The Psychology of Followership:
How Group Conflict Influences Preferences for Leaders

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Abstract

A growing body of research suggests that humans likely evolved to use two distinct strategies to acquire social rank: dominance and prestige (e.g., Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Dominance is characterized by the use of aggression to induce fear and coerced followership, whereas prestige involves the display of expertise and knowledge to gain admiration and freely chosen deference. Little is known, however, about the factors that influence follower preferences for these different kinds of leadership. We propose that group conflict dynamics contribute to follower preferences, such that followers exhibit a stronger preference for dominant leaders during intergroup conflict, due to these leaders’ willingness to use aggression against outgroups, and a stronger preference for prestigious leaders during intragroup conflict, due to prestigious leaders’ perceived ability to resolve conflicts. We conducted three pre-registered studies (N = 979) to test this account. Studies 1-3 manipulated perceptions of group conflict using hypothetical scenarios and assessed follower preferences for dominant and prestigious leadership in each situation. Results supported our hypotheses, showing that followers preferred dominant leaders during intergroup, compared to intragroup, conflict; and prestigious leaders during intragroup, compared to intergroup, conflict. In Study 3 we further found that these preferences are partly driven by the different group goals that become salient during each kind of conflict. Finally, in a fourth pre-registered study we tested two hypotheses emerging from these findings: (1) Dominant and prestigious leaders should strategically manipulate followers’ perceptions of conflicts so as to make their own leadership style seem more effective, and (2) These manipulations should be observable in the language leaders use when speaking to followers. Using archival data from U.S. presidential speeches, Study 4 provided initial evidence to support these hypotheses: presidents high in dominance and prestige (based on ratings made by expert U.S. historians) used distinctive
language in their State of the Union Addresses potentially to increase the salience of the group conflicts for which their own leadership style is preferred. Together, these studies provide new insights into how group context and follower preferences work together to influence dominant and prestigious leaders’ status acquisition.
Lay Summary
Leaders acquire status in more than one way; some demonstrate expertise to gain respect (i.e., prestigious leaders), whereas others use intimidation and aggression to force deference (i.e., dominant leaders). Although prestigious leaders tend to be more successful at acquiring support, recent global politics has seen a rise in support for dominant leadership. To understand this trend, we examined how one contextual factor facing groups—conflict within versus between groups—shifts the traits that followers seek in leaders. Across three studies, we found that followers preferred dominant leaders more when they were concerned about a conflict with another group, and prestigious leaders more when they were concerned about conflicts within their group. In a fourth study, we examined and found support for one way that real-world leaders might capitalize on these preferences: when addressing followers, they use language that emphasizes the group conflict for which their own leadership style is preferred.
Preface

This thesis is an original, unpublished work by Ian Hohm, under the supervision of Dr. J. Tracy. I was responsible for developing theoretical hypotheses, conducting experiments, analyzing data, and writing this thesis under Dr. Tracy’s supervision. The experiments reported here were covered by UBC Ethics Certificates H20-03360 and H21-00954.
# Table of Contents

Abstract......................................................................................................................... iii

Lay Summary.................................................................................................................... v

Preface............................................................................................................................... vi

Table of Contents .......................................................................................................... vii

List of Tables ................................................................................................................... x

Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................... xi

Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1

  Status-Seeking Strategies: Dominance and Prestige ................................................... 2

  Adaptive Followership Theory ................................................................................... 4

  Follower Preferences May Vary by Group Conflict ..................................................... 7

  The Present Research ............................................................................................... 10

Study 1 ........................................................................................................................... 12

  Method ....................................................................................................................... 12

  Participants ................................................................................................................ 12

  Procedure ................................................................................................................. 12

  Materials .................................................................................................................. 13

  Results ....................................................................................................................... 13

  Discussion ............................................................................................................... 14

Study 2 ........................................................................................................................... 16
List of Tables

Table 1 Dominance and Prestige Ratings for Each United States President, Study 4...36
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Introduction

In recent years global politics has seen a rise in the popularity of authoritarian and dominating leaders, such as Donald Trump, Vladmir Putin, and Matteo Salvini (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). According to the Global State of Democracy Report, 2021 marks the fifth consecutive year that the number of countries moving in an authoritarian direction exceeds the number moving in a democratic direction (IDEA, 2021), and this change is reflected in elected officials. Whereas elected leaders are typically agreeable-seeming people who earn their status through experience and the demonstration of valued expertise (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014), this newer brand of leaders are individuals who gained status despite their relatively disagreeable personalities, lack of experience, and aggressive and opportunistic tendencies. This marks something of a shift in citizens’ preferences, and a surprising one given that these kinds of leaders often behave against the interests of the group when placed in positions of power (Case & Maner, 2014).

The current cross-cultural emergence of support for these leaders thus suggests that global contextual factors may be influencing these preferences. Although prior research has examined the factors that contribute to determining who rises to the top of social hierarchies (Cheng et al., 2013; Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010) much less work has explored the factors that contribute to followers’ preferences for particular kinds of leaders, even though followers play a crucial role in determining the structure of social hierarchies. More specifically, little is known about how contextually based group challenges influence follower preferences, by shifting the characteristics they prioritize or seek out in leaders. In the current research, we aim to fill this gap in the literature by investigating whether and how follower preferences are shaped by the conflicts their groups face.
Status-Seeking Strategies: Dominance and Prestige

Across species, social hierarchies evolved as an adaptive solution to many of the problems associated with group living (Mazur, 1973; Chase, Tovey, Spangler-Martin, & Manfredonia, 2002). Although hierarchies can take numerous forms, they are, fundamentally, systems in which some group members are afforded higher status, and consequently granted greater attention, influence, and resources than their lower status counterparts (Homans 1950, 1961; Magee & Galinsky 2008; Mazur, 1985; Zitek & Tiedens 2012). Notably, the existence of social hierarchies benefits both high- and low-status group members, by minimizing conflict (e.g., over the distribution of resources), creating order, and facilitating collective action (Halevy, Chou, & Galinsky, 2011; de Kwaadsteniet & van Dijk, 2010). Hierarchies thus enhance groups’ overall performance on tasks that require coordination and cooperation (Báles 1950; Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980).

Nonetheless, the acquisition of higher status has been associated with additional adaptive benefits across human evolution. High-status agents accrue reputational benefits that make them more desirable as potential allies and sexual partners (Gintis, Smith, & Bowles, 2001), and they are granted greater access to shared resources (Boone & Kessler, 1999; Price & Van Vugt, 2014). Given these benefits, researchers have proposed that individuals evolved an innate motivation to seek status (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Kenrick et al., 2010). Furthermore, a growing literature suggests that humans utilize two distinct behavioral tactics to acquire status: dominance and prestige (Cheng & Tracy, 2014; Cheng et al., 2010; 2013). In this account, first proposed by Henrich and Gil-White (2001), social hierarchies emerge as a result of (a) the coercion of others by dominant individuals who attain power by threatening to invoke harm, and
(b) freely conferred deference granted to prestigious individuals who display and share culturally valued skills and knowledge.

More specifically, individuals who attain social rank via dominance use intimidation, aggression, and coercion to force compliance from other group members. Dominance tactics are seen in the hierarchical systems of a wide range of other species (e.g., Chase, Tovey, Spangler-Martin, & Manfredonia, 2002; Rowell 1974) and continue to influence status allocation in human hierarchies today (Garfield & Hagen, 2020; Cheng et al., 2013). In general, dominant individuals acquire power by threatening to harm the well-being or resources of group members if they are not granted deference, and subordinates comply in order to avoid such costs. Prestige, in contrast, is high status that is granted willingly by subordinates to group members who have earned others’ respect through the display of socially valued skills and knowledge. By deferring to prestigious leaders, followers are granted access to these individuals, allowing them to copy their skills and learn from these particularly competent social models. Attaining social rank through prestige is a strategy thought to be unique to humans, as it facilitates the transfer of cultural skills and knowledge (Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Laland & Galef, 2009). Humans are prone to imitating the behavior of high-ranking group members (McGuigan, 2013), so placing prestigious group members in positions of high rank results in the imitation of culturally valued practices, enhancing the transfer of fitness-maximizing behaviors.

Consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of this account, dominance and prestige-based strategies are associated with divergent traits, competencies, and behaviors. Prestigious individuals tend to be humble, agreeable, conscientious, well-liked, and exhibit a strong desire for social approval (Cheng et al., 2010; Maner & Case, 2016). Prestige is also associated with high achievement and skill, whereas dominance is unassociated with expertise (Cheng et al.,
Dominant individuals, in contrast, are disagreeable, manipulative, and aggressive, and they tend to be disliked by their group (Cheng et al., 2013; Buttermore, 2006; Cheng et al., 2010; Weidman, Cheng, & Tracy, 2018).

Despite these differences, both dominance and prestige-based strategies have been shown to facilitate the acquisition of social rank, across a range of contexts. In the lab, undergraduate students working together in small groups were found to grant influence to group members whom they perceived as prestigious and to those perceived as dominant (Cheng et al., 2013). In this study, dominant individuals were granted power despite the fact that group members reported disliking them, and, in fact, group members’ fear of dominant individuals mediated the relationship between peer-perceived dominance and influence, suggesting that dominants’ ability to induce fear is what allows them to attain power. Brand and Mesoudi (2019) conceptually replicated these results in a study of several different naturalistic groups, including sports clubs, chess clubs, and volunteer groups. Across all groups examined, dominance and prestige independently predicted greater influence over the group. Similarly, in their study of the Chabu, an Ethiopian population of egalitarian former hunter-gatherers, Garfield and Hagen (2020) found that both dominance and prestige independently predicted status.

These findings demonstrate that dominance and prestige are distinct effective avenues to acquiring status; both work, and they work through different means. However, it is difficult to reconcile these findings with active support for dominant leadership in contemporary societies. Dominance is partially defined by its coercive nature (i.e., followers defer to dominant individuals unwillingly). This fact raises the question of why dominant leaders are sometimes willingly chosen, even over more prestigious alternatives.

**Adaptive Followership Theory**
Given that dominant and prestigious leaders differ in their typical behavioral tendencies and skillsets, and that group living presents a range of challenges that require different skillsets, one potential answer is that followers select the leader they perceive to be best suited to solve current problems the group is facing (Van Vugt, 2006; Bastardoz and Van Vugt, 2019). At times, that leader may be a dominant one. Previous researchers have argued that humans, as group-living creatures, possess a psychology which guides decision-making on a number of issues relevant followership (Van Vugt, 2006; Bastardoz and Van Vugt, 2019). These decisions include whether to become an active and engaged follower, what goals to pursue, and how to behave around and engage with leaders. Most important for the present research, followership psychology also likely evolved to shape the cues that followers use to select their leaders.

Importantly, leadership positions are unique roles in social groups that require specific skillsets to carry out effectively. A person who is popular does not necessarily possess the qualities that facilitate successful leadership. Hence, adaptive followership theory suggests that humans select leaders based on different criteria than those they use to select other kinds of social partners. For example, an individual might want a romantic partner who shares their love for kayaking, but care less whether their boss does. Supporting this idea, Laustsen and Petersen (2015) found that preferences for traits in leaders are unrelated to preferences for traits in friends. For example, conservatives prefer dominant-looking political candidates but non-dominant-looking friends. This finding suggests that individuals form leadership preferences through a domain-specific psychological process, prioritizing and seeking out a particular set of cues, and use different processes for selecting individuals to fill other social roles. It is therefore likely that when selecting a leader, followers will seek out and utilize cues that are particularly relevant to effective leadership in a given situation.
What cues, or information, do followers seek and attend to when selecting leaders? Ostensibly, followers use available information about (a) the skills and attributes of potential candidates and (b) the situation in which a leader is needed. Indeed, several studies have found that followers’ preferences are informed by potential leaders’ physical features, such as facial or body appearance (Re et al., 2013; Cherulnik, Turns, & Wilderman, 2006) because followers make subconscious inferences about others’ traits (e.g., competence, trustworthiness) based on physical cues (Antonakis & Eubanks, 2017). This process, known as face-ism, has been shown to predict leader selections by influencing followers’ inferences about whether potential leaders possess likeable characteristics (e.g., Antonakis & Eubanks, 2017). Inferences based on facial appearance occur in milliseconds (Willis & Todorov, 2006), and generalize across cultures (Berggren et al., 2010). Demonstrating the real-world validity of these face-based preferences, Antonakis and Dalgas (2009) showed 681 Swiss children pairs of faces of political candidates (matching in gender and ethnicity) in 57 French parliamentary run-off elections currently underway. These children guessed the winner, based on facial appearance alone, at 71% accuracy.

These findings suggest that there is a certain profile of individuals that followers generally prefer in leaders. However, situational factors are also known to influence these preferences. First, they influence whether followers want to be led at all. Jumenez, Flitton, and Mesoudi (2021) demonstrated that followers desire greater leadership in times of economic uncertainty compared to stability. This preference is sensible, because in the absence of a group problem needing to be solved, accepting leadership requires sacrifice and provides little benefit to followers. Situational factors also have been shown to influence preferences for particular
traits in leaders. For example, followers tend to prefer younger rather than older leaders during times of change (Spisak et al., 2014).

Perceptions of conflict the group is facing also influence preferences for leaders. Followers prefer leaders with more feminine and warm personalities in times of peace, and more masculine leaders in times of conflict (Laustsen & Petersen, 2015; Little, 2014; Little, Burriss, Jones, & Roberts, 2007; Spisak, Dekker, Krüger, & Van Vugt, 2012). To our knowledge, however, previous research has not examined whether the type of conflict facing a group influences followers’ preferences for type of leader. Prior studies in this domain have largely contrasted times of war versus peace, with war defined as aggressive conflict between groups. However, conflict can also occur within groups, such as when group members fight over a shared resource or group decision. This type of conflict is not generally solved with aggression, and requires a different skillset to effectively resolve. Given this distinction, followers may take the specific nature of a group conflict into account when selecting leaders, and shape their preferences partly on this basis.

**Follower Preferences May Vary by Group Conflict**

This line of thinking suggests that specific features of a conflict are likely to play an important role in shaping follower preferences for leaders. Furthermore, one feature that may be particularly relevant is the presence of intergroup versus intragroup conflict, as both can impair group functioning by drawing resources or impeding cooperation, but they vary in the skillsets required to solve them. Intergroup conflicts refer to those that occur between two different groups, and their presence is likely to have been a major selection pressure in humans’ ancestral history. These conflicts are typically elicited by competition over some mutually desired resource, and can involve attempting to outperform an outgroup, or outright violence between
groups. Intragroup conflicts, in contrast, occur when one or more members within the same group are in conflict, and also can take a number of forms, including disagreements over group decisions, conflicting goals, criminal behavior, and other kinds of divisions within a group that might impede coordination and cooperation. Although considering conflict at this broad level, by distinguishing between inter and intragroup, is somewhat imprecise, the overall differences between these kinds of conflicts make it likely that the presence, or potential, of each will generate distinct leadership preferences among followers.

In the case of a group facing intergroup conflict with some other adversarial group, dominant leadership may become particularly appealing to followers, for a several reasons. First, dominant leaders possess the dispositional characteristics and often physical appearance necessary to intimidate opponents. As noted above, these include an ability to convey intimidation, aggression, and threat. A dominant leader might seem ideally suited to handle intergroup conflict because outgroup members witnessing this individual in a leadership role may be intimidated and consequently dissuaded from engaging in aggression against the group (Sell, Tooby, & Cosmides, 2009). Second, a large body of research on group dynamics has established that individuals tend to prioritize the welfare of their ingroup over that of outgroups (Struch & Schwartz, 1989), so dominant leaders’ apparent willingness to use aggressive tactics to protect the ingroup and its resources may elicit feelings of safety among followers in the face of outgroup threats. Although intergroup conflicts do not necessarily lead to aggressive altercations, they often do, and a risk-averse followership psychology would suggest a preference for leaders who can both (a) deter outgroup aggression and (b) facilitate aggression against the outgroup when deterrence is ineffective. Third, dominant leaders may be willing to use punitive tactics to enforce ingroup coordination in the face of outgroup threats. Intergroup conflicts often
require sacrifice on the part of the ingroup, whether it be the expenditure of resources or risk of life and limb, as in conscripted military service. Dominant leaders’ affinity for coercing others to follow orders may therefore be seen as a useful skill in these situations, facilitating coordinated action among even more reluctant ingroup members.

Prestigious leaders, in contrast, may appear less capable of resolving intergroup conflicts. Prestigious individuals acquired their status by sharing knowledge while also demonstrating empathy, humility, and agreeableness, in the sense of a willingness to help others and teach. Yet agreeable people are more likely to be taken advantage of, and less likely to retaliate or seek revenge (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Lee & Ashton, 2012; Zettler, Thielmann, Hilbig, & Moshagen, 2020). Prestigious leaders may therefore seem like less-than-ideal choices in times of intergroup conflict, as they present a risk of allowing the group to be exploited by outgroups. Furthermore, given their aversion to forcing cooperation with threat of punishment, prestigious leaders may seem less capable of enforcing ingroup coordination, often necessary for effectively dealing with outgroup threat. This line of reasoning suggests that dominant individuals will seem more appealing to followers when intergroup conflicts are salient, whereas prestigious individuals may seem less desirable in this situation.

Intragroup conflicts, in contrast, require a different set of solutions. Preserving group unity and minimizing relational conflicts among group members are both important for maximizing group performance, as ingroup divisions impede cooperation (de Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012). Within group conflicts should therefore create situations in which followers prefer leaders who can enhance their interpersonal relationships with other group members and effectively and fairly mediate and adjudicate conflicts. Prestigious individuals may appear to be especially viable leaders for these tasks. Prestigious individuals seek admiration and are
hypervigilant of social disapproval (Case, Bae, Larson, & Maner, 2021), so are likely to make decisions that all members of the group will respect and abide. They are likely to suggest thoughtful, impartial, and acceptable compromises, which in turn ensure cooperation and restore group functioning. Dominant individuals may be seen as less capable of this kind of delicate diplomacy, given their abrasiveness and self-interest while in positions of leadership (Case, Maner, 2014). We therefore predict that prestigious individuals will be preferred as leaders to a greater extent during intragroup conflicts than intergroup ones, whereas dominant individuals may seem less desirable in situations of intragroup conflict, and more desirable in situations of intergroup conflict.

**The Present Research**

To our knowledge, no prior studies have examined how particular types of group conflict influence follower preferences for various traits in leaders. Here, we take a step toward filling this gap in the literature by investigating how inter- and intragroup conflict differentially shape preferences for dominant and prestigious leaders. We do so by testing: (a) whether followers prefer dominant leaders in times of intergroup compared to intragroup conflict; (b) whether followers prefer prestigious leaders in times of intragroup compared to intergroup conflict; (c) whether preferences for dominant leaders are strengthened, and preferences for prestigious leaders weakened, when goals of enforcing norms and aggressing against outgroups are particularly salient; and (d) whether leaders might strategically increase their followership by using language patterns that highlight or make salient the kind of group conflict for which their own leadership style is preferred.

Four preregistered studies tested these hypotheses using both experimental and archival methods. In Studies 1 and 2, we examined how inter- versus intragroup conflict influence
leadership preferences, and specifically preferences for a more dominant versus a more prestigious leader. In Study 3, we investigated how these leadership preferences change depending on the particular goals followers hold in seeking to resolve each form of conflict. Finally, in Study 4, we tested whether the rhetorical styles demonstrated in speeches given by actual dominant and prestigious leaders throughout history (i.e., American presidents) vary in ways that might strategically alter follower perceptions of group conflicts, and potentially influence followers’ leadership preferences.
Study 1

In Study 1 we tested whether group conflict influences preferences for dominant and prestigious leaders, and, if so, whether these preferences depend on the type of conflict facing the group. We predicted that dominant leaders would be preferred during salient intergroup (compared to intragroup) conflicts, and prestigious leaders would be preferred during salient intragroup (compared to intergroup) conflicts.

Method

Participants. Three hundred, fifty-four Canadian undergraduates were recruited from the University of British Columbia’s human subjects pool to participate in a survey in exchange for course credit. Following the criteria specified in our pre-registration (https://osf.io/4udb6), 16 participants were excluded from analyses for failing an attention check. This resulted in a final sample of 338 participants (74% female; age range = 18-45, Median = 19 years). A power analysis indicated that our planned repeated-subjects design would require 180 participants to detect a moderate effect ($f = .20$) of conflict condition on leadership preferences, with 80% power. Additional participants were recruited to obtain a large enough sample for a separate study that participants also completed.

Procedure. This study used a 2 (social context) x 2 (conflict type) design in which each participant read two of four randomly chosen hypothetical vignettes describing a group conflict situation and asking them to imagine that they were a member of the group. Each participant read one vignette that involved an intergroup conflict and one that involved an intragroup conflict. After reading each vignette, participants rated the extent to which they wanted their group leader to be dominant and the extent to which they wanted their group leader to be prestigious, using the 17-item Dominance and Prestige Scales (Cheng et al., 2010; $\alpha = .76$ and
Finally, participants reported demographic information (including political orientation) before being thanked and debriefed.

**Materials.** All vignettes were five sentences long and asked participants to “imagine that” they were a part of a group facing conflict and were “put in the unique position of deciding who will lead” the group. Two of the four vignettes described a group that was in conflict with another group (**intergroup conflict condition**) and two described a group in which group members were in conflict with each other (**intragroup conflict condition**). Within these conflict conditions social context was manipulated, such that the conflict either took place in a clothing store or on a soccer team. This meant that in the intergroup conflict condition, participants were either employees at a clothing store that was in conflict with a competing business, or members of a soccer team facing a competitive opponent. In the intragroup conflict condition, clothing store vignettes described a situation where co-worker disagreements were impeding cooperation, and soccer team vignettes described a situation where arguments among teammates were impeding cooperation. Full vignettes used in all conditions are shown in Appendix A.

**Results**

We examined leadership preferences as a function of social context (soccer team vs. clothing store), conflict type (intergroup vs. intragroup), and leadership style (dominance vs. prestige) using multiple regression. Although it was not predicted, social context moderated a two-way interaction between conflict type and leadership style predicting leader preferences, $\beta = .81$, $t(1344) = 4.48$, $p < .001$; $F(7, 1344) = 473.7$, $p < .001$. We therefore conducted analyses separately by scenario context.

In the soccer team scenario, a two-way interaction emerged, showing that leadership preferences varied as a function of conflict type and leadership style, $\beta = .29$, $t(672) = 2.12$, $p =$
.03; \( F(3, 672) = 587.50, p < .001 \). Simple slope tests showed no effect of conflict type on preference for prestigious leaders, \( \beta = .001, t(336) = -0.03, p = .98 \), but, consistent with our hypothesis, a significant effect on preferences for dominant leaders, such that they were preferred to a greater extent during intergroup, \( M = 3.30, SD = .95, \beta = .15, t(336) = -2.7, p < .01 \), compared to intragroup, \( M = 3.01, SD = .99 \), conflict.

In the clothing store scenario, a two-way interaction also emerged between conflict type and leadership style predicting leadership preferences. Preferences for prestigious leaders varied depending on conflict type, but, in opposition to our hypothesis, participants preferred prestigious leaders to a greater extent during intergroup, \( M = 5.86, SD = .83 \), compared to intragroup, \( M = 5.42, SD = .66, \beta = .28, t(336) = -5.4, p < .001 \), conflict. Preferences for dominance did not vary depending on conflict type, \( \beta = .04, t(336) = .82, p = .42 \).

**Discussion**

Study 1 provided mixed support for our hypotheses. As predicted, follower preferences for dominant and prestigious leaders varied depending on the type of conflict the group was facing. However, these preferences also varied depending on the social context of the conflict. While results in the soccer team scenario supported our expectation that intergroup conflicts lead followers to prefer dominant leaders who can coordinate the ingroup against an outgroup threat, results in the clothing store scenario did not replicate this effect, and produced an effect for prestige preferences inconsistent with our hypotheses.

One possibility for this unexpected result is that participants in the clothing store scenario were not sufficiently invested in the success of their group. Whereas individuals on a sports team tend to feel a strong intrinsic desire to win—the explicit goal of every team member—this same desire does not necessarily exist for employees working in retail. Follower decision-making is
partially based on perceptions of the relative pay-offs followers expect to accrue from successful leadership (Bastardoz & van Vugt, 2019), so, if a follower has little to gain from selecting an effective leader, they may exhibit preferences that do not reflect their beliefs about the leader’s likely effectiveness. In the clothing store scenario, lower investment in group success may have resulted in preferences driven by factors unrelated to perceived leader capabilities, such as conformity to group norms or a desire for a leader who would be less demanding.

Given this potential limitation, in Study 2 we sought to examine the effects of social context more robustly by incorporating additional, and more diverse, social contexts. We also ensured that participants had good reason to be invested in the outcome of each group conflict, by specifying the negative impacts (e.g., monetary losses) that both individual members and the group as a whole would suffer if their leader did not resolve the conflict effectively.
Study 2

In Study 2, we replicated the design of Study 1 but edited the vignettes such that participants were told why they, as followers, should be personally invested in the success of the group. We also developed additional vignettes to test our hypotheses across a broader range of social contexts. As in Study 1, we predicted that dominant leadership would be preferred when intergroup conflicts were made salient (compared to intragroup conflicts), and prestigious leadership would be preferred when intragroup conflicts were made salient (compared to intergroup conflicts).

Method

Participants. Two hundred, eighty Americans were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. Following the same exclusion criteria as in Study 1 and as specified in our pre-registration (https://osf.io/2rkc4), 16 participants were excluded from analyses for failing an attention check. This resulted in a final sample of 264 participants (52% female; age range = 19-77, Median = 41 years). This sample size was determined based on a power analysis that indicated our planned repeated-subjects design required 250 participants to detect a moderate effect (f = .20) of group conflict condition (intergroup vs. intragroup) and leadership style (dominance vs. prestige) on leadership preferences, with 80% power.

Procedure. This study used a 2 (conflict type) x 4 (social context) design in which each participant read two of eight randomly chosen vignettes describing a group conflict situation, and were asked to imagine that they were a member of the group. Each participant read one vignette that involved an intergroup conflict and one that involved an intragroup conflict. As in Study 1, after reading each vignette participants rated the extent to which they wanted a group leader who was dominant and the extent to which they wanted a group leader who was prestigious, using the same 17-item Dominance and Prestige Scales as in Study 1 (Cheng et al., 2010; α = .87, and .89,
respectively). Finally, participants provided basic demographic information before being thanked and debriefed.

**Materials.** All vignettes described, in five to nine sentences, a situation of group conflict, and asked participants to imagine that they were part of the group and were “put in the unique position of deciding who will lead” the group. Four of the vignettes described a group in conflict with another group (**intergroup conflict condition**) and four described a group in which group members were in conflict with each other (**intragroup conflict condition**). Within each of these conditions, social context was manipulated such that the conflict took place either among teammates on a soccer team, members of a self-sufficient commune, scientists collaborating in a laboratory, or co-workers on a business retreat. This meant that in the intergroup conflict condition participants were asked to imagine that they were either (a) members of a soccer team facing a competitive opponent, (b) members of a commune confronting a rival commune that had stolen supplies, (c) scientists working in a laboratory confronting a rival lab that had stolen plans for a self-driving car, or (d) co-workers on a business retreat competing with another group of co-workers in a series of retreat games. In contrast, in the intragroup conflict condition participants imagined that they were either (a) members of a soccer team engaged in an argument that was impeding group cooperation, (2) commune members disagreeing about the allocation of food, (c) collaborating scientists disagreeing about the design of a self-driving car, or (d) co-workers on a business retreat disagreeing about the best course of action in cooperative games. In each vignette participants were informed that all members of the group would lose valuable resources if the conflict was not resolved effectively by the leader. Full vignettes used in all conditions are shown in Appendix B.

**Results**
We examined leadership preferences as a function of conflict type (intergroup vs. intragroup) and leadership style (dominance vs. prestige) using multiple regression. As predicted, a two-way interaction emerged, indicating that the type of conflict facing the group moderated leadership preferences, $\beta = .16$, $t(1052) = 7.53, p < .001$; $F(3, 1052) = 479.60, p < .001$. We next tested whether social context moderated this interaction. In contrast to Study 1, and consistent with our expectation that the predicted two-way interaction would hold across social context, no three-way interaction emerged, $\beta = .02$, $t(1048) = 1.21, F(7, 1048) = 205.80, p = .23$. We therefore collapsed across social context for all subsequent analyses.

We next examined the effect of conflict condition (intergroup conflict vs. intragroup conflict) on preferences for dominant and prestigious leadership. Supporting our predictions, simple slope tests revealed that conflict type influenced preferences for dominant leaders, such that followers preferred a leader high in dominance during intergroup, $M = 3.98, SD = 1.37, \beta = .32$, $t(526) = 7.67, p < .001$, compared to intragroup, $M = 3.13, SD = 1.18$, conflict. Also supporting our predictions, followers preferred a leader high in prestige during intragroup, $M = 6.17, SD = .91, \beta = -.09$, $t(526) = -2.41, p = .03$, compared to intergroup, $M = 5.99, SD = .93$, conflict.

**Discussion**

Study 2 provided clear support for our hypotheses. Dominant leadership was preferred to a greater extent in times of intergroup, compared to intragroup, conflict, whereas prestigious leadership was preferred to a greater extent in times of intragroup, compared to intergroup, conflict. These findings held across four different social contexts, suggesting that these preferences exist irrespective of group type. Given that Study 2 included two additional contexts beyond those included in Study 1, these results are likely to be more robust than those of Study
1, in terms of addressing the question of whether group type moderates the relationship between conflict type and leadership preferences. This interpretation is particularly likely given that, in Study 2, followers were given clear reason to feel invested in their group’s success. This design change suggests that our predictions about leadership preferences may emerge most strongly when followers believe they will be personally affected by the conflict’s outcome. Without such personal investment, other considerations may exert a stronger influence on follower preferences.

Despite the consistency of these results, it is possible that a broader, more latent factor influenced follower preferences here: the underlying goals that followers hold for how they believe a conflict should be solved. Our primary predictions regarding dominance rely on the premise that under conditions of intergroup conflict, followers will seek a leader who can (a) demonstrate and communicate aggression against an outgroup and (b) enforce ingroup coordination to best respond to the conflict. Notably, though, these are distinctive goals, and, depending on the nature of the intergroup conflict, followers may see the optimal solution as involving greater aggression against outgroups or increased ingroup coordination and productivity. For example, in some intergroup conflicts (e.g., competition between businesses), aggression against the outgroup may not be an option. In others (e.g., wartime), aggression may be seen as a requisite for success. The findings of Study 2 do not make clear whether dominant leaders are sought for their ability to facilitate aggression, their ability to enforce ingroup coordination, or both.

Similarly, followers may also hold different goals for how best to solve intragroup conflict. We have argued that follower preferences for prestigious leaders during times of intragroup conflict are driven by a desire for a leader who can effectively (a) mediate within-
group conflicts and (b) restore within-group cooperation. However, these are also distinct goals, and, depending on the nature of the conflict, followers may see the optimal solution as involving mediation or increased cooperation. For example, in intragroup conflicts arising from conflicting values or practices among group members (e.g., political differences) mediation may be seen as the optimal solution. In others (e.g., norm violation, criminal behavior) enforced cooperation may be seen as required for group success. The findings of Study 2 do not make clear whether prestigious leaders are sought for their ability to mediate conflicts, restore cooperation, or both.
Study 3

In Study 3, we examined whether followers’ specific goals for resolving intergroup and intragroup conflict influence their preferences for dominant and prestigious leadership. We again used a hypothetical scenario approach in which participants imagined themselves as members of a group experiencing intergroup or intragroup conflict. In contrast to the prior studies, however, in Study 3 we also explicitly stated follower goals within each conflict, to determine how these goals influence preferences for dominant and prestigious leaders. In the intergroup conflict conditions, followers’ goals were either to (a) aggress against an outgroup, or (b) coordinate the ingroup to outperform an outgroup. In the intragroup conflict conditions, followers’ goals were either to (a) mediate conflicts between group members, or (b) deal with norm violators.

We pre-registered five main hypotheses for this study (https://osf.io/ncztu). First, we predicted that in situations of intragroup conflict, dominant leaders would be preferred when followers’ goals of handling norm-violators were salient, compared to goals of conflict mediation; whereas prestigious leaders would be preferred when conflict mediation goals were salient, compared to handling norm-violator goals. Second, in situations of intergroup conflict, we predicted that prestigious leaders would be preferred when followers’ goals of coordinating the ingroup against an outgroup threat were salient, compared to when goals of aggression against the outgroup were salient. In contrast, dominant leaders should be preferred during intergroup conflict regardless of follower goals (i.e., ingroup coordination or outgroup aggression), compared to when followers’ goals involving conflict mediation were salient.

Method

Participants. Four hundred American survey workers were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk for this study. As specified by our preregistered exclusion criteria (https://osf.io/ncztu), 23 participants were excluded from analyses for failing an attention check.
This resulted in a final sample of 377 participants (80% female; age range = 20-81, Median = 38 years). This sample size was determined based on a power analysis that indicated our planned repeated-subjects design would require 370 participants to detect a small interaction effect (f = .15) of goal condition and leadership style (dominance vs. prestige) on leadership preferences, with 80% power.

**Procedure.** This study used a 4 (goal condition) x 2 (social context) design in which each participant read two of eight randomly chosen vignettes describing a group conflict situation, and were asked to imagine that they were a member of the group. Each participant read one vignette involving an intragroup conflict (with specified goals of either norm-violation or conflict mediation; see below), and one vignette involving an intergroup conflict (with specified goals of either outgroup aggression or ingroup coordination condition; see below). After reading each vignette, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they wanted a group leader who was dominant and the extent to which they wanted a group leader who was prestigious, using the 17-item Dominance and Prestige Scales (Cheng et al., 2010; α = .86 and .77, respectively). Finally, participants reported demographic information before being thanked and debriefed.

**Materials.** All vignettes described, in nine sentences, a situation of group conflict, and asked participants to imagine that they were part of the group and were “put in the unique position of deciding who will lead” the group. Goals for conflict resolution were manipulated such that, within the overarching context of intergroup conflict, two vignettes described a group that sought to aggress against an outgroup (outgroup aggression condition) and two described a group that sought to coordinate to outperform an outgroup (ingroup coordination condition). Within the overarching context of intragroup conflict, two vignettes described a group in which certain group members were violating norms in a way that impeded cooperation (norm-violation...
condition), and two described a group dealing with disputes among group members (conflict mediation condition).

Within each of these four goal conditions social context was manipulated, such that the conflict either took place on a self-sufficient commune or at a business retreat. This meant that, in the outgroup aggression condition, the group sought a leader who either (a) would sabotage a rival commune or (b) sabotage the competing team on the retreat. In the ingroup coordination condition, the group sought a leader who would either (a) coordinate the commune to become more productive in the face of a highly productive rival commune, or (b) coordinate their team on the business retreat to outperform the competing team. In the norm-violation condition, the group sought a leader who would either (a) deal with unproductive members of the commune, or (b) deal with unproductive members of their team on the business retreat. Finally, in the conflict resolution condition, the group wanted a leader who would either (a) resolve conflicts over the allocation of resources on the commune, or (b) resolve the disputes of several team members working together on cooperative games at a business retreat. All vignettes also specified that all group members would lose valuable resources if the conflict was not resolved effectively by the leader. Full vignettes used in all conditions are shown in Appendix C.

Results

First, we examined leadership preferences as a function of follower goals and leadership style, using multiple regression. A two-way interaction emerged, indicating that follower goals influenced preferences for dominant and prestigious leadership, $\beta = .12$, $t(1504) = 7.22$, $p < .001$, $F(3, 1504) = 507.70$, $p < .001$. We next tested whether social context moderated this interaction and found no interaction, $\beta = .02$, $t(1500) = 1.14$, $p = .25$, so all further analyses were conducted across the two contexts.
Next, to test our predictions regarding dominance, we examined the effect of follower goals on preferences for dominant leadership, using a series of regressions. Supporting each of our predictions, simple slope tests showed that dominant leaders were preferred to a greater extent when participants’ goals involved dealing with norm-violators, $M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.01$, $\beta = .55$, $t = 5.5$, $p < .001$, compared to mediating conflicts, $M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.20$. Dominant leaders also were preferred to a greater extent when followers’ goals were to aggress against outgroups, $M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.39$, $\beta = .43$, $t = 9.2$, $p < .001$, compared to mediating conflicts, $M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.20$; and when goals involved coordinating the ingroup to counter an outgroup threat, $M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.17$, $\beta = .48$, $t = 4.78$, $p < .001$, compared to mediating conflicts, $M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.20$. Interestingly, no difference in follower preferences emerged when goals involved coordinating the ingroup to counter an outgroup threat versus handling a norm-violating group-member (a goal related to intragroup conflict), $\beta = .02$, $t = .42$, $p = .67$.

To test our predictions regarding prestige, we examined the effect of follower goals on preferences for prestigious leadership, using a series of regressions. Generally supporting our predictions, simple slope tests showed that prestigious leaders were preferred to a greater extent when followers’ goals involved coordinating the ingroup to counter an outgroup threat, $M = 6.03$, $SD = .88$, $\beta = .57$, $t = 5.75$, $p < .001$, compared to aggressing against the outgroup, $M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.16$. Prestigious leaders were also preferred marginally more when follower goals were to mediate conflict, $M = 6.06$, $SD = .91$, $\beta = .18$, $t = 1.77$, $p = .08$, compared to dealing with norm-violators, $M = 5.88$, $SD = 1.05$; and when goals involved mediating conflicts, $\beta = .29$, $t = 5.98$, $p < .001$, compared to aggressing against outgroups.

Discussion
Study 3 provided support for most of our hypotheses. Followers most strongly sought dominant leaders when they held the goal of aggressing against an outgroup. Dominant leadership also was preferred to a greater extent when followers’ goals involved coordinating the ingroup and handling norm violation, compared to resolving ingroup disagreements. In contrast, prestigious leadership was least preferred when follower goals were to aggress against the outgroup.

These results suggest that dominant leaders are desired most for their ability to aggress against outgroups, but also for their ability to facilitate ingroup coordination and norm-following. While the former is a goal relevant to intergroup competition, it need not always be. Furthermore, the latter goal is more relevant to intragroup conflict. These results thus suggest that while dominant leaders are, in general, preferred in times of intergroup than intragroup conflict, this is not always the case, and the specific goals followers have in mind are more critical in shaping their preferences.

The finding that dominant leaders were preferred when followers’ goals were to coordinate the ingroup in the face of an outgroup threat and deal with norm-violators, compared to mediating conflicts, suggests that followers may hold a lay intuition that dominants are effective leaders by virtue of coercing coordination and norm-following through threat of punishment. Supporting this intuition, a recent study found that leaders with a dominant reputation promote greater cooperation during group economic-decision-making games (Chen, Zhang, Laustsen, & Cheng, 2021). Furthermore, although prestigious leadership was preferred similarly when followers’ goals involved resolving intragroup conflicts and coordinating the ingroup in the face of outgroup threats, it was seen as less valuable when followers’ goals to aggress against outgroups were salient, and somewhat less valuable in the face of ingroup norm
violation. These results thus support our theoretical expectation that prestigious leaders are viewed as less capable of using aggression, whether that aggression is directed against outgroups or norm-violating ingroup members.
**Study 4**

In Study 4, we turned to examine whether leaders strategically make use of group conflicts to try to shift followers’ preferences, by utilizing language in their speeches that emphasizes the form of conflict best suited to their own style of leadership. The findings of Studies 1-3 suggest that different types of group conflict shape follower preferences for dominant versus prestigious leaders, so, if leaders are aware of these preferences, they may selectively use language that highlights potential group conflict for which their own leadership style is preferred. This strategic speaking style would serve adaptive ends for the leader, as it could influence followers’ perceptions of conflicts their group faces, potentially leading to greater support for leader speaking.

To test this hypothesis, we examined differences in the language used by dominant and prestigious United States presidents using a large corpus of their speeches: State of the Union Addresses (SOTUs). In doing so, we test two predictions emerging from our model: (1) Dominant and prestigious leaders strategically seek to manipulate followers’ perceptions of current conflicts so as to make their own leadership style seem more effective, and (2) these manipulations should be observable in the language leaders use when speaking to followers. While not following directly from our model, the second prediction is consistent with previous work showing that individuals and media organizations can, and do, strategically use language to both manage impressions of the speaker and frame others’ perceptions of social conflicts (Canetti et al., 2019; Forgas, 2007; Bless, Betch, & Franzen, 1998; Leshner et al., 2009; Vultee, 2010; Sendén, Lindholm, & Sikström, 2014). The importance of strategic language may be especially salient for U.S. presidents, who have been purported to win or lose elections depending on whether they successfully control the framing of social conflicts (Bai, 2005).
We preregistered four main hypotheses for this study (https://osf.io/s9kwc). First, we predicted that a president’s trait-level dominance would be associated with his use of third-person plural, or “exclusive”, pronouns (e.g., they, them) in his SOTUs. The use of third-person plural pronouns can subtly sculpt social categorization of in-group and out-group members (Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman, & Tyler, 1990), typically by categorizing targeted individuals as out-group members. For dominant leaders, the use of third-person plural pronouns may function to highlight out-group presence and potential threat, increasing followers’ desire for dominant leadership. Second, and in contrast, we predicted that a president’s trait-level prestige would be associated with greater use of first-person plural, or “inclusive”, pronouns (e.g., us, our), which tend to indicate a sense of shared social identity (Stone & Pennebacker, 2002). The use of first-person plural pronouns may serve as a rhetorical device to increase cooperative goals (Sendén, Lindholm, & Sikström, 2014). Given that prestigious leaders are preferred when cooperative goals are salient, their use of first-person plural pronouns might enhance followers’ desire for cooperation, and consequently for prestigious leadership.

Third, we predicted that presidents higher in trait dominance would show greater use of anger words (e.g., hate, kill) in their SOTUs. Although anger words may increase perceptions of the speaker’s dominance, anger expressed by dominant leaders might also function to trigger emotional contagion (i.e., transferring a leader’s anger to listeners), thereby increasing follower desire for aggression, especially given that negative, threat-based emotions transfer to others more automatically than other emotions (Kelly, Iannone, & McCarty, 2015). Fourth, and in contrast, we predicted that presidents higher in trait prestige would show greater use of social words (e.g., talk, communal), affiliation words (e.g., ally, friend) and sadness words (e.g., grief, crying). Social and affiliation words may promote a desire for prosocial behavior and
cooperation, and sadness words promote sympathy (Reed & DeScioli, 2017; Huron, 2018), so the use of these words might increase followers’ desire for leaders who can promote unity and cooperation (i.e., prestigious leaders) and decreased desire for aggressive, dominant leaders. Notably, although these linguistic tactics may increase perceptions of the speaker as prestigious, prior research suggests that they also are likely to decrease aggressive desires and frame conflicts in terms of cooperative goals.

**Method**

**Participants.** To assess the trait levels of dominance and prestige of U.S. presidents throughout history, as accurately as possible, we recruited expert presidential historians to complete measures of dominance and prestige for a set of presidents about whom they held expertise. Historians were selected for recruitment based on their participation in the national C-SPAN presidential historian survey, which recruited a set of prominent scholars in the field to rate presidents on various aspects of their leadership. We excluded participants who were retired, not currently affiliated with a U.S. university, or do not have publicly available email addresses. The resulting sample of recruited individuals was 54. Thirty of these individuals agreed to participate, in exchange for a $10 Amazon gift card (41% female; age range = 39-78, Median = 71 years).

**Procedure.** Participants were presented with a list of all former and (the current) U.S. presidents and asked to select the five presidents about whom they had the greatest expertise. After making these selections, participants were presented with each of the five presidents they had selected and asked to make judgements about each person’s leadership style, by rating each on the 8-item version of the Dominance and Prestige Scales (Cheng et al., 2010; scale α = .95 and .96, respectively). The included items were those that had the highest factor loadings on each
dimension across the two studies that were originally used to validate the full scale (see Cheng et al., 2010). Finally, participants reported demographic information before being thanked and debriefed.

**Materials.** Indices of dominance and prestige for each president were obtained using the ratings provided by expert presidential historians. In order to ensure adequate interrater reliability (i.e., alpha > .60), four participants’ ratings of one president each were excluded from analyses. In addition, two mean dominance ratings (for President Chester A. Arthur and Martin van Buren) and three mean prestige ratings (for Presidents Thomas Jefferson, Millard Fillmore, and Martin van Buren) were excluded due to inadequate interrater reliability (i.e., alphas < .60). Two presidents (i.e., William Henry Harrison and James Garfield) never delivered a SOTU, so were also not included in analyses. In total, mean ratings (across 2-13 raters per president) of dominance and prestige were obtained and included in analyses for 42 presidents (see Table 1).

SOTU text data and information on the political party of each president were collected from [http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sou.php](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sou.php), a publicly available archive of each document, collected by the University of California, Santa Barbara. This archive includes both written and spoken SOTUs, encompassing 247 documents in all, with over 2 million words (M = 8,164 words per document). To convert text in each SOTU to quantitative values, we used the 2022 Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001; Pennebaker, Chung, Ireland, Gonzales, & Booth, 2007; Boyd, Ashokkumar, Seraj, & Pennebaker, 2022), one of the most widely used automated coding methods for assessing word frequencies in textual documents. LIWC text analysis counts words within each document to calculate the relative frequency of words present in various LIWC dictionaries (e.g., anger, positive emotion, pronouns). For each SOTU address, we used LIWC to calculate the frequency of third-person
plural pronouns, first-person plural pronouns, anger words, social words, affiliation words, and sadness words.

**Results**

To test each of our hypotheses, we conducted a series of regressions using historians’ ratings of presidents’ dominance and prestige to predict presidents’ word use in their SOTU addresses. In each analysis we controlled for president’s political party affiliation, given that party affiliation was significantly associated with both leadership style (i.e., dominance and prestige) and our outcome variables (we pre-registered our plan to control for any assessed variables that were significantly related to predicted outcomes; see https://osf.io/s9kwc).

Supporting our hypotheses for dominance, participants’ ratings of presidents’ dominance predicted presidents’ greater use of third-person plural pronouns in their SOTU addresses, $\beta = .30$, $t(230) = 4.63$, $p < .001$, whereas ratings of presidents’ prestige did not, $\beta = .02$, $t(223) = .28$, $p = .78$. In addition, presidents’ dominance predicted greater use of anger words, $\beta = .16$, $t(229) = 2.31$, $p = .02$; whereas presidents’ prestige did not, $\beta = .05$, $t(222) = .77$, $p = .44$. Our hypotheses regarding prestige were also were largely supported. Presidents’ prestige predicted greater use of first-person plural pronouns, $\beta = .18$, $t(223) = 2.92$, $p < .01$, social words, $\beta = .13$, $t(223) = 1.97$, $p = .04$, and affiliation words, $\beta = .17$, $t(223) = 2.62$, $p = .01$. Presidents’ dominance was not significantly related to first-person plural pronouns, $\beta = -.04$, $t(230) = -.58$, $p = .56$, social words, $\beta = .01$, $t(230) = .10$, $p = .92$, or affiliation words, $\beta = -.07$, $t(230) = -1.06$, $p = .29$. Interestingly, neither prestige nor dominance predicted the use of sadness words, $ps > .51$.

**Discussion**

The results of Study 4 provide support for all but one of our pre-registered hypotheses for this study. U.S. presidents who were rated by expert historians as higher in dominance were
more likely to use third-person plural pronouns and words associated with anger in their State of the Union addresses, whereas presidents rated by experts as more prestigious were not. Conversely, U.S. presidents rated higher in prestige were more likely to first-person plural pronouns, affiliation words, and social words in their SOTU addresses, whereas those rated as dominant were not. However, in contrast to our predictions, neither presidential prestige nor dominance was associated with the use of sadness words. One potential explanation for the failure to support this last prediction is that sadness is rarely expressed by presidents in SOTU addresses, which tend to be oriented toward conveying hope and future plans. In support of this explanation, the frequency of sadness words ($M = .05$, $SD = .05$) was less than half that of anger words ($M = .12$, $SD = .09$).

Overall, these findings suggest that dominant and prestigious leaders (a) strategically emphasize conflicts they are best suited to deal with, and (b) do so using language. These results are therefore consistent with the suggestion that language use functions as an adaptive strategy supporting status acquisition and maintenance for both dominant and prestigious leaders. For dominant leaders, the use of third-person plural pronouns and anger words may be used to highlight out-group presence and threat, emphasizing intergroup conflict. Given the findings from Studies 1-3, that dominant leaders are preferred during intergroup conflict and particularly when aggression is desired, this language usage might in turn increase follower preferences for dominant leadership. In contrast, the use of first-person plural pronouns, affiliation words, and social words are likely to decrease perceptions of outgroup threat and consequently promote goals for group cohesion and cooperation. Given the findings from Studies 1-3 that followers prefer prestigious leaders in times when they desire greater cooperation and ingroup unity,
prestigious presidents’ use of these words might in turn lead followers to support more prestigious leadership.

However, it is also possible that these differences in language use reflect differences in the speaking style of dominant and prestigious individuals, unrelated to group conflict. Given that these presidents were likely not always talking about group conflicts, it remains an important future direction to determine whether these differences emerge exclusively or more strongly when leaders are discussing conflict and are in the presence of followers. Addressing these questions might help rule out the possibility that these differences are merely downstream consequences of known personality correlates dominant and prestigious dispositions (e.g., agreeableness). To our knowledge no prior study has investigated language differences between dominant and prestigious leaders, so it remains possible that the observed language differences are used by leaders to inform follower inferences about each leader’s dominance and prestige, and not to manipulate perceptions of group conflict. Given that language is one of the primary mediums through which potential leaders advocate for themselves, differences like those found here may play an important role in shaping perceptions of dominance and prestige.
General Discussion

The present research primarily examined how followers’ preferences for particular kinds of leaders are shaped by different group conflicts. We hypothesized that followers would prefer dominant leaders in times of intergroup conflict compared to intragroup conflict, and prestigious leaders in times of intragroup conflict compared to intergroup conflict. By manipulating the salience of these two types of conflict among individuals imagining themselves in various groups, we found support for these predictions. We also examined the specific goals for conflict resolution that likely underlie these preferences, and found that followers showed stronger preferences for dominant leaders when they held goals of enforcing group norms during intragroup conflict, and aggressing against outgroups during intergroup conflict. Conversely, followers showed weaker preferences for prestigious leaders when they held goals of enforcing norms during intragroup conflict, and aggressing against out-groups during intergroup conflict.

More broadly, these results support the notion that followers alter their leadership preferences so as to adapt to particularly salient group problems. They also give some credence to our theoretical account of when and why followers select leaders with dominant and prestigious characteristics. In times of intergroup conflicts, followers exhibit a stronger desire for dominant leadership and a weaker desire for prestigious leadership. These preferences are likely shaped by the intuition that dominant leaders are ideally suited to intimidating outgroups, and consequently dissuading such groups from harming the ingroup, or, if necessary, leading a strong aggressive front during an agonistic encounter. In contrast, prestigious leaders’ generally agreeable nature (Case & Maner, 2017) may be seen as leaving the door open for outgroups to potentially take advantage of the ingroup. These leaders are, however, more desired during intragroup conflicts, perhaps because more agreeable and respected leaders are seen as capable of promoting mutually acceptable compromises that can minimize relational conflicts to ensure
continued cooperation. Dominant leaders may be seen as less capable of promoting cooperation within a group, due to their abrasive and self-interested tendencies (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Semenya & Honey, 2015).

The present findings also suggest that followers’ narrower goals for conflict resolution, within each kind of conflict, moderate these preferences, providing some indication as to when and why these preferences emerge. We found that dominant leaders were preferred to a greater extent when followers sought a leader who would facilitate aggression, ingroup coordination, and norm-following; and less when followers sought a leader who would promote ingroup conflict resolution. This last goal, of resolving conflict among members of the same group, is, notably, the least likely of the four we examined to involve aggression or punitive action. This distinction thus suggests that dominant leaders are seen as more capable for handling tasks involving punishment, coercion, and aggression—that is, tasks that are generally more likely to emerge during intergroup conflict, but not necessarily only in that context. Conversely, prestigious leaders were less strongly preferred when followers seek leaders to deal with norm-violators and facilitate aggression against outgroups. This pattern supports our expectation that prestigious individuals are seen as less capable of effectively handling groups and individuals who are viewed negatively by followers, presumably because in such situations followers want or expect aggression, punishment, or coercion.

Overall, these findings indicate that the relationship between group conflict type (i.e., intergroup vs. intragroup) and preferences for dominant and prestigious leadership is likely to vary based on more specific follower goals. However, given that this relationship emerged when collapsing across specific goal conditions, we can conclude that there is a general preference for dominant leadership during intergroup conflict, and for prestigious leadership during intragroup
conflict, likely because of the specific goals that tend to emerge during each of these types of conflicts.

In a related line of inquiry, the present research was the first to examine whether dominant and prestigious leaders use different kinds of language when addressing followers, and specifically whether these differences correspond to those that are likely to shape follower perceptions of group conflict. We posited that dominant and prestigious leaders might strategically use language to manipulate followers’ perceptions of current conflicts so as to make their own leadership style seem more effective, and, consistent with our predictions, we found significant differences in the language use of historical leaders who varied in dominance and prestige. Furthermore, we obtained reliable ratings of dominance and prestige for 42 of 46 U.S. presidents from leading presidential historians; our findings that these ratings were correlated with language usage as predicted allows for confidence in their validity. Although scholars have speculated about the relative dominance and prestige of various historical figures and U.S. presidents in particular (e.g., Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017; Witkower, Tracy, Cheng, & Henrich, 2020), no prior work has obtained reliable and validated ratings of the dominance and prestige of such a large body of world leaders, making this an additional contribution of the present work, and one that we hope can be of use to a wide range of future research endeavors. Although further research is required to uncover how these linguistic differences influence follower perceptions of their social context and the speaker, these findings present a first step toward understanding how dominant and prestigious leaders differ in language use and how this may play an important role in status acquisition.

Limitations and Future Directions
The present research provides an important first step toward addressing the question of how group conflict and follower goals influence preferences for dominant and prestigious leaders. However, there are several limitations to these studies that should be addressed in future work. First, all three studies used a hypothetical scenario method that requires participants to imagine themselves in particular situations and use their intuitions to make judgments about how they would likely feel and think. Although such studies have proven reliable, in that participants’ beliefs about their feelings in a particular situation map onto the actual feelings they experience in such situations (Robinson & Clore, 1993; but see Wilson & Gilbert, 2005), one important future direction is to replicate these findings in studies that examine real-world leadership choices. Notably, however, studies examining real-world decision making tend to invoke actual fears about potential consequences to followers’ livelihood or social groups. As a result, in real-world situations followers are may be more motivated to choose effective leaders, potentially increasing the strength of the effects observed here. At the same time, the hypothetical, nature of these experiments may have increased our chances of detecting effects for other reasons that would play less of a role in actual face-to-face interactions. For example, followers may be more willing to select a dominant leader when they know they will never actually be forced to work under that person.

Another limitation of the present research is that all participants were North American, and they were either MTurk workers or undergraduate students. As a result, the present findings may not generalize beyond WEIRD populations (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). In fact, it is possible that culturally variable norms surrounding different kinds of group conflicts and leadership styles influence followers’ selections of leaders in different situations. For example, cultures vary in their relative tightness-looseness (Gelfand et al., 2011), and this may impact
preferences for dominant leadership in certain contexts. Tight cultures are those with strong social norms and low tolerance for deviant behavior, whereas loose cultures have weak social norms and high tolerance for deviant behavior. Given this cross-cultural difference in attitudes toward deviant behavior, regions with tight cultures may exhibit stronger preferences for dominant, highly punitive leaders to deal norm-violation. In especially loose cultures, in contrast, followers might not exhibit greater preferences for dominant leadership to deal with norm-violation.

Beyond addressing these limitations, another important future direction is to examine whether the preferences observed here generalize to other cues of dominance and prestige. In the present research we examined explicit preferences for dominant and prestigious traits, but numerous other cues exist which lead individuals to infer dominance and prestige in others (e.g., non-verbal displays, facial morphology). Given that Study 4 found significant differences in the language use of dominant and prestigious leaders, it may be the case that certain speaking styles influence follower perceptions of dominance and prestige. Our study examined a relatively small number of language differences across a limited sample of speakers, and we did not examine how these differences influence follower perceptions. Thus, fruitful avenues for future research may be to investigate: (a) potential language differences beyond those reported here (e.g., dehumanizing language), (b) how these language differences influence follower perceptions of dominance and prestige as well as group conflicts, and (c) the contexts under which these language differences are more likely to emerge (e.g., when addressing followers).

Another question that emerges from this research is whether dominant and prestigious leaders adapt to the current concerns of their followers in order to maintain, acquire, or boost their status. The present research suggests that dominant individuals will be more likely to
acquire status during intergroup conflicts, and prestigious individuals will be more likely to acquire status during intragroup conflicts. However, given that dominant and prestigious individuals are likely to seek status regardless of current conflicts, it is possible that they would adapt their leadership style to fit followers’ desires. Do status-seekers attempt to appear more dominant or prestigious depending on the nature of the conflict facing the group? One potential test of this possibility is to examine whether leaders (e.g., U.S. presidents) alter their use of dominant and prestigious language depending on current conflicts and the concerns of followers.

In conclusion, the current research provides some of the first evidence that group conflict influences leadership preferences, suggesting that both the type of conflict facing the group and follower goals for resolving these conflicts shape preferences for both dominant and prestigious leadership. This research builds on previous theory suggesting that followers select situational leaders, a practice which may have been functional for maximizing group cooperation and coordination in the face of different threats.
Table 1

Dominance and Prestige Ratings for Each United States President

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Number of Raters</th>
<th>Prestige</th>
<th>Dominance</th>
<th>Number of SOTUs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Washington</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Adams</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Jefferson</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Madison</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Monroe</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Quincy Adams</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Jackson</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>6.85</td>
<td>8</td>
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*Note:* For all mean ratings, interrater reliability was greater than alpha = .60.
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Appendix A

Intergroup Conflict

Clothing Store Scenario: Imagine that you are an employee at a clothing store. A few months ago, a new shop opened across town and since then you have seen a significant drop in sales as this rival store poaches your customers. You’ve also received much lower commission as a result. Little has been done to fight this problem, and you and your coworkers are likely to soon face the threat of job loss if this problem is not solved. Your current manager is about to retire and has asked you to recommend a new manager who could help deal with this rival store.

Soccer Team Scenario: Imagine that you are on a competitive soccer team. You believe in your skills and the skills of your teammates, but this year your rival team is known to be especially tough. You’ve heard that they trained all summer and have a new star player. You know that your team will have to train extra hard to win against them. Before the season begins you and your team must elect a captain who will coach practices and prepare you for your match with this rival team.

Intragroup Conflict

Clothing Store Scenario: Imagine that you are an employee at a clothing store. For the past month you have noticed a lot of arguments and expressions of contempt among your coworkers. Although you respect and generally enjoy working with all these people, these conflicts have made it increasingly difficult to do your job. In fact, you’ve noticed that your commissions have dropped somewhat as a result. Your current manager is about to retire and has asked you to recommend a new manager who can help with the employee infighting and dissatisfaction.

Soccer Team Scenario: Imagine that you are on a competitive soccer team. You believe in your skills and the skills of your teammates, but recently many members of the team have been getting into arguments and fights. Many players feel contemptuous of others on the team, and this has made it increasingly difficult to work together on the field. You know that to have a great season you will all have to learn to get along and work well together. Before the season begins you and your team must elect a captain who will coach practices and deal with this issue of infighting and dissatisfaction.
Appendix B

Intergroup Conflict

Soccer Team Scenario: Imagine that you are on a competitive soccer team. You believe in your skills and the skills of your teammates, but this year your rival team is known to be especially tough. You’ve heard that they trained all summer and have a new star player. You know that your team will have to train extra hard to win against them. Before the season begins you and your team must elect a captain who will coach practices and prepare you for your match with this rival team.

Business Retreat Scenario: Imagine that you have decided to spend a week at a summer camp-like retreat for adults. The program is set up such that attendees are organized into two groups: The Wolves and The Bears. Throughout the week, The Wolves and The Bears will compete in various competitive games to earn points for their team. At the end of the week, the team with the most points will win a cash prize that will be distributed evenly among the winning team members. You are placed in the Wolf team on the first day. Very quickly, the Bears show themselves to be unsportsmanlike and untrustworthy, cheating in the first couple games and seeking ways to sabotage your team, more than once. As a result, by Day 3, your team is losing by a large margin. Half-way through the week, your team is told they must select a leader who will make decisions for and lead your team in the coming competitions against the Bears. It is your job to decide who this leader will be.

Commune Scenario: Imagine that you live in a self-sufficient commune. Everything your commune has and uses was created by the commune members. This includes food, clothing, tools, and houses. This makes the winter season an especially difficult time; food and heat become harder to find, and everyone works together to distribute resources evenly across the community. One night in mid-winter, an immoral and greedy neighboring commune sneaks into your storehouses, and steals most of your remaining stores of food. In the morning, you all realize that there is not enough food remaining to last until spring. As a result, the social bonds that hold your community together are likely to fall apart, some people in the commune may starve, and the commune might need to disband. Your commune decides they must form a coalition to go and take back what was stolen by the band of thieves. You are put in the unique position of deciding who will lead and coordinate this group, and do whatever is necessary to get your food back.

Science Laboratory Scenario: Imagine that you are a member of a group of scientists working at an automobile company to develop a new kind of self-driving car. However, you just learned that another group of scientists, working for a different company, is developing a very similar type of car. They have based their design on preliminary designs that they stole from your lab, and your group recently received intel suggesting that they are moving fast to complete their design, and will likely do so ahead of your team. If they finish their design first, your design will become irrelevant, as they will receive all the credit and all of your team’s work will have been for nothing. The company has decided a lab representative must be chosen for your group. He/she must find a way to confront the other lab and get them to return the stolen design materials, or
admit to their use of your lab’s design so that your lab will receive at least some credit. You are placed in the unique position of recommending who should serve this role.

Intragroup Conflict

Soccer Team Scenario: Imagine that you are on a competitive soccer team. You believe in your skills and the skills of your teammates, but recently many members of the team have been getting into arguments and fights. Many players feel contemptuous of others on the team, and this has made it increasingly difficult to work together on the field. You know that to have a great season you will all have to learn to get along and work well together. Before the season begins you and your team must elect a captain who will coach practices and deal with this issue of infighting and dissatisfaction.

Business Retreat Scenario: Imagine that you have decided to spend a week at a summer camp-like retreat for adults. The program is organized such that the attendees must work together to solve various puzzles, problems, and tasks, in order to promote social bonding among the attendees. However, these activities have led to division and infighting among the members of the group. During the tasks, the attendees bicker and argue with each other about strategies and tactics, and contempt and frustration is starting to develop among many, such that some group members are thinking about leaving early. The program organizers have asked you to recommend one of the attendees to become the leader of the group in the next activity. This leader will have to listen to disputes among the group members, and try to promote compromise and cooperation and reach a decision that keeps the group together.

Commune Scenario: Imagine that you live in a community that is entirely self-sufficient. Everything your community has and uses was created by one of the community’s members. This includes food, clothing, tools, and houses. This makes the winter season an especially difficult time; food and heat become harder to find, and everyone works together to distribute resources evenly across the community. This fall the harvest was especially small, and your commune is unsure whether there is enough food to last through the winter. This has led to a lot of arguments and division among the people in the commune, as they bicker about strategies for how to distribute these resources among those most at risk. If a compromise is not reached, the social bonds that hold your community together are likely to fall apart, some people in the commune may starve, and the commune might need to disband. Your commune decides to select a leader who will listen to the needs of the community and decide how to choose among the various debated options to distribute the resources in such a way that will be allow the commune to best survive. You are put in the unique position of deciding who will take on this role.

Science Laboratory Scenario: Imagine that you are a member of a group of scientists working at an automobile company to develop a new kind of self-driving car. Unfortunately, your team has recently started arguing about various aspects of the design. No one seems to be able to agree on what the car should look like, how they should execute various safety precautions, and other technical details. The group is engaged in considerable bickering and arguing. As a result, all progress has stopped, and it appears that your group may not make its deadline for the final design. The company has decided that a lab manager needs to be chosen from your group who will be given power to make final decisions about the car design. You are placed in the unique
position of recommending who should serve in this position, which will involve listening to the various viewpoints, finding a way to end the infighting, and rendering unbiased decisions that will be best for the group’s success.
Appendix C

Conflict Mediation

Business Retreat Scenario: Imagine that you have decided to spend a week at a summer camp-like retreat for adults. The program is organized such that the attendees must work together to solve various puzzles, problems, and tasks to earn a prize at the end of the week. The more tasks your group completes, the bigger the prize you earn at the end of the week. However, these activities have led to division and infighting among the members of the group. During the tasks, the attendees bicker and argue with each other about strategies and tactics, and contempt and frustration is starting to develop among many, such that some group members are thinking about leaving early. The program organizers have asked you to recommend one of the attendees to become the leader of the group in the next activity. This leader will have to listen to disputes among the group members, and try to promote compromise and cooperation and reach a decision that keeps the group together. It is your job to decide who this leader will be.

Commune Scenario: Imagine that you live in a community that is entirely self-sufficient. Everything your community has and uses was created by one of the community’s members. This includes food, clothing, tools, and houses. This makes the winter season an especially difficult time; food and heat become harder to find, and everyone works together to distribute resources evenly across the community. This fall the harvest was especially small, and your commune is unsure whether there is enough food to last through the winter. This has led to a lot of arguments and division among the people in the commune, as they bicker about strategies for how to distribute these resources among the community members. If a compromise is not reached, the social bonds that hold your community together are likely to fall apart, some people in the commune may starve, and the commune might need to disband. Your commune decides to select a leader who will listen to the needs of the community and decide how to choose among the various debated options to distribute the resources in such a way that will be allow the commune to best survive. You are put in the unique position of deciding who will take on this role.

Norm-Violation

Business Retreat Scenario: Imagine that you have decided to spend a week at a summer camp-like retreat for adults. The program is organized such that the attendees must work together to solve various puzzles, problems, and tasks to earn a prize at the end of the week. The more tasks your group completes, the bigger the prize you earn at the end of the week. However, some members of the group have barely been participating in the tasks, and since these are group problems, their refusal to help out is actively preventing the team from getting very far. The program organizers have asked you to recommend one of the attendees to become the leader of the group in the remaining activities. This leader will have to get the whole group to participate in these tasks and complete them efficiently. It is your job to decide who this leader will be.

Commune Scenario: Imagine that you live in a community that is entirely self-sufficient. Everything your community has and uses was created by one of the community’s members. This includes food, clothing, tools, and houses. This makes the winter season an especially difficult time; food and heat become harder to find, and everyone works together to distribute resources
evenly across the community. This fall, some members of the community have been neglecting their duties and taking extra food for themselves. As a result, the amount of food being produced is small and the amount of food remaining is even smaller. If these members are not dealt with effectively, the social bonds that hold your community together are likely to fall apart, some people in the commune may starve, and the commune might need to disband. Your commune decides to select a leader who will deal with these group members in such a way that will allow the commune to survive. You are put in the unique position of deciding who will take on this role.

Ingroup Coordination

Business Retreat Scenario: Imagine that you have decided to spend a week at a summer camp-like retreat for adults. The program is set up such that attendees are organized into two groups: The Wolves and The Bears. Throughout the week, The Wolves and The Bears will compete in various competitive games to earn points for their team. At the end of the week, the team with the most points will win a huge cash prize that will be distributed evenly among the winning team members. You are placed in the Wolf team on the first day. Very quickly, the Bears pull ahead of your team at every competition. As a result, by Day 3, your team is losing by a large margin, and will likely lose the entire competition if you do not start beating them. Half-way through the week, your team is told they must select a leader who will rally the team members against the other team. He/she will need to enforce fast and coordinated efforts among the team members to increase performance against your rivals. It is your job to decide who this leader will be.

Commune Scenario: Imagine that you live in a self-sufficient commune. Everything your commune has and uses was created by the commune members. This includes food, clothing, tools, and houses. This makes the winter season an especially difficult time; food and heat become harder to find, and everyone works together to distribute resources evenly across the community. A neighboring commune has recently become much more prosperous than your own. It has acquired new farming equipment, and so the past few years their harvests have been more plentiful. As a result, members of your commune are leaving to join them. Due to this series of events, your fields are becoming under-staffed, the social bonds that hold your community together are falling apart, and the commune will soon need to disband. Your commune decides they must select a leader who will rally the remaining members of your community against this threat. He/she will need to enforce fast and efficient coordinated efforts to increase productivity so that your community will be competitive against this rival commune. You are put in the unique position of deciding who will lead and coordinate the competition with the rival commune.

Outgroup Aggression

Business Retreat Scenario: Imagine that you have decided to spend a week at a summer camp-like retreat for adults. The program is set up such that attendees are organized into two groups: The Wolves and The Bears. Throughout the week, The Wolves and The Bears will compete in various competitive games to earn points for their team. At the end of the week, the team with the most points will win a huge cash prize that will be distributed evenly among the winning
team members. You are placed in the Wolf team on the first day. Very quickly, the Bears pull ahead of your team at every competition. As a result, by Day 3, your team is losing by a large margin, and will likely lose the entire competition if you do not start winning against them. Half-way through the week, your team decides to select a leader who will coordinate efforts to sabotage the other team in competitions. This may be the only way to gain an edge against them and win the cash prize. It is your job to decide who this leader will be.

Commune Scenario: Imagine that you live in a self-sufficient commune. Everything your commune has and uses was created by the commune members. This includes food, clothing, tools, and houses. This makes the winter season an especially difficult time; food and heat become harder to find, and everyone works together to distribute resources evenly across the community. A neighboring commune has recently become much more prosperous than your own. It has acquired new farming equipment, and so the past few years their harvests have been more plentiful. As a result, members of your commune are leaving to join them. Due to this series of events, your fields are becoming under-staffed, the social bonds that hold your community together are falling apart, and the commune will soon need to disband. Your commune decides they must elect a leader who will coordinate efforts to sabotage the neighboring commune’s fields and equipment to level the playing field between your two groups. You are put in the unique position of deciding who will lead and coordinate this effort against the rival commune.