each G20 country, excluding the European Union (19 in total). Each coding sheet contained a list of all countries in the world, except for the country of data collection. This list is based on the “State System Membership (v2016)” dataset from the Correlates of War Project website. For a country to be considered a part of the international system, it must be a member of the United Nations, or have a population greater than 500,000 and receive diplomatic missions from two major powers (Correlates of War Project, 2017). As of 2016, there were 195 countries part of the international system, according to this dataset. Each coding sheet, therefore, contains a list of precisely 194 countries. For each country on the list, I selected the most widely recognized English version of its official name (e.g., “Myanmar” instead of “Burma,” the “Democratic Republic of the Congo” instead of “Zaire,” and “Ivory Coast” instead of “Côte d’Ivoire”) to be used for the purposes of Google advanced search described in the next stage. Furthermore, the coding sheets also included the list of root domains for the websites of relevant political institutions in the specific G20 country to be used for the same purposes.

In the third stage of data collection, I relied on Google advanced search to collect raw text data, utilizing the following formula: “strategic” AND “partnership” AND “[country name]” site:[root

domain 1] OR site:[root domain 2] ... For all 194 in each coding sheet, I then recorded the first 10 search results – that is, links to web pages – and saved the content of these web pages in a pdf format to a separate directory (see the online supplemental materials). In certain cases, such as in the case of small island nations, the search frequently returned less than 10 results. This is because the term “strategic partnership” and the names of these smaller countries rarely appear in the same text. The threshold of the first 10 search results was set arbitrarily to make the coding procedure more manageable. On balance, the content analysis of 10 search results, described on the following pages, took approximately 10 minutes, meaning that by increasing the number of search results, the overall time spent on each coding sheet would likely exceed 40 hours. At the same time, if the evidence of an existing BISP tie does not appear on the first page with Google search results, it seems reasonable to assume that there is, in fact, no such tie.

Once I collected the text data, I continued by conducting a full-text manual search of the stored web pages. For convenience, I also include a visual representation of this step in Figure 1. If the texts mentioned that the two countries – that is, the country of coding (a G20 member) and one of the countries on the list in the coding sheet – established a strategic partnership in a specific year, I coded the dependent variable as “1” and recorded the year of the establishment. If the texts mentioned a strategic partnership between the two countries without specifying the year in which it was established, I conducted an additional free web search for this specific partnership and, where applicable, consulted the secondary sources. In certain cases, I was able to retrieve this information from the previous “datasets” of strategic partnerships (see, e.g., Costa Vaz, 2014; Hall, 2016; Strüver, 2017). In other cases, I relied on the information from news media. If none of these alternative sources contained information on the year of establishment, I recorded the earliest year in which the partnership was mentioned instead. This was the case in approximately 10% of cases of BISP in the

dataset. If the texts did not contain any evidence of an existing BISP tie, I coded the dependent variable as “0”.

In some cases, the coding was straightforward. For example, one source on the South African side mentions that “In line with our Strategic Partnership signed in 2010, relations between South Africa and the United States are solid, strong and positive” (Government of South Africa, 2013). In other cases, the situation was more complicated. First, some texts contain references to “strategic partners.” For example, one source on the British side mentions that “We see Qatar as a strategic partner for the UK [...]” (Government of the United Kingdom, 2015). Second, some texts mention the *interest* to establish a strategic partnership. For example, one source on the Mexican side mentions that “Mexico wishes [the Bolivian] administration success and hopes that the bilateral relationship will be elevated to a strategic partnership [...]” (Government of Mexico, 2020). Third, some texts mention that certain foreign policy actions *indicate* a strategic partnership. For example, one source on the Argentinian side mentions that the signing of a joint declaration with the U.S. is “[...] evidence of the strong and enduring strategic partnership that unites the two countries” (Government of Argentina, 2018). I treated all such cases, which did not clearly indicate that there *is* a strategic partnership in place, as borderline cases, and recorded them separately.

I included some of these less clear instances of BISP ties in the dataset on a case-by-case basis, using the following criteria: (1) multiple official sources indicate the existence of a strategic partnership, and/or (2) official sources on the side of the partner country mention the existence of a strategic partnership, and/or (3) alternative sources, such as the previous “datasets” or news reports, contain information about the year of establishment of this specific partnership. I mainly relied on free web searches in checking the latter two criteria. The rationale behind requiring the secondary sources to specify the year of the establishment was to offset the lower reliability by applying stricter

criteria. In the text version of the dataset, I explain all coding decisions on all cases in greater detail and provide links to primary and secondary sources. Although the chosen coding procedure may be perceived as narrow, as it relies on explicit and rather unambiguous mentions of existing strategic partnership ties, it also ensures a relatively high level of confidence in cases that do end up captured by this procedure. Consequently, the coding procedure is more likely to generate false negatives than false positives.

Once I obtained the information on the year of onset for all BISP of interest, I created a TSCS master dataset in a dyadic format with the binary dependent variable (see the “Research Design and Data Structure” section). Importantly, this data structure has further implications for the coding of the dependent variable. Specifically, there are multiple ways how to code years following the “onset” of an event in BTSCS data. Most studies set ongoing years to “0.” However, as pointed out by McGarh (2015, pp. 534–35), this approach has a potentially adverse effect on the reliability of estimation. First, years before the onset and ongoing years become indistinguishable from each other, which is problematic because the chosen estimator does not “know” that there is a qualitative difference between the two. Second, this approach assumes that the effect of independent variables on the onset of an event and ongoing years is identical. Yet, we know that there is a qualitative difference between the onset and ongoing years. For instance, research on military alliances shows that whereas jointly democratic states are less likely to form alliances, they are more likely to be allied in the long run (see Gibler & Wolford, 2006; cf. Lai & Reiter, 2000). To avoid this problem, I, therefore, follow McGarh (2015, p. 535) and set ongoing years to “missing” instead.

One additional challenge in constructing the dataset concerns the uncertainty about the status of individual BISP – whether “in force” or “defunct.” Official sources do not provide information on BISP termination, meaning that some BISP in the dataset may already be defunct. This is partly

due to the informal nature of BISP, which makes the partnership-related activities inherently non-transparent. To my best knowledge, the one documented case of such termination concerns the U.S.–China dyad. According to Strüver (2017, p. 62), the two countries scrapped their strategic partnership, established in 1997, and replaced it with a “cooperative partnership of mutual respect and benefit” in 2011. Such instances are, unfortunately, exceedingly rare. To capture the “defunct” BISP, I, therefore, opted for a conservative approach based on two criteria: (1) the collapse of the state authority on the part of one of the BISP members; and/or (2) the use of military force by one of the BISP members against another. Although observing the specific moment of termination or suspension may not be possible, it is reasonable to assume that – unless the official sources reaffirm its existence – the BISP tie *de facto* terminates under these circumstances.

With regard to the first criterion, I assume that when one of the parties to the arrangement effectively ceases to exist, cooperation under that arrangement ceases as well. For this criterion, I consulted the “PITF State Failure Problem Set, 1955–2018” dataset, which includes a list of cases of the “complete collapse or near-total failure of state authority” (Marshall et al., 2019). The only relevant case in the BISP v1.0 dataset concerns the partnership between Italy and Libya. Following the collapse of the state authority on the part of Libya in 2011, official sources no longer mention this partnership. I, therefore, set the ongoing years to “0” instead of missing. Furthermore, I assume that when one of the parties to the arrangement uses military force against the other, this event marks a significant shift in bilateral relations, from cooperation to conflict. For this criterion, I consulted the dyadic version of the “ Militarized Interstate Disputes (v4)” dataset, which includes information about the highest level of hostility in dyadic disputes, including the level of “use of force” (Maoz et al., 2018). I set the years

after the use of force to “0” instead of missing unless the official sources reaffirmed the existence of a BISP tie within the first three years after the dispute (see Table 7).⁴⁰

Table 7. BISP Termination⁴¹

| Dyad | BISP onset | Years of dispute | BISP termination | Note |
|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| U.S. – Turkey | 1999 | 2003 | N/A | Official sources continue to refer to a BISP tie after 2003 |
| U.S. – Afghanistan | 2012 | 2014 | N/A | Official sources continue to refer to a BISP tie after 2014 |
| U.S. – China | 1997 | 2001 | Coded as “0” since 2002 | Official sources no longer mention a BISP tie after 2001 |
| U.S. – Pakistan | 2010 | 2010, 2011, 2014 | Coded as “0” since 2015 | Official sources continue to refer to a BISP tie after 2010 and 2011, but not after 2014 |
| Brazil – Peru | 2003 | 2003 | N/A | Official sources continue to refer to a BISP tie after 2003 |
| Italy – Libya | 2008 | 2011 | Coded as “0” since 2012 | Official sources no longer mention a BISP tie after 2011 |
| Russia – Ukraine | 1997 | 2013, 2014, 2014 | Coded as “0” since 2014 | Official sources no longer mention a BISP tie after 2013 |
| Russia – Kazakhstan | 2007 | 2013 | N/A | Official sources continue to refer to a BISP tie after 2013 |
| Russia – China | 1996 | 2009, 2012 | N/A | Official sources continue to refer to a BISP tie after 2009 and 2012 |
| Iran – India | 2003 | 2013 | Coded as “0” since 2014 | Official sources no longer mention a BISP tie after 2013 |
| China – South Korea | 2008 | 2014 | N/A | Official sources continue to refer to a BISP tie after 2014 |
| China – India | 2005 | 2013 | N/A | Official sources continue to refer to a BISP tie after 2013 |
| China – Vietnam | 2008 | 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014 | N/A | Official sources continue to refer to a BISP tie after 2010, 2012, 2013, and 2014 |

⁴⁰ The threshold of the first three years after the dispute was set arbitrarily to prevent situations where the coding of termination could be merely an artifact of the infrequent mentions rather than evidence of a BISP tie being “defunct.”

⁴¹ See Appendix 6 for MID IDs.

After collecting the data, I followed the convention in content analysis and assessed the reliability of coding – meaning the extent to which the coding procedure yields the same results on repeated trials. When a human-coding procedure is performed, such as in the case of the BISP v1.0 dataset, researchers typically rely on measures of “intercoder reliability,” which capture the level of agreement between two or more coders on a measured variable (Neuendorf, 2012, p. 234). Although uniform standards for such measures are not in place, researchers typically use the Cohen’s kappa statistic, which ranges from 0 to 1, where “1” indicates perfect agreement. According to Neuendorf (2012, p. 236), values close to 0.8 are considered almost universally acceptable, while values close to 0.6 are considered acceptable by most. To gauge the level of agreement, researchers typically take a random sub-sample of observations – in this case, a random sub-sample of dyads from the BISP v1.0 dataset – to be coded by two or more coders. Views on the appropriate size of such a sub-sample differ. According to Neuendorf (2012, p. 263), it should be “[...] at least 10% of the sample, probably never be smaller than 50, and should rarely need to be larger than about 300.”

To measure the intercoder reliability, I proceeded as follows. First, I took a random sub-sample of 100 dyads from the BISP v1.0 dataset. For this purpose, I employed simple random sampling, meaning that each dyad in the dataset had an equal chance of being selected. Second, I created a new coding sheet with the list of these 100 cases and relevant root domains. For convenience, I also include the complete list of randomly selected cases and a comparison with the BISP v1.0 dataset in Appendix 7. Third, I proceeded with the coding by following the steps described in the third stage of data collection (see Figure 1). Due to the limited availability of other coders, I decided to code this random sub-sample myself after a period of approximately half a year after finishing the first version of the BISP v1.0 dataset. While imperfect, this approach should still produce useful information about reliability. Table 8 summarizes the results of replication. There was an overall 97% agreement between the two phases of coding. In the remaining 3% of cases, the coding differed. To get a better sense of

reliability, I then calculated the Cohen’s kappa statistic, which is equal to 0.88.⁴² This number indicates a near perfect agreement.

Table 8. Inter-Coder Reliability

| | | Replication | | Total |
|-----------------|-------|-------------|----|-------|
| | | 0 | 1 | |
| Original coding | 0 | 84 | 2 | 86 |
| | 1 | 1 | 13 | 14 |
| | Total | 85 | 15 | 100 |

As another way of checking the reliability of coding, I compared the BISP v1.0 dataset to other existing “datasets” on SPs. Table 9 summarizes the main differences. For the purposes of comparison, I chose the “datasets” developed by Costa Vaz (2014), Hall (2016), Hamilton (2014), Locoman and Papa (2021), and Strüver (2017), which cover strategic partnerships established by Brazil, India, the United States, Russia, and China, respectively. It bears noting that the timeframe of coverage varies across these “datasets,” and none covers the years 2017–2020. It should, therefore, be expected that the number of strategic partnerships in the BISP v1.0 dataset will be somewhat higher. As evident from the table, the chosen data collection procedure was able to capture between 88% and 100% of cases identified in previous “datasets.” These figures suggest a surprisingly high level of overlap, considering that the other authors have applied different data collection procedures at different points in time. In addition, the table illustrates that the existing “datasets” are outdated, as the BISP v1.0 dataset contains between 14% and 36% more cases. The vast majority of these additional BISPs have been established relatively recently.

⁴² The formula for Cohen’s kappa is calculated as $K = (p_o - p_e) / (1 - p_e)$ where p_o indicates relative observed agreement among coders (0.97) and p_e indicates hypothetical probability of random agreement (0.752).

Table 9. Comparison of BISP v1.0 with Similar Datasets

| Dataset | Country of comparison | % of cases in this dataset that appear in BISP v1.0 | Cases in this dataset that do not appear in BISP v1.0 | % of cases in BISP v1.0 that appear in this dataset | Cases in BISP v1.0 that do not appear in this dataset |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Costa Vaz (2014) | Brazil | 90% | Finland, Norway | 86% | Canada, Japan, Saudi Arabia |
| Hall (2016) | India | 100% | N/A | 72% | Argentina, Denmark, Iraq, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritius, Mexico, Mozambique, Rwanda, Singapore |
| Hamilton (2014) | United States | 90% | Azerbaijan, Brunei, Kyrgyzstan | 64% | Angola, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Cyprus, Greece, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Macedonia, Mongolia, Nigeria, Paraguay, Singapore, South Africa, Tunisia |
| Locoman and Papa (2021) | Russia | 88% | Georgia, Jordan, Turkey | 64% | Belarus, Cuba, Ecuador, France, Italy, Laos, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Peru, South Africa, South Korea, Spain |
| Strüver (2017) | China | 100% | N/A | 69% | Austria, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brunei, Bulgaria, Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Hungary, Jamaica, Kenya, Kuwait, Micronesia, Namibia, Nepal, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Tonga, Turkey, Uruguay, Zimbabwe |

Note: Cases of partnerships between countries and international organizations were excluded from this analysis.

Applying the above-described data-gathering method has allowed me to construct the first large-*N* time-series cross-country dataset of BISP to date. This dataset captures a total of 382 BISP established between G20 members (excluding the European Union) and any other country during the period from 1993 and 2020. Compared to previous data collection efforts, the new dataset, therefore, significantly expands on the geographical and temporal coverage (cf. Costa Vaz, 2014; Hall, 2016; Hamilton, 2014; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Michalski, 2019; Renard, 2021; Strüver, 2017; Zhongping & Jing, 2014). Furthermore, unlike the previous attempts at mapping the proliferation of strategic partnerships, the BISP v1.0 dataset is based on a transparent and reliable coding scheme. This reliability is evident from the high values of the Cohen's kappa statistic, but also from the fact that the new dataset covers almost all previously documented cases of BISP. In the online supplemental materials, I offer the full dataset in a dyadic TSCS format along with its text version for other researchers. In the text version of the dataset, I also elaborate on each coding decision in a greater detail, list borderline cases, and provide links to the official sources.

In the end, I have created four versions of the dependent variable. The first, *BISP onset*, captures the establishment of a strategic partnership between two countries. Years following the establishment are coded as missing (see McGarth, 2015). The second, *BISP onset (term.)*, captures the same event, but years after the establishment are coded as "0" instead of missing if one of the members in a dyad experienced a collapse of state authority or used military force against the other. The third, *BISP tie*, captures the presence of a strategic partnership between the two countries. Unlike the onset variables, I continue to code this variable as "1" following the establishment of the partnership. The fourth, *BISP tie (term.)*, also capture the presence of a strategic partnership, rather than mere onset, but years after the collapse of state authority or use of military force by one dyad member against another are coded as "0" instead of "1". The onset and incidence of BISP ties are two qualitatively different phenomena. As demonstrated by previous research on military alliances, the reasons for the formation

and maintenance of alliance ties may vary (see Gibler & Wolford, 2006). This may also be the case with BISP, and hence the inclusion of these alternative variables.

I describe the dataset in greater detail, and provide comparison with similar forms of institutionalized cooperation in the following chapter. However, before doing so, it is also necessary to summarize certain limitations pertaining to this data collection effort. Firstly, while the BISP v1.0 dataset offers the most expansive geographical coverage of strategic partnerships to date, it may ultimately capture only a specific type of strategic partnerships. By the virtue of case selection, most BISP covered in the dataset reflect asymmetrical relations between major or regional powers, on the one hand, and minor powers, on the other hand. Secondly, countries may establish strategic partnerships without officially acknowledging this decision. However, the coding procedure relies precisely on explicit mentions of strategic partnership ties. As with other data collection efforts concerned with informal cooperation, the BISP v1.0 dataset will, therefore, inevitably include cases of false negatives. Thirdly, countries may use different terms than “strategic partnership” to describe a qualitatively identical arrangement. For instance, Brazil occasionally refers to BISP as “strategic alliances” (Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). These cases are less likely to be captured.

3.3. Independent Variables

While the dependent variable comes from the original “BISP dataset v1.0”, the data for independent variables come from the existing datasets. Before elaborating on the operationalization of individual variables, however, it is necessary to address how the undirected dyadic structure of the data affects the former. The use of undirected dyads requires additional (theoretical) assumptions to convert individual-level variables into a nondirected form so as to eliminate identity and directionality. Typically, this process involves calculating the minimum value, maximum value, average, ratio of the larger to lower, or the absolute difference of values for a given variable across i and j . The process of variable construction should ideally be guided by theoretical concerns. For example, studies on democratic peace hypothesize that the relationship between the onset of militarized interstate disputes and regime type is driven by the lower state’s democracy score, because that state constitutes the “weak link” in the chain of peaceful relations (Bennett & Stam, 2000, pp. 656–657; for an example of this operationalization, see Oneal & Russett, 1999, pp. 11–12). Where appropriate, I, therefore, provide theory-based justifications for the specific conversion procedure.

First to test **H1a** and **H1b** on complementarity and substitution, I use the binary variable *alliance*. The data comes from the updated version of the “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (v5.1)” dataset created by Leeds et al. (2002).⁴³ I code the variable as “1” if both members of the dyad were members to the same alliance, regardless of the type of obligations or provisions, and “0” otherwise. This dataset defines alliance as “[...] a formal agreement among independent states to cooperate militarily in the face of [a] potential or realized military conflict” (Leeds, 2020, p. 6). For the robustness check, I use the alternative categorical variable *alliance commitment*. The data comes from the same dataset as above. This variable accounts for the fact that different types of alliances entail

⁴³ See <http://www.atopdata.org/>

different levels of political commitment (Small & Singer, 1969, p. 280). I code this variable as “0” for “no alliance commitment,” “1” for “low alliance commitment,” and “2” for “high alliance commitment.” The last category corresponds to a “defense pact,” whereas the middle category corresponds to alliances without defensive obligations.⁴⁴ Scholars agree that “defense pacts” constitute the most serious level of political commitment (see Leeds et al., 2002, pp. 240–42).

The rationale behind the alternative variable is that the propensity of countries to establish BISP as complements to or “low-cost” alternatives to alliances also depend on the *level* of pre-existing alliance commitment. For instance, BISP may be poor substitutes for “high commitment” alliances. Importantly, as explained in the theoretical section, to gauge whether BISP function as complements to or substitutes for formal alliances, we must further account for the underlying rationale of enhancing national and regional security. If the role of these partnerships is substitutive, as stated by **H1a**, we should see BISP formation especially between countries that do *not* share membership in the same alliance, but face a common threat. If the role is complementary, as stated by **H1b**, we should see BISP formation especially between countries that share membership in the same alliance and face a common threat at the same time. To test this conditional relationship, I, therefore, employ an interaction term between the *alliance/alliance commitment* variable, on the one hand, and the *common threat (MID)* variable, on the other hand. The operationalization of the latter variable is described in the following paragraph. Furthermore, I elaborate on the use of interaction terms in the section “Quantitative Analysis.”

⁴⁴ Note that the “low alliance commitment” category encompasses all consultation and neutrality/non-aggression pacts. Neutrality and non-aggression pacts involve promises to refrain from a military conflict with an ally. Consultation pacts commit the members to a policy coordination short of active military support. Finally, defense pacts include promises of active military assistance in the event of a conflict (Leeds, 2020, pp. 11–12).

Second, to test **H2** on the presence of common threats, I employ the binary variable *common threat (MID)*. The data comes from the dyadic version of the “Militarized Interstate Disputes (v4.02)” dataset, which is available on the website of the Correlates of War Project (Maoz et al., 2018).⁴⁵ I follow Lai and Reiter (2000, p. 214) and code *common threat (MID)* as “1” if the two states in a dyad participated in a militarized interstate dispute against the same adversary at some point during the previous 10 years, and “0” otherwise. Additionally, to test the robustness of findings, I use the alternative binary variable *common threat (rivalry)*. The data for this variable comes from the “Peace and Rivalry” dataset created by Goertz, Diehl and Balas (2016). I follow a similar operationalization to that described above and code *common threat (rivalry)* as “1” if the two states were involved in a “lesser” or “sever rivalry” with the same third party in a given year, and “0” otherwise.⁴⁶ According to **H2**, there should be a statistically significant and positive association between *common threat (MID)* and *common threat (rivalry)*, on the one hand, and the dependent variable, on the other hand.

Third, to test **H3** on international trade, I employ the continuous variable *trade value log*. The data comes from the “Trade (v4.0)” dataset, which is available on the website of the Correlates of War Project (Barbieri et al., 2009).⁴⁷ The dyadic version of the dataset contains the “smoothtotrade” item, which captures the total value of merchandise trade between the two countries. To test the robustness of findings, I additionally use the alternative continuous variable *market potential log*, which measures a country’s potential attractiveness for the counterparts’ companies (Strüver, 2017, p. 46). I obtain this variable by taking the lower of the two states’ scores of the gross domestic product (GDP) in current USD divided by the distance between capitals in kilometers. The data for GDP comes from the World

⁴⁵ See <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/MIDs>

⁴⁶ Whereas MIDs are specific instances of conflictual behavior, rivalries tend to be long-lasting. This is why I only look at the overlap in rivalries of two states in the present year, rather than 10 years back as in the case of MIDs.

⁴⁷ See <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/bilateral-trade/>

Bank,⁴⁸ and the data for the distance between capitals comes from Gleditsch (n.d.).⁴⁹ I expect that cooperation will be only as attractive as the “minimum” market potential in a given dyad. In both cases, I use a logarithmic transformation to account for the skewed distribution of values. According to **H3**, there should be a statistically significant and positive association between *trade value_{log}* and *market potential_{log}*, on the one hand, and the dependent variable, on the other hand.

Fourth, to test **H4** on similarity of foreign policy preferences, I use the continuous variable *foreign policy similarity*. The data comes from the updated version of the “United Nations General Assembly Voting Data” dataset created by Voeten, Strezhnev and Vailey (2009), which includes the item “ideal point,” a single-dimension spectrum that captures states’ positions toward the US-led liberal order based on voting in the General Assembly. To obtain a measure of preference similarity, I follow Bailey, Strehnev and Voeten (2017, p. 438) and calculate the absolute difference between two states’ “ideal point” scores multiplied by -1 . For the robustness check, I employ the alternative continuous variable *S-scores*, which measures foreign policy similarity based on overlaps in two states’ alliance portfolios (see Signorino & Ritter, 1999). The data comes from the updated version of the dataset created by Chiba, Johnson and Leeds (2015). In both cases, I calculate the squared term to be used in the regression analysis alongside these variables in order to account for the potential non-linear relationship. If **H4** holds, both *foreign policy similarity* and *S-scores*, and their respective squared terms, should be statistically significant and negatively associated with the dependent variable.

Fifth, to test **H5** on power differentials, I employ the continuous variable *power differential (CINC)*. The data comes from the “National Material Capabilities (v6.0)” dataset, which is available on the Correlates of War Project website (Singer et al., 1972).⁵⁰ The dataset includes the “Composite

⁴⁸ See <https://data.worldbank.org/>

⁴⁹ See <http://ksgleditsch.com/data-5.html>

⁵⁰ <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities/>

Index of National Capability” (CINC) item, which measures states’ share of material capabilities in the international system. I obtain values for this variable by calculating the absolute difference between two states’ CINC scores. To test the robustness of findings, I additionally use the alternative continuous variable *power differential (GDP)*. The data for this variable comes from the World Bank, which provides information on national GDP in current USD. As a first step, I converted the values to a percent share of global GDP. Similarly to *power differential (CINC)*, I then calculated the absolute difference between two states’ share of global GDP figures. According to **H5**, there should be a statistically significant and positive association between *power differential (CINC)* and *power differential (GDP)*, on the one hand, and the dependent variable, on the other hand.

Sixth, to test **H6** on major powers, I use the binary variable *major power*. The data comes from the “State System Membership (v2016)” dataset, which is available on the Correlates of War Project website (Correlates of War Project, 2017).⁵¹ The dataset provides a list of states designated as major powers.⁵² Because I expect that major powers will be especially likely to attract and initiate cooperation with other partners, I code this variable as “1” if either or both members of the dyad are major powers, and “0” otherwise. Additionally, to test for the robustness of findings, I employ the alternative binary variable *P5*. This is an alternative operationalization based on the status of the permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). I code this variable as “1” if either or both members of the dyad have a permanent seat in the UNSC, and “0” otherwise. The same rationale of the attractiveness and likelihood of initiating the cooperation applies. P5 countries include China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US. According to **H6**, there should be a statistically significant and positive

⁵¹ <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/state-system-membership/>

⁵² For a discussion of the coding of the major power status, see the FAQ document on the Correlates of War Project website: <https://correlatesofwar.org/wp-content/uploads/State-FAQ.pdf>

association between *major power* and *P5*, on the one hand, and the dependent variable, on the other hand.

Seventh, to test **H7** on rising powers, I use the binary variable *BRICS*. Because I expect that rising powers will be especially likely to attract and initiate cooperation with other partners, I code this variable as “1” if either or both members of the dyad are members of the BRICS, and “0” otherwise. There is a fairly widespread agreement in the literature that BRICS members, including Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, are considered to be “rising powers” (see Kahler, 2013; Stephen, 2014). As for the alternative, I employ a conceptually different but related binary variable *regional power*. I follow Jo and Gartzke (2007, p. 175) and construct the measure of regional power status by identifying “all states [that are not major powers] with at least half of the resources of the most powerful state in each region using the COW project’s code of region and CINC.” I then code the variable as “1” if either or both members of the dyad are regional powers, and “0” otherwise.⁵³ According to **H7**, there should be a statistically significant and positive association between *BRICS* and *regional power*, on the one hand, and the dependent variable, on the other hand.

Eight, to test **H8** on regime similarity, I employ the continuous variable *regime similarity (Polity V)*. The data comes from the “Polity V” dataset, which is available on the Center for Systemic Peace website (Marshall & Gurr, 2020).⁵⁴ This dataset includes the “polity2” item, which measures the level of democracy for a given country. To obtain values for this variable, I follow Lai and Reiter (2000, pp.

⁵³ For the period between 1990 and 2016, regional powers include: Algeria (1996; 1998-2001; 2014), DRC (2002; 2008-2016), Egypt (1990-2016), Ethiopia (1998-2002; 2005-2006), India (1990-1992), Iraq (1990-1991; 2008-2009), Iran (1990-2016), Kuwait (1992), Morocco (1998-2001), Nigeria (1990-2016), Saudi Arabia (1990-2016), South Africa (1990-2016), and Turkey (1990-2016). It bears noting that this coding depends heavily on the regional designation. The Correlates of War Project distinguishes between five major regions, including the Americas, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. This division, in turn, results in the near absence of regional powers in the Americas and Asia due to the preponderance of the US and China, respectively, and in Europe due to the presence of multiple major powers (France, Germany, and the UK).

⁵⁴ <https://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>

213–14) and calculate the absolute difference between two states’ “polity2” scores. I additionally multiply the score by -1 to get a measure of similarity. To test the robustness of findings, I use the alternative continuous variable *regime similarity (V-dem)*. The data comes from the “V-dem (v12)” dataset, which is available on the Varieties of Democracy website (Coppedge et al., 2022).⁵⁵ This dataset includes the “v2x_polyarchy” item, which captures the extent to which the ideal of electoral democracy is achieved. I use the same conversion as described earlier to create the measure of similarity. According to **H8**, there should be a statistically significant and positive association between *regime similarity (Polity V)* and *regime similarity (V-dem)*, on the one hand, and the dependent variable, on the other hand.

Next, to test **H9** on democratic cooperation, I use the binary variable *joint democracy (Polity V)*. The data comes from the same “Polity V” dataset as above. I follow Leeds (1999, p. 992) and code the variable as “1” if both members of the dyad have “polity2” scores of 6 or higher, and “0” otherwise. Researchers typically use the score of 6 as a threshold for identifying democratic states (see, also, Leeds & Davis, 1999, p. 13). For the robustness check, I use the alternative binary variable *joint democracy (V-dem)*. The data comes from the same “V-dem (v12)” dataset as above. To my best knowledge, there are no guidelines for using a specific threshold for identifying democratic states based on “v2x_polyarchy” scores. For this reason, I first calculate the population median of “v2x_polyarchy” for the period from 1990 to 2020. I then code the variable as “1” if both members of the dyad have “v2x_polyarchy” scores above the median of 0.493, and “0” otherwise. According to **H9**, there should be a statistically significant and positive association between *joint democracy (Polity V)* and *joint democracy (V-dem)*, on the one hand, and the dependent variable, on the other hand.

⁵⁵ <https://www.v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/>

Lastly, to test **H10** on domestic barriers to formal cooperation, I use the continuous variable *constraints (POLCON)*. The data comes from the updated version of “The Political Constraints Index” dataset developed by Henisz (2002). This dataset includes the “POLCONIII” item, which indicates the feasibility of policy change based on the number of veto players in a given polity, or the level of difficulty policy-makers could have anticipated in the ratification of a hypothetical agreement (see, also, Roger, 2020, p. 85). Because I expect that such ratification would be only as difficult as the “maximum” constraints in a given dyad, I take the higher of the two states’ “POLCONIII” values. As for the robustness check, I employ the alternative variable *constraints (Polity V)*. The data comes from the same “Polity V” dataset as described earlier. The “xconst” item captures the extent of institutionalized constraints on the decision-making powers of chief executives (Marshall & Gurr, 2020, p. 24). Again, I take the higher of the two states’ “xconst” values. If **H10** holds, there should be a statistically significant and positive association between *constraints (POLCON)* and *constraints (Polity V)*, on the one hand, and the dependent variable, on the other hand.

Table 10 below summarizes sources and temporal availability of the data pertaining to **H1a–H10**. Table 11 on the following page reports basic descriptive statistics for all independent variables. Note that observations for a single dyad repeat several times in the dataset due to the time-series aspect of the research design. With 3,515 undirected dyads in the dataset and temporal coverage from 1992 to 2020, the master dataset includes a total of 100,130 observations. However, a substantial portion of observations are missing for some of the key independent variables, including *alliance* (7,030) and *common threat (MID)* (21,090). To address this shortfall, I create alternative versions of those independent variables with missing observations for the recent years by forward-filling the most recent values (for an example of the application of this approach, see Horowitz et al., 2020). In practice, this means that when the last observation on the *common threat (MID)* variable is “1” in the year 2014, the following years, 2015–2020, will also be coded as “1” instead of missing. I use these alternative

independent variables as an additional robustness check for the main findings (see chapter “Empirical Analysis”).

Table 10. Overview of Independent Variables

| Hypothesis | Variable | Type | Direction of the effect | Data source | Data availability |
|----------------------|--|-------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| H1a & H1b | <i>alliance</i> | Categorical | Positive (a) or negative (b) | ATOP | 1815-2018 |
| | <i>alliance commitment</i> | Categorical | Positive (a) or negative (b) | ATOP | 1815-2018 |
| H2 | <i>common threat (MID)</i> | Categorical | Positive | Correlates of War Project | 1816-2014 |
| | <i>common threat (rivalry)</i> | Categorical | Positive | Goertz et al. (2016) | 1900-2015 |
| H3 | <i>trade value</i> _(log) | Numeric | Positive | Correlates of War Project | 1870-2014 |
| | <i>market potential</i> _(log) | Numeric | Positive | World Bank; Gleditsch (n.d.) | 1960-2021 |
| H4 | <i>foreign policy similarity</i> | Numeric | Non-linear | Voeten et al. (2009) | 1946-2021 |
| | <i>S-scores</i> | Numeric | Non-linear | ATOP | 1815-2018 |
| H5 | <i>power differential (CINC)</i> | Numeric | Positive | Correlates of War Project | 1816-2016 |
| | <i>power differential (GDP)</i> | Numeric | Positive | World Bank | 1960-2021 |
| H6 | <i>major power</i> | Categorical | Positive | Correlates of War Project | 1816-2016 |
| | <i>P5</i> | Categorical | Positive | N.A. | N.A. |
| H7 | <i>BRICS</i> | Categorical | Positive | N.A. | N.A. |
| | <i>regional power</i> | Categorical | Positive | Correlates of War Project | 1816-2016 |
| H8 | <i>regime similarity (Polity V)</i> | Numeric | Positive | Center for Systemic Peace | 1776-2018 |
| | <i>regime similarity (V-dem)</i> | Numeric | Positive | Varieties of Democracy | 1789-2021 |
| H9 | <i>joint democracy (Polity V)</i> | Categorical | Positive | Center for Systemic Peace | 1776-2018 |
| | <i>joint democracy (V-dem)</i> | Categorical | Positive | Varieties of Democracy | 1789-2021 |
| H10 | <i>constraints (POLCON)</i> | Numeric | Positive | Political Constraint Index | 1800-2016 |
| | <i>constraints (Polity V)</i> | Numeric | Positive | Center for Systemic Peace | 1776-2018 |

Table 11. Descriptive Statistics

| Variable | N | Missing | Mean | Median | Standard deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|--|----------|----------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <i>alliance</i> | 93100 | 7030 | 0.222 | 0.00 | 0.415 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>alliance commitment</i> | 93100 | 7030 | 0.313 | 0.00 | 0.631 | 0 | 2 |
| <i>common threat (MID)</i> | 79040 | 21090 | 0.165 | 0.00 | 0.371 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>common threat (rivalry)</i> | 82555 | 17575 | 0.0262 | 0 | 0.160 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>trade value</i> _(log) | 74019 | 26111 | 1.89 | 1.87 | 1.24 | 0.00 | 5.82 |
| <i>market potential</i> _(log) | 94867 | 5263 | 6.38 | 6.34 | 1.02 | 3.72 | 9.90 |
| <i>foreign policy similarity</i> | 96515 | 3615 | -1.21 | -1.07 | 0.889 | -5.26 | -3.70e-6 |
| <i>S-scores</i> | 51604 | 48526 | 0.551 | 0.559 | 0.248 | -0.292 | 1.00 |
| <i>power differential (CINC)</i> | 86070 | 14060 | 0.0356 | 0.0162 | 0.0472 | 2.42e-6 | 0.231 |
| <i>power differential (GDP)</i> | 96653 | 3477 | 0.0407 | 0.0191 | 0.0598 | 5.69e-7 | 0.315 |
| <i>major power</i> | 86070 | 14060 | 0.381 | 0.00 | 0.486 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>P5</i> | 100130 | 0 | 0.273 | 0.00 | 0.446 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>BRICS</i> | 100130 | 0 | 0.273 | 0.00 | 0.446 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>regional power</i> | 86070 | 14060 | 0.186 | 0.00 | 0.389 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>regime similarity (Polity V)</i> | 77007 | 23123 | -6.89 | -4 | 6.24 | -20 | 0 |
| <i>regime similarity (V-dem)</i> | 89186 | 10944 | -0.340 | -0.314 | 0.238 | -0.909 | 0.00 |
| <i>joint democracy (Polity V)</i> | 77007 | 23123 | 0.429 | 0 | 0.495 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>joint democracy (V-dem)</i> | 89186 | 10944 | 0.406 | 0.00 | 0.491 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>constraints (POLCON)</i> | 81377 | 18753 | 0.446 | 0.463 | 0.141 | 0.00 | 0.726 |
| <i>constraints (Polity V)</i> | 74147 | 25983 | 6.50 | 7 | 1.07 | 1 | 7 |

3.4. Quantitative Analysis

In this section, I provide a brief description of the specific methods used for hypotheses testing. Firstly, I describe the main method of analysis, the logistic regression (see, e.g., Rabe-Hesketh & Everitt, 2006; Long & Freese, 2014), the use of multiplicative interaction tailored specifically for testing conditional hypotheses (see, e.g., Brambor et al., 2006; Berry et al., 2012), and the appropriate interpretation of the results of these estimation techniques. Secondly, I elaborate on some of the notable pitfalls of working with BTSCS data, which affect the utilization of the logistic regression – in particular, the issue of temporal dependence (Beck et al., 1998; Carter & Signorino, 2010), dyadic clustering (Aronow et al., 2015; Carlson et al., 2023), and endogeneity concerns (Bellemare et al., 2017). In this latter part, I further specify, which statistical adjustments will be part of the main analysis, and which will serve as robustness checks. Additionally, throughout this section, I offer examples of the practical implementation of each step in the Stata statistical analysis program.

3.4.1. *Logistic regression*

Researchers in quantitative IR literature typically use logistic regression to analyze dyadic BTSCS data (see, e.g., Beck et al., 1998; Carter & Signorino, 2010). In general, binary outcome regression models, such as the binary logit and binary probit models, allow researchers to explore how the independent variable affects the *probability* of the event occurring (Long & Freese, 2014, p. 187), which always ranges from 0 to 1. In this way, binary outcome models differ from the more commonly employed linear regression models in which the dependent variable of interest can take any value from minus infinity to plus infinity and the observed values follow a normal distribution (Rabe-Hesketh & Everitt, 2006, p. 113). They are particularly well-suited for the analysis of categorical dependent variables, such as binary measures indicating whether an event has occurred or has not occurred, corresponding to values “1” and “0,” respectively (Long & Freese, 2014, p. 187). In the same vein, the goal of this dissertation is to explore how different independent variables affect the likelihood of the onset of a BISP occurring (“1”) as opposed to not occurring (“0”). In the Stata program, the logit model can be implemented with the following formula.

Box 1. Example of the Implementation of a Logistic Regression in STATA

```
*** running a logistic regression model ***  
  
logit sp_onset_v1 i.mid10_common i.alliance_binary  
  
*** storing the estimates ***  
  
estimates store M1  
  
*** generating a table with results ***  
  
esttab M1 using M1.rtf, se pr2 drop(0.mid10_common 0.alliance_binary)
```

Note: “logit” is the command for logistic regression; “sp_onset_v1” is the dependent variable capturing the onset of a BISP; “i.mid10_common” is an independent variable capturing whether the two countries faced the same enemy during the last 10 years; “i.alliance_binary” is an independent variable capturing whether the two countries were members to the same alliance; the “estimates store M1” specifies that the results should be saved as a new object “M1”; the “esttab” command exports the results in the .rtf format.

Utilizing this formula yields a table with the output of the logit model (see Table 12). Firstly, the regression table provides the information about the number of observations, or N (77,491). Secondly, the table provides information about the McFadden’s *Pseudo* R^2 statistic (0.036), which indicates the overall goodness of fit – ranging from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate a better performance. The model contains one dependent variable, “sp_onset_v1,” two independent variables, “i.mid10_common” and “alliance_binary,” and the constant term, “_cons,” which captures the baseline probability of the dependent variable. Values in the first row next to each independent variable correspond to coefficients (“mid10_common” = 0.329; “alliance_binary” = 1.306), which determine how probability of an event occurring changes when the values of the independent variables change. Negative coefficients indicate a negative relationship, while positive coefficients indicate a positive relationship. Star signs next to each coefficient correspond to the p -statistic, where values under 0.05 are considered to be statistically significant, and value above indicate the lack of statistical significance. Values in the second row correspond to standard errors, which quantifies the variability associated with coefficient estimates.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ For additional examples of the interpretation, see Rabe-Hesketh & Everitt, 2006, chapter 6; Long & Freese, 2014, pp. 194–96.

Table 12. An Example of the Logit Model

| | (1) sp_onset_v1 |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1.mid10_common | 0.329* (0.141) |
| 1.alliance_binary | 1.306*** (0.130) |
| _cons | -6.167*** (0.0886) |
| <i>N</i> | 77491 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.036 |

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Because one of the hypotheses, **H1**, assumes a conditional relationship between the dependent variable, *BISP onset*, on the one hand, and the independent variables, *alliance* and *common threat*, it is further necessary to address the issue of multiplicative interaction models. Multiplicative interaction models are typically used for hypotheses such as “an increase in X is associated with an increase in Y when condition Z is met, but not when condition Z is absent” (Brambor et al., 2006, p. 63). An interaction term simply captures the combined effect of two or more explanatory variables interacting or modifying each other’s influence on the outcome variable. When running models with interactions, researchers typically include both the interaction term as a new “variable” while keeping the constitutive terms – the components of the interaction – in the model (Brambor et al., 2006, pp. 64–66). Gauging the statistical significance of the interaction term can yield empirical support for, or lack thereof, the conditional hypothesis. However, to correctly interpret the interaction, it is also necessary to plot the predictive margins to see how the effect differs across the different combinations of values (Berry et al., 2012). Following is an example of implementation.

Box 2. Example of the Implementation of an Interaction Term in STATA

```
*** running a logistic regression model with an interaction ***  
  
logit sp_onset_v1 i.mid10_common##i.alliance_binary  
  
*** calculating the margins ***  
  
margins alliance_binary, over(mid10_common)  
  
*** generating the interaction plot ***  
  
marginsplot, recast(scatter)
```

Note: “logit” is the command for logistic regression; “sp_onset_v1” is the dependent variable capturing the onset of a BISP; “i.mid10_common” is an independent variable capturing whether the two countries faced the same enemy during the last 10 years; “i.alliance_binary” is an independent variable capturing whether the two countries were members to the same alliance; the “##” operator specifies that there should be an interaction between the two variables; the “margins” command is used to generate predictive margins of the different combinations of values across the two independent variables; the “marginsplot” command serves to create a visual representations of the adjusted predictions.

3.4.2. *The Pitfalls of Working with Dyadic BTSCS Data*

Although the logistic regression method offers a fairly straightforward tool for analyzing data with a binary dependent variable, several problems emerge when applied to the analysis of dyadic BTSCS data. This is because dyadic BTSCS data violate the assumption that observations in the dataset are uncorrelated, or independent, across units and over time. Temporal and spatial autocorrelation, or dependence, in quantitative IR studies typically occurs because “[...] countries persist over time and have persistent relations with other countries across space [...]” (Bennett & Stam, 2000, p. 663). In simple terms, observations are not independent over time, because what happens in dyad ij at a particular point in time, t , is partially a function of what happened in that dyad at the point $t-1$, $t-2$, and so on (Bennett & Stam, 2000, p. 664). At the same time, observations are not independent across units, because what happens in dyad ij may depend on what happens in dyads ik , il , and so on (Poast, 2016, p. 370). Statistical models analyzing dyadic BTSCS data should, therefore, account for temporal and spatial autocorrelation. Although there is no universally agreed statistical technique for addressing these issues, the contemporary quantitative IR literature offers some partial remedies.

The issue of temporal autocorrelation in BTSCS data has received a relatively substantive attention in the quantitative IR scholarship, particularly since Beck, Katz, and Tucker’s (1998) “Taking Time Seriously: Time-Series-Cross-Section Analysis with a Binary Dependent Variable” article, which pointed out that BTSCS data are likely to violate the independence of observations assumption of logistic and probit regression models, commonly used for this type of analysis (e.g., onset of a wars or alliances). To account for the issue of temporal dependence, the above authors suggested using time dummies – usually the number of years since the start of the sample period, the previous occurrence of an event, or the time before the event has occurred – and/or temporal splines – that is, baseline hazards that give the probability of the occurrence of an event when all the independent variables are

zero at a particular point in time (Beck et al., 1998). However, other researchers have since demonstrated that while time dummies are relatively easy to execute, they can lead to estimation bias, and while temporal splines do not suffer from these limitations, they are relatively difficult to execute and interpret (see Carter & Signorino, 2010).

For this reason, Carter and Signorino (2010) developed a relatively simple alternative: including time (t), time squared (t^2), and time cubed (t^3) in the regression – an approach also referred to as cubic polynomial approximation. A cubic polynomial already captures any hazard shape that is recovered by commonly used parametric and semi-parametric duration models, such as Cox proportional hazard model. This approach also avoids overfitting with higher order polynomials (i.e., t^4 , t^5 , and so on). The implementation of cubic polynomials has the same effect as splines proposed by Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998) – it accounts for baseline hazards, or the varying probabilities of the occurrence of an event in time when all the independent variables are zero (Carter & Signorino, 2010, pp. 281–82). In this sense, the baseline hazard plays a similar role to an error term in a regression model, as its purpose is to capture everything that is left out of the model (Beck, 2010, p. 294). There has been some disagreement as to which technique for controlling for temporal dependence should be used by researchers, with some authors arguing for the use of Cox duration models instead of logistic and probit regression models (Metzger & Jones, 2022).

Irrespective of this, the most common approach to analyzing BTSCS data in contemporary quantitative IR literature has been to use logit and probit models with cubic polynomials to account for temporal dependence. Examples of studies using the approach advocated by Carter and Signorino (2010) include contributions on alliance formation and duration (e.g., Fordham & Poast, 2016; Gartzke & Weisiger, 2012; Johnson, 2017), onset of BITs (e.g., Haftel & Thompson, 2018), initiation and incidence of MIDs (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017; Fuhrmann & Sechser, 2014; Gleditsch & Ward, 2013;

Johnson & Leeds, 2011; Johnson et al., 2015; Kinne, 2020; Renshon, 2016), nuclear proliferation (e.g., Fuhrmann & Horowitz, 2015), and even withdrawal from IGOs (Borzyskowski & Vabulas, 2019). In a similar fashion, this dissertation will apply the cubic polynomial approach to account for the issue of temporal dependence. As noted by Carter and Signorino (2010), one of the advantages of using the cubic polynomials approach is the relative ease of implementation. In the Stata software, we can obtain values t , t^2 , and t^3 simply by utilizing the formula described in the box below.

Box 3. Example of the Implementation of Cubic Polynomials in STATA

```
*** generating cubed polynomials ***
gen non_bisp_years = 0
replace non_bisp_years = 1 if (id==id[_n-1] & id==id[_n+1] & sp_onset_v1[_n-1]==0)
replace non_bisp_years = (non_bisp_years [_n-1]+1) if ((id==id[_n-1]) & sp_onset_v1[_n-1]==0)
gen non_bisp_years_sq = non_bisp_years ^2
gen non_bisp_years_cubed = non_bisp_years ^3
```

Note: the “gen” command is used to create a new variable; the “replace” command is used to replace the values of the newly created variable under specified conditions; “sp_onset_v1” is the dependent variable capturing the onset of a BISP; “non_bisp_years” stands for t , “non_bisp_years_sq” stands for t^2 , and “non_bisp_year_cubed” stands for t^3 . These variables are subsequently added to the regression model with other independent variables.

While most researchers working with dyadic BTSCS data follow Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998) in their advice of “taking time seriously,” they often overlook another pertinent issue. As noted previously, observations in dyadic data are not independent across units (Poast, 2016, p. 370). This is due to the complex dependency structure of the data, which emanates from the connection between dyad members (Aronow et al., 2015, p. 564) – that is, dyads that share a common member are likely

correlated with one another. Consequently, model errors can be correlated across dyads, leading to overconfidence in tests of statistical significance (Carlson et al., 2023, p. 2; Erikson et al., 2014, p. 457). This issue is also known as “dyadic clustering” (Aronow et al., 2015, p. 564). Interdependence between dyads may occur on both the dependent and independent variable. For example, when we want to explain why states sign trade agreements, the signing of an agreement between i and j could affect whether i and k sign an agreement. When we use trade flows to explain this outcome, it is possible that flows from states i to j are influenced by flows from i to k (Poast, 2016, p. 370). The same problem occurs when applied to the onset of alliances or SPs – one event may trigger a chain reaction beyond the dyadic level.

The usual approach when working with dyadic BTSCS data is to regress the dyad-level outcome on unit- and dyad-level predictors (Aronow et al., 2015, p. 565). Researchers typically use dyad clustered standard errors for estimation, but this approach still fails to account for “dyadic clustering” because it assumes that all country groups, or dyads, that do not share both members are independent. Carlson, Incerti and Aronow (2021) consequently find evidence of overestimation in the majority of studies relying on clustering by repeated dyad only. Fortunately, recent work has developed new and comprehensive corrections for spatial autocorrelation, including dyadic cluster-robust standard errors (DCRSEs) (Aronow et al., 2015; Carlson et al., 2023). Compared to dyad clustered standard errors, DCRSEs at least partially address the issue of “dyadic clustering” by accounting for interdependencies between dyads that share a common member. However, DCRSEs still do not account for interdependencies arising from hyper-dyadic influences, such as when the decision of ij to sign an agreement is influenced by lk signing an agreement (Carlson et al., 2023, p. 7).⁵⁷ Because of

⁵⁷ To my best knowledge, no comprehensive corrections for dyadic BTSCS data accounting for such hyper-dyadic influences exist at the time of writing.

the relative novelty of this approach, I will use the more commonly employed dyad clustered standard errors, and use DCRSEs as a robustness check. These can be implemented as follows.

Box 4. Example of the Implementation of Dyad Clustered Standard Errors and DCRSEs in STATA

```
*** running a logistic regression model with dyad clustered standard errors ***  
logit sp_onset_v1 i.mid10_common i.alliance_binary, vce(cluster id)  
*** running a logistic regression model with DCRSEs ***  
dcr logit sp_onset_v1 i.mid10_common i.alliance_binary, dm1(ccodea) dm2(ccodeb)  
dofundo(reglike)
```

Note: “logit” is the command for logistic regression; “sp_onset_v1” is the dependent variable capturing the onset of a BISP; “i.mid10_common” is an independent variable capturing whether the two countries faced the same enemy during the last 10 years; “i.alliance_binary” is an independent variable capturing whether the two countries were members to the same alliance; the “vce(cluster id)” command specifies that the regression should include dyad clustered standard errors where “id” stands for the identity of the dyad; the “dcr” command specifies that the regression should include controls for dyadic clustering; the “dm1” command specifies the identity of country i ; the “dm2” command specifies the identity of country j . The use of these commands requires the installation of the DCR package developed by Jacob Carlson.⁵⁸

Aside from the above described controls for temporal dependence and dyadic clustering, researchers also frequently use lagged explanatory variables with BTSCS data (see, e.g., Bellemare et al., 2017; Cook & Webb, 2021). This strategy is commonly used to tackle endogeneity concerns, or situations in which an explanatory variable is correlated with the error term. Researchers may wish to include lagged explanatory variables because of theoretical assumptions, such as when they expect that the independent variable affects the dependent variable only after some time had already passed (Bellemare et al., 2017, p. 2). For example, a country is unlikely to experience a considerable increase

⁵⁸ See <https://github.com/jscarlson/stata-dcr>

in inbound investments until the next year after signing a BIT. Furthermore, lagging the explanatory variables lessens the risk of reverse causality such that Y_t cannot possibly cause X_{t-1} (Bellemare et al., 2017, p. 2). For example, countries can form alliances to balance against an external threat, but an external threat can also make countries form alliances. If we are interested in examining what factors explain the formation of alliances, using a lagged variable of alliance membership rules out the possibility of reverse causality. Lagging the explanatory variables in Stata can be achieved as follows.

Box 5. Example of the Implementation of Lagged Explanatory Variables in STATA

```
*** generating the lagged version of the mid10_common variable ***  
gen mid10_common_lag = l1.mid10_common
```

Note: the “gen” command is used to generate a new variable; “mid10_common_lag” is the newly created variable; the “l1” prefix specifies that the newly created variable should be lagged by one period, or one year; “mid10_common” is the original variable.

While none of the above-described approaches to account for temporal dependence, dyadic clustering, and endogeneity ultimately “solve” the underlying issues, they help in reducing the risk of estimation bias. In the application of the logistic regression analysis, I will be using: (1) models with controls for temporal dependence based on the cubic polynomial approximation; (2) models with dyad clustered standard errors; and (3) models with lagged explanatory variables. In addition, I will provide the results of additional robustness checks using: (4) models without controls for temporal dependence; (5) models with DCRSEs to account for the possibility of dyadic clustering; and (6) models with the values of independent variables at time t rather than $t-1$. In summary, these adjustments provide valuable measures to reduce estimation bias and enhance the reliability of the analysis. They address issues of temporal dependence, dyadic clustering, and endogeneity, thereby improving the robustness of the results obtained from logistic regression analysis. Additional

robustness checks further strengthen the validity of the findings, particularly if they do not differ significantly from the results of the main analysis.

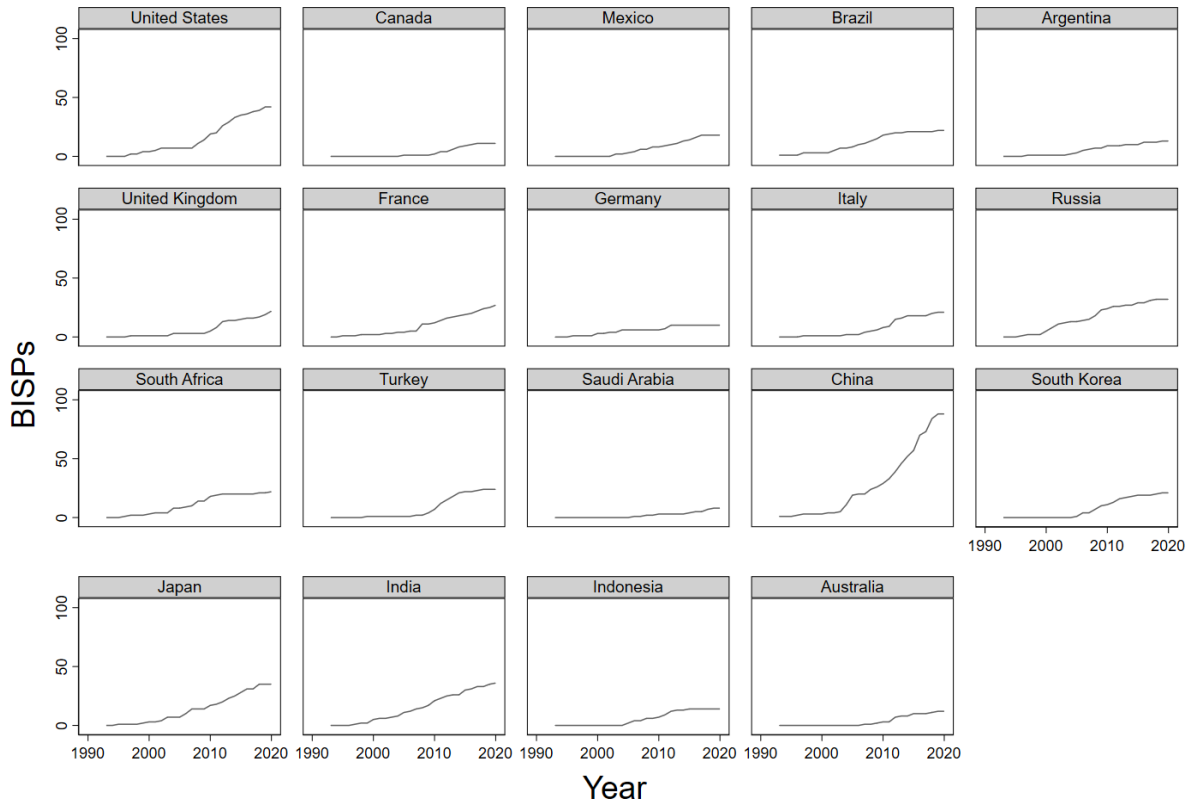
4. Mapping the Proliferation of Strategic Partnerships

This chapter provides an overview of the original BISP v1.0 dataset, focusing on major temporal and geographical trends in the proliferation of strategic partnerships. It compares the BISP proliferation with other forms of formal and informal cooperation and examines the strategic partnership portfolios of selected countries. In the “Major Temporal and Geographical Trends” section, I explore the differences in BISP proliferation across the 19 countries of case selection, compare the differences between various groupings of states and regions, and identify the most attractive partners. In the “Comparison with Other Forms of Institutionalized Cooperation” section, I then compare the proliferation of BISPs to FIGOs, IIGOs, and formal alliances, and discuss the issue of “institutional overlap.” Finally, in the “Strategic Partnership Portfolios of Selected Countries” section, I offer a more in-depth overview of the substantive content of strategic partnership agreements established by China and the United States. Additionally, I provide specific examples of the four ideal types of partnerships identified in the theoretical section.

4.1. Major Temporal and Geographical Trends

Using the newly compiled BISP v1.0 dataset, we can gain some general insights about the major temporal and geographical trends in the proliferation of strategic partnerships through data visualization and descriptive statistics. The dataset contains a total of 382 BISPs established between 1993 and 2020. Figure 2 below captures the increase in the number of BISPs over time across the 19 countries of case selection (i.e., the G20 members, excluding the European Union). The data reveals that China had by far the highest number of BISPs by the end of 2020. With 88 BISPs, China had more than twice as many partnerships than the country with the second highest BISP count, the United States. This finding is not surprising, considering that the discussion of the use of strategic partnerships in foreign policy has been often framed as a distinctly Chinese phenomenon (see Chang-Liao, 2023; Deng, 2007; Maher, 2016; Strüver, 2017; Ying, 2018; Yu, 2015). Arguably more surprising is the fact that the rise in the number of partnerships established by the United States went largely unnoticed (cf. Hamilton, 2014; Parameswaran, 2014). This could be explained by the fact that formal alliances dominate the U.S. foreign policy discourse as a form of alignment.

Figure 2. The BISP count over time for each G20 member, 1993–2020



Graphs by G20 country

China and the United States can be thought of as the first tier proliferators of BISPs. This is reflected not only in the number of partnerships they had established, but also in the status of the two countries as the two most powerful players in international politics.⁵⁹ Three other countries, which can be thought of as the second tier proliferators of BISPs, had established more than 30 partnerships by the end of 2020 – India, Japan, and Russia. Whereas the use of BISPs in foreign policy of India and Russia is well documented (see, e.g., Burns, 2007; Fergusson, 2012; Hall, 2016; Joshi & Pant, 2015; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Lynch, 2004), scholars have paid less attention to the case of Japan (cf.

⁵⁹ For instance, using the CINC measure of national power, the two countries accounted for approximately 36% of all material capabilities distributed throughout the international system as of 2016 (see the updated version of the “National Material Capabilities (v6.0)” dataset; see, also, Singer et al., 1972).

Wilkins, 2022; Envall & Wilkins, 2023). Together, the first and second tier countries accounted for about two thirds of all partnerships in the dataset. Interestingly enough, the five countries also map well onto the CINC measure as the five most powerful countries in terms of material capabilities.⁶⁰ The third tier includes Brazil, France, Italy, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, all of which had established over 20 partnerships by the end of 2020. Finally, the fourth tier is composed of countries that had less than 20 partnerships as of 2020, including Argentina, Australia, Canada, Germany, Indonesia, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia.

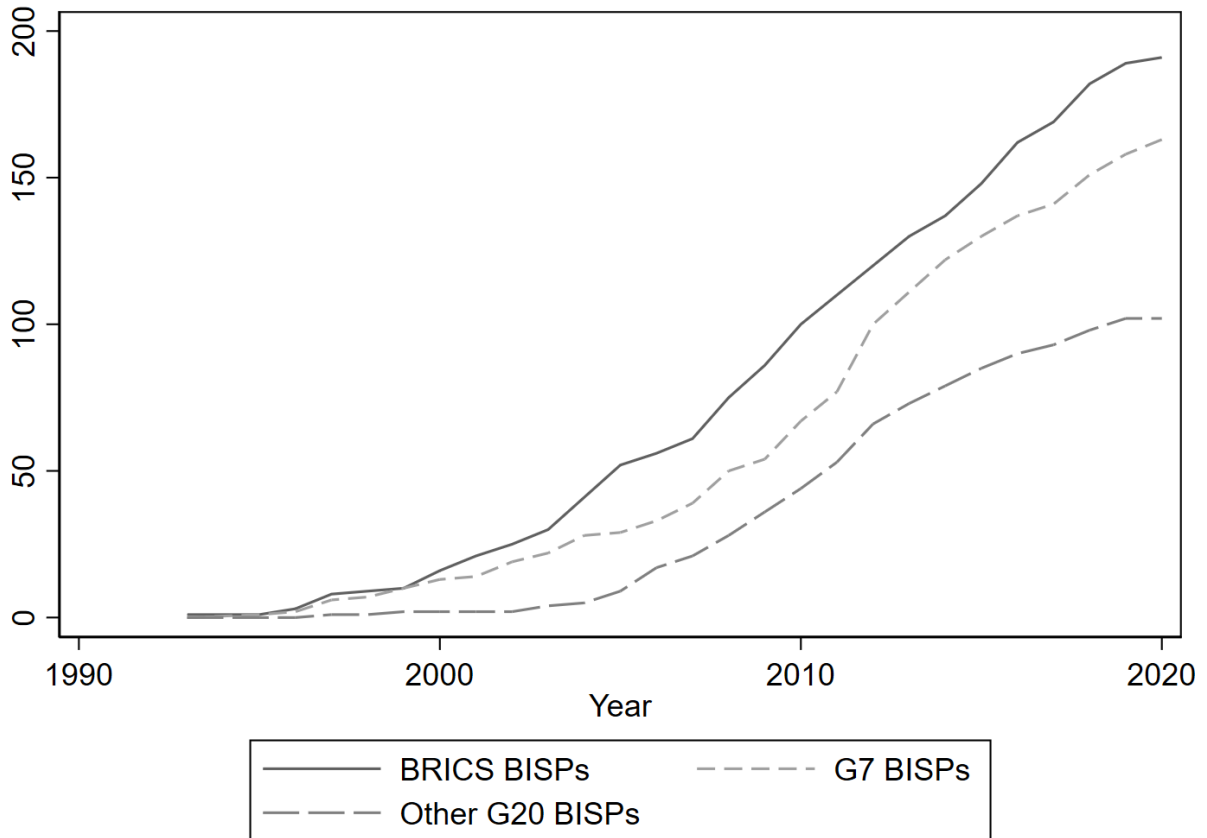
The latter two categories are more of a “mixed bag,” as they include members of G7 and BRICS, as well as major, regional, and middle powers. Many of these countries, such as South Korea and Turkey, have embarked on the practice of strategic partnership diplomacy in the late 2000s. Others, such as Brazil and South Africa, have been among the first adopters of this form of informal cooperation, yet their efforts to expand their partnership portfolio have seen a steady decline in the 2010s. Still others, such as Argentina and Germany, can be characterized as reluctant adopters, as their partnerships portfolios have expanded only marginally over the observed time period. Because the countries of case selection include both members of the G7 and BRICS, we can also compare the trends in proliferation of BISP among these two prominent groups. Figure 3 below captures the increase in the number of BISP across the three groups: G7, BRICS, and the residual G20 group.⁶¹ On balance, this figure illustrates that, by the end of 2020, BRICS had established more partnerships

⁶⁰ As of 2016, the five most powerful countries according to the “National Material Capabilities (v6.0)” dataset were, in a descending order, China, the United States, India, Russia, and Japan. These countries accounted for approximately 52% of all material capabilities distributed throughout the international system. It bears noting that this measure does not account for diplomatic power or the possession of nuclear weapons.

⁶¹ G7 includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and United States. BRICS include Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The residual G20 group includes Argentina, Australia, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Turkey.

than G7. However, this increase is largely due to China being especially active. In addition, it shows that the residual G20 group is mostly composed of late adopters.

Figure 3. The count of BISP's across G7, BRICS, and other G20 members, 1993–2020



Note: The sum of BISP's in this figure goes beyond the total of 382 in the dataset because some partnerships include members of more than one group of countries.

The dyadic form of the dependent variable also allows us to learn about what regions and specific countries have been prioritized as partners by members of the G20. First and foremost, the data reveals that BISP's are mostly used as a tool for inter-regional cooperation. Only about 29% of all partnerships in the dataset have been established between members of the same region as of 2020. In contrast, looking at the same subset of dyads with G20 countries as one of the members, about 51% of all alliances have been established between members of the same region as of 2018. This

finding suggests that countries prefer informal alignments, such as BISPs, for cooperation with partners from different regions, whereas they prefer formal alignments, such as alliances, for cooperation with partners from the same region. Arguably, only a few countries in the world, such as the United States, possess the capabilities to make security commitments, such as the provision of military aid, credible at long distances. On the other hand, because the level of commitment is inherently low in the case of strategic partnerships, this allows states to align with others more easily, despite the long distance. Strategic partnerships may, therefore, constitute a better fit for inter-regional security cooperation than formal alliances.

Table 13. Regional distribution of partnerships

| Region | Count of BISPs | Percent of BISPs | Most common partner regions (% within this region) |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Africa | 60 | 16% | Asia (40%), Europe (23%), Americas (18%) |
| Americas | 119 | 31% | Asia (32%), Europe (26%), Americas (18%) |
| Asia | 223 | 58% | Europe (29%), Asia (22%), Americas (17%) |
| Europe | 161 | 42% | Asia (40%), Americas (19%), Europe (18%) |
| Middle East | 69 | 18% | Asia (45%), Europe (30%), Americas (20%) |
| Oceania | 20 | 5% | Asia (70%), Americas (15%), Europe (10%) |

Note: The sum of BISP count and percentage in this table goes beyond the total of 382 in the dataset and 100% because some partnerships include members of more than one region.

Table 13 above further illustrates the distribution of partnerships across different regions.⁶² Most importantly, it shows that strategic partnership diplomacy is especially predominant in Asia. More than half of all partnerships in the dataset included an Asian country as one of the members. Again, this is partly due to China being especially active in this regard, but several other Asian G20 members, including India, Japan, and South Korea, have also maintained a sizeable partnership portfolio by the end of 2020. Together, the five Asian members of G20 had established about half of all partnerships in the dataset. This finding is in line with previous studies on regional institutions,

⁶² To determine to which region does a country belong, I use the Correlates of War Project regional designation. Country codes 2–165 correspond to the “Western Hemisphere,” or Americas, 200–395 to Europe, 402–626 to Africa, 630–698 to the Middle East, 700–860 to Asia, and 900–990 to Oceania.

which suggest that Asian states prefer less formal forms of cooperation, partly as a result of the historically low confidence in regional integration efforts as well as domestic and cultural factors, such as the preeminence of the idea of national sovereignty (Acharya & Johnston, 2007; Kahler, 2000; Vabulas & Snidal, 2021, pp. 866–67). In addition, the table shows that countries from other regions have maintained BISP's primarily with their Asian counterparts. On balance, however, Asia–Europe was the most frequent regional pair.

Finally, the data allows us to identify the most “attractive” partners for cooperation under BISP's. Table 14 below ranks countries by the number of BISP's established with the G20 group as a whole. In other words, it shows how many G20 members maintained a strategic partnership with this specific country. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Asian countries dominate the ranking, with China and India occupying the first two spots. On balance, G20 members have preferred establishing BISP's with other G20 countries. More surprising is the fact that many G20 countries maintain strategic partnerships with countries from Central Asia, including Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and Southeast Asia, including Malaysia and Vietnam. One possible explanation, applicable also to the case of the United Arab Emirates, is that these countries may be attractive for their raw materials production and/or fast growing economies.⁶³ Relatively perplexing is the case of Afghanistan and Peru, which rank 10th and 9th, respectively. In these cases, the establishment of BISP's could be motivated by the involvement in post-conflict reconstruction and/or combating transnational crime and terrorism.⁶⁴

⁶³ For instance, the 2015 “Joint Declaration on New Stage of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan” emphasizes cooperation under the “Belt and Road Initiative” (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

⁶⁴ For instance, the 2012 “Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement Between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan” focuses on areas such as social and economic development as well as combating terrorist networks, organized crime, narcotics trafficking, and money laundering (The White House, 2012).

Table 14. Top 10 most attractive partners

| Ranking | Country | Count of BISPs |
|----------------|--|-----------------------|
| 1 | China | 17 |
| 2 | India | 16 |
| 3 | Brazil | 15 |
| 4 | Indonesia | 13 |
| 5 | Vietnam, Japan | 12 |
| 6 | France, United Arab Emirates | 11 |
| 7 | Mexico, South Africa, Turkey | 10 |
| 8 | Kazakhstan, Russia, United Kingdom, United States | 9 |
| 9 | Australia, Canada, Peru, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Korea | 8 |
| 10 | Afghanistan, Argentina, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Malaysia, Spain, Uzbekistan | 7 |

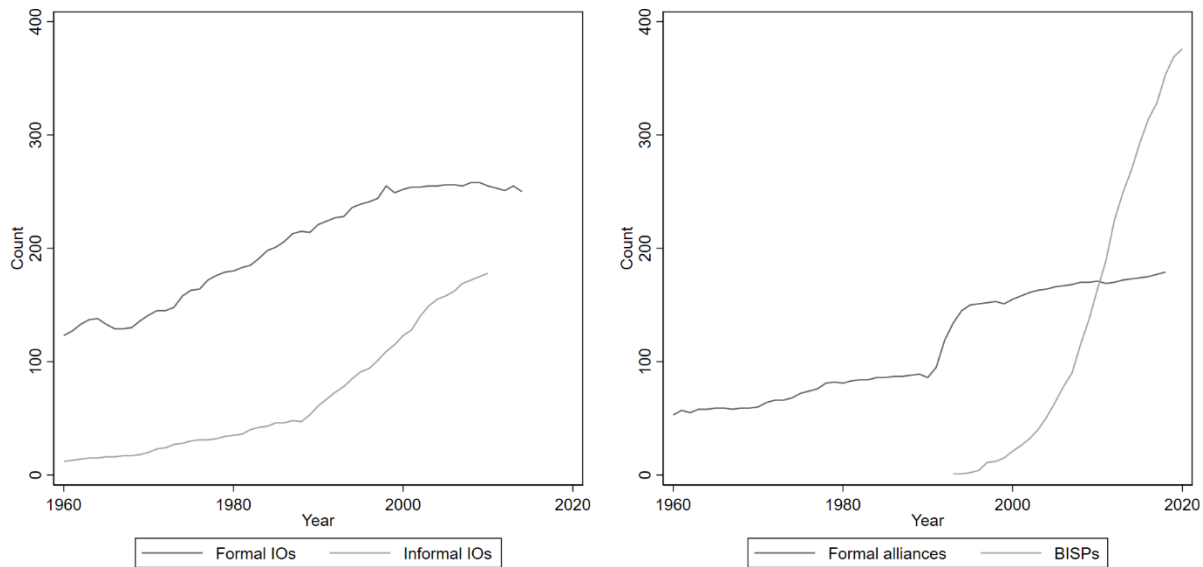
Note: The table shows how many G20 members (excluding the European Union) maintain a strategic partnership with this/these specific country/countries. Ranks 5–10 are split among several countries due to the equal number of BISPs.

In summary, the data reveal several important trends. First, BISPs started to proliferate rapidly since the late 2000s. While all G20 members have embarked on the practice of strategic partnership diplomacy by this point, China constitutes a significant outlier, as none of the other G20 members come close in terms of the sheer number of BISPs. Second, the most economically developed countries, the G7, have been less active in establishing BISPs than BRICS. One possible explanation is that these countries already enjoy membership in many formal economic and security institutions, such as the European Union and NATO, and may view the establishment of BISPs as less beneficial or redundant. Third, a look at the regional distribution of partnerships suggests that, partly as a result of China's activities, strategic partnerships have become a dominant feature of foreign policy in Asia. Interestingly, compared to formal alliances, BISPs have more of an inter-regional character, wherein countries from two different regions are more likely to establish these arrangements than countries from the same region. Finally, as a whole, the G20 members have preferred other G20 countries as partners for cooperation under BISPs. Arguably, these countries are attractive for their large market potential as well as significance for international security.

4.2. Comparison with Other Forms of Institutionalized Cooperation

Thus far, the data revealed that the number of partnerships with the involvement of G20 countries as one of the members has seen an exponential growth over the 1993–2020 period, reaching a total of 382 BISP in the last year of observation. To understand the significance of this number, let us now compare the proliferation of BISP to that of other forms of institutionalized cooperation. The two line plots in Figure 4 below depict the increases in the number of FIGOs and IIGOs, on the one hand, and formal military alliances and BISP, on the other hand, at the G20 level over the period from 1960 to 2020. Previous data collection efforts on informal institutions have found that states have increasingly preferred to establish informal forms of cooperation since the end of the Cold War (see Roger & Rowan, 2022; Vabulas & Snidal, 2021). This is evident from the plot on the left, which indicates that the increase in the number of IIGOs was more rapid than that of FIGOs. As shown in the plot on the right, this trend is likely even more prevalent in the area of agreements on security cooperation. By the end of 2020, there were roughly twice as many BISP as there were formal alliances. Though the number of BISP has risen exponentially since the mid-1990s, the number of formal alliances has remained fairly constant.

Figure 4. The Count of Formal and Informal Forms of Cooperation at the G20 Level, 1960–2020⁶⁵



Note: The data on FIGOs comes from the “Intergovernmental Organizations (v3)” dataset (Pevehouse et al., 2019). The data on IIGOs comes from Roger and Rowan (2022). The data on formal alliances comes from the “ATOP (v5)” dataset (Leeds et al., 2002). Unit of observation: G20-year.

As observed elsewhere, the membership in formal and informal institutions is not mutually exclusive. In fact, authors observe that many areas of cooperation are governed by “hybrid institutional complexes” (Abbott & Faude, 2022). “Institutional overlaps” often emerge from the co-existence of formal and informal forms of cooperation (Reisenberg & Westerwinter, 2023). This is also the case for international alignments, where states can maintain formal alliances and informal partnerships at the same time. In total, approximately 56% of dyads with a BISP also shared their membership in the same alliance(s). Table 15 disaggregates this figure by the specific alliance obligations and provisions entailed in formal treaties, using the data from the updated version of the “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (v5)” dataset (see Leeds et al., 2002). These data illustrate that virtually all dyads with an overlapping alliance membership shared the non-aggression obligation,

⁶⁵ Note that FIGOs and formal alliances are two distinct, but not mutually exclusive, concepts. Both are based on formal agreements, but the latter do not require a permanent secretariat (see Pevehouse et al., 2019; Leeds, 2020).

a considerable number of these dyads also shared the consultation obligation, a lower number of dyads shared the defensive obligation, and only a marginal number of dyads shared the neutrality obligation. This finding suggests that the institutional overlap between BISPs and formal alliances is likely prevalent in the case of alliances that entail a less serious political commitment.⁶⁶

Table 15. Overlapping alliance obligations and provisions

| Overlapping alliance obligations and provisions | Count of BISPs | Percent of BISPs |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| None | 154 | 44% |
| Non-aggression | 199 | 56% |
| Neutrality | 5 | 1% |
| Consultation | 77 | 22% |
| Defense | 53 | 15% |

Note: The sum of BISPs in this table goes beyond the total of 382 in the dataset because some partners share more than one type of alliance obligation. The data on formal alliances comes from the “ATOP (v5)” dataset (Leeds et al., 2002).

⁶⁶ As discussed in previous chapters, scholars agree that “defense pacts,” or alliances with the defensive obligation, constitute the most serious level of political commitment because, unlike other types of alliances, they assume active military support in the event of an attack (see Leeds, 2020).

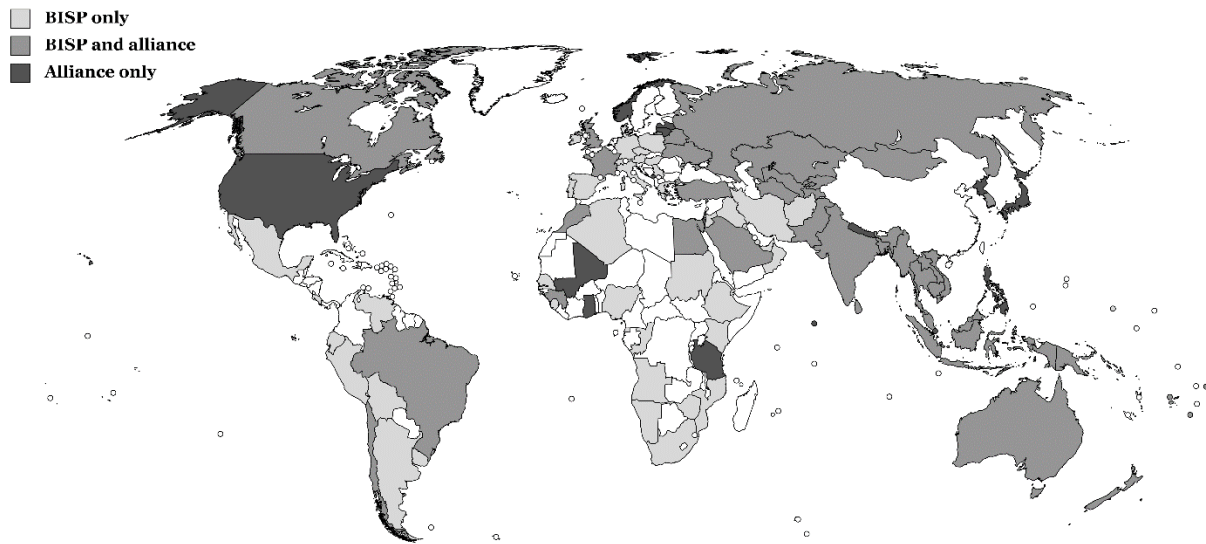
4.3. Strategic Partnership Portfolios of Selected Countries

To gain a better understanding of the substantive content of strategic partnership cooperation, I will now examine partnership portfolios of two G20 countries, China and the United States, in greater detail. The rationale behind the selection of these cases is based on the number of BISPs they had established until 2020. The two countries alone account for one third of all partnerships in the dataset. In the following sub-sections, I, first, examine the geographical distribution of BISPs and the institutional overlap between BISPs and formal alliances of the two countries. Second, I then offer a discussion of the substantive content of these countries' BISPs across the four ideal types of partnerships identified in the theoretical chapter: (1) BISPs in name only (i.e., non-allied states without a common threat); (2) BISPs as a tool of soft balancing (i.e., non-allied states with a common threat); (3) BISPs as an extension of alliance ties (i.e., allied states without a common threat); and (4) BISPs as a reassurance tool (i.e., allied states with a common threat). In doing so, I show that the predominant rationale for the establishment partnerships differs across countries. In addition, this exercise allows me to assess the conceptual validity of the four ideal types – that is, whether the theorized functions correspond to the substantive content.

4.3.1. China

By the end of 2018, China had established BISP with roughly 43% of all states in the international system. The corresponding share of formal allies was approximately 28%. In absolute terms, these figures translate to 83 strategic partners and 54 formal allies. In terms of the institutional overlap, the share of states with which China maintained both a BISP and a formal alliance was roughly 20%, or 38 countries in total. Overall, these numbers indicate a considerable institutional overlap – 45% of strategic partners were also China’s formal allies and 70% of China’s formal allies were also its strategic partners. Figure 5 below illustrates the geographical distribution of exclusive BISP, exclusive formal alliances, and the coexistence of both forms of institutionalized cooperation (i.e., groups “BISP only,” “Alliance only,” and “BISP and alliance”). Additionally, the figure reveals that the institutional overlap was especially prevalent in China’s own regional neighborhood. On the other hand, exclusive BISP were prevalent in Africa, the Americas, and Europe. On balance, it would seem that the primary role of these arrangements is substitutive, as 55% of China’s strategic partners did not share membership in the same alliance. To investigate this possibility, I turn to the classification of partnerships based on the four ideal types discussed in the theoretical chapter.

Figure 5. China’s Alliance and BISP portfolio, 2018⁶⁷



Note: The data on formal alliances comes from the updated version of the “ATOP (v5)” dataset (see Leeds et al., 2002). The alliance category includes all alliances, irrespective of the type of obligation.

Table 16 below reveals that among the four ideal types of partnerships, BISPs as an extension of alliance ties and BISPs in name only are prevalent, accounting for 35% and 31% of all of China’s partnerships, respectively, formed by the end of 2014. One example of the first ideal type is the Sino-Uzbek BISP established in 2012. The two countries share membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which qualifies as a non-aggression and consultation pact under the ATOP classification. China and Uzbekistan did not share a common enemy, neither at the inception of the

⁶⁷ The “BISP only” category includes: Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Austria, Bolivia, Congo, Costa Rica, Czechia, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Mexico, Micronesia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Oman, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland, U.A.E., Uruguay, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe. The “BISP and alliance” category includes: Australia, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Egypt, Fiji, France, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Tonga, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. The “Alliance only” category includes: East Timor, Ghana, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Maldives, Mali, Montenegro, Nepal, North Korea, Norway, Philippines, Singapore, Tanzania, and the United States. As of 2018, the three categories comprised of 45, 38, and 16 countries, respectively.

partnership nor before or after. This partnership is characterized by a broad policy scope and “low politics.” Under it, the heads of states meet regularly to express mutual support for each others’ core interests, including the ideas of national sovereignty and non-interference in their internal affairs (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016, 2022a). However, in practical terms, bilateral cooperation has focused primarily on areas such as agriculture, education, economy, investment, and trade. The two countries have signed a number of agreements in these areas, which go beyond the cooperation within the SCO, with the explicit intention to boost their partnership (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013; President of Uzbekistan, 2023).

Table 16. China’s BISP across the four ideal types

| BISP type | Percent of BISP | Examples |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| BISPs in name only | 31% | Angola, Argentina |
| BISPs as a tool of soft balancing | 14% | Afghanistan, Venezuela |
| BISPs as an extension of alliance ties | 35% | Cambodia, Uzbekistan |
| BISPs as a reassurance tool | 20% | Pakistan, Russia |

Note: As of 2014, China had established 51 BISP. The classification is based on two variables, *alliance* and *common threat*, described in the previous chapter. Data extend only to the year 2014 due to missing observation for the latter variable.

An example of the second prevalent ideal type is the Sino-Angolese BISP established in 2010. The two countries do not share membership in the same alliance. Moreover, they did not share a common enemy, neither at the inception of the partnership nor before or after. This partnership is characterized by a limited policy scope and “low politics.” Meetings under it are typically held at the level below heads of state or over telephone (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Chinese officials frequently express the interest in elevating the partnership to higher levels (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b), emphasizing the economic complementarity of the two countries and opportunities for investment (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Nevertheless, in practice, cooperation under this partnership is substantively limited to diplomatic exchange and expressions of political support. On one occasion, Foreign Minister Wang Yi described the Sino-Angolese

partnership as “a paragon and microcosm of China-Africa win-win cooperation and common development” (Government of China, 2018). Yet, there is no tangible outcome, which could be attributed – whether solely or in part – to the existence of this BISP.

Next, an example of the second least prevalent ideal type – BISPs as a reassurance tool – is the Sino-Russian BISP established in 1996. The two countries share membership in the SCO, which qualifies as a non-aggression and consultation pact according to the ATOP classification. During and after the inception of this partnership, China and Russia also had common enemies, including Japan and later the United States. This partnership is characterized by a broad policy scope and “high politics.” The 1996 declaration introduced several “principles of peaceful coexistence,” including: (1) a system of regular top level meeting; (2) bilateral coordination in the economic, trade, scientific, energy, transportation, and nuclear fields; (3) consultations on international issues; (4) and non-governmental exchanges (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Since then, the two countries have adopted a number of additional joint statements and declarations with the intent of boosting bilateral cooperation. In practical terms, the cooperation often involves the promotion of multipolarity and anti-hegemonic world order at various multilateral fora (Locoman & Papa, 2021, p. 19). On several occasions, the heads of states stated that the partnership is “superior to any Cold War-era alliance” (Munroe et al., 2022) and that it has “no limits” (Kapetas, 2022).

While China and Russia have maintained that their partnership is “non-confrontational in nature” and not directed against any third country (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.), the continuous Chinese support of Russia despite the recent invasion of Ukraine can arguably be viewed as an attempt to increase the (junior) partner’s feeling of security. For instance, on the occasion of the signing of the 2023 “Joint Statement on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era,” the two countries declared that “to settle the Ukraine crisis, the

legitimate security concerns of all countries must be respected, bloc confrontation should be prevented and fanning the flames avoided” (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023) – an implicit opposition to the U.S. and NATO members’ military aid to Ukraine. China is also one of the few countries who abstained during the voting on several UNGA resolutions condemning the Russian aggression (Al Jazeera, 2023). Yet, the outcomes of the Sino-Russian partnership cooperation in relation to the Western backing of Ukraine have, thus far, remained limited to diplomatic support rather than material or military support. This has led many experts to the conclusion that the “no limits” partnership has, in fact, considerable limits (Denisov, 2022; Kim, 2023).

Finally, an example of the least prevalent ideal type – BISPs as a tool of soft balancing – is the Sino-Venezuelan partnership established in 2001. The two countries do not share membership in the same alliance, but they have had a common enemy, the United States, before, during, and after the inception of the partnership. This partnership is characterized by a limited policy scope and “high politics.” At its inception, the two parties based their partnership on their shared identity as “developing nations faced with the task of expediting economic development to raise the living standards of the people” (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001). While the theme of economic development has remained a prominent feature of the Sino-Venezuelan partnership cooperation, regular meetings have increasingly focused on the coordination of positions within international organizations, such as the United Nations and the China-CELAC forum, which is underlined by the intention to “participate together in the reform and construction of the global governance system” (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). Within these fora, the two countries frequently condemn “illegal” actions of the United States and promote the ideas of multilateralism, national sovereignty, and non-interference (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021, 2022c).

4.3.2. United States

By the end of 2018, the United States had established BISPs with roughly 19% of all states in the international system. The corresponding share of formal allies was approximately 60%. In absolute terms, these figures translate to 37 strategic partners and 116 formal allies. In terms of the institutional overlap, the share of states with which the United States maintained both a BISP and a formal alliance was roughly 12%, or 24 countries in total. Overall, these numbers indicate an asymmetric institutional overlap, wherein only 21% of U.S. formal allies were also its strategic partners, but 65% of strategic partnerships were also its formal allies. Figure 6 below follows the same rationale as Figure 5, as it illustrates the geographical distribution of exclusive BISPs, exclusive formal alliances, and the coexistence of both forms of institutionalized cooperation. The United States had established simultaneous BISPs and formal alliances with a number of countries across different regions, but there is no discernable regional pattern. On the other hand, exclusive BISPs were prevalent in Africa and exclusive alliances were prevalent in Europe. On balance, it would seem that the primary role of these partnerships is complementary since most U.S. strategic partners also shared membership in the same alliance. To examine this further, I turn to the four ideal types.

Figure 6. U.S. Alliance and BISP portfolio, 2018⁶⁸



Note: The data on formal alliances comes from the updated version of the “ATOP (v5)” dataset (see Leeds et al., 2002). The alliance category includes all alliances, irrespective of the type of obligation.

Table 17 below reveals that among the four ideal types of partnerships, BISPs as a reassurance tool and BISPs as an extension of alliance ties are prevalent, accounting for 38% and 25% of all of U.S. partnerships, respectively, established by the end of 2014. One example of the first ideal type is the U.S.-Ukrainian BISP established in 2008. The two countries share membership in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which qualifies as a non-aggression pact according to the

⁶⁸ The “BISP only” category includes: Angola, Bahrain, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Tunisia, and U.A.E. The “BISP and alliance” category includes: Afghanistan, Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Egypt, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Mexico, New Zealand, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Romania, Singapore, Turkey, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The “Alliance only” category includes: Albania, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Dominica, Dominican Republic, East Timor, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Netherlands, Nicaragua, North Korea, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Vietnam. As of 2018, the three categories comprised of 13, 24, and 92 countries, respectively.

ATOP coding. In addition, before, during, and after the inception of the partnership, they have shared common enemies, including the former Yugoslavia and Russia. This partnership is characterized by a broad policy scope and “high politics.” Since the 2008 “U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership,” the United States has emphasized the idea of “strong, independent and democratic Ukraine” as the desired outcome of cooperation. In practice, this involved U.S. assistance with domestic-political reforms in areas of defense, security, and economy, as well as the promotion of trade liberalization and cultural exchange. These reforms were also intended to strengthen Ukraine’s NATO candidacy (U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, 2008).

Table 17. U.S. BISP types across the four ideal types

| BISP type | Percent of BISP types | Examples |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------|
| BISP types in name only | 22% | Djibouti, South Africa |
| BISP types as a tool of soft balancing | 16% | Israel, Saudi Arabia |
| BISP types as an extension of alliance ties | 25% | New Zealand, Mexico |
| BISP types as a reassurance tool | 38% | Georgia, Ukraine |

Note: As of 2014, the US had established 32 BISP types. The classification is based on two variables, *alliance* and *common threat*, described in the previous chapter. Data extend only to the year 2014 due to missing observation for the latter variable.

Since the signing of the updated version of the charter in 2021, the depth and breadth of bilateral cooperation has expanded even further. The two countries have established the “Strategic Partnership Commission” with working groups and other bilateral mechanisms to address the common challenges. Most importantly, the 2021 charter explicitly identifies Russia as a threat and lays out specific measures to counter it. Among other things, the charter includes a commitment by the United States “to support Ukraine’s efforts to counter armed aggression, economic and energy disruptions, and malicious cyber activity by Russia, including by maintaining sanctions against or related to Russia and applying other relevant measures until restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders” (U.S. Department of State, 2021a). Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the United States has invested over 40 billion USD in

security assistance (U.S. Department of State, 2023a) and continues to be Ukraine’s most important “ally,” despite the fact that it has no formal obligations to provide active military assistance to its junior partner, as would be the case with typical “defense pacts.”

An example of the second prevalent ideal type is the U.S.-Mexican BISP established around the year 2011. The two countries share membership in the Organization of American States, which qualifies as a defense, non-aggression, and consultation pact according to the ATOP dataset, but they did not share a common enemy, neither at the inception of the partnership nor before or after. This partnership is characterized by a broad policy scope and “low politics.” The initial goals of this partnership were defined vaguely around the principles of “promoting democracy, security, and prosperity around the world” (U.S. Department of State, 2011). Later statements emphasized the need to continue strengthening the partnership in order to advance cooperation on economic, security, and social issues (U.S. Department of State, 2014), to facilitate the coordination of national positions on different international issues within the United Nations, and to increase joint efforts to combat transnational crime (U.S. Congress, 2017). On balance, however, the two countries refer to each other as “strategic partners” relatively rarely and it is difficult to demonstrate that any tangible outcomes of their bilateral engagement are a direct result of the existing BISP tie.

Next, an example of the second least prevalent ideal type – BISP in name only – is the U.S.-South African partnership established in 2010. The two countries do not share membership in the same alliance. Moreover, they did not share a common enemy, neither at the inception of the partnership nor before or after. This partnership is characterized by a fairly limited policy scope and “low politics.” The Obama administration has forged the partnership partly to create conducive conditions for re-engagement between the two countries (Government of South Africa, 2010). In practice, the cooperation under it has focused mainly on areas such as health, climate, trade, and

investment (U.S. Department of State, 2022a). However, evidence of tangible outcomes of cooperation as a direct result of partnership diplomacy is scant. Moreover, recent years have seen a steady decline in bilateral relations, partly as a result of South Africa's military cooperation with China and Russia, the refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and arms and ammunition transfers to Russia. Some analysts have argued that, as a result of these events, the year 2023 marked a *de facto* breakdown of the U.S.-South African strategic partnership (Walsh, 2023).

Finally, an example of the least prevalent ideal type – BISP as a tool of soft balancing – is the U.S.-Saudi BISP established in 2008. The two countries do not share membership in the same alliance. However, they have shared a common enemy, Iran, before, during, and after the inception of the partnership. This partnership is characterized by a limited policy scope and “high politics.” Cooperation is limited primarily to the area of nuclear energy and security. According to the United States, the partnership is based on the pursuit of shared national security interests, respect for human rights, and it entails joint efforts to combat terrorism, ensure regional stability, and address other common challenges (U.S. Congress, 2019). Specific efforts have included policy coordination on countering the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (The White House, 2014) as well as direct U.S. security assistance to aid Saudi Arabia in its war against the Houthis in Yemen, supported by Iran (U.S. Department of State, 2021b).⁶⁹ The latter efforts, in particular, can be viewed as “limited hard balancing,” described by T. V. Paul (2018, p. 21) as involving moderate arms build-up and semi-formal alliances to allow for the pooling of resources, but no coordinated military operations.

⁶⁹ It bears noting that the direct support of Saudi Arabia in the conflict with Yemen has stopped with the Biden administration (see U.S. Department of State, 2021b).

5. Empirical Analysis

This chapter presents and discusses the results of quantitative analyses on strategic partnership formation, utilizing the original BISP v1.0 dataset. Firstly, the section titled “Main Analysis 1: Alliance Complements or Substitutes?” empirically tests the proposition that these partnerships could function as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to formal alliances (**H1a–H1b**) using multiplicative interaction models. In the subsequent section, “Main Analysis 2: Competing Explanations of BISP Onset,” I test other potential explanations related to the three categories of functionalist, power-oriented, and domestic-politics approaches (**H2–H10**) and present the results of the full model to assess their relative significance. The following sections delve into several exploratory analyses. In the “Exploratory Analysis 1: Building Blocks or Stumbling Blocks?” section, I investigate the possibility that strategic partnerships could either facilitate or hinder the formation of their formal counterparts – military alliances. Next, in the “Exploratory Analysis 2: Armed Conflict and Arms Trade,” I examine the potential *effects* of strategic partnership ties on state behavior in interstate conflicts and bilateral arms trade. Finally, in the “Exploratory Analysis 3: Monadic BISP Onset” section, I explore why certain G20 members establish more partnerships than others.

5.1. Main Analysis 1: Alliance Complements or Substitutes?

In this section, I address the key question of this dissertation: If strategic partnerships serve similar, albeit more modest, goals as formal alliances—namely, enhancing national and regional security, as argued by many authors (Envall & Hall, 2016; Kay, 2000; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Parameswaran, 2012; Paul, 2018; Wilkins, 2008)—do they act as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to their formal counterparts? This is a pertinent question for both scholars interested in the empirical phenomenon of strategic partnerships and students of informal cooperation. Based on the review of the existing literature, I have formulated two competing expectations regarding the role of these informal arrangements. On the one hand, strategic partnerships could operate as the “second-best” arrangement to formal alliances as a low-cost vehicle for soft- and limited-hard-balancing measures, including arms and technology transfers, coordination of positions within international institutions, and signaling resolve (**H1a**). On the other hand, strategic partnerships could complement formal alliances by broadening the scope of cooperation to issue areas beyond those encompassed by formal alliance treaties and by providing reassurance to insecure allies through economic and limited security aid, allowing states to act more swiftly in times of crisis and potentially bypassing rigid formal procedures where necessary (**H1b**).

As discussed in the introduction and following chapters, this analysis is predicated on three fairly strong assumptions. Firstly, that we can determine whether strategic partnerships operate as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to alliances simply through empirical observation of the configuration of states’ interests and institutional membership. Secondly, that strategic partnerships serve as counterparts to formal alliances when we consider security in its broader sense (Wilkins, 2018). Thirdly, that strategic partnerships, at best, can function as “low-cost” alternatives or the “second-best” arrangement to formal alliances, but cannot entirely replace them, for instance, since

they lack mechanisms to make the commitments in them credible (Abbott & Faude, 2020, p. 400). To test these propositions, I will analyze the original BISP v1.0 dataset of strategic partnerships involving G20 countries as one of the members. I will use the *BISP onset* variable—a binary indicator of whether a pair of countries has formed a strategic partnership in a given year or not—as the dependent variable. In doing so, I will rely on the undirected dyadic BTSCS design and the logistic regression method with controls for temporal dependence, as advocated by Carter and Signorino (2010). The key independent variables of interest in this section include *alliance* and *common threat (MID)*.⁷⁰ As discussed in the theoretical chapter, I expect the effect of the *alliance* variable to be contingent on the presence of common threats. I argue that conceptualizing strategic partnerships as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to formal alliances makes sense to the extent that we account for the same general purpose, presumably to enhance national and regional security. My estimation strategy ultimately relies on the implementation of multiplicative interaction models (see Berry et al., 2012; Brambor et al., 2006). In addition, I employ the alternative *alliance commitment* variable to account for the possibility that the effect of alliance membership could vary based on the type of obligations and provisions it entails.⁷¹

First, I present the results of the analysis utilizing the *alliance* variable, as displayed in Table 18 below. The *common threat (MID)* variable is lagged by one year to eliminate the possibility of reverse causality. All models incorporate the same set of variables, with the addition of the interaction term *common threat (MID) * alliance*. Models 1 and 3 utilize the logistic regression method, while Model 2 and 4 employ an alternative estimation technique, probit regression. Additionally, I address missing values

⁷⁰ *Alliance* indicates whether the two members of a dyad shared membership in any formal alliance. Data come from the “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (v5)” dataset (Leeds et al., 2002). *Common threat (MID)* indicates whether the two states stood at the same side of a militarized interstate dispute against the same enemy at some point during the last ten years. Data come from the dyadic “Militarized Interstate Disputes (v4)” dataset (Maoz et al., 2018).

⁷¹ Alliance commitment disaggregate alliance membership by the type of obligations and provisions into three categories of “no commitment,” corresponding to the absence of a formal alliance tie, “low commitment,” corresponding to consultation and neutrality/non-aggression pacts, and “high commitment,” corresponding to the defense pact category (see Leeds, 2020). Data are sourced from the same dataset as for the *alliance* variable.

by forward-filling them for all variables in Models 3 and 4 to extend the analysis timeframe. To assess the relative performance of these models, I evaluate the pseudo R^2 and the Area Under Curve (AUC) statistic. These metrics indicate the models' ability to accurately distinguish between classes, specifically whether the onset of a strategic partnership has occurred or not. The former statistic ranges from 0.075 to 0.091, with models that do not include forward-filled values exhibiting slightly higher explanatory power. The latter ranges from 0.764 to 0.790 (see Appendix 9). In Appendix 10–11, I show that the results are robust to the use of DCRSEs instead of dyad-clustered standard errors and year dummies instead of cubic polynomials.

Table 18. Analysis⁷²

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Probit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Probit</i> |
| Common threat (MID) | 1.275*** (0.193) | 0.439*** (0.0688) | 1.276*** (0.170) | 0.443*** (0.0613) |
| Alliance | 1.413*** (0.142) | 0.493*** (0.0507) | 1.224*** (0.126) | 0.426*** (0.0449) |
| Common threat (MID) * | -1.164*** (0.257) | -0.396*** (0.0940) | -1.113*** (0.231) | -0.379*** (0.0849) |
| Alliance | 0.109 (0.160) | 0.0234 (0.0515) | 0.157 (0.117) | 0.0343 (0.0368) |
| Time ² | 0.0130 (0.0131) | 0.00509 (0.00433) | 0.00858 (0.00790) | 0.00402 (0.00256) |
| Time ³ | -0.000506 (0.000324) | -0.000182 (0.000109) | -0.000390* (0.000164) | -0.000152** (0.0000541) |
| Constant | -8.706*** (0.599) | -3.647*** (0.186) | -8.781*** (0.548) | -3.654*** (0.165) |
| N | 77204 | 77204 | 93117 | 93117 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.091 | 0.091 | 0.076 | 0.075 |
| Years | 1993–2014 | 1993–2014 | 1993–2020 Forward-filled | 1993–2020 Forward-filled |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

⁷² Please note that I consider the first year of a strategic partnership's introduction to the international system, specifically the initial documented case of the Brazil-China partnership in 1993, as the starting point for the analysis and calculation of *Time*, *Time*², and *Time*³. The *Time* variable simply represents the number of years elapsed before the two countries in a dyad establish a strategic partnership.

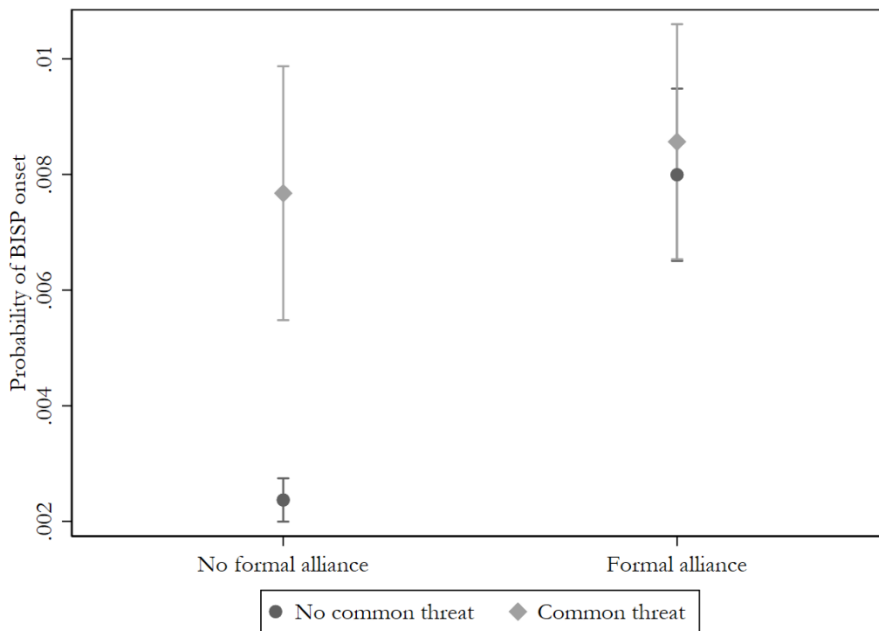
The primary focus of this analysis lies on the interaction between *common threat (MID)* and *alliance*. The statistical significance of the interaction term ($p < 0.001$ across all models) indicates that the relationship between *alliance* and *BISP onset* is contingent on the *common threat (MID)* variable. To ensure a correct interpretation of this interaction, I adhere to the approach recommended by Berry, Golder, and Milton (2012) and calculate predictive margins (see Table 19), which are visualized in Figure 7. These figures reveal that the predicted probability of BISP onset is highest for dyads that share membership in a formal alliance while also facing a common threat (0.009). It is closely followed by the group of dyads with shared alliance membership but without a common threat, as well as dyads lacking shared alliance membership that still face a common threat (both 0.008). Notably, the group of dyads without shared alliance membership, and without a common threat, exhibits a significantly lower probability of *BISP onset* (0.002), suggesting that the conditions which produce “BISPs in name only” are least conducive of *BISP onset* overall. It is important to recognize, however, that the overall probabilities are low due to the nature of the research design, where the onset of a strategic partnership occurs in roughly 0.4% of all dyad-year observations in the dataset.⁷³

Table 19. Predictive margins of *Common threat * Alliance*

| | Margin | Std. err. | z | P > z | 95% conf. interval |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|--------------------|
| No common threat, No formal alliance | .002371 | .0001911 | 12.41 | 0.000 | .0019964 .0027455 |
| No common threat, Formal alliance | .007995 | .0007599 | 10.52 | 0.000 | .0065056 .0094844 |
| Common threat, no formal alliance | .0076759 | .0011202 | 6.85 | 0.000 | .0054804 .0098715 |
| Common threat, formal alliance | .0085664 | .0010374 | 8.26 | 0.000 | .0065332 .0105996 |

⁷³ In absolute terms, there are only 382 onsets of strategic partnerships for the entire population of 100,130 dyad-year observations in the dataset.

Figure 7. Predictive margins of *Common threat* by *Alliance*



Note: 95% CIs. The plot depicts predictive margins of the *common threat (MID)* * *alliance* interaction based on the results of Model 3.

These findings suggest that, when using general alliance membership as a reference point, strategic partnerships, as informal institutions, are not inherently more likely to either complement or act as “low-cost” alternatives to their formal counterparts. Instead, as proposed by Vabulas and Snidal (2013, p. 195), both possibilities are viable. While the results of the logistic regression analysis provide insight into the significance of various conditions in increasing the likelihood of strategic partnership formation, it is important to note that although states with shared membership in the same alliance that face common threats may be somewhat more likely to enter into these informal arrangements, this does not necessarily imply that partnerships falling within this category are overall prevalent. So, what does the empirical record reveal? Table 20 below presents the distribution of partnership onsets based on the two independent variables of interest, alliance membership, and common threats. The table reveals that while states are generally less inclined to form strategic partnerships when they lack

shared alliance membership or a common threat, such partnerships (“BISPs in name only”) are still quite common. Likewise, while states may be equally likely to set up partnerships as complements or substitutes to formal alliances, empirically, complementary partnerships are much more common.

Table 20. Share of BISP onsets by alliance and common threat, 1993–2015

| | No common threat | Common threat |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| No formal alliance | 110 (54%) | 36 (37%) |
| Formal alliance | 92 (46%) | 61 (63%) |
| Total | 202 | 97 |

Note: Column percentages in parentheses; χ^2 (df = 1, $N = 299$) = 7.89, $p = 0.005$.

While these initial findings already reveal intriguing patterns, I will commence by reanalyzing the data using the alternative variable *alliance commitment* before delving into illustrative cases. The results of this additional analysis are summarized in Table 21 below. Once again, the *common threat (MID)* variable is lagged by one year to eliminate the possibility of reverse causality. All models incorporate the same set of variables, including the interaction term *common threat (MID) * alliance commitment*. The construction of individual models follows the same rationale as models 1–4, with Models 5 and 7 employing logit estimation, while Model 6 and 8 use probit for robustness. Furthermore, missing values for all variables in Model 7 and 8 are forward-filled. Comparing the pseudo R^2 and AUC statistics, we observe that the former ranges between 0.079 and 0.095, while the latter falls between 0.768 and 0.794. Model 5 exhibits the highest overall explanatory power. Models containing forward-filled values perform slightly worse (see Appendix 9). To further ensure robustness, I repeated the analysis using DCRSEs and year dummies. These results can be found in Appendix 10–11 and do not substantially differ from those presented here.

Table 21. Analysis

| | Model 5 | Model 6 | Model 7 | Model 8 |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Probit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Probit</i> |
| Common threat (MID) | 1.279*** (0.193) | 0.441*** (0.0689) | 1.281*** (0.170) | 0.445*** (0.0614) |
| Low commitment | 1.521*** (0.154) | 0.532*** (0.0560) | 1.338*** (0.136) | 0.468*** (0.0492) |
| High commitment | 1.151*** (0.230) | 0.402*** (0.0831) | 0.910*** (0.218) | 0.317*** (0.0779) |
| Common threat (MID) * Low commitment | -0.850** (0.282) | -0.279** (0.106) | -0.749** (0.256) | -0.242* (0.0963) |
| Common threat (MID) * High commitment | -1.383*** (0.356) | -0.483*** (0.129) | -1.286*** (0.327) | -0.449*** (0.118) |
| Time | 0.0969 (0.160) | 0.0213 (0.0517) | 0.141 (0.117) | 0.0307 (0.0369) |
| Time ² | 0.0138 (0.0131) | 0.00528 (0.00435) | 0.00982 (0.00790) | 0.00432 (0.00257) |
| Time ³ | -0.000522 (0.000323) | -0.000185 (0.000109) | -0.000415* (0.000164) | -0.000158** (0.0000543) |
| Constant | -8.684*** (0.595) | -3.647*** (0.186) | -8.749*** (0.544) | -3.651*** (0.165) |
| N | 77204 | 77204 | 93117 | 93117 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.095 | 0.094 | 0.080 | 0.079 |
| Years | 1993–2014 | 1993–2014 | 1993–2020 | 1993–2020 |
| | | | Forward-filled | Forward-filled |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

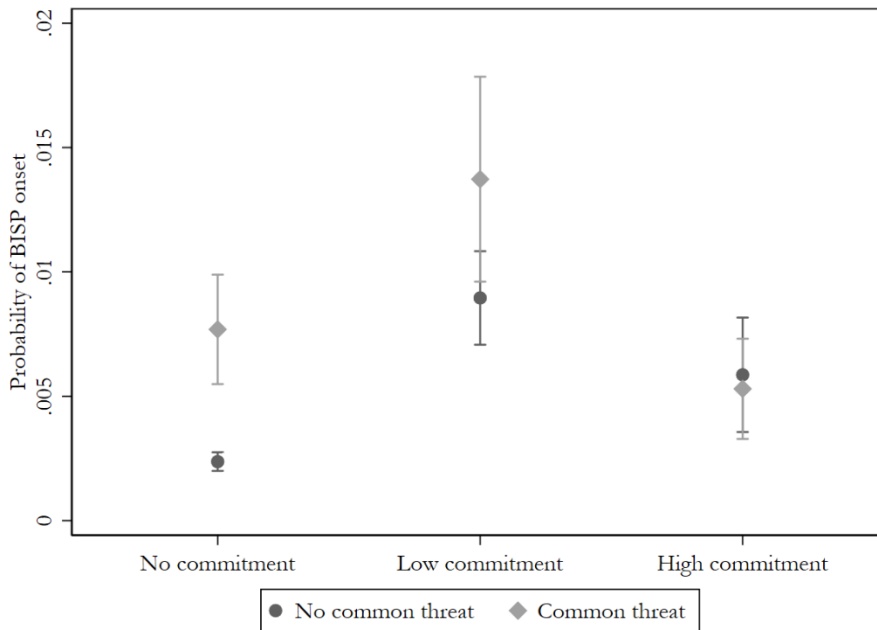
Consistent with the analysis using the *alliance* variable, I have found that the interaction between *common threat (MID)* and *alliance commitment* is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ across all models) for both the *common threat (MID) * low commitment* and *common threat (MID) * high commitment* terms. This indicates a conditional relationship with *BISP onset*. To gain a better understanding of these results, I have, again, calculated predictive margins (see Table 22), which are visualized in Figure 8. These figures reveal that the predicted probability of *BISP onset* is significantly higher for dyads that share membership in a “low commitment” alliance, such as a consultation or neutrality/non-aggression pact, and also face a common threat (0.014), compared to any other group of states. In contrast, and in line with previous findings, the predicted probability of *BISP onset* is at its lowest when

states neither share membership in the same alliance nor face common threats simultaneously (0.002). The presence of common threats significantly increases the likelihood of non-allied dyads and dyads with shared membership in “low commitment” alliances forming strategic partnerships. However, this effect is not observed in the case of “high commitment” alliances, such as defense pacts.

Table 22. Predictive margins of *Common threat* * *Alliance commitment*

| | Margin | Std. err. | z | P > z | 95% conf. interval | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|--------------------|----------|
| No common threat, No commitment | .0023722 | .0001912 | 12.41 | 0.000 | .0019974 | .002747 |
| No common threat, Low commitment | .008952 | .0009594 | 9.33 | 0.000 | .0070716 | .0108324 |
| No common threat, High commitment | .0058619 | .001174 | 4.99 | 0.000 | .0035609 | .0081628 |
| Common threat, No commitment | .0076892 | .0011225 | 6.85 | 0.000 | .0054891 | .0098893 |
| Common threat, Low commitment | .0137269 | .0021017 | 6.53 | 0.000 | .0096076 | .0178462 |
| Common threat, High commitment | .0052983 | .0010285 | 5.15 | 0.000 | .0032825 | .0073141 |

Figure 8. Predictive margins of *Common threat* by *Alliance commitment*



Note: 95% CIs. The plot depicts predictive margins of the *common threat* (*MID*) * *alliance commitment* interaction based on the results of Model 7.

What do these results imply? The conditions that drive the formation of partnerships as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to their formal counterparts do not decisively stand out as more significant predictors of *BISP onset*. States are equally inclined to establish partnerships under conditions of complementarity (simultaneous alliance ties and common threats) and substitution (absence of alliance ties with common threats). The least conducive situation for *BISP onset* is when states lack both alliance ties and common security concerns. When we examine alliance membership based on commitment levels, it becomes clear that states are less likely to form partnerships when they already have a high level of political commitment, such as through defense pacts, compared to situations with lower commitment levels, such as through consultation and neutrality/non-aggression pacts. This makes sense as partnerships among countries with mutual defense obligations could potentially be counterproductive, signaling a scaling back of alignment (from a formal ally to a mere strategic partner). However, in general, while we might expect countries to establish partnerships as either complements or “low-cost” alternatives with a similar probability, empirically, complementary partnerships are more common (see also Table 23 for the distribution of outcomes by *alliance commitment*).

Table 23. Share of BISP onsets by alliance commitment and common threat, 1993–2015

| | No common threat | Common threat |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| No commitment | 110 (54%) | 36 (37%) |
| Low commitment | 68 (34%) | 39 (40%) |
| High commitment | 24 (12%) | 22 (23%) |
| Total | 202 | 97 |

Note: Column percentages in parentheses; χ^2 (df = 2, $N = 299$) = 9.79, $p = 0.007$.

The validity of the above findings depends on how well the assumed complementary or substitutive role of strategic partnerships aligns with empirical reality. As far as the complementary function is concerned, the United States has, for instance, established partnerships with allied nations facing the same enemy, namely Russia. Notable cases include Georgia and Ukraine, with which the

United States shares membership in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (a non-aggression pact). Cooperation under these arrangements has largely focused on economic and security assistance (e.g., U.S. Department of State, 2009, 2021a), supporting the logic of reassurance. These nations pursued partnerships with the United States as a secondary option when NATO membership was denied (Kay, 2000, p. 18). In this sense, partnerships complement the existing “low commitment” alliances through limited security guarantees beyond the scope of formal structures. Remarkably, the United States has also formed partnerships with certain NATO members, including Bulgaria and Poland, with whom it also shared a common threat. These partnerships complement the existing alliance structures by expanding the scope of cooperation to areas such as trade and energy (U.S. Department of State, 2022b; U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria, n.d.).

Besides the United States, other nations have also pursued partnerships that complement existing alliance structures. For instance, Russia has established strategic partnerships with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, with which it shared common adversaries and membership in the same alliances, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization (a defense pact) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (a consultation/non-aggression pact). Their primary goal is to “further expand and deepen allied relations” (e.g., Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). The complementary nature of these arrangements is emphasized by Russia’s officials, who frequently describe their bilateral relations as “relations of strategic partnership and alliance” (e.g., President of Russia, 2020, 2021). The complementary role of strategic partnerships can also be observed in cases like Australia–India and Australia–Japan partnerships. These nations shared a common threat, namely China, and are members of the treaty of amity and cooperation (a non-aggression pact) within the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Strategic partnership agreements between these countries promote enhanced cooperation through ASEAN, among other objectives (e.g., Government of Australia, 2020; Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007).

There is also evidence suggesting that partnerships can serve as “low-cost” alternative, or the “second-best” arrangement, to alliances in certain cases. For instance, both Russia and China have formed strategic partnerships with Venezuela, even though they did not share joint alliance membership. However, they have had a common adversary at the inception of these arrangements—the United States. The essence of cooperation within these strategic partnerships has been to promote the notion of “multipolarity” and to challenge the hegemonic, U.S.-led liberal order in various multilateral forums (e.g., Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021, 2022c; Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020, 2021). This aligns with the principles of entangling diplomacy. As another example, the United States has established several partnerships with Middle Eastern states, including Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, even though they did not have formal alliances at the inception of these partnerships. However, they have shared one common adversary with all of these nations—Iraq. Cooperation within these arrangements has primarily focused on maintaining regional stability, often involving U.S. security assistance and arms transfers (e.g., U.S. Department of State, 2020, 2021b, 2023b). This aligns with the principles of limited hard balancing.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Some less obvious examples include strategic partnerships established by Japan with countries like Poland and the Netherlands, even though Japan has not maintained a formal alliance with them. The inception of these partnerships took place at the backdrop of a shared external threat, namely Russia. Joint statements on these partnerships often include condemnations of Russia’s aggressive military actions, such as the annexation of Crimea, along with commitments to strengthen defense cooperation (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015a, 2015b).

5.2. Main Analysis 2: Competing Explanations of BISP Onset

The results presented in the preceding section pertain to a single possible explanation (**H1a–H1b**). Nevertheless, the formation of strategic partnerships is ultimately a multicausal phenomenon. In this section, I will explore alternative explanatory avenues beyond the complementarity/substitution argument, which were expounded upon in the theoretical chapter. Firstly, I will focus on the individual factors associated with the three categories of functionalist (**H2–H4**), power-oriented (**H5–H7**), and domestic-politics (**H8–H10**) explanations (see Roger, 2020; Westerwinter et al., 2021). Subsequently, I will assess the results of a full model with all independent variables, thereby enabling us to gauge the relative significance of these factors. As in the previous section, I will employ the undirected dyadic BTSCS design, utilizing the logistic regression method with temporal controls (Carter & Signorino, 2010). Additionally, I use the same dependent variable, *BISP onset*, as in the previous section. Drawing upon the findings of these analyses, I will evaluate whether the empirical evidence supports the aforementioned hypotheses or not. Similar to the previous section, I will utilize illustrative cases that either corroborate or contradict the theoretical expectations.

Firstly, I examine a set of explanations that I have broadly categorized as functionalist. These factors are related to the substantive cooperation problems that strategic partnerships, and (informal) institutions more broadly (Roger, 2020; Westerwinter et al., 2021), aim to address, encompassing the utilization of joint economic opportunities and the response to security challenges (Wilkins, 2008, p. 383). As posited in the theoretical chapter, my hypotheses are that two states within a dyad are more likely to establish a strategic partnership when they confront a shared threat (**H2**), as well as when they engage in high levels of bilateral trade (**H3**). Additionally, I anticipate that both dyads with very similar and very dissimilar foreign policy preferences are less likely to form a strategic partnership (**H4**; for a more detailed description, please refer to the section titled “Additional Hypotheses on Strategic

Partnership Formation”). For these purposes, I use variables *common threat (MID)*, *trade value log*, and *foreign policy similarity* and its squared term.⁷⁵ Additionally, as a robustness check, I employ several alternative operationalizations of these variables, including *common threat (rivalry)*, *market potential log*, *S-scores* and its squared term, respectively (for a detailed description of these variables, see the “Independent Variables” section).

The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 24 below. All models use the same dependent variable, *BISP onset*, and all independent variables are lagged by one year. In Model 9, I employ the variables *common threat (MID)*, *trade value log*, and *foreign policy similarity*, along with its squared term. In Model 10, I utilize the alternative *common threat (rivalry)*. In Model 12, I make use of the alternative *market potential log*, and in Model 11, I incorporate the alternative *S-scores* along with its squared term. Models 13–16 follow the same rationale, but missing values are forward-filled to extend the timeframe of the analysis. Consistent with the approach advocated by Carter and Signorino (2010), all models also include temporal controls, encompassing *time*, its squared term, and its cubed term, to account for temporal dependence. Similar to the previous analysis, I initially assess the overall performance of the models by examining the pseudo R² and the AUC statistic. The pseudo R² values range from 0.110 to 0.169, with Model 9 yielding the highest explanatory power for the dependent variable. The AUC statistic ranges from 0.827 to 0.882. Models with forward-filled values exhibit slightly lower performance on average (see Appendix 9).

⁷⁵ Note that the inclusion of the squared term in the model accounts for the possibility that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is non-linear.

Table 24. Analysis

| | Model 9 | Model 10 | Model 11 | Model 12 | Model 13 | Model 14 | Model 15 | Model 16 |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> |
| Common threat (MID) | -0.347* (0.162) | | -0.257 (0.177) | -0.180 (0.178) | -0.350* (0.146) | | -0.137 (0.156) | -0.128 (0.165) |
| Trade value _{log} | 1.173*** (0.0619) | 1.102*** (0.0576) | | 1.115*** (0.0759) | 1.148*** (0.0545) | 1.077*** (0.0501) | | 1.081*** (0.0677) |
| Foreign policy similarity | 0.176 (0.201) | 0.126 (0.197) | 0.271 (0.193) | | 0.203 (0.177) | 0.153 (0.175) | 0.288 (0.171) | |
| Foreign policy similarity ² | 0.0497 (0.0575) | 0.0402 (0.0563) | 0.132* (0.0529) | | 0.0505 (0.0513) | 0.0411 (0.0504) | 0.124** (0.0475) | |
| Common threat (rivalry) | | 0.136 (0.341) | | | | 0.146 (0.328) | | |
| Market potential (low) _{log} | | | 1.132*** (0.0758) | | | | 1.007*** (0.0680) | |
| S-scores | | | | -1.057 (0.806) | | | | -1.013 (0.720) |
| S-scores ² | | | | 0.829 (0.737) | | | | 0.691 (0.661) |
| Time | 0.198 (0.164) | 0.174 (0.162) | 0.179 (0.170) | 0.0685 (0.160) | 0.205 (0.114) | 0.183 (0.113) | 0.203 (0.120) | 0.144 (0.120) |
| Time ² | 0.00123 (0.0134) | 0.00349 (0.0133) | 0.00443 (0.0138) | 0.0103 (0.0140) | 0.000928 (0.00779) | 0.00299 (0.00772) | 0.00223 (0.00809) | 0.00438 (0.00872) |
| Time ³ | -0.000206 (0.000331) | -0.000256 (0.000328) | -0.000308 (0.000336) | -0.000407 (0.000355) | -0.000201 (0.000162) | -0.000246 (0.000161) | -0.000242 (0.000167) | -0.000271 (0.000190) |
| Constant | -10.75*** (0.653) | -10.65*** (0.642) | -15.51*** (0.833) | -9.801*** (0.602) | -10.68*** (0.558) | -10.60*** (0.555) | -14.70*** (0.728) | -9.924*** (0.566) |
| <i>N</i> | 69466 | 69466 | 71103 | 39275 | 85803 | 85803 | 87290 | 47500 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.169 | 0.168 | 0.131 | 0.165 | 0.158 | 0.157 | 0.110 | 0.150 |
| Years | 1993–2015 | 1993–2015 | 1993–2015 | 1993–2015 | 1993–2020 Forward- filled | 1993–2020 Forward- filled | 1993–2020 Forward- filled | 1993–2020 Forward- filled |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

In summary, I observe that only the *trade value* \log variable consistently exhibits a statistically significant positive association with the dependent variable ($p < 0.001$ across all models). These results remain robust when using the alternative *market potential* \log and extending the analysis timeframe, underscoring the importance of partnerships in fostering economic cooperation (see Nadkarni, 2010; Strüver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008). The *common threat* (*MID*) variable is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in Model 9 and 13, and interestingly, it demonstrates a negative association with the dependent variable, which contradicts the theoretical expectations. It is plausible that when confronted with a common threat, states often opt for different institutional arrangements, such as formal alliances. Lastly, the effect of *foreign policy similarity*² is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in Model 11 and 15, and it exhibits a positive association with the dependent variable. Since the effect of both *foreign policy similarity* and its squared is positive, this suggests that as preferences become more similar, the effect becomes stronger, supporting the argument that informal institutions are more likely to emerge under conditions of preference homogeneity (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2009; Whytock, 2007). Nevertheless, the findings regarding these latter two factors remain inconclusive.

The finding that dyads with high volumes of bilateral trade are more likely to form these informal arrangements is not surprising, given that many authors emphasize this dimension of cooperation within strategic partnerships (see Nadkarni, 2010; Strüver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008). For instance, Wilkins (2008, pp. 365–66) observes that since the concept of “strategic partnership” originated from the business world, economic cooperation often takes center stage in collaborative activities. In practice, the founding documents of many partnerships, such as the Australia–France (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, 2017), Japan–United Arab Emirates (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014), and South Korea–India (South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010) declarations on strategic partnership, include provisions to boost trade and economic relations. As an example, the 2017 “Joint statement of enhanced strategic partnership between Australia and

France” commits the two parties to “intensify their dialogue on international economic policy and breathe new momentum into bilateral trade and investment,” including through regular ministerial meetings on trade and economic matters (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, 2017).

Moving forward, I examine the set of explanations categorized under power-oriented approaches. These factors revolve around the influence wielded by both powerful and weaker actors and the balance of power among them. This includes considering the general preference of powerful actors for informality (see Stone, 2011, and Vabulas & Snidal, 2013), as well as the potential utilization of strategic partnerships as a means to pursue primacy, as suggested by Kay (2000, p. 16). In alignment with the existing literature and as articulated in the theoretical chapter, I have formulated hypotheses proposing that strategic partnerships are more likely to form when at least one of the states within a dyad is a major power (**H5**), when a substantial power disparity exists between the two dyad members (**H6**), and when at least one member is a rising power (**H7**; see the “Additional Hypotheses on Strategic Partnership Formation” section). For this analysis, I utilize variables *power differential (CINC)*, *major power* status, and *BRICS* membership. Additionally, as a robustness check, I employ alternative operationalizations of these variables, including *power differential (GDP)*, *P5* status, and *regional power* (see the “Independent Variables” section).

Table 25 below presents the results of the analysis. The overarching logic behind the construction of these models follows the same approach as models 9–16. All models share the common attributes of using the dependent variable *BISP onset*, employing independent variables lagged by one year, and incorporating controls for temporal dependence. In Model 17, I incorporate the variables *power differential (CINC)*, *major power* status, and *BRICS* membership. Model 18 utilizes the alternative *power differential (GDP)*, while Model 19 employs the alternative *P5* designation. In Model

20, I include the alternative variable for *regional power*. Once again, Models 21–24 adhere to a parallel rationale, albeit with missing values forward-filled to extend the analysis timeframe. Before delving into the specific results, I first evaluate the overall performance of these models by scrutinizing the pseudo R^2 and the AUC statistic. Pseudo R^2 values range from 0.092 to 0.097, with Model 17 displaying the highest explanatory power for the dependent variable. The AUC statistic varies between 0.776 to 0.795. On average, models with forward-filled values exhibit slightly inferior performance (see Appendix 9). When comparing these statistics to the analysis of the previous set of factors, it becomes evident that power-related factors demonstrate a slightly lower performance.

Table 25. Analysis

| | Model 17 | Model 18 | Model 19 | Model 20 | Model 21 | Model 22 | Model 23 | Model 24 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> |
| Power differential (CINC) | 4.337*** (0.961) | | 4.846*** (0.994) | 7.592*** (0.843) | 4.890*** (0.876) | | 5.270*** (0.909) | 7.907*** (0.770) |
| Major power | 0.805*** (0.136) | 0.791*** (0.130) | | 0.816*** (0.157) | 0.831*** (0.128) | 0.845*** (0.123) | | 0.860*** (0.149) |
| BRICS | 0.791*** (0.130) | 1.184*** (0.116) | 0.671*** (0.126) | | 0.732*** (0.122) | 1.159*** (0.109) | 0.609*** (0.118) | |
| Power differential (GDP) | | 4.474*** (0.852) | | | | 4.532*** (0.781) | | |
| P5 | | | 0.639*** (0.142) | | | | 0.689*** (0.134) | |
| Regional power | | | | 0.668*** (0.167) | | | | 0.687*** (0.159) |
| Time | 0.101 (0.138) | 0.0668 (0.136) | 0.101 (0.138) | 0.104 (0.138) | 0.196 (0.120) | 0.172 (0.120) | 0.196 (0.120) | 0.197 (0.119) |
| Time ² | 0.0145 (0.0105) | 0.0172 (0.0104) | 0.0144 (0.0105) | 0.0141 (0.0105) | 0.00583 (0.00802) | 0.00779 (0.00805) | 0.00579 (0.00802) | 0.00558 (0.00801) |
| Time ³ | -0.000558* (0.000242) | -0.000621** (0.000241) | -0.000556* (0.000242) | -0.000547* (0.000242) | -0.000332* (0.000166) | -0.000377* (0.000167) | -0.000331* (0.000166) | -0.000326* (0.000166) |
| Constant | -9.022*** (0.566) | -9.050*** (0.560) | -8.833*** (0.563) | -9.007*** (0.567) | -9.311*** (0.562) | -9.378*** (0.561) | -9.122*** (0.562) | -9.319*** (0.565) |
| <i>N</i> | 83625 | 80631 | 83625 | 83625 | 93117 | 90153 | 93117 | 93117 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.097 | 0.096 | 0.094 | 0.092 | 0.096 | 0.094 | 0.093 | 0.093 |
| Years | 1993–2017 | 1993–2017 | 1993–2017 | 1993–2017 | 1993–2020 Forward- filled | 1993–2020 Forward- filled | 1993–2020 Forward- filled | 1993–2020 Forward- filled |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Overall, I find that all three factors exert a significant influence on the dependent variable. The *power differential (CINC)* variable is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ across all models) and positively associated with *BISP onset*, consistent across all models and robust to the use of the alternative *power differential (GDP)*. This finding indicates that dyads characterized by a large disparity in material capabilities are much more likely to form strategic partnerships than pairs of states of more equal standing, supporting the argument that power asymmetries motivate states to establish informal institutions (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013). The *major power* variable also attains a statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ across all models) and positive association with the dependent variable, even when the alternative *P5* is used. Similarly, the *BRICS* variable is also statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ across all models) and positive, even when the alternative *regional power* is used. These findings highlight the overall preference of powerful actors for informal institutions (Stone, 2011, 2013), as well as the potential use of strategic partnerships for the pursuit of primacy (Kay, 2000). In isolation, power-related factors appear to play a significant role in the proliferation of these informal arrangements.

When examining the partnerships in the dataset, the majority of them have been formed between states of unequal standing. It is important to note, however, that this is partly due to the nature of case selection, which includes dyads involving G20 countries as one of the members. G20 countries are among the most powerful states in the world. Nevertheless, when assessing the substantive content of these partnerships, many of such asymmetrical arrangements align well with what Morrow (1991) terms the “security-autonomy trade-off.” The weaker state compromises its freedom of action in favor of the powerful in return for security and economic benefits. This is most evident in partnership agreements forged by the United States. For instance, the 2021 “U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership” commits the Ukrainian side to trade liberalization and democratization in exchange for U.S. security assistance (U.S. Department of State, 2021a). Moreover, many partnership agreements between rising powers and other states, such as India and the United

States, include commitments to the reform of existing FIGOs, such as the United Nations Security Council (The White House, 2023), which supports the argument that rising powers often use informal institutions to bypass or challenge formal structures that disadvantage them.

Finally, I investigate explanations pertaining to the domestic-politics perspective. These factors revolve around interactions between different regime types, the inclination of jointly democratic states to cooperate, and the constraints imposed by domestic veto players (see Leeds, 1999; Roger, 2020). In line with the existing literature, I have formulated hypotheses suggesting that dyad members with similar regime types are more likely to form strategic partnerships (**H8**). I expect this tendency to be particularly pronounced among jointly democratic dyads (**H9**). Furthermore, I anticipate that in cases where at least one dyad member faces significant domestic-political constraints, such conditions are also likely to contribute to the formation of strategic partnerships, as the informality of such arrangements aids states in overcoming impediments caused by these constraints (**H10**; see the “Additional Hypotheses on Strategic Partnership Formation” section). To investigate these hypotheses, the following analysis incorporates variables *regime similarity (Polity V)*, *joint democracy (Polity V)*, and *constraints (POLCON)*. Once again, as a robustness check, I employ alternative operationalizations of these variables, including *regime similarity (V-dem)*, *joint democracy (V-dem)*, and *constraints (Polity V)* (see the “Independent Variables” section).

Table 26 below presents the results of the analysis. Once again, the logic behind model construction follows that of models 9–16 and 17–24. All models employ the same dependent variable, *BISP onset*, with independent variables lagged by one year, and they all incorporate controls for temporal dependence. In Model 25, I utilize the variables *regime similarity (Polity V)*, *joint democracy (Polity V)*, and *constraints (POLCON)*. Model 26 introduces the alternative variable *regime similarity (V-dem)*, while Models 27 and 28 incorporate the alternative variables *joint democracy (V-dem)* and *constraints (Polity V)*.

V), respectively. The rationale behind Models 29–32 remains identical, with missing values for all variables forward-filled to extend the analysis timeframe. Consistent with previous analyses, I initially evaluate the overall performance of these models by examining the pseudo R^2 and the AUC statistic. Pseudo R^2 values range from 0.045 to 0.049. No single model stands out in terms of explanatory power. The AUC statistic varies from 0.706 to 0.719. In addition, models with forward-filled values perform slightly worse than models without forward-filled values (see Appendix 9). Among the three sets of variables, those related to domestic-political factors appear to possess the least explanatory power.

Table 26. Analysis

| | Model 25 | Model 26 | Model 27 | Model 28 | Model 29 | Model 30 | Model 31 | Model 32 |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> |
| Regime similarity (Polity V) | -0.00995 (0.0143) | | -0.00260 (0.0124) | -0.0323* (0.0139) | -0.0236 (0.0133) | | -0.00686 (0.0113) | -0.0377** (0.0138) |
| Joint democracy (Polity V) | 0.278 (0.176) | 0.0188 (0.151) | | 0.482** (0.185) | 0.372* (0.166) | 0.0823 (0.139) | | 0.533** (0.182) |
| Constraints (POLCON) | -1.134** (0.423) | -0.949* (0.412) | -1.058* (0.416) | | -1.269*** (0.383) | -1.111** (0.375) | -1.068** (0.370) | |
| Regime similarity (V-dem) | | 0.506 (0.343) | | | | 0.176 (0.312) | | |
| Joint democracy (V-dem) | | | 0.172 (0.150) | | | | 0.0952 (0.137) | |
| Constraints (Polity V) | | | | -0.226*** (0.0520) | | | | -0.212*** (0.0511) |
| Time | 0.143 (0.140) | 0.149 (0.141) | 0.145 (0.140) | 0.233 (0.135) | 0.164 (0.118) | 0.174 (0.119) | 0.175 (0.119) | 0.143 (0.120) |
| Time ² | 0.00997 (0.0106) | 0.00965 (0.0106) | 0.00994 (0.0106) | 0.00204 (0.00934) | 0.00792 (0.00800) | 0.00724 (0.00804) | 0.00720 (0.00808) | 0.00971 (0.00813) |
| Time ³ | -0.000436 (0.000242) | -0.000433 (0.000244) | -0.000438 (0.000244) | -0.000237 (0.000198) | -0.000375* (0.000167) | -0.000362* (0.000167) | -0.000362* (0.000168) | -0.000420* (0.000169) |
| Constant | -7.683*** (0.616) | -7.444*** (0.606) | -7.630*** (0.615) | -7.223*** (0.675) | -7.837*** (0.586) | -7.593*** (0.583) | -7.732*** (0.585) | -7.122*** (0.631) |
| <i>N</i> | 67755 | 67755 | 67755 | 71172 | 76905 | 76905 | 76905 | 75484 |
| Pseudo <i>R</i> ² | 0.049 | 0.049 | 0.049 | 0.046 | 0.046 | 0.045 | 0.045 | 0.046 |
| Years | 1993–2017 | 1993–2017 | 1993–2017 | 1993–2019 | 1993–2020 Forward- filled | 1993–2020 Forward- filled | 1993–2020 Forward- filled | 1993–2020 Forward- filled |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Overall, I find that only the *constraints (POLCON)* variable exhibits a statistically significant and negative association with the dependent variable ($p < 0.05$ in Model 26 and 27, $p < 0.01$ in Model 25, 30, and 31, and $p < 0.001$ in Model 29). This negative association holds consistently across all models and remains robust even when the alternative variable *constraints (Polity V)* is used. However, this variable affects the probability of *BISP onset* in the opposite direction than predicted by theory. It suggests that states with low domestic-political constraints are more likely to forge strategic partnerships. Despite the advantages of informality for bypassing domestic veto players, it appears that the formation of partnerships is more prevalent in situations where the executive dominates other branches of the government, aligning with the notion of partnership-building as a “top-down or elite-driven process” (Wilkins, 2008, p. 364). The evidence regarding the role of the remaining two factors is inconclusive. *Regime similarity (Polity V)* is statistically significant in Model 28 and 32 ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$), albeit exhibiting a negative association with *BISP onset*, contradicting theoretical expectations. On the other hand, *joint democracy (Polity V)* is statistically significant in Model 28 ($p < 0.01$), 29 ($p < 0.05$), and 32 ($p < 0.01$), and positively associated with *BISP onset*.

When examining the process of strategic partnering, the impulse for cooperation almost always originates at the executive level. However, this does not preclude the possibility that such an impulse could originate, for instance, at the legislative level, as seen in certain strategic partnership agreements proposed in the U.S. Congress (see U.S. Congress, 2017, 2019). Likewise, the fact that cooperation within these partnerships sometimes involves state and private enterprises or other actors besides political leadership (see Wilkins, 2008, p. 365) does not diminish the role of the executive. Certain high-profile strategic partnerships, such as the one between China and Russia, are practically synonymous with relations between the presidents of the two countries, who frequently personally deliver joint statements and declarations on their partnership (see Munroe et al., 2022; Putin, 2022). Moreover, the primary focus of partnership cooperation lies in high-level meetings between officials.

In this sense, it seems more likely that strategic partnerships emerge, in part, from the regular interactions, shared interests, and personal sympathies among top-level executives, rather than from interactions between the executive and other branches of the government at the national level.

To assess the relative significance of the different sets of explanations, including the complementarity/substitution argument, I conduct a logistic regression analysis incorporating all the variables above. These results are summarized in Table 27 below. All models utilize the same dependent variable, *BISP onset*, and feature independent variables lagged by one year. Additionally, they include controls for temporal dependence. Model 33 encompasses variables related to the three categories of functionalist, power-oriented, and domestic-politics explanations. In Model 34, I introduce the interaction between the binary *alliance* variable and *common threat (MID)*, while Model 35 incorporates the interaction between the categorical *alliance commitment* variable and *common threat (MID)*. Models 36–38 follow the same approach, except that they incorporate forward-filled values for all variables to extend the analysis timeframe. The pseudo R^2 values range from 0.175 to 0.196, while the AUC statistic varies between 0.879 and 0.896. On average, models featuring the addition of the interaction term perform slightly better, with Model 35 demonstrating the highest explanatory power. Models with forward-filled values exhibit slightly lower performance on average (see Appendix 9). These results remain robust to the use of DCRSEs and year dummies (see Appendix 10–11).

Table 27. Analysis

| | Model 33 | Model 34 | Model 35 | Model 36 | Model 37 | Model 38 |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> |
| Common threat (MID) | -0.182 (0.175) | 0.535* (0.215) | 0.515* (0.215) | -0.136 (0.155) | 0.481** (0.186) | 0.462* (0.186) |
| Trade value log | 1.131*** (0.0746) | 1.072*** (0.0818) | 1.101*** (0.0835) | 1.028*** (0.0640) | 1.000*** (0.0699) | 1.029*** (0.0723) |
| Foreign policy similarity | 0.205 (0.204) | 0.0843 (0.213) | 0.210 (0.207) | 0.164 (0.179) | 0.107 (0.181) | 0.218 (0.178) |
| Foreign policy similarity ² | 0.0820 (0.0573) | 0.0343 (0.0609) | 0.0685 (0.0583) | 0.0551 (0.0504) | 0.0238 (0.0517) | 0.0526 (0.0505) |
| Power differential (CINC) | -0.532 (1.317) | -0.0347 (1.364) | 0.283 (1.402) | 1.578 (1.098) | 1.935 (1.144) | 2.283 (1.179) |
| Major power | 0.179 (0.173) | 0.145 (0.175) | 0.115 (0.172) | 0.324* (0.154) | 0.317* (0.155) | 0.297 (0.153) |
| BRICS | 1.198*** (0.167) | 1.179*** (0.174) | 1.059*** (0.178) | 1.012*** (0.156) | 0.978*** (0.161) | 0.845*** (0.165) |
| Regime similarity (Polity V) | -0.0364* (0.0167) | -0.0438* (0.0172) | -0.0411* (0.0175) | -0.0417** (0.0139) | -0.0464** (0.0141) | -0.0428** (0.0144) |
| Joint democracy (Polity V) | 0.585* (0.234) | 0.697** (0.241) | 0.808*** (0.240) | 0.601** (0.198) | 0.706*** (0.204) | 0.803*** (0.203) |
| Constraints (POLCON) | -1.320** (0.463) | -1.228* (0.484) | -1.265* (0.504) | -1.236** (0.409) | -1.190** (0.422) | -1.192** (0.435) |
| Alliance | | 0.767*** (0.179) | | | 0.507** (0.158) | |
| Common threat * Alliance | | -1.337*** (0.297) | | | -1.160*** (0.268) | |
| Low commitment | | | 0.898*** (0.187) | | | 0.617*** (0.167) |
| High commitment | | | 0.340 (0.290) | | | 0.0776 (0.272) |
| Common threat * Low commitment | | | -1.127*** (0.340) | | | -0.871** (0.317) |
| Common threat * High commitment | | | -1.418*** (0.408) | | | -1.275*** (0.369) |
| Constant | -11.45*** (0.735) | -11.73*** (0.733) | -11.67*** (0.732) | -11.05*** (0.589) | -11.26*** (0.590) | -11.19*** (0.588) |
| N | 59361 | 59361 | 59361 | 74205 | 74205 | 74205 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.184 | 0.193 | 0.196 | 0.175 | 0.180 | 0.184 |
| Years | 1993– 2015 | 1993– 2015 | 1993– 2015 | 1993– 2020 | 1993– 2020 | 1993– 2020 |
| | | | | Forward- filled | Forward- filled | Forward- filled |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; Temporal controls hidden; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

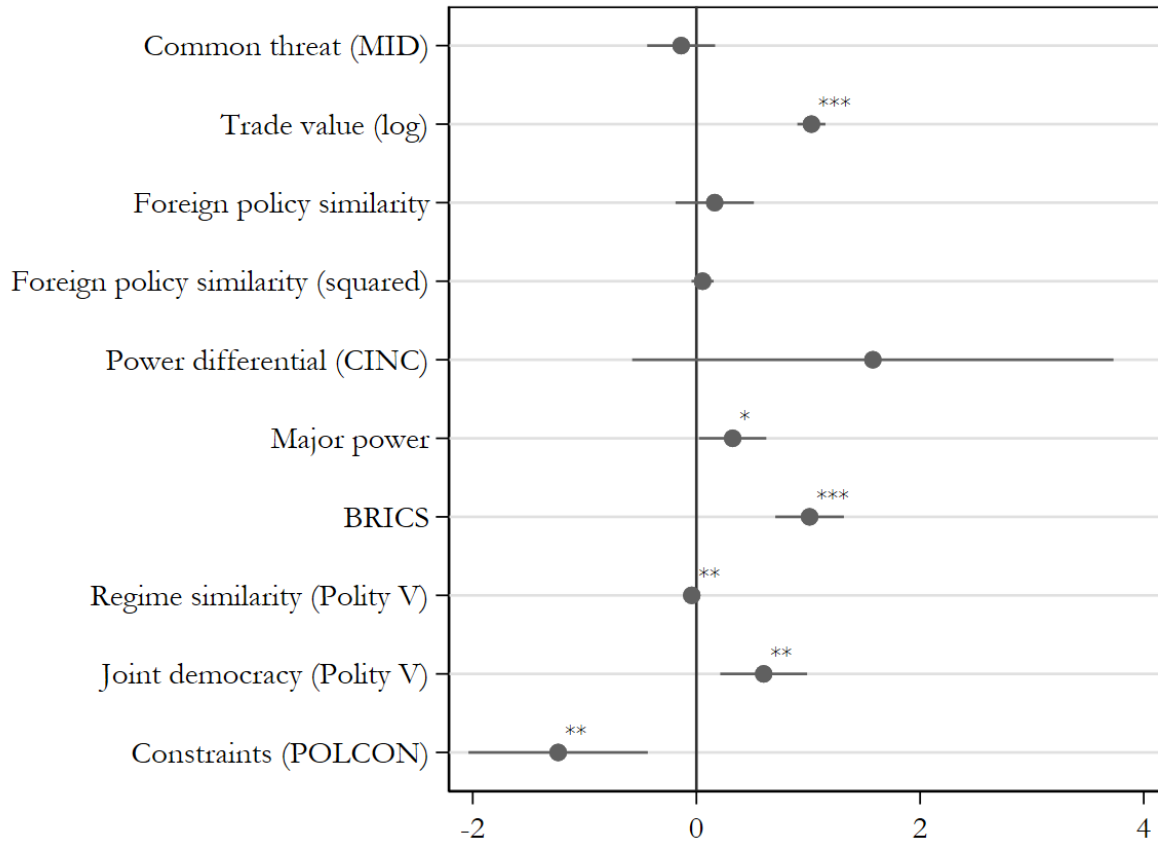
When all independent variables are included in one model, the domestic-political factors emerge as the most consistently significant predictors of *BISP onset*. This is in contrast to models without additional explanation controls (see Model 25–32). The *regime similarity (Polity V)* variable is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$ in models 33–35 and $p < 0.01$ in models 36–38) and negatively associated with the dependent variable. This suggests that politically dissimilar regimes are more likely to establish strategic partnerships, contradicting theoretical expectations. Moreover, the *joint democracy (Polity V)* variable is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$ in Model 33, $p < 0.01$ in Model 34 and 36, and $p < 0.001$ in Model 35, 37, and 38) and positively associated with *BISP onset*, indicating that jointly democratic dyads are more likely to forge strategic partnerships. Overall, these findings suggest that while jointly democratic dyads are generally more inclined to cooperate, including through strategic partnerships, the informal nature of these arrangements may enable otherwise antagonistic regimes to achieve some level of cooperation. Because strategic partnerships impose relatively few costs on the parties, this may make democracies – which may otherwise be concerned about defection – more willing to cooperate with their less democratic counterparts.

Consider, for example, the strategic partnerships established by China. The country has successfully formed strategic ties with several democratic regimes, including Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, despite being an autocracy. In contrast, China's track record in maintaining formal alliances with democratic counterparts appears to be limited. Its primary allies predominantly consist of Central- and East-Asian states, many of which are, at best, flawed democracies, such as Kazakhstan, and, at worst, full autocracies, such as North Korea. One plausible explanation for this empirical trend, as suggested earlier, is that many democracies possess pragmatic incentives to collaborate with China, often driven by trade dependencies. However, these democracies may find committing to formal treaties impractical due to potential domestic audience costs. Strategic partnerships provide democratic states with a means to

circumvent these costs. They do so by keeping cooperation confidential, given the low profile of these arrangements, and by reducing the impact of potential reputational damage due to the relatively low costs of defection. This finding contrasts with the conclusions of Leeds (1999) and Carlson and Koremenos (2021), who found that mixed-regime dyads are less likely to cooperate.

Another finding that contradicts theoretical expectations concerns the effect of *constraints* (*POLCON*), which achieves statistical significance ($p < 0.01$ in Model 33 and 36–38, and $p < 0.05$ in Model 34 and 35) and shows a negative association with the dependent variable. As previously suggested, this outcome may be attributed to the fact that strategic partnership cooperation involves a high level of engagement between the executive branches of states, particularly the heads of state/government and foreign affairs ministers, with minimal participation from other branches of government. It is not so much that states form partnerships to bypass domestic veto players, but rather that these partnerships are inherently executive-driven endeavors, characterized as “top-down or elite-driven” (Wilkins, 2008, p. 364). Additionally, I find that the impact of the *trade value log* and *BRICS* variables remains consistently significant ($p < 0.001$ for both variables across all models) and positively associated with *BISP onset* across all models. These findings underscore the relative importance of partnerships in facilitating economic cooperation (see Nadkarni, 2010; Parameswaran, 2014; Wilkins, 2008) and managing power shifts (see Kay, 2000). The remaining variables did not consistently exhibit significant effects. Figure 9 below visualizes the effect sizes of all variables.

Figure 9. Coefficient plot

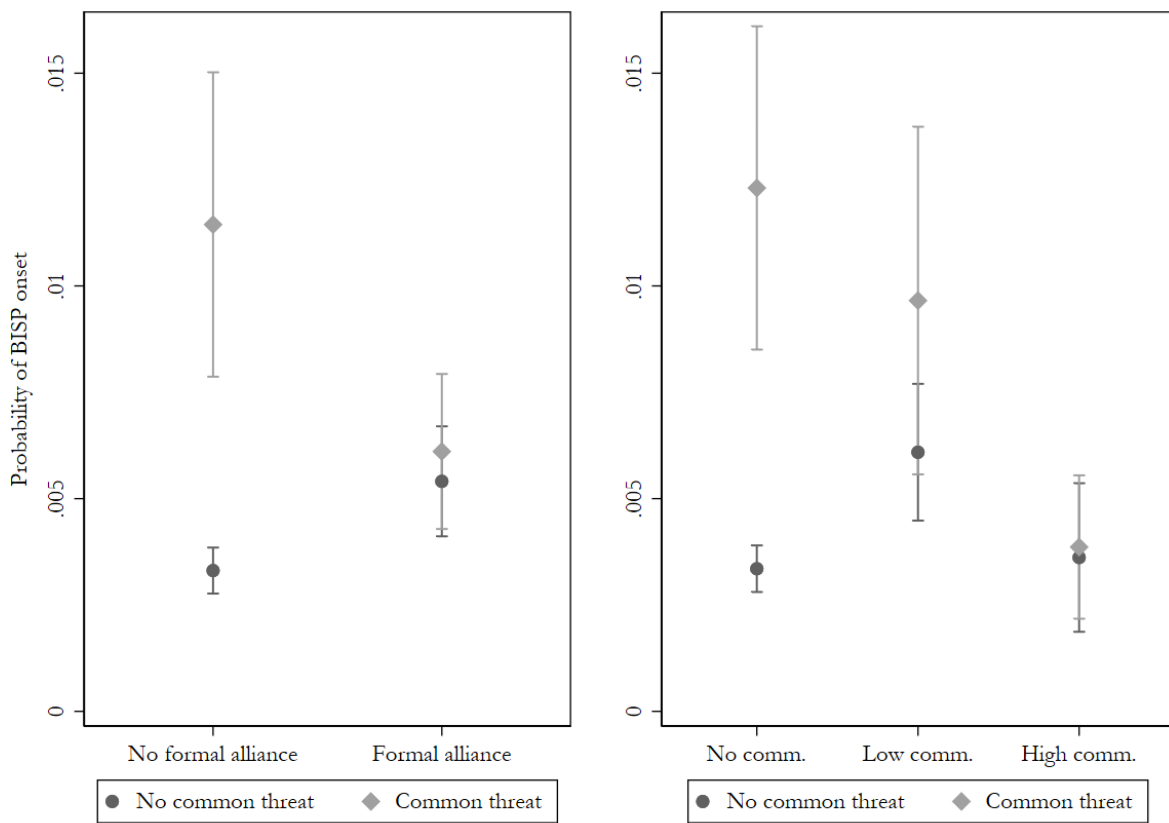


Note: Results of the logistic regression, Model 36; 95% confidence intervals (CIs). The effect of variables whose intervals overlap with the vertical line is statistically indistinguishable from zero. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Examining the interaction between *alliance/alliance commitment* and *common threat (MID)*, I find that both the *alliance * common threat (MID)* and *alliance commitment * common threat (MID)* interaction terms are statistically significant after controlling for additional factors. As in the previous section, this leads me to conclude that the relationship between the presence of alliance ties and the onset of strategic partnerships is contingent upon the presence of common threats. To better understand these interactions and assess hypotheses **H1a–H1b**, I calculate (see Table 28) and plot predictive margins (see Figure 10). The figure below illustrates that, when other factors are considered, the probability of *BISP onset* is highest for pairs of states without joint membership in a formal alliance that also face a common threat. Conversely, the probability of *BISP onset* is lowest for pairs of states without joint

membership in a formal alliance that do not face a common threat. This holds true whether the *alliance* or *alliance commitment* variable is used. Further analysis of alliance membership by commitment type reveals that pairs of states belonging to “high commitment” alliances are less inclined to form partnerships compared to those in “low commitment” alliances. The likelihood of *BISP onset* for the latter group increases in the presence of common threats, albeit not significantly.

Figure 10. Adjusted predictions of *Alliance/Alliance commitment* by *Common threat*



Note: 95% CIs. The plot on the left depicts predictive margins of the *alliance * common threat (MID)* interaction based on the results of Model 37. The plot on the right depicts predictive margins of the *alliance commitment * common threat (MID)* interaction from Model 38.

Table 28. Predictive margins of *alliance/alliance commitment * common threat (MID)*

| | Margin | Std. err. | z | P > z | 95% conf. interval | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|--------------------|----------|
| No common threat, No formal alliance | .0033098 | .0002759 | 12.00 | 0.000 | .0027691 | .0038504 |
| No common threat, Formal alliance | .0054068 | .0006596 | 8.20 | 0.000 | .0041139 | .0066996 |
| Common threat, No formal alliance | .0114439 | .0018255 | 6.27 | 0.000 | .0078661 | .0150217 |
| Common threat, Formal alliance | .0061087 | .0009296 | 6.57 | 0.000 | .0042867 | .0079307 |
| No common threat, No commitment | .003353 | .0002792 | 12.01 | 0.000 | .0028058 | .0039003 |
| No common threat, Low commitment | .0060908 | .0008201 | 7.43 | 0.000 | .0044835 | .0076981 |
| No common threat, High commitment | .0036162 | .0008909 | 4.06 | 0.000 | .00187 | .0053625 |
| Common threat, No commitment | .0123029 | .0019387 | 6.35 | 0.000 | .0085031 | .0161027 |
| Common threat, Low commitment | .0096558 | .0020846 | 4.63 | 0.000 | .0055701 | .0137414 |
| Common threat, High commitment | .0038628 | .0008598 | 4.49 | 0.000 | .0021777 | .005548 |

Therefore, when considering other factors, the conditions of substitution (common threats in the absence of formal alliance ties) emerge as the most conducive to the formation of strategic partnerships, supporting **H1a**. Again, however, this does not necessarily imply that substitutive partnerships are prevalent empirically (see Tables 20 and 23). Furthermore, the results of the full model support **H3**, **H7**, and **H9**, highlighting the role of economic interests, rising powers' preferences, and cooperation among jointly democratic dyads, respectively. Interestingly, the results contradict **H8** and **H10** concerning regime similarity and domestic-political constraints. I speculate that the low-cost nature of strategic partnerships fosters cooperation among mixed-regime dyads that might otherwise hesitate due to concerns about defection and reputational damage. Moreover, the finding that states with significant constraints on the executive branch are less likely to forge partnerships suggests that partnerships are inherently executive-driven endeavors rather than tools for bypassing domestic opposition. The null findings for **H2**, **H4**, **H5**, and **H6** indicate that common threats, foreign policy similarity, power disparities, and major power status have overall limited influence on *BISP onset*.

As noted in the previous chapter, it is important to keep in mind that, although the results presented here may provide some initial evidence on the mechanisms underlying the formation of strategic partnerships in general, they are ultimately confined to the specific sample under study—the

universe of cases of dyads with the involvement of G20 countries as one of the members. The scope of case selection likely introduces an estimation bias, particularly when it comes to estimating the effects of variables such as *power differential (CINC)*, *major power*, and *BRICS*, since the majority of dyads in the sample are characterized by significant power asymmetry. We cannot rule out the possibility that the effects of certain variables, or lack thereof, is due to the specificity of the scope of case selection.

5.3. Exploratory Analysis 1: Building Blocks or Stumbling Blocks?

In the preceding section, I investigated whether strategic partnerships primarily function as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to formal alliances. A closely related yet distinct question pertains to whether these partnerships act as “building blocks” toward or “stumbling blocks” for formal alliances. In essence, when states establish strategic partnerships, does this make them more or less likely to formalize their cooperative arrangements, such as through the establishment of a formal alliance? Institutionalist International Relations scholarship suggests that both are possible. For example, Abbott and Snidal (2000, p. 423) acknowledge that while “soft law” can be desirable on its own, it may also function as an interim step toward “hard law,” leading to progressive “hardening” of institutionalized cooperation. States might opt for “soft law” when the formal alternative is not immediately available, potentially due to substantial negotiating and adoption costs, with the intention of paving the way for formal cooperation (Schaffer & Pollack, 2010, p. 722). Likewise, Vabulas and Snidal (2013, pp. 212–13) propose that IIGOs may act as “building blocks” by enabling states to appreciate the benefits of increasing formalization, as well as “stumbling blocks” as certain states might exploit them for their own gain, obstructing the development of formal alternatives.

In this exploratory analysis, I assume that, similar to other informal institutions, strategic partnerships might provide states with opportunities to either facilitate or hinder the emergence of their formal counterparts: Military alliances. To investigate this question, I will examine the formation of formal alliances using the same undirected dyadic BTSCS design and estimation techniques utilized in the main analysis. I will employ a total of four dependent variables, drawing inspiration from Edry, Johnson, and Leeds (2023), who argue that the rationale behind the establishment of defense pacts, consultation pacts, and neutrality/non-aggression pacts varies. For example, the formation of defense pacts is often driven by external threats, while consultation pacts tend to emerge in response to internal

threats. It is plausible that the impact of strategic partnership ties on the likelihood of alliance formation differs based on the types of obligations and provisions present in these newly formed alliances. The binary variable *alliance onset* indicates whether the two states within a dyad have established any form of alliance in a given year. *Defense pact onset*, *consultation pact onset*, and *neutrality/non-aggression pact onset* then break down this dependent variable by the specific types of obligations and provisions. Data come from the “ATOP (v5)” dataset (Leeds et al., 2002).

The main independent variable of interest is *BISP tie (term.)*, indicating whether the two states in a dyad had a strategic partnership in a given year (see the “Data Collection and the Dependent Variable” section). To reduce omitted variable bias, I employ several control variables corresponding to some frequently discussed factors in the literature on alliance formation (e.g., Crescenzi et al., 2012; Gibler & Wohlforth, 2006; Lai & Reiter, 2000). *Common threat* is a binary variable indicating whether the two countries stood on the same side of a militarized interstate dispute against the same enemy at some point during the last ten years. *Foreign policy similarity* captures the absolute difference in the two countries’ ideal points based on voting in the United Nations General Assembly, multiplied by -1. *Regime similarity* captures the absolute difference in the two countries’ Polity V scores, also multiplied by -1. *Joint democracy* indicates whether both sides of a dyad were democracies. *Major power* indicates whether at least one of the two sides was a major power. The operationalization of these variables is identical to the variables used in the main analysis. Additionally, I incorporate the *distance* variable, which measures the distance between the capitals of the two countries (Gleditsch, n.d.), and controls for the existence of previous alliance commitments (Edry et al., 2023).

Table 29. Logistic regression of alliance formation

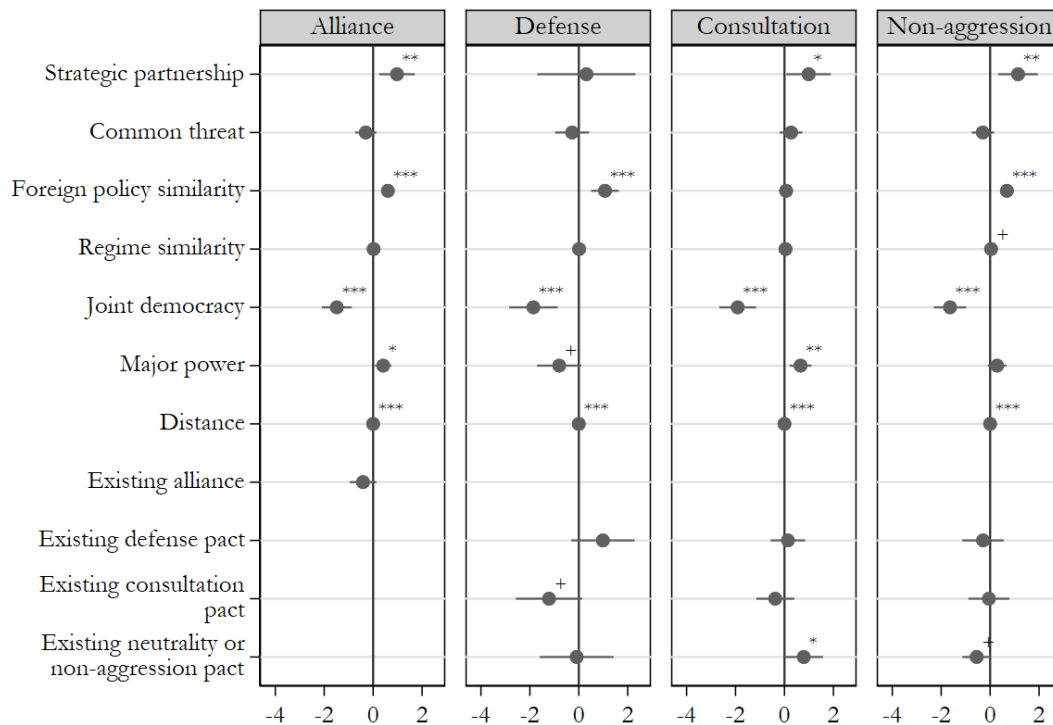
| | Model 39 | Model 40 | Model 41 | Model 42 |
|---|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> |
| Dependent variable | Alliance onset | Defense pact onset | Consultation pact onset | Neutrality / non-aggression pact onset |
| BISP tie (term.) | 0.974** (0.371) | 0.309 (1.024) | 0.987* (0.463) | 1.141** (0.413) |
| Common threat | -0.302 (0.223) | -0.274 (0.352) | 0.269 (0.236) | -0.298 (0.232) |
| Foreign policy similarity | 0.602*** (0.132) | 1.070*** (0.289) | 0.0650 (0.144) | 0.686*** (0.143) |
| Regime similarity | 0.0177 (0.0189) | 0.0117 (0.0396) | 0.0418 (0.0286) | 0.0381 (0.0199) |
| Joint democracy | -1.485*** (0.309) | -1.856*** (0.506) | -1.911*** (0.385) | -1.639*** (0.340) |
| Major power | 0.411* (0.171) | -0.800 (0.462) | 0.658** (0.227) | 0.284 (0.196) |
| Distance | -0.000357*** (0.0000440) | -0.00101*** (0.000144) | -0.000380*** (0.0000628) | -0.000385*** (0.0000480) |
| Existing alliance | -0.414 (0.280) | | | |
| Existing defense pact | | 0.984 (0.659) | 0.141 (0.360) | -0.287 (0.432) |
| Existing consultation pact | | -1.215 (0.692) | -0.377 (0.399) | -0.0490 (0.428) |
| Existing neutrality/non-aggression pact | | -0.0878 (0.769) | 0.787* (0.401) | -0.552 (0.299) |
| Time since last alliance onset | -0.108 (0.164) | -2.514*** (0.660) | -0.530** (0.170) | 0.000206 (0.194) |
| Time since last alliance onset ² | 0.00219 (0.0234) | 0.367* (0.160) | 0.0326 (0.0215) | -0.00704 (0.0280) |
| Time since last alliance onset ³ | -0.000337 (0.000930) | -0.0153 (0.00937) | -0.000845 (0.000748) | -0.000134 (0.00112) |
| Constant | -1.697*** (0.492) | 1.037 (1.004) | -2.462*** (0.679) | -1.551** (0.549) |
| <i>N</i> | 62729 | 62729 | 62729 | 62729 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.206 | 0.502 | 0.285 | 0.212 |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

To assess the impact of strategic partnerships on the formation of formal alliances, I employed the logistic regression method with temporal controls (Carter & Signorino, 2010). The results are outlined in Table 29. In Models 39, 40, 41, and 42, I utilized *alliance onset*, *defense pact onset*, *consultation pact onset*, and *neutrality/non-aggression pact onset*, respectively, as the dependent variables. All independent

variables are lagged by one year. Overall, my findings indicate that strategic partners are significantly more likely to establish alliances, including consultation and neutrality/non-aggression pacts, but not defense pacts. The *BISP tie (term.)* variable exhibits statistical significance and a positive association with the dependent variable in Model 39 ($p < 0.01$), Model 41 ($p < 0.05$), and Model 42 ($p < 0.01$). Other statistically significant predictors include *foreign policy similarity*, *joint democracy*, *major power*, and *distance*, although the impact of the *joint democracy* variable on formal alliance formation contradicts conventional expectations (cf. Gibler & Wohlforth, 2006). Figure 11 depicts a coefficient plot for comparing effect sizes. The absence of a statistically significant effect for the *common threat* variable might be attributed to the restricted timeframe of the analysis. Defense pacts represented the least common form of alliance established during the observed period.

Figure 11. Coefficient plot for models 1–4



+ $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Given that the presence of strategic partnership ties increases the likelihood of alliance formation, one might conclude that these informal arrangements serve as “stepping stones” toward formal alliances. However, such a characterization could be incorrect unless we examine the broader context. Recall that the *alliance onset* variable indicates whether the two countries in a dyad formed an alliance, whether multilateral or bilateral, in a given year. During the observed period, there were 304 alliance onsets, 134 defense pact onsets, 215 consultation pact onsets, and 188 neutrality/non-aggression pact onsets at the dyadic level. However, only a small fraction of these events took place against the backdrop of an existing BISP tie, corresponding to 23 alliance onsets, 2 defense pact onsets, 15 consultation pact onsets, and 20 neutrality/non-aggression pact onsets. This suggests that the effect of the *BISP tie (term.)* variable is driven by a relatively small number of observations. Moreover, the vast majority of these newly formed alliances did not represent a substantial change in the degree of formalization or “hardening” of states’ commitments. As shown in Table 30 below, overall, there were only six instances where states had no mutual alliance commitments before establishing a new alliance against the backdrop of a strategic partnership.

Table 30. Alliance commitments before and after BISP onset

| Dyad | BISP onset | Alliance commitments before BISP onset | Alliance onset after BISP onset | New alliance commitments after BISP onset | Possible stepping stone? |
|-------------|-------------------|---|--|--|---------------------------------|
| USA–IRQ | 2008 | None | 2008 | Consultation, non-aggression | No |
| USA–AFG | 2012 | None | 2012 | Consultation | No |
| USA–UZB | 2002 | Non-aggression | 2002 | Consultation | No |
| ITA–LIB | 2008 | None | 2008 | Non-aggression | No |
| RUS–UKR | 1997 | Non-aggression | 1997 | Consultation, non-aggression | No |
| RUS–TKM | 2017 | Consultation, non-aggression | 2017 | Non-aggression | No |
| RUS–TAJ | 2003 | Defense, consultation, neutrality, non-aggression | 2007 | Consultation, non-aggression | No |
| RUS–UZB | 2004 | Defense, consultation, non-aggression | 2004 | Non-aggression | No |
| | - | - | 2005 | Defense, consultation | No |
| | - | - | 2007 | Consultation, non-aggression | No |
| RUS–KZK | 2007 | Defense, consultation, non-aggression | 2007 | Consultation, non-aggression | No |
| | - | - | 2013 | Neutrality/non-aggression | No |
| RUS–CHN | 1996 | Non-aggression | 1996 | Consultation, non-aggression | No |
| | - | Consultation, non-aggression | 2001 | Consultation, non-aggression | No |
| | - | - | 2007 | Consultation, non-aggression | No |
| CHN–UKR | 2011 | Non-aggression | 2013 | Consultation, non-aggression | No |
| CHN–BLR | 2013 | None | 2015 | Non-aggression | Yes |
| SAF–LES | 2001 | Non-aggression | 2001 | Defense, consultation, non-aggression | No |
| SAF–ALG | 2000 | None | 2000 | Non-aggression | No |
| CHN–TKM | 2013 | None | 2014 | Consultation, non-aggression | Yes |
| CHN–UZB | 2012 | Consultation, non-aggression | 2013 | Non-aggression | No |
| CHN–KZK | 2005 | Consultation, non-aggression | 2007 | Consultation, non-aggression | No |
| CHN–PAK | 2005 | Non-aggression | 2005 | Non-aggression | No |

What, if any, partnerships then could have served as “stepping stones” to formal alliances? Firstly, I eliminate all candidates whose establishment coincided with alliance formation.⁷⁶ In such instances, it is unlikely that states could have learned the benefits of formalizing their cooperation over such a short period of time. Additionally, it is probable that at least some of the newly formed alliances were established before the onset of strategic partnership cooperation if both events occurred in the same year. Secondly, I eliminate all instances where the level of new alliance commitment did not exceed the pre-existing level (defense pact > consultation and neutrality/non-aggression pact > none). Applying these criteria, we are left with only two possible candidates for the “stepping stone” proposition: China-Belarus and China-Turkmenistan partnerships. In both cases, the two countries entered into a low commitment alliance with provisions for consultation and non-aggression after they had established a strategic partnership, without any prior alliance commitments. This finding makes it unlikely that partnerships can serve as an interim step toward formal alliances. A more plausible explanation for the statistically significant effect of the *BISP tie (term.)* variable is that partnership ties signify shared interests, motivating states to form alliances.

⁷⁶ In the regression analysis, I deal with this issue by lagging the *BISP tie (term.)* variable by one year.

5.4. Exploratory Analysis 2: Armed Conflict and Arms Trade

In the preceding sections, I examined the circumstances under which states establish strategic partnerships. While authors attribute diverse functions to these informal arrangements, including those discussed in the section titled “Function: Balancing, Issue-Linkage, Reassurance,” uncertainty remains about their impact on state behavior. Essentially, we lack insights into when and how strategic partnerships matter. Drawing inspiration from Brandon J. Kinne (2020), who analyzes the effects of DCAs (Defense Cooperation Agreements) on state behavior in two contexts—armed conflict and bilateral arms trade—this exploratory analysis aims to illustrate the potential uses of the “BISP dataset v1.0” for different purposes. In doing so, I will use the *BISP tie* variable for the analysis of the onset of MIDs (Militarized Interstate Disputes) – relaxing the assumption of termination after one party uses military force against another – and *BISP tie (term.)* variable for the analysis of bilateral arms trade.⁷⁷ In both cases, I rely on the undirected dyadic TSCS design. Following the convention in the research on MIDs, I employ the logistic regression method with temporal controls (see Bennett & Stam, 2000). For the analysis of arms trade, I employ the fixed-effects OLS regression method. Control variables for each analysis correspond to Kinne (2020).

Before proceeding further, it is important to note that this exploratory analysis does not aim to develop causal explanations. Relatedly, the methods and model specifications used here cannot be used to estimate causal relationships, as they do not account for the problem of “self-selection” (see Downs et al., 1996; Fuhrmann & Lupu, 2016). Whether the two states become strategic partners may partly depend on prior patterns of friendly relations and levels of bilateral arms trade, thus resulting in states “self-selecting” into partnerships that do not significantly alter their behavior. Consequently,

⁷⁷ I relax the assumption that BISP ceases upon one party using force against another, as failing to do so could introduce estimation bias. This is due to the endogenous nature of the coding for termination in the *BISP tie (term.)* variable vis-à-vis *MID onset*.

we cannot be sure whether partnerships cause their members to be less hostile toward each other or to engage in higher levels of arms trade, or whether the reverse is true—that is, the absence of conflict and higher levels of arms trade cause states to establish strategic partnerships. Regardless, my aim is mainly to illustrate other potential uses of the “BISP dataset v1.0.” The results may hint at potential behavioral effects of strategic partnerships, but they should not be interpreted as evidence of causal relationships.⁷⁸

The analysis of armed conflict relies on a dichotomous dependent variable, *MID onset*, indicating whether the two countries within a dyad stood at opposing sides of an MID in a given year (Maoz et al., 2018). We might expect that the presence of a strategic partnership tie will discourage parties from entering an MID, as many such agreements include pledges of mutual non-aggression and non-interferences (see the “Strategic Partnership Portfolios of Selected Countries” section). An example is China’s strategic partnership diplomacy, which aims at establishing “stable relations without targeting any third party” (Goldstein, 2005, p. 134). However, countries enter (and refrain from entering) armed conflict due to a host of other reasons. I, therefore, control for the influence of other variables. *IGOs* denotes the count of FIGO memberships both countries share (Pevehouse et al., 2019). *Trade_{log}* measures the value of bilateral merchandise trade between the two countries (Barbieri et al., 2009). *Alliance* is a binary variable indicating whether the two countries were allied (Leeds et al., 2002). *Joint democracy* is a binary variable capturing jointly democratic dyads (Marshall & Gurr, 2020). *Power (lower)* takes the lower of the two countries’ CINC scores (Singer et al., 1972). Lastly, *GDP (lower)* measures the lower gross domestic product of the two countries.

The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 31 below. Model 43 and 44 examine the dichotomous *MID onset* variable, utilizing logit and probit regression for robustness. As an additional

⁷⁸ I thank the reviewer, Jan Karlas, for highlighting the issue of potential reverse causality.

robustness check, Model 45 and 46 assess the *MID hostility level* variable as an alternative to *MID onset*. This ordinal variable captures the highest hostility level, ranging from 0 to 4 (from “none” to “interstate war”), instead of just onset. Additionally, Model 47 and 48 employ fixed-effects and random-effects OLS regression, respectively, to accommodate the continuous nature of this alternative dependent variable. All independent variables are lagged by one year. Moreover, Model 43 and 44 incorporates controls for temporal dependence, employing the approach developed by Carter and Signorino (2010). The results indicate that strategic partners are equally likely (or unlikely) to engage in armed conflict with each other as compared to other pairs of countries. The *BISP tie* variable does not exhibit a statistically significant association with either *MID onset* or *MID hostility level*. Statistically significant variables include *IGOs*, *alliance*, *joint democracy*, *power (lower)*, and *GDP (lower)*, with the first two showing a contrary direction than might be anticipated.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ This could be attributed to the case selection, as the sample solely encompasses dyads involving G20 countries as one of the members.

Table 31. Analysis of MID onset

| | Model 43 | Model 44 | Model 45 | Model 46 |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Probit</i> | <i>Fixed-effects OLS</i> | <i>Random-effects OLS</i> |
| BISP tie | 0.0158 (0.281) | -0.000248 (0.120) | 0.00217 (0.0164) | 0.00346 (0.0142) |
| IGOs | 0.0192** (0.00725) | 0.00806** (0.00311) | 0.00101* (0.000501) | 0.000861* (0.000351) |
| Trade _{log} | 0.0954 (0.147) | 0.0698 (0.0558) | 0.000172 (0.00426) | 0.00118 (0.00294) |
| Alliance | 1.255*** (0.254) | 0.536*** (0.0953) | -0.00664 (0.00942) | 0.00759 (0.00694) |
| Joint democracy | -1.443*** (0.273) | -0.648*** (0.0983) | -0.0185*** (0.00499) | -0.0196*** (0.00432) |
| Power (lower) | 10.47** (4.062) | 7.291*** (2.091) | -1.233 (3.608) | 4.846*** (1.043) |
| GDP (lower) | 0.492* (0.211) | 0.214** (0.0792) | -0.0113 (0.0104) | -0.0105 (0.00697) |
| Peace years | -1.447*** (0.195) | -0.587*** (0.0686) | | |
| Peace years ² | 0.134*** (0.0217) | 0.0531*** (0.00737) | | |
| Peace years ³ | -0.00373*** (0.000674) | -0.00145*** (0.000224) | | |
| Constant | -7.930*** (2.084) | -3.852*** (0.759) | 0.105 (0.0905) | 0.0829 (0.0595) |
| <i>N</i> | 58692 | 58692 | 58692 | 58692 |
| <i>Dependent variable</i> | MID onset | MID onset | MID hostility level | MID hostility level |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

For the second analysis, I utilize the continuous *arms trade* _{log} variable, which captures the sum of the trend-indicator values of major conventional arms imports and exports within a dyad, log-transformed. The data originates from the “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.”⁸⁰ Prior authors have underscored how strategic partnerships can function as tools for “limited” hard balancing, fostering arms and technology transfers between states (see Brooks & Wohlforth, 2005, pp. 83–84; Paul, 2018). In practical terms, as detailed in the descriptive chapter, partnership agreements commonly involve (political) commitments to bolstered defense cooperation (see the “Strategic Partnership Portfolios of

⁸⁰ Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>

Selected Countries” section). An illustrative instance is the 2021 “U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership” (U.S. Department of State, 2021a). Thus, we might anticipate that strategic partners would exhibit higher levels of arms trade in comparison to other state pairs. However, the arms trade volume depends on various additional factors. In this analysis, I incorporate the *trade log*, *alliance*, *joint democracy*, *power (lower)*, and *GDP (lower)* variables described earlier, along with *foreign policy similarity*, measured as the absolute difference in ideal points of the two countries and multiplied by -1, sourced from the “UNGA voting data” (Voeten et al., 2009).

Table 32 presents the results of four models. In Models 47 and 48, I use the *BISP tie* variable as the sole predictor, while in Models 48 and 50, I control for the influence of additional factors. Models 47 and 48 apply the fixed-effects OLS regression method, whereas Models 49 and 50 use the random-effects OLS regression method for robustness. All independent variables are lagged by one year. Additionally, all models include the lagged dependent variable as a control. On the whole, the analysis demonstrates that strategic partnerships exert considerable influence over bilateral arms trade. The *BISP tie* variable attains a statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and positive correlation with *arms trade log*, consistently observed across all models. This pattern holds true whether the *BISP tie* is employed as the sole predictor or alongside additional controls. In Figure 12 below I illustrate the size of the effect through the plot of predictive margins. The only two other predictors that exhibit a statistically significant correlation with the dependent variable in both Models 48 and 50 are *trade log* and *GDP (lower)*. Overall, the four models effectively account for variance in *arms trade log* at the dyadic level (as indicated by the R^2 *between*), but this explanatory power is notably weaker for temporal variance (as shown by the R^2 *within*).

Table 32. Analysis of arms trade

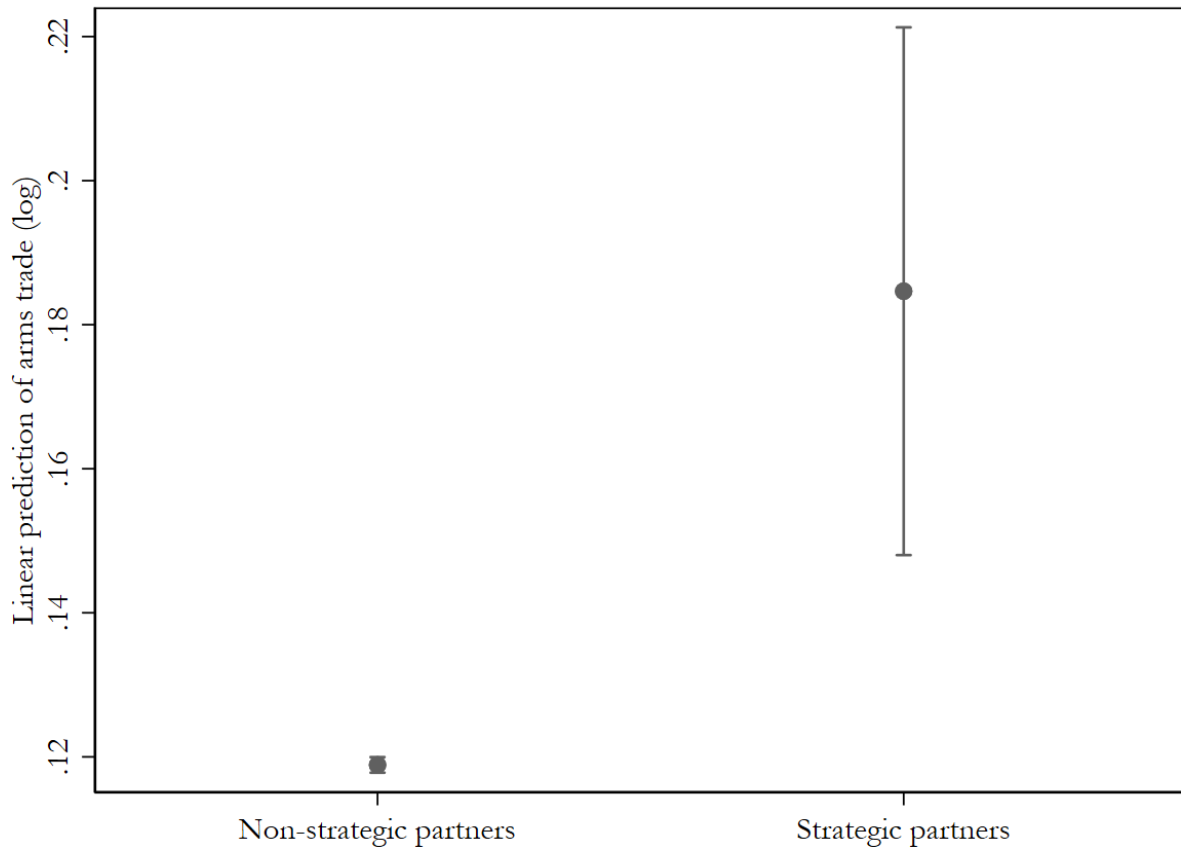
| | Model 47 <i>Fixed-effects</i> OLS | Model 48 <i>Fixed-effects</i> OLS | Model 49 <i>Random-effects</i> OLS | Model 50 <i>Random-effects</i> OLS |
|------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| BISP tie | 0.0640 ^{***} (0.0131) | 0.0658 ^{***} (0.0192) | 0.0966 ^{***} (0.0111) | 0.0625 ^{***} (0.0169) |
| Trade (log) | | 0.0107 ^{**} (0.00363) | | 0.0162 ^{***} (0.00198) |
| Alliance | | 0.0191 (0.0124) | | 0.0268 ^{***} (0.00469) |
| Foreign policy similarity | | 0.000732 (0.00367) | | -0.0126 ^{***} (0.00218) |
| Joint democracy | | -0.00496 (0.00388) | | 0.00158 (0.00291) |
| Power (lower) | | 3.003 (3.332) | | 3.160 [*] (1.501) |
| GDP (lower) | | 0.0214 ^{***} (0.00567) | | 0.0115 [*] (0.00453) |
| Lagged DV | 0.439 ^{***} (0.0120) | 0.408 ^{***} (0.0140) | 0.764 ^{***} (0.0127) | 0.731 ^{***} (0.0135) |
| Constant | 0.0542 ^{***} (0.00126) | -0.183 ^{**} (0.0556) | 0.0206 ^{***} (0.00105) | -0.151 ^{***} (0.0429) |
| <i>N</i> | 96596 | 59959 | 96596 | 59959 |
| <i>Years</i> | 1993–2020 | 1993–2014 | 1993–2020 | 1993–2014 |
| <i>R</i> ² : | | | | |
| <i>Within</i> | 0.1953 | 0.1702 | 0.1953 | 0.1695 |
| <i>Between</i> | 0.9953 | 0.9281 | 0.9959 | 0.9576 |
| <i>Overall</i> | 0.5983 | 0.6003 | 0.5983 | 0.6063 |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The results of these additional exploratory analyses suggest that strategic partnerships might have some effect on state behavior, although this influence could be limited, at least when it comes to partnerships established by the G20. While the analysis of armed conflict implies that strategic partners are equally likely as other pairs of states to engage in militarized interstate disputes with each other, the absence of a statistically significant effect should not necessarily indicate that these informal arrangements are inconsequential for states' inclination to avoid conflictual behavior. For instance, as described in the introduction, several of Russia's strategic partners have refrained from condemning its invasion of Ukraine (see Al Jazeera, 2023), with countries such as China and India upholding their

bilateral (political) commitments to non-interference in Russia’s foreign policy and military adventurism in its immediate region. Nonetheless, overall, it is improbable that strategic partnerships themselves substantially alter these states’ behavior compared to their conduct in the absence of such arrangements. Instead, the instances where strategic partners engage in hostile actions toward each other underscore their pragmatic nature (e.g., Chang-Liao, 2023).⁸¹ These arrangements likely carry more significance in scenarios where states’ core interests are not at stake.

Figure 12. Adjusted predictions of *BISP tie* with 95% confidence intervals



Note: Predictive margins of *BISP tie* come from Model 48. Note that the values on Y-axis correspond to the log-transformed version of arms trade.

⁸¹ Militarized interstate disputes involving countries like the United States and Turkey, or China and Russia, did not signify the termination of their respective partnerships (as discussed in the “Data Collection and the Dependent Variable” section). In a way, these partnerships have endured precisely because they do not constrain their members’ freedom of action when it comes to defending one’s core interests.

Similarly, the finding that strategic partners exhibit significantly greater levels of bilateral arms trade than other pairs of states is not necessarily a proof that these arrangements directly prompt states to initiate arms and technology transfers, or that they systematically employ them as tools of “limited” hard balancing. As highlighted by Brooks and Wohlforth (2005, pp. 83–84), practical defense industry interests frequently underlie arms transfers among strategic partners, as exemplified by Russia’s partnerships with China and India. Arguably, an exception to this portrayal can be seen in partnerships involving the United States: Numerous strategic partners of the United States experience substantial U.S. arms imports and security assistance due in part to the security advantages the United States gains from such transfers, contributing to enhanced regional stability. In this context, the partnerships between the United States and Ukraine, as well as the United States and Saudi Arabia, present notable examples. The United States engages in arms transfers to counterbalance the influence of adversarial powers in these regions, specifically Russia and Iran (U.S. Department of State, 2021a; U.S. Department of State, 2021b). Even in this context, however, the extent to which partnerships significantly alter the behavior of states seems somewhat limited.

5.5. Exploratory Analysis 3: Monadic BISP Onset

Recall Figure 2 from the section “Major Temporal and Geographical Trends.” Why do certain G20 members, such as the United States and China, establish more strategic partnerships than others? In the main analysis, I have explored the general conditions that lead pairs of states to establish these informal arrangements. In this section, I aim to briefly examine the factors influencing the proliferation of strategic partnerships at the individual G20 member level. For this analysis, I will utilize a monadic TSCS design, with the dependent variable being *BISP onset (count)*. This design resembles the dyadic BTSCS design used in the main analysis but observes data at the G20 member-year level, rather than dyad-year. The dependent variable, *BISP onset (count)*, represents the count of partnerships formed by a specific G20 member in year t with any country/countries in the international system. Because of the skewed nature of the dependent variable’s value distribution, with an excess of zeroes, I will implement the fixed-effects negative binomial regression (Long & Freese, 2014, p. 507). For the purposes of this analysis, I will utilize a number of independent variables, drawing in part from the expectations outlined in the theoretical chapter.

Firstly, I anticipate that G20 states, recognizing their utility for “soft” and “limited hard” balancing (e.g., Fergusson, 2012; Kay, 2000; Paul, 2018), will be inclined to establish BISPs when faced with external threats. I, therefore, employ the *conflict intensity* variable, which measures the five-year average of the highest hostility level observed across MIDs where the country was involved (for a similar approach, see Kahn & Horowitz, 2023). Data for this variable is sourced from the “Militarized Interstate Disputes (v4.02)” dataset (Maoz et al., 2018). Secondly, considering the emphasis that numerous authors place on strategic partnerships for fostering economic cooperation (e.g., Nadkarni, 2010, Strüver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008), I expect that G20 states will have incentives to create BISPs when their economies depend on international trade. For this reason, I use the *trade openness* variable, which

reflects the sum of exports and imports of goods and services measured as a share of gross domestic product.⁸² Thirdly, I anticipate that G20 members with greater levels of integration into international institutions will similarly be driven to establish BISP. ⁸³ For this reason, I employ the variable *IGOs*, which reflects the number of memberships a given country holds in FIGOs (Pevhouse et al., 2019).

Next, I anticipate that democratic G20 members will find it easier to establish BISP. Democracies are often considered more attractive partners for cooperation due to accountability mechanisms that discourage defection (Leeds, 1999). For this, I use the *democracy* variable, employing the “polity 2” item from the “Polity V” dataset, where higher values correspond to greater levels of democracy (Marshall & Gurr, 2020). Additionally, I anticipate that countries facing certain domestic-political constraints will be more likely to establish BISP. The informal nature of strategic partnerships enables executives to bypass resource-intensive ratification procedures and reach agreements that better conform to their preferences (e.g., Roger, 2020; Westerwinter et al., 2021). To examine this, I employ the *constraints (POLCON)* variable, based on the “POLCONIII” item from “The Political Constraints Index” dataset, reflecting the feasibility of policy change (Henisz, 2002). Finally, I expect that more powerful G20 members will be motivated to establish BISP. These states gain the most from informal cooperation (e.g., Vabulas & Snidal, 2013) and could employ partnerships to seek primacy (Kay, 2000). For this, I use the *power (CINC)* variable sourced from the “National Material Capabilities (v6.0)” dataset (Singer et al., 1972), measuring material capabilities.⁸⁴

The results of the monadic analysis are summarized in Table 33 below. Models 51 and 54 present the findings of fixed-effects negative binomial regression employing the aforementioned

⁸² Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS>

⁸³ First, greater levels of integration into international institutions may reflect a general propensity of a given country to cooperate. Second, states may establish and use strategic partnerships as complements to these formal structures, for instance, to coordinate their positions more effectively and avoid an impasse where formal rules and divergent preferences of some members prove detrimental to cooperation (e.g., Michalski, 2019).

⁸⁴ I use the *power (CINC)* variable over the binary major power status since the latter is time invariant.

variables. As an additional test of the results, Model 52 and 55 adopt an alternative estimation method, the random-effects negative binomial regression. In Models 53 and 56, the *interstate rivalries* variable is used as an alternative to *conflict intensity*. Models 54–56 also expand the analysis timeframe by six years through forward-filling the final observation for variables with missing values. All independent variables are lagged by one year. Additionally, a lagged dependent variable is included as a control in all models. I find three independent variables to exert significant influence over *BISP onset (count)*, consistent across all models. First, the *conflict intensity* variable attains a statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ in Model 51 and 54, and $p < 0.05$ in Model 52 and 55) and negative association with *BISP onset (count)*. Second, the *trade openness* variable is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$ in Model 51–53, and $p < 0.01$ in Model 54–56) and positively associated with the dependent variable. Finally, there is a statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ in Model 51, 53, 54, and 56, and $p < 0.05$ in Model 55) and positive association between variables *IGOs* and *BISP onset (count)*.

Table 33. Analysis

| | Model 51 <i>Fixed-effects</i> <i>negative</i> <i>binomial</i> | Model 52 <i>Random-effects</i> <i>negative</i> <i>binomial</i> | Model 53 <i>Fixed-effects</i> <i>negative</i> <i>binomial</i> | Model 54 <i>Fixed-effects</i> <i>negative</i> <i>binomial</i> | Model 55 <i>Random-effects</i> <i>negative</i> <i>binomial</i> | Model 56 <i>Fixed-effects</i> <i>negative</i> <i>binomial</i> |
|----------------------|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| Conflict intensity | -0.319*** (0.0816) | -0.139* (0.0688) | | -0.290*** (0.0763) | -0.164* (0.0664) | |
| Trade openness | 0.0152* (0.00711) | 0.0115* (0.00570) | 0.0182* (0.00719) | 0.0166** (0.00637) | 0.0149** (0.00525) | 0.0186** (0.00644) |
| IGOs | 0.0846*** (0.0164) | 0.0126 (0.0116) | 0.0696*** (0.0174) | 0.0708*** (0.0152) | 0.0269* (0.0129) | 0.0579*** (0.0157) |
| Democracy | 0.0666 (0.0499) | 0.0581* (0.0280) | 0.0503 (0.0473) | 0.0461 (0.0371) | 0.0447 (0.0286) | 0.0470 (0.0376) |
| Constraints (POLCON) | 0.147 (0.726) | -0.553 (0.682) | 0.412 (0.751) | 0.302 (0.666) | -0.317 (0.642) | 0.442 (0.678) |
| Power (CINC) | 4.256 (4.704) | 10.14*** (2.462) | 6.646 (4.967) | 3.468 (3.813) | 9.370*** (2.775) | 6.646 (4.231) |
| Interstate rivalries | | | -0.230* (0.0976) | | | -0.219* (0.0853) |
| Lagged DV | 0.0930* (0.0410) | 0.183*** (0.0456) | 0.0774 (0.0414) | 0.0808* (0.0340) | 0.0924** (0.0310) | 0.0563 (0.0345) |
| Constant | -6.423*** (1.296) | -1.779 (1.018) | -5.537*** (1.498) | -5.757*** (1.220) | -2.931** (1.053) | -4.943*** (1.340) |
| <i>N</i> | 437 | 437 | 437 | 532 | 532 | 532 |
| <i>Years</i> | 1993-2014 | 1993-2014 | 1993-2014 | 1993-2020 Forward-filled | 1993-2020 Forward-filled | 1993-2020 Forward-filled |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

These results suggest that G20 members facing more severe external threats were less likely to forge BISPs, whereas those with higher dependence on trade and more memberships in FIGOs were more likely to forge BISPs. The latter two findings correspond to the theoretical expectations – countries establish partnerships to facilitate trade and often leverage these arrangements as platforms for policy coordination within international organizations. However, the former finding does not correspond to the theoretical expectations – countries should be more likely to forge BISPs when faced with external threats, not less. As a robustness check, I, therefore, ran models with the alternative *interstate rivalries* variable. This variable similarly attains a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$ in Model 53 and 56) and negative association with *BIPS onset (count)*. One potential explanation for this finding is that, when faced with severe external threats like interstate wars, the utility of strategic partnerships

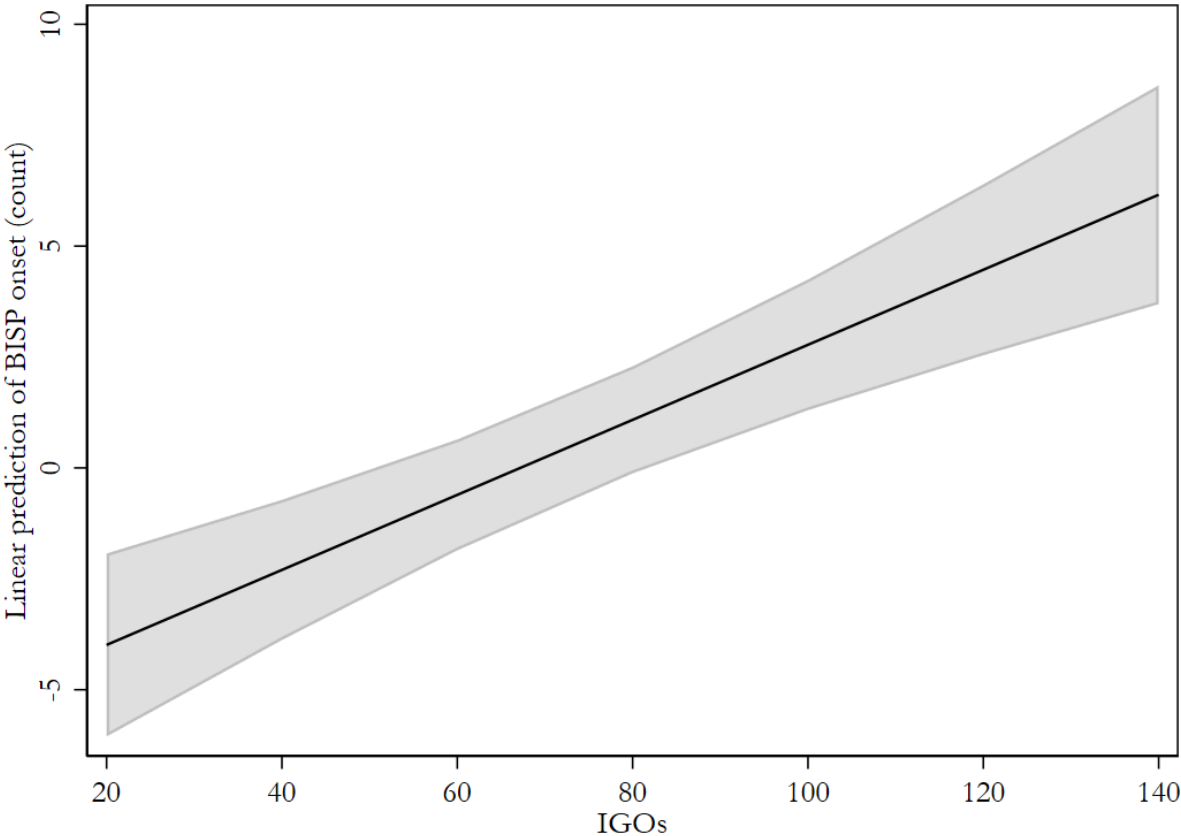
might be somewhat constrained. In such circumstances, G20 members might lean more towards adopting hard-balancing measures, including arms buildups and formal alliances. Whereas hard balancing may be infeasible for the weak, making soft-balancing measures like partnerships more attractive, the opposite may be true for the powerful (cf. He & Feng, 2008).

Furthermore, the results suggest that, at least in the context of G20 members, factors such as regime type, specific domestic-political constraints, and material capabilities might be less relevant as catalysts for the proliferation of strategic partnerships. The *democracy*, *constraints (POLCON)*, and *power (CINC)* variables do not demonstrate a consistent statistically significant association with the dependent variable across the models. In this context, it is important to note that, while insightful in one way, the above-presented analysis suffers from certain limitations. Particularly noteworthy is the limited variability observed in the independent variables at the time-series and cross-sectional level. This is largely due to the nature of case selection, where G20 members are observed over a relatively short period of time, spanning from 1993 to 2020. These countries share several similarities: They are relatively powerful states with significant influence in the global economy, they are highly integrated into existing FIGO structures, and the majority of these nations are democracies with influential domestic veto players. Even within this relatively homogeneous sample, however, we observe that factors such as economic openness and IGO membership affect when and how many strategic partnerships states establish with the outside world.

As shown in Figure 13, the number of FIGO memberships exerts a notably strong influence on *BISP onset (count)*. This variable effectively accounts for both cross-national and time-series variation in the dependent variable. On a cross-national level, it is evident that some of the less prolific initiators of strategic partnerships, such as Saudi Arabia and South Africa, possess significantly fewer FIGO memberships in comparison to other G20 members. By the end of 2020, Saudi Arabia had established

a mere 8 strategic partnerships, a stark contrast to China’s count which exceeded tenfold. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia remains the most internationally isolated among all G20 members in terms of FIGO memberships. Temporally, it is noticeable that the pace at which countries like China and South Korea form strategic partnerships correlates with their integration into these formal institutional structures. A similar pattern emerges in relation to trade dependence. The frequency at which countries like Japan and India establish strategic partnerships with the outside world aligns with their growing reliance on trade, which has doubled between 1992 and 2020.

Figure 13. Adjusted predictions of *IGOs* with 95% confidence intervals



Note: Predictive margins of *IGOs* come from Model 51.

6. Conclusions

For over three decades, scholarly attention has largely overlooked the phenomenon of strategic partnerships, even though many nations consider them essential in their foreign policy toolkit. The rapid spread of strategic partnerships reflects a broader trend of proliferation of various forms of security cooperation (e.g., Chidley, 2014; Kinne, 2020; Locoman & Papa, 2021; Tertrais, 2004; Wilkins, 2012) and informal institutions (e.g., Roger & Rowan, 2022; Vabulas & Snidal, 2021) after the end of the Cold War. This period, characterized by rapid political and technological changes, contributed to increasing uncertainty in the international environment. In response, many countries have embraced shorter-term and more flexible forms of cooperation, particularly in security matters (Vabulas & Snidal, 2021). This shift involved a transition away from formal alliances as the primary means of enhancing national and regional security towards other forms of “alignment,” such as strategic partnerships, which provide states with a flexible framework for addressing joint economic and security challenges (Wilkins, 2008, p. 363). However, this situation leads to an intriguing question: If strategic partnerships serve a similar overarching purpose of enhancing national and regional security—considered broadly—similar to military alliances, do they primarily operate as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to the latter? And what motivates states to establish them in the first place?

The existing literature lacks a suitable analytical framework for identifying and analyzing the factors driving the rapid spread of these informal arrangements and their role in comparison to other forms of security cooperation. Part of this deficiency arises from the absence of a unified conceptual framework. Authors disagree even on the fundamental characteristics of strategic partnerships. Some emphasize aspects such as multidimensionality and flexibility (e.g., Nadkarni, 2010; Strüver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008), while others highlight elements like inclusivity and equality among members (Chang-Liao, 2023; Vahl, 2001). Some view it as a distinct form of “alignment” (Envall & Hall, 2016;

Parameswaran, 2014; Wilkins, 2012), while others broadly categorize it as a “foreign policy instrument” (Chang-Liao, 2023; Michalski, 2019). The lack of a shared understanding of the nature of strategic partnership cooperation has hindered scholars from examining broader proliferation patterns, instead focusing on a limited number of empirical cases, often centered on prominent instances like the China–Russia partnership. One notable exception to this is Strüver’s (2017) article, which, despite employing a large-*N* analysis, still concentrates solely on strategic partnerships established by China.

In this dissertation, I have advocated for an understanding of strategic partnerships as informal alignments. This perspective calls for conceptual refinement along two dimensions. First, I align with other authors who argue that strategic partnerships constitute a distinct form of alignment alongside military alliances, security communities, and coalitions (Envall & Hall, 2016; Wilkins, 2012). According to this view, these partnerships involve “expectations of states about whether they will be supported or opposed by other states in future interactions” (Snyder, 1997, p. 6). The distinct characteristics of strategic partnerships, in contrast to other forms of alignments, include their general (security) purpose and informality. Second, I argue that by reclassifying strategic partnerships as informal institutions, we can establish specific expectations about the conditions under which they are likely to emerge and the behavioral effects they are likely to have on states. In this perspective, these partnerships fit the concepts of “soft law,” IIGOs, and LCIs (Abbott & Snidal, 2000; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013; Abbott & Faude, 2020). The informal nature of strategic partnerships brings with it certain costs and benefits, influencing states’ likelihood of establishing them based on the circumstances. Combining these viewpoints results in conceptual refinement.

In the introduction, I posed three overarching research questions: (1) what is the extent to which strategic partnerships have proliferated among the G20 and over time?; (2) what factors explain the formation of strategic partnerships?; and (3) do strategic partnerships complement or substitute

for formal alliances? To address these questions, I first constructed the original BISP v1.0 dataset, which encompasses all cases of bilateral interstate strategic partnerships (BISPs) involving at least one G20 member from 1993 to 2020. This dataset provided insights into temporal and regional trends in the proliferation of strategic partnerships. Second, I analyzed the data using an undirected dyadic BTSCS design with the binary *BISP onset* variable, indicating whether the two members within a dyad formed a strategic partnership in a given year. Organizing the data in this manner resulted in a total of 100,300 observations. Similar to studies on alliance formation and the onset of militarized interstate disputes, I employed logistic regression as the main analytical method (see, e.g., Bennett & Stam, 2000). To ensure the robustness of these findings, I incorporated temporal controls (Cartner & Signorino, 2010) and conducted supplementary analyses with DCRSEs (Carlson et al., 2023). This approach allowed me to test hypotheses with multiple independent variables.

To identify the key independent variables of interest, I developed a theoretical framework based on insights from the literature on informal institutions (e.g., Roger, 2020; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013; Westerwinter et al., 2021) and military alliances (e.g., Gibler & Wohlforth, 2006; Lai & Reiter, 2000; Leeds, 1999). First, I formulated hypotheses concerning two potential functions of these partnerships in relation to their formal counterparts—military alliances. I argued that, as informal institutions, strategic partnerships could serve complementary and/or substitutive roles vis-à-vis these formal structures (e.g., Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, p. 195). In this perspective, substitutive partnerships exist “in place of” formal alliances, while complementary partnerships function as “add-ons” to such alliances (see the “Hypotheses on Complementarity and Substitution” section). As substitutes, they could offer a low-cost alternative to formal alliances, enabling states to pursue soft and limited hard-balancing measures, such as entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and arms and technology transfers.. As complements, they could be established as add-ons to existing alliance structures,

expanding the scope of cooperation to other issue areas and providing reassurance to junior partners through economic and (limited) security aid provisions.

As previously acknowledged, exploring the question of complementarity/substitution relies on several assumptions. Firstly, I assume that determining whether strategic partnerships operate as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to alliances can be achieved through a somewhat mechanical process of looking at the particular configuration of states’ interests and institutional membership. I consider all partnerships emerging in conditions where two states share a common threat but lack membership in the same alliance to represent the “second-best” arrangement compared to a hypothetical alliance. I view partnerships emerging among allied states as complementary. While this approach is imperfect and might misattribute the specific type of relationship—whether complementary or substitutive—in certain cases, it allows for a systematic measurement and analysis of the phenomenon in a quantitative setting. Secondly, I assume that, generally, strategic partnerships serve as informal counterparts to military alliances (see, e.g., Envall & Hall, 2016; Wilkins, 2008; 2012). Thirdly, I presume that strategic partnerships, at best, function as “low-cost” alternatives or the “second-best” option compared to formal alliances. However, they cannot entirely replace them due to the inherent governance limitations of their informal nature, such as the inability to establish credible commitments (Abbott & Faude, 2020, p. 400).

Second, apart from the hypotheses regarding complementarity and substitution, I have formulated additional hypotheses that can be broadly categorized into three explanatory camps: functionalist, power-oriented, and domestic-politics perspectives on the proliferation of (informal) international institutions (e.g., Roger, 2020; Westerwinter et al., 2021). I have hypothesized that strategic partnerships are more likely to emerge when states share common security and economic interests, as well as when their foreign policy preferences are neither completely aligned nor in conflict. Additionally, I have proposed that these informal arrangements are more likely to develop in

conditions of power inequality, with both major and rising powers being inclined to establish them due to the specific benefits derived. Lastly, I have hypothesized that strategic partnerships are more likely to form among states with similar political regimes, particularly among jointly democratic dyads. Additionally, I have suggested that domestic-political constraints on the ratification of formal agreements may also encourage their formation (see the “Additional Hypotheses on Strategic Partnership Formation” section). I have constructed several independent variables and used them as predictors in the logistic regression of *BISP onset* based on these expectations.

What are the main findings? First, from the descriptive perspective, my attempt to map the proliferation of strategic partnerships reveals that this informal form of cooperation is much more common than previously believed. As noted by one author, “no [previous] study or database has ever attempted—or been able—to provide an exact account” (Renard, 2021, p. 313). The original BISP v1.0 dataset shows that the 19 G20 member states alone formed approximately 382 strategic partnerships between 1993 and 2020. By the end of the observed period, this number had doubled the count of formal alliances among the selected countries. The exponential increase in the number of partnerships is primarily driven by major powers, such as China and the United States. India, Japan, and Russia also played significant roles. Collectively, these five countries were responsible for half of all partnerships established by the 19 G20 member states during the selected timeframe. Interestingly, this informal form of cooperation appears to be much more popular among Asian countries than among countries from any other region in the world. This highlights the historical preference for informality and skepticism of these Asian countries toward formal cooperation projects (e.g., Acharya & Johnston, 2007; Kahler, 2000).

My findings regarding the hypotheses on complementarity and substitution suggest that, while empirically, complementary strategic partnerships are more common, states, on average, are equally likely to establish partnerships as complements or “low-cost” alternatives to formal alliances. The least

conducive conditions for strategic partnership formation occur when two states neither share joint alliance membership nor common threats. Conversely, the presence of common threats in the absence of alliance ties significantly increases the likelihood of partnership formation. Furthermore, the type of obligations and provisions found in alliance treaties appears to play a role. States are more inclined to establish partnerships when they are members of “low commitment” alliances, such as consultation and/or neutrality/non-aggression pacts, compared to “high commitment” alliances, like defense pacts with provisions for active military assistance in the event of an attack. This suggests that the complementary function is predominantly limited to “low commitment” alliances. I speculate that this is because when members of a “high commitment” alliance establish a strategic partnership, it could be interpreted as a reduction in the level of political commitment, essentially downgrading the alignment.

Furthermore, I have uncovered that four other factors significantly influence the emergence of strategic partnerships: bilateral trade, joint democracy, regime similarity, and domestic-political constraints. Strategic partnerships tend to develop more frequently among countries engaged in robust bilateral trade, underscoring their role in fostering economic cooperation (e.g., Nadkarni, 2010; Parameswaran, 2014; Wilkins, 2008). Additionally, while jointly democratic dyads are more inclined to establish these informal arrangements, partnerships are, on average, more likely to emerge among politically dissimilar dyads (cf. Leeds, 1999). I speculate that the informal nature of these arrangements may enable democracies to address concerns about potential defection by autocratic counterparts, given the low costs associated with potential violations. Interestingly, I find that states with higher domestic-political constraints and strong veto players are less inclined to form strategic partnerships. This suggests that the process of strategic partnering is a “top-down or elite-driven” process (Wilkins, 2008, p. 364), rather than a means to bypass domestic opposition. These arrangements often result

from interactions among “strongmen,” as exemplified by the case of China and Russia, rather than executives reliant on support from other branches of the government.

It is important to keep in mind that although these results provide some hints about the mechanisms underlying the formation of strategic partnerships in general, the generalizability of these findings is limited due to the specific criteria of case selection—they confined to the sample of dyads with the involvement of G20 countries as one of the members.

In addition to these main findings, the exploratory analyses produced several other interesting results. Firstly, I utilized the data on strategic partnership ties to create an independent variable, *BISP tie (term)*, which I then used as a predictor of alliance formation. This allowed me to explore whether partnerships may serve as “building blocks” for or “stumbling blocks” toward formal cooperation (e.g., Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, pp. 212–13). Although the initial regression analysis suggested the former as plausible, a closer examination of individual empirical cases revealed that strategic partnerships very rarely, if ever, lead states to establish formal alliances later on. Secondly, drawing inspiration from Kinne (2020), I analyzed the potential behavioral effects of partnership ties in two areas—armed conflict and bilateral arms trade. This analysis showed that strategic partners are neither more nor less likely to engage in armed conflicts than other pairs of states, but they experience significantly higher levels of bilateral arms trade than others. Finally, I examined the proliferation of partnerships at the monadic level of analysis to investigate the factors explaining why certain G20 countries establish more partnerships than others. These results underscored the role of factors such as trade dependence and membership in FIGOs.

On balance, my findings contribute to three strands of scholarly literature. First, they enhance the small but growing empirical literature on strategic partnerships (see, e.g., Blanco, 2016; Envall & Hall, 2016; Strüver, 2017; Wilkins, 2008) by refining the conceptual framework, advancing our

comprehension of the proliferation of such arrangements across countries and over time, and by identifying the factors driving these trends. The BISP v1.0 dataset, in particular, represents the most significant empirical contribution to the literature on this topic to date, laying the groundwork for future comparative and quantitative studies. Second, my findings contribute to the literature on informal institutions (see, e.g., Abbott & Faude, 2020; Roger, 2020; Roger & Rowan, 2022; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013, 2021; Westerwinter et al., 2021) by illustrating how informal institutions can function as both complements and substitutes for their formal counterparts (cf. Andonova et al., 2017), and by evaluating the viability of prominent hypotheses explaining why states choose informal cooperation over formal arrangements. Finally, they contribute to the broader literature on international alignment (see, e.g., Locoman & Papa, 2021; Snyder, 1997; Wilkins, 2012) by deepening our understanding of the determinants of lesser-known forms of such alignments.

While illuminating in one respect, my research on the proliferation of strategic partnerships is not without certain limitations. The most evident limitation concerns the scope of case selection. My findings, both in terms of the descriptive account and the aforementioned hypotheses on partnership formation, are applicable to the universe of cases involving G20 countries as one of the members. It is questionable to what extent we can generalize these findings to the entire population of states within the international system. In many ways, G20 countries stand as outliers – they rank among the most powerful and influential nations globally. While the term “partnership” implies equality among members (e.g., Chang-Liao, 2023), assuming that the dynamics of cooperation between a G20 state and any other, less powerful and influential state involve symmetrical costs and benefits would be misguided. Powerful countries like China often utilize these channels of communication to exert influence over weaker counterparts, such as certain island nations, in ways that disproportionately favor them (The Guardian, 2023). A more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon would

necessitate expanding the scope of case selection to encompass more symmetrical dyads and dyads composed of weaker states.

Another limitation pertains to the informal nature of strategic partnerships. In my endeavor to map the proliferation of strategic partnerships, I have identified approximately 382 partnership agreements within the constraints of case selection. However, similar to previous attempts to document informal cooperation (e.g., Carlson & Koremenos, 2021; Roger & Rowan, 2022; Vabulas & Snidal, 2021), this account is likely imprecise. States may intentionally keep their strategic partnerships confidential, often due to concerns about their reputation. Moreover, even when cooperation is not secretive, it leaves a much less noticeable “paper trail” compared to formal treaties and FIGOs. States do not have to ratify these agreements, and there is no repository for informal agreements akin to the United Nations treaty repository. Consequently, my effort to document strategic partnerships has most likely resulted in at least some cases of “false negatives”—that is, instances where strategic partnership agreements have evaded the coding process. The same issues apply to determining whether a strategic partnership is “in force” or “defunct.” Countries do not have to, and almost never, announce the termination of their partnership agreements. Therefore, certain partnerships in the dataset may no longer exist, leading to “false positives.”

As one of the potential measures to address the problem with “false positives,” the future version of the dataset could additionally adopt a “minimum level of activity” as a requirement for including the partnerships into the dataset.⁸⁵ For instance, if countries have not engaged in strategic partnership cooperation for a certain amount of time, such as longer than 3-5 years, such instances could be classified as “defunct.” If countries have announced a “strategic partnership,” but there is no evidence of further activity under such initiative, those instances could be treated as borderline

⁸⁵ I thank the reviewer, Benjamin Faude, for this suggestion.

cases or omitted from the dataset entirely. Adopting the additional criterion of a “minimum level of activity” could, therefore, mitigate the issue with “false positives” and help approximate the year of termination more accurately.

These limitations may introduce an estimation bias into the statistical analysis. While I did not find empirical support for several hypotheses, it is plausible that these null findings could, in part, be attributed to the limited scope of case selection and/or certain inaccuracies in the coding of the dependent variable. These limitations present potentially promising avenues for future research on this topic. Although the BISP v1.0 dataset offers the most extensive coverage of strategic partnerships in existence today, future studies could broaden the scope of case selection to include other countries and refine the coding process. For example, this could involve incorporating additional sources such as news media for the purposes of cross-validation. Additionally, while I have demonstrated the dataset’s utility for studying other issues, such as the onset of militarized interstate disputes and bilateral arms trade (see the “Exploratory Analysis 2: Armed Conflict and Arms Trade” section), researchers can use the BISP v1.0 dataset in various ways, employing the data on strategic partnerships as an independent variable. This research direction has the potential to significantly enhance our understanding of the behavioral effects of strategic partnerships.

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7.1. Peer-Reviewed Articles

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8. Appendices

8.1. Appendix 1 – ATOP IDs of Ukraine’s Allies

Following is the complete list of Ukraine’s alliances (ATOP ID) with countries who delivered or promised to deliver military aid to it.

Table 34. The List of ATOP IDs

| Ally | ATOP ID |
|----------------|----------------|
| Austria | 3740 |
| Belgium | 3740 |
| Bulgaria | 3740, 4340 |
| Canada | 3740, 4638 |
| Croatia | 3740, 5025 |
| Czechia | 3740, 4710 |
| Denmark | 3740 |
| Estonia | 3740, 4241 |
| Finland | 3740 |
| France | 3740, 4710 |
| Germany | 3740 |
| Greece | 3740, 4855 |
| Iceland | 3740 |
| Ireland | 3740 |
| Italy | 3740 |
| Latvia | 3740, 4715 |
| Lithuania | 3740, 4545 |
| Luxembourg | 3740 |
| Netherlands | 3740 |
| Norway | 3740 |
| Poland | 3740, 4225 |
| Portugal | 3740 |
| Romania | 3740, 4880 |
| Slovakia | 3740, 4490 |
| Slovenia | 3740 |
| Spain | 3740, 4850 |
| Sweden | 3740 |
| Turkey | 3740, 4205 |
| United Kingdom | 3740 |
| United States | 3740 |

Note: The data comes from the ATOP v5.1 dataset (see Leeds et al., 2002).

8.2. Appendix 2 – Ukraine’s Strategic Partnerships

The data collection process is described in chapter 3.2.2, “Building the Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnership (BISP) Dataset v1.0.” I used the same procedure for the collection of the data for Ukraine (see Table 1). Relevant sources are below. For convenience, I only include the positive cases here with the explanation of coding. Please note that this is not a complete list of all Ukraine’s partnerships, but only a subset of countries who delivered or promised to deliver military aid to it.

United States

- *Note:* Established in 2008 (see Alternative source).
- Source 1: <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/spilna-zayava-shchodo-strategichnogo-partnerstva-ukrayini-ta-spoluchenih-shtativ-ameriki>
- Source 2: <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/ukraine-us-charter-strategic-partnership>
- Alternative source: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/3349019-ukraineusa-renewing-strategic-cooperation.html>

Germany

- *Note:* One source notes that “the parties noted the importance of developing strategic partnership, bilateral interaction and economic cooperation” (see Source 1). Another source references a statement issued after the German-Ukrainian meeting, which states: “The consultations gave an opportunity to discuss the current state and identify promising areas of bilateral cooperation for 2021, reaffirm the mutual desire of the parties to develop strategic partnership and contribute to strengthening security and stability in Europe” (see Alternative

source). This is consistent with the intent to develop a “strategic partnership.” However, there is no evidence that such a partnership is or was in place at the time of coding.

- Source 1: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/vsi-krayini-mayut-tisnuti-na-rosiyu-v-pitanni-provedennya-zu-69485>
- Alternative source: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-defense/3121294-ukrainegermany-consultations-on-defence-cooperation-development-held-in-berlin.html>

United Kingdom

- *Note:* Established in 2020.
- Source 1: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/volodimir-zelenskij-i-boris-dzhonson-pidpicali-ugodu-pro-pol-64377>
- Source 2: <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/joint-communicue-ukraine-and-united-kingdom-ukraine-uk-strategic-dialogue-8-december-2021>
- Alternative source: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-polytics/3574300-ukraine-pm-uk-foreign-secretary-discuss-development-of-strategic-partnership.html>

Poland

- *Note:* Sources indicate that the partnership was in place at least since 2015 (see Alternative source 2).
- Source 1: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/vizit-prezidenta-polshi-v-ukrayinu-pidtverdiv-strategichne-p-64645>
- Source 2: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayina-duzhe-vdyachna-polshi-za-pidtrimku-svoyih-interesiv-55757>

- Alternative source 1: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/2363738-strategic-partnership-between-poland-and-ukraine-remains-unchanged-for-both-countries-poroshenko.html>
- Alternative source 2: <https://poland.mfa.gov.ua/pl/news/43228-oficijnij-vizit-prezidenta-mp-adudi-v-ukrajinu-polyshha-pidtrimaje-ukrajinu-na-shlyahu-jevropejsykih-reform-pidsumki-zustrichi-prezidentiv>

Lithuania

- *Note:* Sources indicate that the partnership was in place at least since 2010 (see Source 2).
- Source 1: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/strategichne-partnerstvo-ukrayini-j-litvi-zavzhdi-napovnyuye-69369>
- Source 2: <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/3203-komyunike-spilynoji-radi-ministerstva-zakordonnih-sprav-ukrajini-ta-ministerstva-zakordonnih-sprav-litovsykoji-respubliki>
- Alternative source: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/2826500-presidents-of-ukraine-and-lithuania-sign-strategic-partnership-declaration.html>

Turkey

- *Note:* Established in 2011 (see Source 1).
- Source 1: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/strategichne-partnerstvo-ukrayini-j-turechchini-pidkriplene-67925>
- Source 2: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/spilna-deklaraciya-devyatogo-zasidannya-strategichnoyi-radi-67909>
- Alternative source: <https://guangzhou.mfa.gov.ua/en/news/13885-konsul-z-jekonomichnih-pitanygeneralynogokonsulystvaukrajini-v>

[guanchzhouviktorberezovsykijproviv-zustrichizzastupnikomdirektora-viddiluzovnishnyojekonomichnogo-spivrobotnictvadepartam](https://www.mfa.gov.ua/en/news/dmytro-kuleba-ukraine-and-romania-are-ready-become-strategic-partners)

Romania

- *Note:* One source mentions that Ukraine and Romania are “ready to become strategic partners” (see Source 1). Another mentions that the officials “stressed the need to develop the Ukrainian-Romanian relations in the spirit of strategic partnership” (see Source 2). Yet another source notes that the officials discussed the idea of “strategic partnership” already in 2015. However, at the time of coding, I was unable to find any evidence that such a partnership is already in place. The mentions are consistent with the intent to establish the partnership, rather than its existence.
- Source 1: <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/dmytro-kuleba-ukraine-and-romania-are-ready-become-strategic-partners>
- Source 2: <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/33300-ministr-pavlo-klimkin-zustrivsvya-zi-svojim-rumunskykim-kolegoju-bogdanom-auresku-pochatok-perezavantazhennya-ukrajinskyko-rumunskykih-vidnosin>
- Alternative source: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/1844580-330c82f8e21fb254529825e8983fe9ca.html>

Borderline cases

Canada

- *Note:* Some sources on the Ukrainian side mention “strategic partnership” between the two countries. One source mentions that Ukraine and Canada have “strategic partnership” (see

Source 1). Another source mentions that Ukraine “sees” Canada as a strategic partner (see Alternative source 1). However, these references are rather vague and there is no evidence of an existing partnership tie on the Canadian side.

- Source 1: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/250389197>
- Alternative source 1: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/2564088-canada-and-ukraine-formed-a-mutually-beneficial-partnership-kubiv.html>
- Alternative source 2: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-economy/2038956-canadian-trade-minister-freeland-ukraine-canada-have-great-potential-for-cooperation.html>

Estonia

- Note: One source on the Ukrainian side references the Deputy Minister of Defense of Ukraine, who stated that “We highly appreciate our strategic partnership and are thankful to the authorities of the Republic of Estonia for their consistent support of the Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and also of the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of our state” (see Source 1). I was unable to find any additional evidence of an existing partnership tie.
- Source 1: <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/news/2022/02/07/delegation-of-ministry-of-defence-of-ukraine-started-two-day-visit-to-republic-of-estonia/>

8.3. Appendix 3 – ATOP IDs of Russia’s Allies

Following is the complete list of Russia’s alliances (ATOP ID) with countries who did not vote in favor of the UNGA resolution ES-11/1.

Table 35. The List of ATOP IDs

| Ally | ATOP ID |
|--------------|--|
| Angola | 3765 |
| Armenia | 3740, 4220, 4400, 4890 |
| Azerbaijan | 3740, 4400, 4885 |
| Bangladesh | 3755 |
| Belarus | 3740, 4220, 4675, 4865 |
| China | 3755, 4810, 4980, 6020 |
| Congo | 3890 |
| Ethiopia | 3835 |
| India | 3755, 4415, 4810 |
| Iran | 4968 |
| Kazakhstan | 3740, 4220, 4235, 4400, 4810, 6020, 6070 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 3740, 4220, 4255, 4400, 4810, 6020 |
| Laos | 3755 |
| Mongolia | 3740, 3755, 4395 |
| Morocco | 3755 |
| Mozambique | 3775 |
| North Korea | 3755, 4940 |
| Pakistan | 3755, 4810 |
| Sri Lanka | 3755 |
| Syria | 3880 |
| Tajikistan | 3740, 4220, 4400, 4470, 4810, 6020 |
| Turkmenistan | 3740, 5000, 7030 |
| Uzbekistan | 3740, 4245, 4400, 4560, 4810, 5045, 5075, 6020 |
| Vietnam | 3755, 4605 |

Note: The data comes from the ATOP v5.1 dataset (see Leeds et al., 2002).

8.4. Appendix 4 – Russia’s Strategic Partnerships

For the complete list of Russia’s strategic partnerships, see the BISP v1.0 dataset. The data collection process is described in chapter 3.2.2, “Building the Bilateral Intergovernmental Strategic Partnership (BISP) Dataset v1.0.” I used the data for Russia as the basis for coding in Table 2. Additionally, I checked for any updates on Russia’s strategic partnership diplomacy after 2020 using the same data collection procedure. This process yielded two updates on Russia’s relations with Angola and Iran. To my best knowledge none of the two countries have officially established a “strategic partnership” with Russia at the time of the voting. However, both have signaled interest in elevating bilateral relations to the “strategic partnership” level. Relevant sources are below.

Angola

- *Note:* Some sources on the Russian side indicate that the two parties had signed a joint communiqué in Spring 2019 “with the aim to convert [bilateral cooperation] into real strategic partnership” (see Alternative source). However, I was unable to find any evidence that the two parties have achieved this aim by the end of 2022. One source from 2023 acknowledges that “the Presidents of Russia and Angola set a strategic goal: to make our relations those of a strategic partnership.” This signals the continuing intention of elevating the relations to the level of “strategic partnership,” but does not necessarily indicate that such a partnership is already in place.
- Source 1: <https://www.mid.ru/en/maps/ao/1849727/>
- Source 2: https://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/1849674/
- Alternative source: <https://tass.com/politics/1085175>

Iran

- *Note:* By the end of 2022, Russia and Iran were finalizing a new large interstate agreement (see Source 1). Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Alexander Novak, said that “this document is designed to bring multifaceted relations between our countries to the level of strategic partnership” (see Alternative source). Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressed the intention to establish the “strategic partnership” already in 2017 (see Source 2). However, it is likely that this intention existed before the 2017 statement. I was unable to find any evidence that the agreement in question had been signed or ratified by the parties by the end of 2022.
- Source 1: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69354>
- Source 2: <https://www.mid.ru/en/maps/ir/1557014/>
- Alternative source: <https://tass.com/economy/1531017>

8.5. Appendix 5 – BISP v1.0 Sources

Following is the list of all sources used for data collection.

Table 36. The Complete List of Relevant Institutions and Official Websites

| Country | Institution/office | Root domain |
|------------------|--|---|
| Argentina | President | https://www.casarosada.gob.ar/ |
| | Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship | https://www.cancilleria.gob.ar/ |
| | Government | https://www.argentina.gob.ar/ |
| Australia | Prime Minister | https://www.pm.gov.au/ |
| | Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade | https://www.dfat.gov.au/ |
| | Parliament | https://www.aph.gov.au/ |
| Brazil | Government | https://www.gov.br/ |
| | Ministry of Foreign Affairs | http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/ |
| Canada | Government | https://www.canada.ca/ |
| | Global Affairs Canada | https://www.international.gc.ca/ |
| | Parliament | https://www.parl.ca/ |
| China | The State Council | https://english.www.gov.cn/ |
| | Ministry of Foreign Affairs | https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ |
| | Parliament | http://www.npc.gov.cn/ |
| France | Ministry for European and Foreign Affairs | https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/ |
| Germany | Chancellor | https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/ |
| | Federal Government | https://www.bundesregierung.de/ |
| | Federal Foreign Office | https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/ |
| India | President | https://presidentofindia.nic.in/ |
| | Ministry of External Affairs | https://www.mea.gov.in/ |
| | Parliament (upper) | https://rajyasabha.nic.in/ |
| | Parliament (lower) | https://loksabha.nic.in/ |
| Indonesia | Ministry of Foreign Affairs | https://kemlu.go.id/ |
| | Parliament (lower) | http://www.dpr.go.id/ |
| Italy | Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation | http://www.esteri.it/ |
| | Parliament (upper) | http://www.senato.it/ |
| | | |
| Japan | Prime Minister | https://japan.kantei.go.jp/ |
| | Government | https://www.japan.go.jp/ |
| | Ministry of Foreign Affairs | https://www.mofa.go.jp/ |
| Mexico | Government | https://www.gob.mx |
| | Parliament (lower) | http://www.diputados.gob.mx/ |
| | Parliament (upper) | https://www.senado.gob.mx/ |
| Russia | President | http://en.kremlin.ru/ |
| | Prime Minister | http://premier.gov.ru/ |
| | Government | http://government.ru/ |

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| | Ministry of Foreign Affairs | https://www.mid.ru/ |
| Saudi Arabia | Government | https://www.my.gov.sa/ |
| South Africa | President | http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/ |
| | Government | https://www.gov.za/ |
| | Department of International Relations and Cooperation | http://www.dirco.gov.za/ |
| | Parliament | https://www.parliament.gov.za/ |
| South Korea | President | https://eng.president.go.kr/ |
| | Government | http://www.korea.net/ |
| | Ministry of Foreign Affairs | http://www.mofa.go.kr/ |
| Turkey | President | https://www.tccb.gov.tr/ |
| | Ministry of Foreign Affairs | http://www.mfa.gov.tr/ |
| United Kingdom | Government | https://www.gov.uk/ |
| | Parliament | https://www.parliament.uk/ |
| United States | White House | https://www.whitehouse.gov/ |
| | Department of State | https://www.state.gov/ |
| | Parliament (lower) | https://www.congress.gov/ |

Note: The list includes only those website, which contained more than 50 mentions of the term “strategic partnership”. Some institutions and offices share the same root domain (e.g., the UK government/cabinet and Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

8.6. Appendix 6 – Termination Data

Following is the list of MID IDs relevant for the termination criterion.

Table 37. The List of Relevant MIDs

| MID ID | Dyad | Year |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| 4516 | USA-TUR | 2003 |
| 4604 | USA-AFG | 2014 |
| 4280 | USA-CHN | 2001 |
| 4598 | USA-PAK | 2010 |
| 4636 | USA-PAK | 2011 |
| 4726 | USA-PAK | 2014 |
| 4496 | BRA-PER | 2003 |
| 4685 | ITA-LIB | 2011 |
| 4681 | RUS-UKR | 2013 |
| 4682 | RUS-UKR | 2014 |
| 4683 | RUS-UKR | 2014 |
| 4639 | RUS-KZK | 2013 |
| 4485 | RUS-CHN | 2009 |
| 4640 | RUS-CHN | 2012 |
| 4670 | IRN-IND | 2013 |
| 4696 | CHN-ROK | 2014 |
| 4719 | CHN-IND | 2013 |
| 4488 | CHN-DRV | 2010 |
| 4700 | CHN-DRV | 2012 |
| 4701 | CHN-DRV | 2013 |
| 4702 | CHN-DRV | 2014 |

Note: Data come from the dyadic version of the “ Militarized Interstate Disputes (v4.02)” dataset, which is available on the website of the Correlates of War Project (Maoz et al., 2018).

8.7. Appendix 7 – Randomly Selected Cases for the Reliability Assessment

Following is the complete list of randomly selected cases for the purposes of replication. The differences in coding are highlighted. For all sources of coding, please see the reliability sheet file in the attached documents.

Table 38. The List of Relevant MIDs

| Dyad ID | State A | State B | BISP v1.0 coding | Replication coding | Dyad ID | State A | State B | BISP v1.0 coding | Replication coding |
|---------|---------|---------|------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|------------------|--------------------|
| 251 | USA | JAM | 0 | 0 | 235325 | ITA | POR | 0 | 0 |
| 252 | USA | TRI | 0 | 0 | 255380 | GMY | SWD | 0 | 0 |
| 2325 | USA | ITA | 0 | 0 | 255570 | GMY | LES | 0 | 0 |
| 2373 | USA | AZE | 0 | 0 | 255700 | GMY | AFG | 1 | 1 |
| 2404 | USA | GNB | 0 | 0 | 316365 | RUS | CZR | 0 | 0 |
| 2411 | USA | EQG | 0 | 0 | 325369 | ITA | UKR | 0 | 0 |
| 2435 | USA | MAA | 0 | 0 | 325434 | ITA | BEN | 0 | 0 |
| 2812 | USA | LAO | 0 | 0 | 325540 | ITA | ANG | 0 | 0 |
| 2910 | USA | PNG | 0 | 0 | 331640 | TUR | SNM | 0 | 0 |
| 2935 | USA | VAN | 0 | 0 | 349560 | SAF | SLV | 0 | 0 |
| 20101 | CAN | VEN | 0 | 0 | 350732 | ROK | GRC | 0 | 0 |
| 20390 | CAN | DEN | 0 | 0 | 365517 | RUS | RWA | 0 | 0 |
| 20434 | CAN | BEN | 0 | 0 | 365560 | RUS | SAF | 1 | 1 |
| 20540 | CAN | ANG | 0 | 0 | 365600 | RUS | MOR | 1 | 1 |
| 20710 | CAN | CHN | 1 | 1 | 365731 | RUS | PRK | 0 | 0 |
| 54220 | FRN | DMA | 0 | 0 | 366710 | CHN | EST | 0 | 0 |
| 56670 | SAU | SLU | 0 | 0 | 368900 | AUL | LIT | 0 | 0 |
| 60140 | BRA | SKN | 0 | 0 | 371710 | CHN | ARM | 0 | 0 |
| 60325 | ITA | SKN | 0 | 0 | 371732 | ROK | ARM | 0 | 0 |
| 60640 | TUR | SKN | 0 | 0 | 373732 | ROK | AZE | 0 | 0 |
| 70349 | MEX | SLV | 0 | 0 | 402740 | JPN | CAP | 0 | 0 |
| 70359 | MEX | MLD | 0 | 0 | 420710 | CHN | GAM | 0 | 0 |
| 70560 | MEX | SAF | 0 | 0 | 432740 | JPN | MLI | 0 | 0 |
| 70760 | MEX | BHU | 0 | 0 | 451710 | CHN | SIE | 1 | 1 |
| 80732 | ROK | BLZ | 0 | 0 | 471900 | AUL | CAO | 0 | 0 |
| 80850 | INS | BLZ | 0 | 0 | 475732 | ROK | NIG | 0 | 0 |
| 93200 | UKG | NIC | 0 | 0 | 483750 | IND | CHA | 0 | 0 |
| 93640 | TUR | NIC | 0 | 0 | 490640 | TUR | DRC | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|-----|-----|---|---|--------|-----|-----|---|---|
| 95200 | UKG | PAN | 0 | 0 | 560600 | SAF | MOR | 0 | 0 |
| 130850 | INS | ECU | 0 | 0 | 560652 | SAF | SYR | 0 | 0 |
| 135710 | CHN | PER | 1 | 1 | 560750 | SAF | IND | 1 | 1 |
| 140200 | BRA | UKG | 1 | 1 | 560986 | SAF | PAL | 0 | 0 |
| 140404 | BRA | GNB | 0 | 0 | 620850 | INS | LIB | 0 | 0 |
| 155732 | ROK | CHL | 0 | 0 | 626850 | INS | SSD | 0 | 0 |
| 160626 | ARG | SSD | 0 | 0 | 630640 | TUR | IRN | 0 | 0 |
| 160703 | ARG | KYR | 0 | 0 | 640703 | TUR | KYR | 1 | 1 |
| 160816 | ARG | DRV | 1 | 0 | 660850 | INS | LEB | 0 | 0 |
| 200347 | UKG | KOS | 0 | 0 | 670690 | SAU | KUW | 0 | 0 |
| 200531 | UKG | ERI | 0 | 0 | 670840 | SAU | PHI | 0 | 0 |
| 200615 | UKG | ALG | 0 | 1 | 670950 | SAU | FIJ | 0 | 0 |
| 220325 | FRN | ITA | 0 | 0 | 698732 | ROK | OMA | 0 | 0 |
| 220341 | FRN | MNG | 0 | 0 | 702750 | IND | TAJ | 1 | 1 |
| 220366 | FRN | EST | 1 | 1 | 710835 | CHN | BRU | 1 | 1 |
| 220471 | FRN | CAO | 0 | 0 | 710947 | CHN | TUV | 0 | 0 |
| 220553 | FRN | MAW | 0 | 0 | 732781 | ROK | MAD | 0 | 0 |
| 220750 | FRN | IND | 1 | 1 | 732970 | ROK | NAU | 0 | 0 |
| 220840 | FRN | PHI | 0 | 0 | 732990 | ROK | WSM | 0 | 0 |
| 220955 | FRN | TON | 0 | 0 | 740770 | JPN | PAK | 0 | 0 |
| 225325 | ITA | SWZ | 0 | 0 | 775850 | INS | MYA | 0 | 0 |
| 225560 | SAF | SWZ | 1 | 0 | 850947 | INS | TUV | 0 | 0 |

8.8. Appendix 8 – G20 Alliances Formed Between 1992 and 2018

Following is a complete list of alliance onsets between 1992 and 2018 for the sample of dyads with G20 as one of the members. Columns “defense,” “neutrality,” “non-aggression,” and “consultation” denote the type of obligations and provisions provided for in the founding treaty. Please note that, for convenience, the data on alliance onset presented here correspond to multilateral events (see Table 1). For the purposes of my analysis, I disaggregate these multilateral events into dyadic form.

Table 39. The List of Dyadic Alliance Onset Events, 1992–2018

| ATOP ID | Onset (year) | Termination (year) | Defense | Neutrality | Non-aggression | Consultation | ATOP ID | Onset (year) | Termination (year) | Defense | Neutrality | Non-aggression | Consultation |
|---------|--------------|--------------------|---------|------------|----------------|--------------|---------|--------------|--------------------|---------|------------|----------------|--------------|
| 4135 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4615 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 4145 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4620 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4148 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4625 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4165 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4635 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4170 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4638 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4175 | 1992 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4675 | 1995 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4180 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4740 | 1995 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4185 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4744 | 1995 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4188 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4758 | 1995 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 4200 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4760 | 1995 | 1999 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4205 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4775 | 1996 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4210 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4810 | 1996 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4215 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4865 | 1997 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4220 | 1992 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4875 | 1997 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4230 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4885 | 1997 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4235 | 1992 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4890 | 1997 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4240 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4895 | 1997 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4245 | 1992 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4896 | 1997 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4250 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4897 | 1997 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4255 | 1992 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4908 | 1998 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4260 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4940 | 2000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4265 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4953 | 2000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4270 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4957 | 2000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4293 | 1992 | 1997 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4958 | 2000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4300 | 1992 | 2002 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4965 | 2000 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4305 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4968 | 2001 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|---|---|---|---|------|------|------|---|---|---|---|
| 4330 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4980 | 2001 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4342 | 1992 | 1997 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4985 | 2001 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4365 | 1992 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4990 | 2001 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4385 | 1992 | 2001 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4998 | 2002 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4395 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5000 | 2002 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4400 | 1993 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5010 | 2002 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4410 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5015 | 2002 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4415 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5030 | 2002 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4420 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5032 | 2003 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4440 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5035 | 2003 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4445 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5045 | 2004 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4470 | 1993 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5060 | 2005 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4475 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5070 | 2005 | 2013 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4480 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5075 | 2005 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4485 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5080 | 2006 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4497 | 1993 | 1997 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5095 | 2006 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4500 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6005 | 2007 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4505 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6020 | 2007 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4507 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 6030 | 2008 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4520 | 1993 | 2002 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 6032 | 2008 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4525 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6035 | 2010 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4530 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 6040 | 2011 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4535 | 1993 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6050 | 2012 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4540 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6060 | 2013 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4550 | 1994 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6070 | 2013 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 4560 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6075 | 2013 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4568 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6085 | 2014 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4570 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6095 | 2015 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4580 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7005 | 2016 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4585 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 7015 | 2017 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4595 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7030 | 2017 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4600 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 7045 | 2018 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 4605 | 1994 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7050 | 2018 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

Note: The data comes from the ATOP v5.1 dataset (see Leeds et al., 2002).

8.9. Appendix 9 – Models 1–8 with DCRSEs

This appendix contains plots of the Receiver Operating Characteristic curve for selected models. The higher the value of the Area Under Curve (AUC) statistic, the better the performance of the model in distinguishing between classes – whether states have or have not formed a BISP.

Figure 14. ROC curve for models 1–4

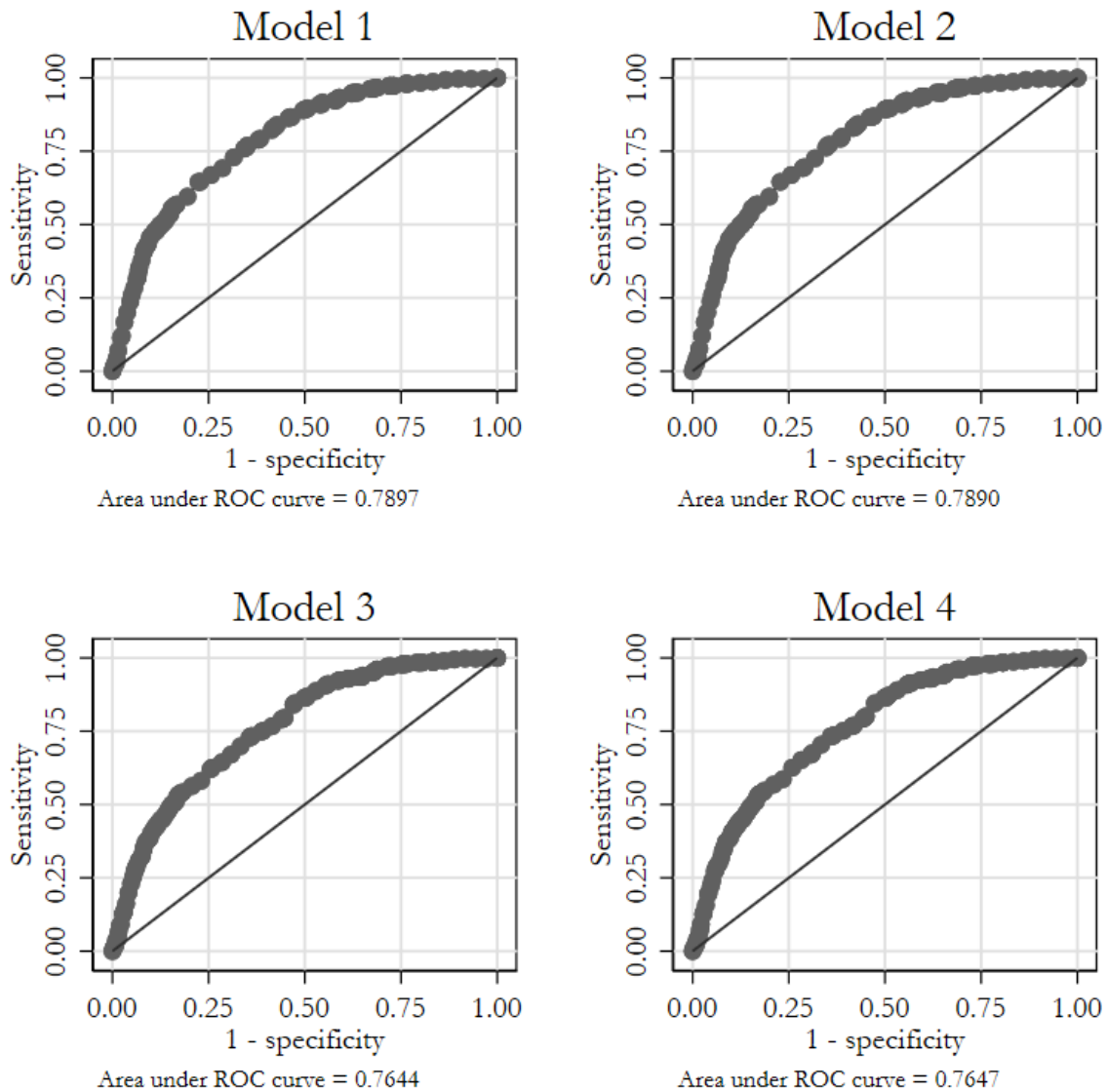


Figure 15. ROC curve for models 5–8

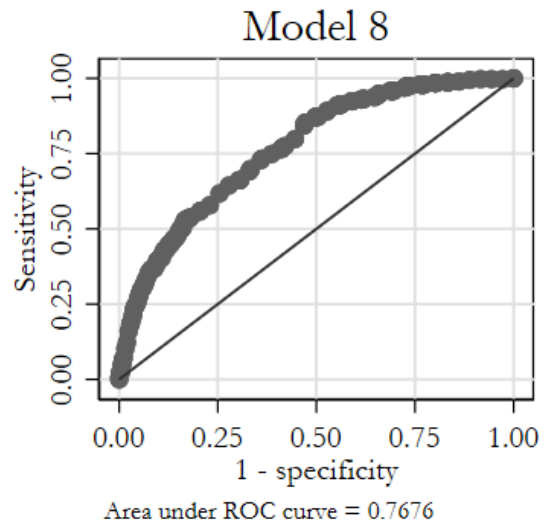
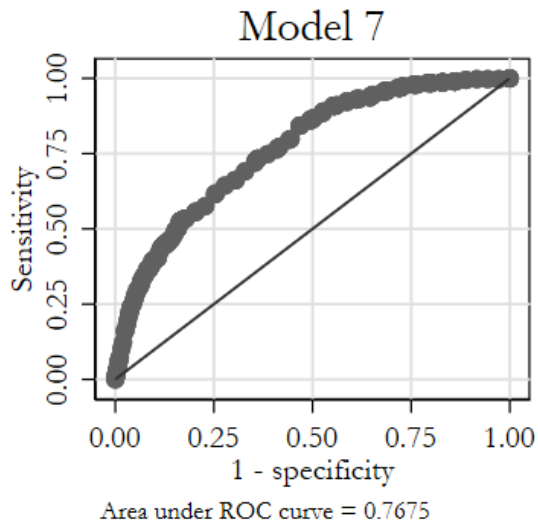
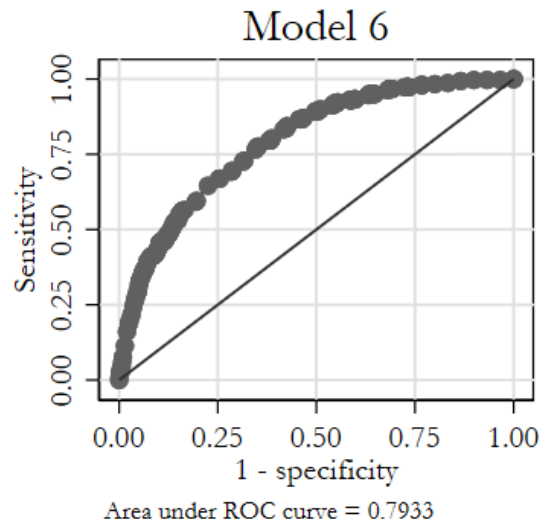
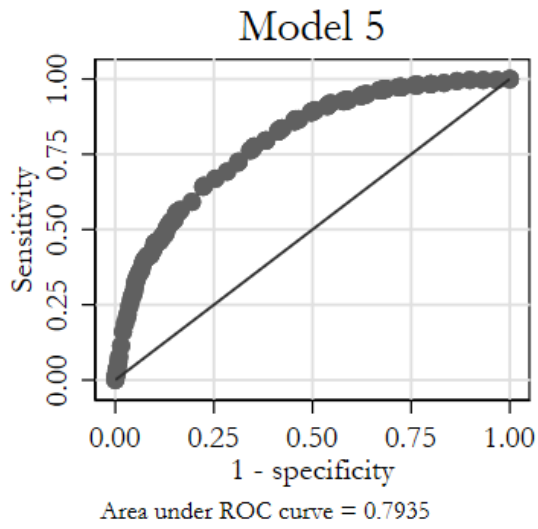


Figure 16. ROC curve for models 9–16

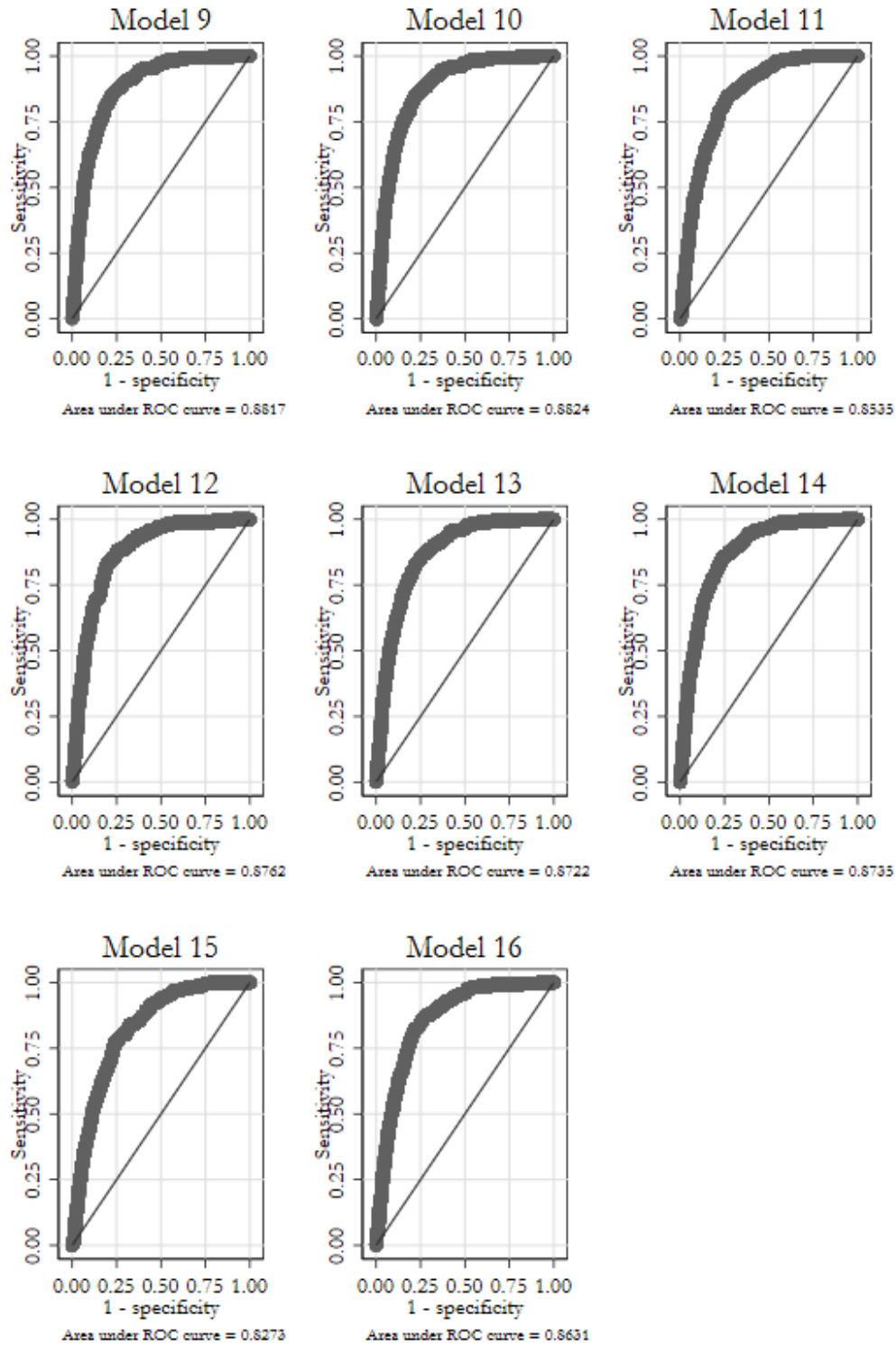


Figure 17. ROC curve for models 17–24

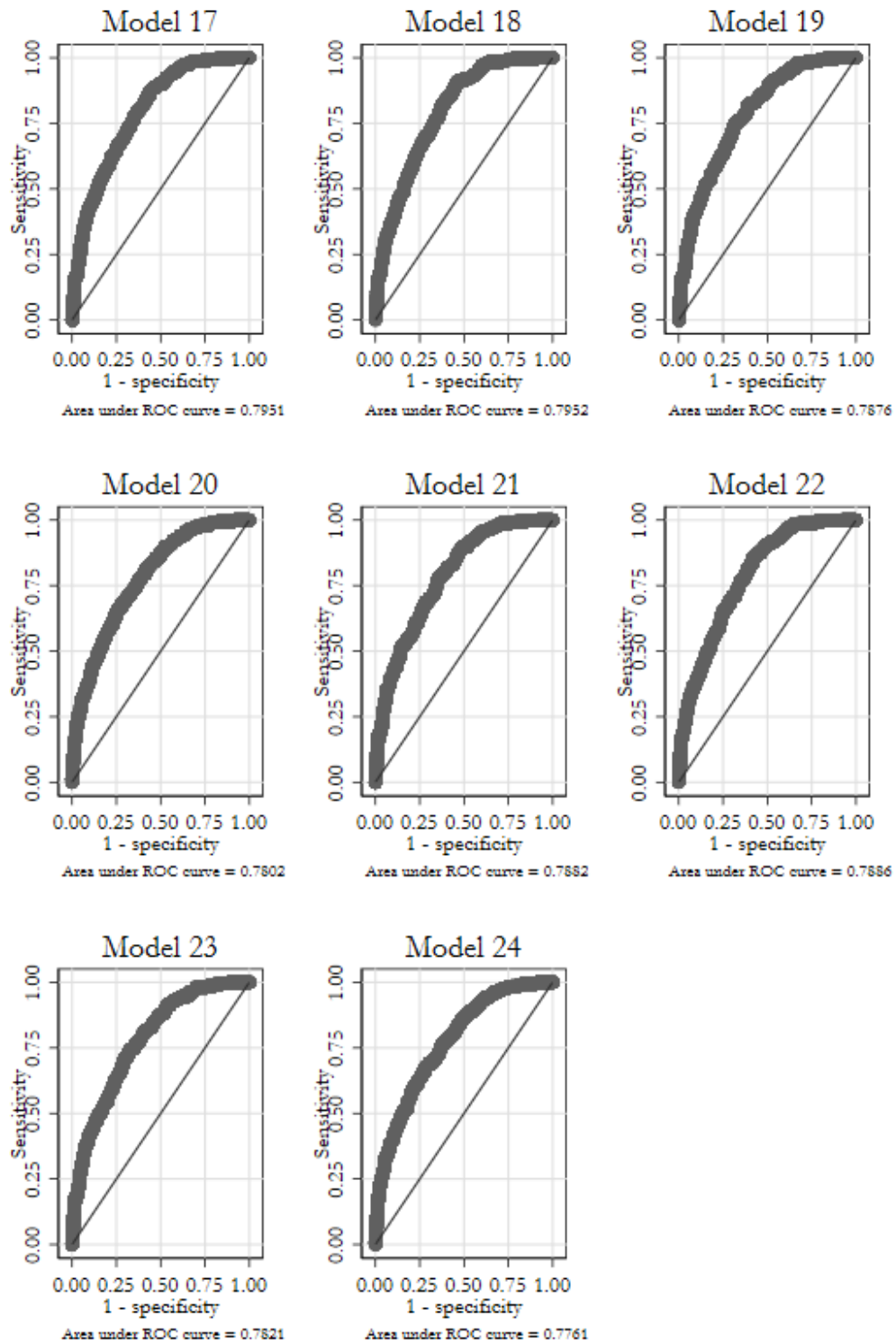


Figure 18. ROC curve for models 25–32

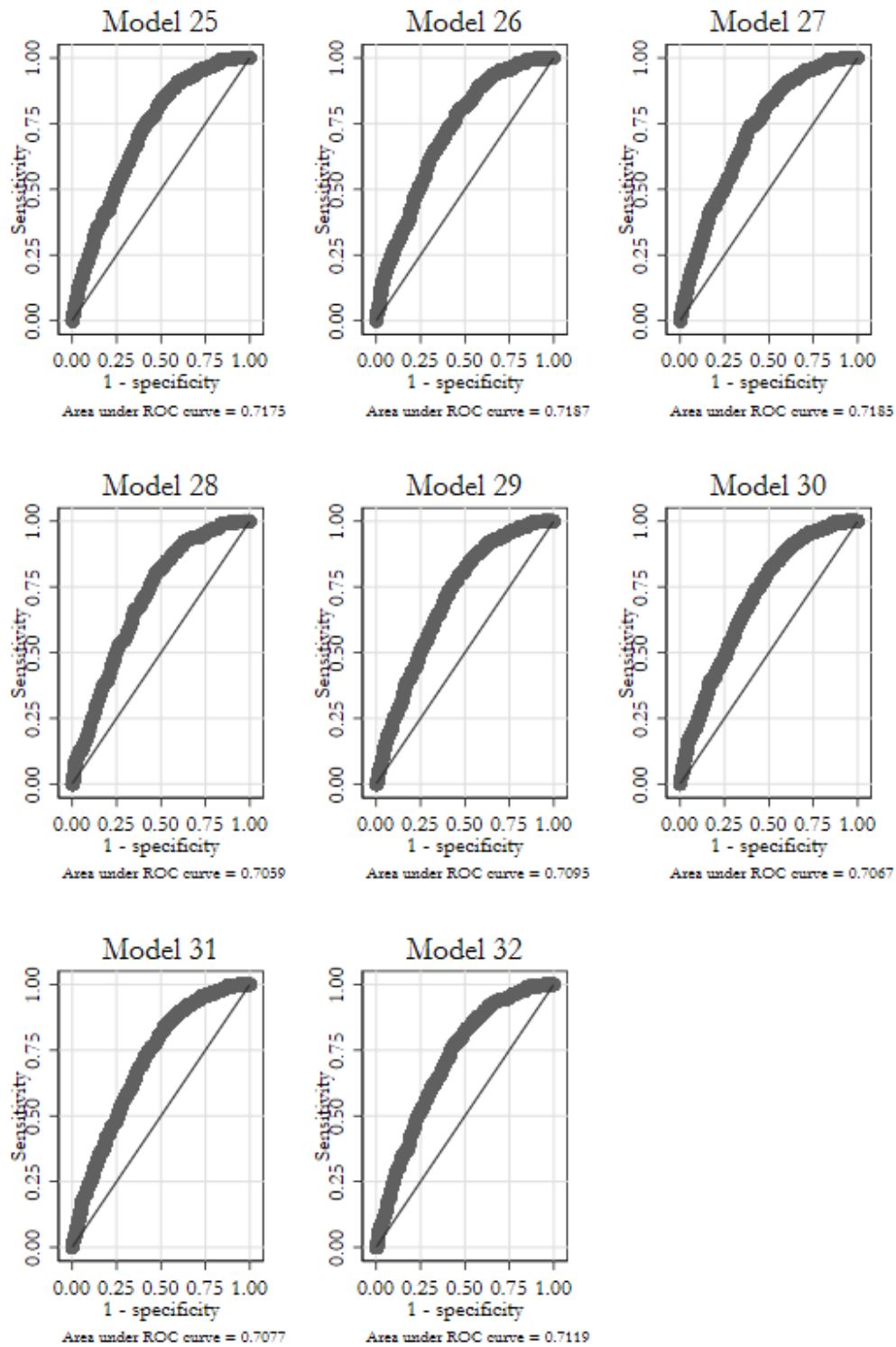
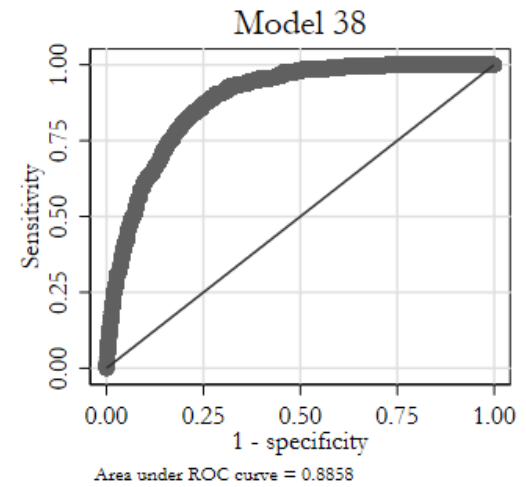
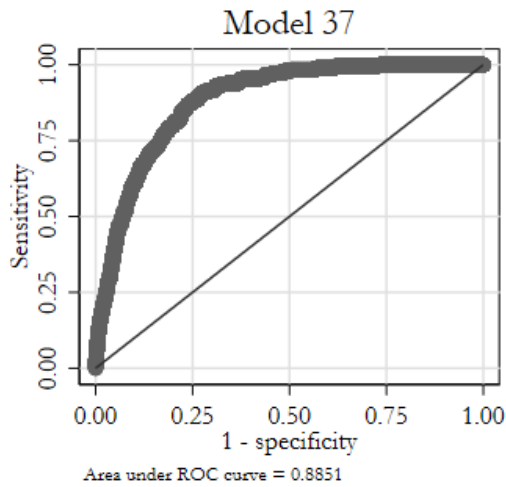
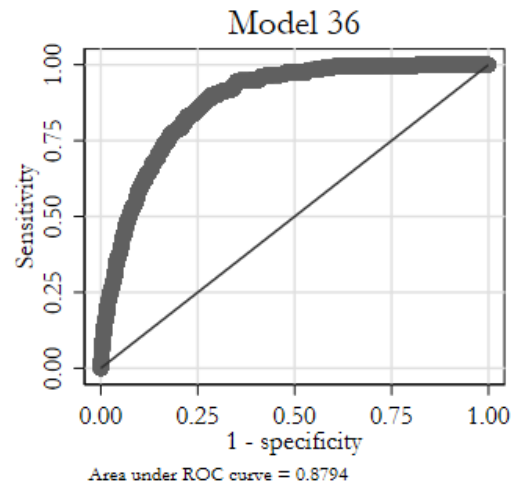
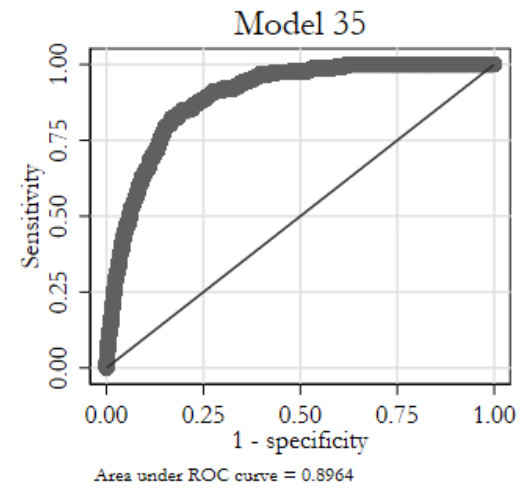
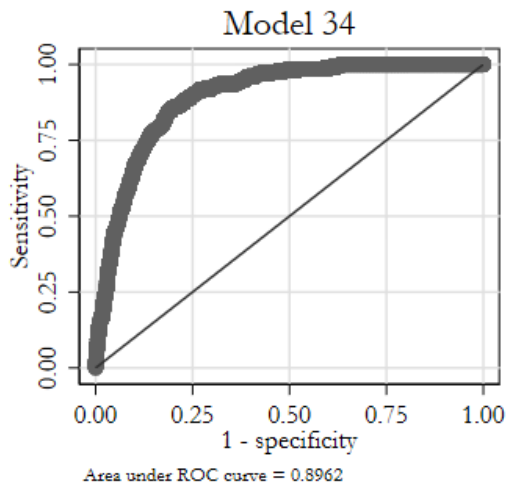
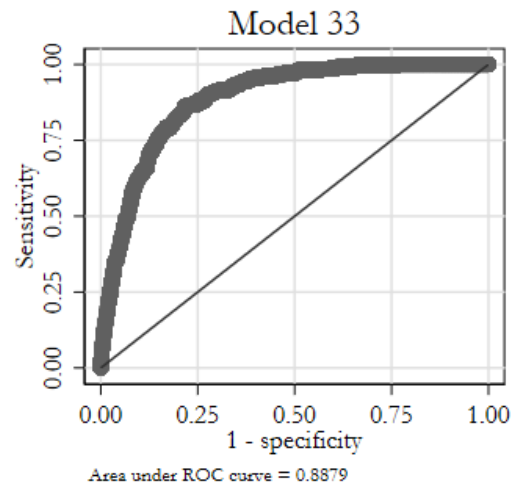


Figure 19. ROC curve for models 33–38



8.10. Appendix 10 – Models with DCRSEs

Below are the results of the logistic regression analysis using dyadic cluster-robust standard errors (DCRSEs) to account for the possibility of “dyadic clustering.” Overall, these results do not differ substantially from those reported in the main text. Any changes in statistical significance, whether from significant to non-significant or vice versa, are highlighted for convenience.

Table 40. Analysis

| | Model 1 | Model 3 |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> |
| Common threat | 1.275^{***} (0.251) | 1.276^{***} (0.216) |
| Alliance | 1.413^{***} (0.233) | 1.224^{***} (0.221) |
| Common threat * Alliance | -1.164^{***} (0.296) | -1.113^{***} (0.256) |
| Time | 0.109 (0.140) | 0.157[*] (0.080) |
| Time ² | 0.0130 (0.0138) | 0.00858 (0.00724) |
| Time ³ | -0.000506 (0.000356) | -0.000390[*] (0.000164) |
| Constant | -8.706^{***} (0.406) | -8.781^{***} (0.503) |
| <i>N</i> | 77204 | 93117 |
| Pseudo <i>R</i> ² | 0.091 | 0.076 |
| Years | 1993–2014 | 1993–2020 |
| | | Forward-filled |

Note: Dyadic cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 41. Analysis

| | Model 5 | Model 7 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Logit</i> |
| Common threat | 1.279*** (0.252) | 1.281*** (0.217) |
| Low commitment | 1.521*** (0.247) | 1.338*** (0.223) |
| High commitment | 1.151** (0.359) | 0.910* (0.378) |
| Common threat * Low commitment | -0.850** (0.293) | -0.749** (0.252) |
| Common threat * High commitment | -1.383*** (0.404) | -1.286*** (0.355) |
| Time | 0.0969 (0.143) | 0.141 (0.0817) |
| Time ² | 0.0138 (0.0141) | 0.00982 (0.00747) |
| Time ³ | -0.000522 (0.000362) | -0.000415* (0.000169) |
| Constant | -8.684*** (0.403) | -8.749*** (0.496) |
| <i>N</i> | 77204 | 93117 |
| Pseudo <i>R</i> ² | 0.095 | 0.080 |
| Years | 1993–2014 | 1993–2020 |
| | | Forward-filled |

Note: Dyadic cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 42. Analysis

| | Model 33 <i>Logit</i> | Model 34 <i>Logit</i> | Model 35 <i>Logit</i> | Model 36 <i>Logit</i> | Model 37 <i>Logit</i> | Model 38 <i>Logit</i> |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Common threat (MID) | -0.182 (0.208) | 0.535 (0.287) | 0.515 (0.284) | -0.136 (0.203) | 0.481 (0.272) | 0.462 (0.264) |
| Trade value log | 1.131*** (0.115) | 1.072*** (0.106) | 1.101*** (0.104) | 1.028*** (0.106) | 1.000*** (0.103) | 1.029*** (0.099) |
| Foreign policy similarity | 0.205 (0.247) | 0.0843 (0.277) | 0.210 (0.211) | 0.164 (0.235) | 0.107 (0.254) | 0.218 (0.201) |
| Foreign policy similarity ² | 0.0820 (0.0531) | 0.0343 (0.0692) | 0.0685 (0.0469) | 0.0551 (0.0528) | 0.0238 (0.0647) | 0.0526 (0.0494) |
| Power differential (CINC) | -0.532 (1.182) | -0.0347 (1.006) | 0.283 (1.060) | 1.578 (1.057) | 1.935 (1.058) | 2.283* (1.030) |
| Major power | 0.179 (0.292) | 0.145 (0.278) | 0.115 (0.245) | 0.324 (0.290) | 0.317 (0.282) | 0.297 (0.254) |
| BRICS | 1.198*** (0.296) | 1.179*** (0.296) | 1.059*** (0.291) | 1.012*** (0.281) | 0.978*** (0.281) | 0.845** (0.272) |
| Regime similarity (Polity V) | -0.0364** (0.0131) | -0.0438** (0.0142) | -0.0411** (0.0147) | -0.0417* (0.0171) | -0.0464** (0.0167) | -0.0428* (0.0176) |
| Joint democracy (Polity V) | 0.585* (0.239) | 0.697** (0.245) | 0.808** (0.285) | 0.601** (0.231) | 0.706** (0.240) | 0.803** (0.254) |
| Constraints (POLCON) | -1.320* (0.619) | -1.228 (0.636) | -1.265* (0.629) | -1.236* (0.581) | -1.190* (0.590) | -1.192* (0.596) |
| Alliance | | 0.767** (0.239) | | | 0.507* (0.227) | |
| Common threat * Alliance | | -1.337*** (0.294) | | | -1.160*** (0.287) | |
| Low commitment | | | 0.898*** (0.238) | | | 0.617* (0.250) |
| High commitment | | | 0.340 (0.480) | | | 0.0776 (0.431) |
| Common threat * Low commitment | | | -1.127*** (0.261) | | | -0.871*** (0.221) |
| Common threat * High commitment | | | -1.418** (0.515) | | | -1.275** (0.454) |
| Constant | -11.45*** (0.446) | -11.73*** (0.413) | -11.67*** (0.381) | -11.05*** (0.619) | -11.26*** (0.672) | -11.19*** (0.660) |
| N | 59361 | 59361 | 59361 | 74205 | 74205 | 74205 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.184 | 0.193 | 0.196 | 0.175 | 0.180 | 0.184 |
| Years | 1993– 2015 | 1993– 2015 | 1993– 2015 | 1993– 2020 | 1993– 2020 | 1993– 2020 |
| | | | | Forward- filled | Forward- filled | Forward- filled |

Note: Dyadic cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses; Temporal controls hidden; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

8.11. Appendix 11 – Models with Year Dummies

Below are the results of the logistic regression analysis using year dummies as a robustness check instead of the cubic polynomial approach (Carter & Signorino, 2010). Overall, these results do not differ substantially from those reported in the main text. Any changes in statistical significance, whether from significant to non-significant or vice versa, are highlighted for convenience.

Table 43. Analysis

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Probit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Probit</i> |
| Common threat (MID) | 1.298*** (0.194) | 0.447*** (0.0685) | 1.288*** (0.171) | 0.450*** (0.0612) |
| Alliance | 1.405*** (0.142) | 0.489*** (0.0505) | 1.217*** (0.126) | 0.424*** (0.0447) |
| Common threat (MID) * Alliance | -1.157*** (0.257) | -0.393*** (0.0935) | -1.107*** (0.231) | -0.379*** (0.0846) |
| Constant | -8.677*** (1.009) | -3.622*** (0.285) | -8.610*** (1.006) | -3.601*** (0.283) |
| <i>N</i> | 73877 | 73877 | 89795 | 89795 |
| Pseudo <i>R</i> ² | 0.087 | 0.086 | 0.073 | 0.073 |
| Years | 1993–2014 | 1993–2014 | 1993–2014 | 1993–2014 |
| Year dummies | Yes | Yes | Forward-filled Yes | Forward-filled Yes |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 44. Analysis

| | Model 5 | Model 6 | Model 7 | Model 8 |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Probit</i> | <i>Logit</i> | <i>Probit</i> |
| Common threat (MID) | 1.301^{***} (0.194) | 0.448^{***} (0.0685) | 1.293^{***} (0.171) | 0.451^{***} (0.0613) |
| Low commitment | 1.509^{***} (0.153) | 0.527^{***} (0.0557) | 1.333^{***} (0.135) | 0.466^{***} (0.0489) |
| High commitment | 1.141^{***} (0.232) | 0.397^{***} (0.0835) | 0.890^{***} (0.220) | 0.311^{***} (0.0783) |
| Common threat * Low commitment | -0.847^{**} (0.283) | -0.277^{**} (0.105) | -0.754^{**} (0.256) | -0.245[*] (0.0959) |
| Common threat * High commitment | -1.367^{***} (0.358) | -0.478^{***} (0.129) | -1.260^{***} (0.329) | -0.443^{***} (0.118) |
| Constant | -8.667^{***} (1.009) | -3.619^{***} (0.286) | -8.601^{***} (1.006) | -3.599^{***} (0.283) |
| <i>N</i> | 73877 | 73877 | 89795 | 89795 |
| Pseudo <i>R</i> ² | 0.091 | 0.090 | 0.077 | 0.077 |
| Years | 1993–2014 | 1993–2014 | 1993–2014 | 1993–2014 |
| Year dummies | Yes | Yes | Forward-filled Yes | Forward-filled Yes |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 45. Analysis

| | Model 33 <i>Logit</i> | Model 34 <i>Logit</i> | Model 35 <i>Logit</i> | Model 36 <i>Logit</i> | Model 37 <i>Logit</i> | Model 38 <i>Logit</i> |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Common threat (MID) | -0.198 (0.178) | 0.567** (0.218) | 0.548* (0.217) | -0.144 (0.157) | 0.494** (0.188) | 0.479* (0.188) |
| Trade value log | 1.092*** (0.0746) | 1.033*** (0.0807) | 1.063*** (0.0826) | 0.994*** (0.0638) | 0.966*** (0.0688) | 0.994*** (0.0714) |
| Foreign policy similarity | 0.0495 (0.186) | -0.0464 (0.190) | 0.0570 (0.187) | 0.0781 (0.159) | 0.0364 (0.160) | 0.124 (0.159) |
| Foreign policy similarity ² | 0.0243 (0.0525) | -0.0160 (0.0539) | 0.0106 (0.0530) | 0.0187 (0.0442) | -0.00723 (0.0446) | 0.0139 (0.0445) |
| Power differential (CINC) | 0.765 (1.285) | 1.246 (1.307) | 1.611 (1.346) | 2.498* (1.080) | 2.834* (1.107) | 3.210** (1.146) |
| Major power | 0.109 (0.174) | 0.0766 (0.175) | 0.0526 (0.170) | 0.276 (0.153) | 0.270 (0.154) | 0.254 (0.151) |
| BRICS | 1.047*** (0.166) | 1.038*** (0.170) | 0.909*** (0.174) | 0.889*** (0.155) | 0.861*** (0.157) | 0.727*** (0.162) |
| Regime similarity (Polity V) | -0.0277 (0.0168) | -0.0358* (0.0174) | -0.0328 (0.0176) | -0.0366** (0.0139) | -0.0419** (0.0142) | -0.0382** (0.0145) |
| Joint democracy (Polity V) | 0.536* (0.234) | 0.661** (0.242) | 0.782** (0.242) | 0.577** (0.198) | 0.688*** (0.203) | 0.791*** (0.203) |
| Constraints (POLCON) | -1.030* (0.462) | -0.929 (0.482) | -0.967 (0.503) | -1.059** (0.408) | -1.014* (0.419) | -1.021* (0.434) |
| Alliance | | 0.792*** (0.179) | | | 0.521*** (0.158) | |
| Common threat * Alliance | | -1.410*** (0.297) | | | -1.190*** (0.268) | |
| Low commitment | | | 0.939*** (0.186) | | | 0.647*** (0.165) |
| High commitment | | | 0.332 (0.289) | | | 0.0641 (0.271) |
| Common threat * Low commitment | | | -1.176*** (0.339) | | | -0.912** (0.318) |
| Common threat * High commitment | | | -1.510*** (0.410) | | | -1.281*** (0.369) |
| Constant | -8.288*** (0.390) | -8.597*** (0.395) | -8.568*** (0.401) | -9.257*** (0.496) | -9.472*** (0.496) | -9.453*** (0.501) |
| N | 54039 | 54039 | 54039 | 69199 | 69199 | 69199 |
| Pseudo R ² | 0.176 | 0.186 | 0.190 | 0.170 | 0.176 | 0.179 |
| Years | 1993– 2015 | 1993– 2015 | 1993– 2015 | 1993– 2020 | 1993– 2020 | 1993– 2020 |
| Years dummies | Yes | Yes | Yes | Forward- filled Yes | Forward- filled Yes | Forward- filled Yes |

Note: Dyad-clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.