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The Effects of Economic Crisis, Domestic Discord, and State Efficacy on the Decision to Initiate Interstate Conflict

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Studies of diversionary conflict typically claim that lower rates of economic growth and domestic unrest increase the risk of militarized interstate conflict. Research shows that these factors are also related to regime changes. Lower rates of economic growth and domestic conflict should increase the risk that governments are overthrown. This article investigates the comparative risk of economic growth and domestic turmoil on militarized interstate conflict and regime changes on a sample of over 100 countries from 1920-92. I find that higher rates of economic growth are related to violent militarized interstate conflicts and reduce the risk of regime changes. Democracy and economic development likewise provide internal stability and interstate peace. Yet the risk of regime change increases rapidly relative to involvement in an interstate conflict for states affected by high levels of domestic conflict, suggesting that any diversionary strategies are a risky gambit that have a high chance of failure.

This article examines the contemporaneous effect of low economic growth and domestic instability on the threat of regime change and/or involvement in external militarized conflicts. Many studies of diversionary conflict argue that lower rates of economic growth should heighten the risk of international conflict. Yet we know that militarized interstate conflicts, and especially wars, are generally rare events whereas lower rates of growth are not. Additionally, a growing body of literature shows that regime changes are also associated with lower rates of economic growth. The question then becomes which event, militarized interstate conflict or regime change, is the most likely to occur with domestic discord and lower rates of economic growth?

Diversions theory claims that leaders seek to divert attention away from domestic problems such as a bad economy or political scandals, or to garner increased support prior to elections. Leaders then supposedly externalize discontented domestic sentiments onto other nations, sometimes as scapegoats based on the similar in-group/out-

1 group dynamic found in the research of Coser (1956) and Simmel
2 (1955), where foreign countries are blamed for domestic problems. This
3 process is said to involve a “rally-round-the-flag” effect, where a leader
4 can expect a short-term boost in popularity with the threat or use of
5 force (Blechman *et al.* 1978; Mueller 1973). Scholarship on diversionary [2]
6 conflict has focused most often on the American case¹ but recent studies
7 have sought to identify this possible behavior in other countries.²

8 The Falklands War is often a popular example of diversionary
9 conflict (Levy and Vakili 1992). Argentina was reeling from
10 hyperinflation and rampant unemployment associated with the Latin
11 American debt crisis. It is plausible that a success in the Falklands War
12 may have helped to rally support for the governing Galtieri regime,
13 although Argentina lost the war and the ruling regime lost power. How
14 many other attempts to use diversionary tactics, if they indeed occur,
15 can be seen to generate a similar outcome? The goal of this article is to
16 provide an assessment of the extent to which diversionary strategy is a
17 threat to peace. Is this a colorful theory kept alive by academics that has
18 little bearing upon real events, or is this a real problem that policy
19 makers should be concerned with? If it is a strategy readily available
20 to leaders, then it is important to know what domestic factors trigger
21 this gambit. Moreover, to know that requires an understanding of the
22 context in external conflict, which occurs relative to regime changes.

23 Theories of diversionary conflict usually emphasize the potential
24 benefits of diversionary tactics, although few pay equal attention to the
25 prospective costs associated with such behavior. It is not contentious to
26 claim that leaders typically seek to remain in office. However, whether
27 they can successfully manipulate public opinion regularly during
28 periods of domestic unpopularity through their states’ participation
29 in foreign militarized conflicts—especially outside of the American
30 case—is a question open for debate. Furthermore, there appears to be a
31 logical disconnect between diversionary theories and extant studies of
32 domestic conflict and regime change. Lower rates of economic growth
33 are purported to increase the risk of both militarized interstate conflicts
34 (and internal conflicts) as well as regime changes (Bloomberg and Hess
35 2002). This implies that if leaders do, in fact, undertake diversionary
36 conflicts, many may still be thrown from the seat of power—especially
37 if the outcome is defeat to a foreign enemy. Diversionary conflict would
38 thus seem to be a risky gambit (Smith 1996).

1 Scholars such as MacFie (1938) and Blainey (1988) have
2 nevertheless questioned the validity of the diversionary thesis. As noted
3 by Levy (1989), this perspective is rarely formulated as a cohesive and
4 comprehensive theory, and there has been little or no knowledge
5 accumulation. Later analyses do not necessarily build on past studies
6 and the discrepancies between inquiries are often difficult to unravel.
7 “Studies have used a variety of research designs, different dependent
8 variables (uses of force, major uses of force, militarized disputes),
9 different estimation techniques, and different data sets covering
10 different time periods and different states” (Bennett and Nordstrom
11 2000, 39). To these problems, we should add a lack of theoretical
12 precision and incomplete model specification. By a lack of theoretical
13 precision, I am referring to the linkages between economic conditions
14 and domestic strife that remain unclear in some studies (Miller 1995;
15 Russett 1990). Consequently, extant studies are to a degree
16 incommensurate; they offer a step in the right direction but do not
17 provide robust cross-national explanations and tests of economic
18 growth and interstate conflict.

19 Yet a few studies have attempted to provide deductive
20 explanations about when and how diversionary tactics might be
21 employed. Using a Bayesian updating game, Richards and others
22 (1993) theorize that while the use of force would appear to offer
23 leaders a means to boost their popularity, a poorly performing
24 economy acts as a signal to a leader’s constituents about his or her
25 competence. Hence, attempts to use diversion are likely to fail either
26 because incompetent leaders will likewise fail in foreign policy or
27 people will recognize the gambit for what it is. Instead, these two
28 models conclude that diversion is likely to be undertaken particularly
29 by risk-acceptant leaders. This stress on a heightened risk of removal
30 from office is also apparent in the work of Bueno de Mesquita and
31 others (1999), and Downs and Rocke (1984), where leaders may
32 “gamble for resurrection,” although the diversionary scenario in the
33 latter study is only a partial extension of their theory on selectorates,
34 winning coalitions, and leader survival. Again, how often do leaders
35 fail in the process or are removed from positions of power before they
36 can even initiate diversionary tactics? A few studies focusing on leader
37 tenure have examined the removal of leaders following war, although
38 almost no study in the diversionary literature has looked at the effects

1 of domestic problems on the relative risks of regime change, interstate
2 conflict, or both events occurring in the same year.³

3 Of course, diversionary theory contends that domestic conflict
4 should motivate interstate conflict, although there is no clear agreement
5 on what type of diversionary behavior should be most beneficial. Again,
6 some studies of diversionary conflict focus on the benefits of conflict
7 externalization but not the potential costs. Leeds and Davis (1997) are
8 an exception and they theorize that if it is low growth that induces
9 diversionary behavior, then initiators should choose targets that are
10 growing based on the belief that they would be less likely to respond
11 militarily. Reducing the costs posed by other states could then maximize
12 the benefits of diversion? However, it is also unclear whether states need
13 to merely make threats or if they need to use military force to attain the
14 benefits of diversion. Undoubtedly, provoking crises that are costly to a
15 state in lives and resources could be seen as immoral, and thus, a
16 detriment to leader survival. Perhaps merely threatening other states
17 could achieve the leader's aims, although citizens may not pay as much
18 attention to these conflicts if they fall short of a crisis. Moreover, once
19 a crisis emerges, it is possible that it may escalate out of control.
20 Diversion may have benefits, but what are the potential costs?

21 I seek to accomplish three basic goals in this study. The first is to
22 provide a test of the conditions purported to lead to diversionary
23 strategy across a general sample of states over a long time span. This is
24 important because the bulk of the existing literature on this theory
25 focuses on the United States. The second goal is to provide overt
26 measures of economic growth and domestic conflict generalizable to all
27 states. Few studies of diversionary conflict have attempted to measure
28 directly domestic conflict cross-nationally. The third goal is the most
29 important contribution, which is to provide a test of diversionary theory
30 that not only examines possible causes for diversion but places these
31 in a context of relative risk to regime change. This is particularly
32 important to (1) understand how common diversionary conflict could
33 occur and (2) see how often it is associated in some fashion with regime
34 change, or how often regime change occurs relative to interstate conflict
35 in the face of domestic conflict and low economic growth. My approach
36 also provides evidence to other issues, such as the roles of economic
37 development and democracy. The next section offers a theoretical basis
38 to expect that diversionary conflicts may be less probable than regime

1 changes during periods of lower economic growth. This is followed
2 by discussions of the research design used to test my theoretical
3 expectations and the empirical results. I then conclude that while there
4 is evidence to support aspects of the diversionary conflict thesis, this
5 behavior is not related to lower rates of economic growth.

6 7 **Theory on Economic Conditions, Conflict, and Regime Change**

8
9 Theories of diversionary conflict make a few basic assumptions.
10 First, leaders seek to remain in office. Second, leaders have some
11 latitude to use military force. Third, leader approval is, in part,
12 determined by the state of the economy. Lastly, the use of military force
13 results in a rally effect that increases leader popularity. Nevertheless,
14 while these assumptions appear reasonable and help simplify theory,
15 they may not be the most appropriate or informative for an explanation
16 of the decision to engage in interstate conflict. From these pieces, we
17 cannot put together the whole diversionary puzzle. Other components
18 of the story are missing and unaccounted for. One example concerns
19 whether there is a difference between scapegoating and externalizing
20 conflict. Disparate studies have discussed the roles of regime types,
21 repression, the magnitude of domestic conflict, opportunities for
22 participation in foreign disputes, and differences in how the severity of
23 international conflict should affect the prospects of successful diversion.
24 Yet many theoretical linkages remain unclear in individual studies.

25 Almost totally ignored in the literature is the problem that lower
26 rates of economic difficulties purportedly motivate diversionary
27 behavior, while other studies suggest that lower rates of growth increase
28 the probability that leaders will be removed from office (Bloomberg
29 and Hess 2002; Londregan and Poole 1990). Similarly, incumbents
30 in democracies are most likely to lose elections following periods of
31 economic stagnation (Lewis-Beck 1988). Logically, lower rates of
32 economic growth should heighten the risks leaders' face, whether
33 they are democrats or autocrats. Perhaps leaders do "gamble for
34 resurrection," although many could be removed from power before they
35 may be able to attempt to roll the dice.

36 Another body of literature disagrees with the diversionary conflict
37 thesis and contends that *higher* rates of economic growth should lead to
38 more frequent (or more severe) interstate conflict (Blainey 1988; MacFie

1 1938; Meernik 1994; Meernik and Waterman 1996).⁴ Economic growth
2 is said to have two effects that increase the probability of conflict. First,
3 economic growth could allow for increases in military spending that
4 could boost war-making capacity (war-chest theme) or, second, that
5 growth provides a greater social willingness to allow leaders to
6 participate in interstate conflict. Fewer domestic constraints should give
7 leaders a freer hand to initiate or join conflicts. Admittedly, theories in
8 this category are no more developed (arguably less so) than diversionary
9 conflict theory. However, this intuition is my focus regarding economic
10 growth in this article.

11 12 **Constituencies and Domestic Pressure**

13 All leaders depend on a constituency of some sort (Bueno de
14 Mesquita *et al.* 1999) and always face potential opposition to their
15 policies (Hagan 1994; Heldt 1999; Miller 1995, 1999; Richards *et al.*
16 1993). In democratic systems, opposition parties may seek to exploit
17 foreign policies that they will argue are not in the best interest of the
18 nation, resulting in higher constraints on such executives relative to
19 their authoritarian counterparts. However, during times of economic
20 prosperity, society is less likely to be influenced by the rhetoric of parties
21 and factions that stand in opposition to the leader. Assuming that
22 popularity ratings are higher than would be the case during economic
23 recession or depression, leaders should be more apt to initiate or join
24 foreign military actions. Economic growth should reduce societal
25 resistance to conflict. This may seem like a counterintuitive proposition
26 that people who are relatively better off and happy during periods of
27 prosperity would allow leaders to opt for foreign conflicts. However,
28 people may become more nationalistic during times of prosperity and
29 more optimistic that success could be achieved in foreign conflicts.
30 Accordingly, Blainey (1988) claims that anything that increases
31 optimism and state strength should be thought of as causes of war. It is
32 plausible that this effect heightens the risk of interstate conflict by
33 reducing constraints placed on executives. For example, would the
34 Clinton Administration have been able to commit U.S. troops to
35 conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo—areas where U.S. interests were
36 debatable—without stauncher Republican resistance in Congress, if the
37 economy had not experienced prolonged prosperity and economic
38 growth?

1 The relationship between domestic and interstate conflict is likely
2 more complex than theories of diversionary conflict specify.
3 Involvement in interstate conflict could be hampered by the presence of
4 domestic conflict, meaning a state may need to fight both internal and
5 external opponents. Some conflicts that appear to be diversionary may
6 also be from insurgencies or civil war that spill over into other states.
7 These may be particularly difficult to recognize in large-N studies or
8 even qualitative case studies without “smoking gun” evidence from
9 leaders’ statements. Domestic conflict could even make a state
10 vulnerable to outside aggression.

11 There are many reasons why people rebel. Throughout history,
12 however, economic hardship seems to be a key factor. While
13 diversionary conflict theorists suggest domestic conflict must be
14 externalized when other options run out, the theory presented here
15 follows the opposite intuition. When governments face severe domestic
16 discontent, they should be less likely to become involved in militarized
17 interstate conflicts. Whatever relationship exists between internal and
18 external conflict would need to be explained by alternative theories.
19 Phenomena may have multiple causes (Bremer and Cusack 1995; King,
20 Keohane, and Verba 1994).

21 22 **Public Opinion and Foreign Policy**

23 A people suffering from economic hardship may become pessimistic
24 and such sentiments may hamper a state’s leadership regime. If a state
25 becomes involved in a dispute that escalates, especially if it turns
26 fatal, it could undermine the government. It would seem that prior
27 perceptions of a government’s leadership could produce doubt to a
28 populace unless the nature of a foreign threat is clear. In times of
29 economic prosperity, the leadership enjoys increased popular support.
30 As society becomes more pessimistic and cynical, the leader’s political
31 opposition is better able to detach the support away from the leader’s
32 policies. Consequently, if an opportunity for military conflict occurs
33 during a period of economic stagnation, factions or parties in the
34 domestic arena may be more able to resist the initiation of military
35 conflicts, or at least increase audience costs of policy failure (Fearon
36 1994). It is even questionable that a rally effect occurs so automatically,
37 especially in a general sample of states.

1 Of course, people in democracies have a more direct means to
2 express support or disapproval through direct communications,
3 elections, and the media compared to citizens of autocracies. But again
4 these same sentiments occur in societies governed by nondemocratic
5 forms of government, but perhaps in a different mode. Factions within
6 institutions such as the military or the sole legitimate party (communist,
7 Baath, etc.) may launch a coup d'état, or similar tactic aimed at
8 removing current leaders or changing the structure of the regime,
9 sometimes with the backing of elite business interests (in nontotalitarian
10 states). In some instances, people may visibly begin to protest and
11 demonstrate their displeasure with the economy or other matters related
12 to the government's management of the social and economic realms.
13 Overall though, autocracies face weaker internal constraints than
14 democracies and should be more apt to participate in military contests
15 during periods of recession or depression.

16 Conceptualizations of domestic conflict appear underdeveloped in
17 the diversionary literature and this is true of its operationalizations as
18 well.⁵ Patrick James (1988) provides a useful categorization of domestic
19 discontent and conflict. Societies that have begun to feel disgruntled with
20 the policies of their current government are said to hold feelings that can
21 be best expressed as *latent*. A poorly performing national economy may
22 be reflected in the prevailing mood of society, although antigovernment
23 sentiments may not yet be visible. James suggests that these concepts can
24 be measured through indicators such as growth of GDP, a misery index
25 (inflation \times unemployment), leader approval polls, and similar variables.
26 Only later does this discontent become *manifest* as it is expressed through
27 various acts ranging from strikes and demonstrations to revolutions and
28 civil wars. Yet, James' dichotomy of latent and manifest conflict is of
29 course a simplification of reality. While clearly it is a difficult task to
30 capture all that domestic conflict entails in its various forms, we can
31 broaden the *manifest* category by sorting it into less and more severe
32 types. There is a great difference, for example, between riots and
33 revolutions, but the latter could be linked to the same factors that led to
34 the former. Manifest domestic conflict may arise from latent sentiments,
35 but the magnitude of visible manifestations of these acts vary in their
36 ability to constrain participation in foreign conflicts. Lower magnitude
37 feelings may be revealed in acts of *protest* such as riots and
38 demonstrations. Later, protest may lead to attempts to overthrow the

1 government. While I contend that manifest acts of domestic conflict
2 should constrain leaders seeking to initiate interstate conflicts, the
3 most severe form of manifest conflict, *rebellion*, should pose a stronger
4 constraint.

5 How leaders of governments respond to lower popularity and
6 domestic unrest appears related to the type of government that they lead,
7 although leaders would generally want to use diversionary tactics before
8 rebellion occurs. Miller (1995) speculates that by the time violent internal
9 crises break out in democracies, it is too late to use diversionary tactics
10 to externalize the conflict, while autocracies are likely able to suppress
11 nonviolent domestic unrest. Sobek (2007) similarly found that
12 oligarchies were more likely to divert than republics in Renaissance Italy.
13 However, Gelpi (1997) argues that democracies should be more likely to
14 engage in diversionary tactics since they cannot as easily repress their
15 citizens.⁶ Scapegoating other nations for a state's internal problems, or at
16 least distracting a state's citizens from these problems, could potentially
17 accomplish this objective. Meanwhile, as autocracies retain repression as
18 an option, they need not externalize internal conflicts. Yet it seems that
19 dictatorships are left with little option but to attempt diversion only when
20 discontent turns into manifest violence. In fact, Enterline and Gleditsch
21 (2000) show that while domestic conflict leads to both repression and
22 interstate disputes, repression is more common. In addition, executive
23 constraints, more than the effects of repression, reduce interstate
24 disputes. Contrary to Gelpi's theory, democracies engage in repression,
25 but will both repress and become involved in interstate disputes less often
26 than states with fewer constraints.

27 Still, attempts to suppress protest are apt to be counterproductive.
28 Suppression by all regimes is likely to lead to declines in popular
29 support. With declines in support come decreases in state efficacy
30 (Hagan 1994) which should undermine governmental legitimacy and
31 lead to the downfall of governments (Jackman 1993). Even in cases
32 where states have a limited ability to suppress their own people without
33 losing all legitimacy or state efficacy, neither economic reforms nor
34 diversion may be viable options. Governments often fall, by vote or
35 force, because they are unable to deal with seemingly intractable
36 economic problems and attempting to engage foreign rivals during these
37 crises should only increase this risk. Poor states may therefore be the
38 most vulnerable without a means to buy off segments of the population.

1 Conflicts against weak states may not alter the government's own
2 domestic situation, while contests against strong states entail a lower
3 probability of victory that could accelerate a government's downfall.
4 Hence, this strategy would seemingly entail more risk than necessary to
5 retain the stability of the government.

6 As Ginkel and Smith (1999) point out, strong governments are
7 likely to succeed in suppressing domestic conflict, and vulnerable states
8 will neither be able to offer concessions in the form of economic or
9 political reform, nor suppress discontent because these acts will only
10 signal the weakness of the regime. It may be a misnomer, then, that
11 states facing economic and political crises have much latitude to initiate
12 foreign conflicts that have any chance of success. Chiozza and Goemans
13 (2004b) find that secure leaders are more likely to be involved in foreign
14 conflicts. In fact, while states may have alternatives to diversion, a
15 possibility for some regimes is that they simply collapse. The best
16 strategic option facing leaders in this situation may be to verbally
17 scapegoat other external actors in a manner that does not invite some
18 form of detrimental (especially military) reprisal. A perfect example of
19 this was the verbal attack on the IMF and currency speculator George
20 Soros by Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia during the financial
21 crisis that swept through Asia in 1997. Such forms of diversion or
22 scapegoating would fall below the radar screen of quantitative studies.

23 For now, though, let us assume economic hardship does induce
24 diversionary behavior on the part of leaders. If diversion exists, I
25 suspect that authoritarian regimes are the most likely to use tactics
26 involving threats, displays, or uses of force because democracies face
27 more institutional constraint and stable totalitarian regimes will have
28 less need to do so. Also, autocracies should be less constrained to act in
29 this manner considering the decreased sources of resistance, yet still not
30 so strong that they need not worry about the maintenance of their
31 power. For example, the Soviet Union under Stalin was stable because
32 of severe repression and militarized diversionary tactics were apparently
33 unnecessary. Such totalitarian regimes may nevertheless be more likely
34 to use diversionary rhetoric because the ability to verify the legitimacy
35 of government statements for such a society would be low. Instead, any
36 constraint upon the leader of a totalitarian state is likely to come from
37 the leader's inner circle (a small winning coalition), such as the top
38 leadership of a communist party or the military.

1 In summary, I expect that higher rates of economic growth will
2 increase the probability of militarized interstate conflict initiation while
3 reducing the risk of regime change. Yet because nations engage in
4 cheap-talk threats or disputes that may have a reduced risk of escalating
5 to war, the effects of economic growth should be most pronounced on
6 those disputes that are more severe and likely to escalate. Wars and
7 other deadly states should be positively related to higher rates of
8 growth, whereas this may not be true of lesser disputes. It could,
9 perhaps, be argued that lower rates of growth stimulate the motivation
10 (willingness) for conflict, but at the same time decrease the opportunity.
11 This kind of claim assumes that opportunity and willingness are
12 equal in their effect on an outcome, which is uncertain. However, if
13 this alternative interpretation were true, then we should not find
14 that economic variables are typically related to purported diversion
15 attempts, as we see in the literature.

16 In instances where states experience both regime changes and
17 militarized interstate conflicts in the same year, I expect that lower
18 rates of economic growth will raise the probability of a regime change
19 to occur first. This means that some of the conflicts that have
20 been associated with low growth and domestic stability in annual
21 aggregations of data actually occur after some regime changes, which
22 does not seemingly square with traditional diversionary theory. I also
23 expect that higher levels of economic development and democracy will
24 reduce both militarized conflict initiations and regime changes because
25 of higher levels of stability and legitimacy, as well as additional
26 constraints on executives. Finally, while domestic conflict is expected to
27 decrease the risk of a militarized interstate conflict, it should have its
28 strongest effect in increasing the probability of a regime change.
29 Leaders under domestic pressure may alter the form of their
30 government or be deposed.

31 **Research Design**

32
33
34 This analysis tests the theoretical propositions that low growth and
35 domestic conflict should constrain foreign conflict participation and
36 escalation. It also examines whether regime change is the more probable
37 outcome for states under duress. In other words, the gambling-for-
38 resurrection gambit should be a rare and desperate behavior that, more

1 often than not, fails. I am therefore broadly interested in the combined
2 relative risks a state faces under pressure regarding regime change
3 and/or military conflict. I predict additionally that economic growth
4 will be positively related to the most severe, deadly interstate conflicts.

5 The unit of analysis of this design is the state-year. I employ data
6 from 1920-98 for over a hundred countries. I specifically use a sample
7 broader both temporally and spatially than past studies of economic
8 growth and diversionary conflict to avoid problems of a biased sample.⁷
9 A benefit of using the state-year approach is that the results here can be
10 couched in the literature already using this unit of analysis. This is
11 important because these previous studies have not looked at the chance
12 of diversion against a fuller backdrop of regime changes.⁸ My approach
13 allows for the observation of not only if economic growth or domestic
14 conflict leads to external conflict, but also whether regime change
15 leads to conflict, or if regime change occurs after external conflict. I am
16 aware of no study that has provided relative probabilities of all these
17 events from a single model. In addition, my approach here could
18 be triangulated and combined in the future with research that has
19 specifically focused on leader removal. While other studies have focused
20 on leadership removal, my approach captures instead a wider range of
21 institutional changes that would most often subsume changes in leaders
22 when they change with regime. This is a benefit and a cost. On the one
23 hand, I am not directly observing when leaders are removed from office;
24 on the other hand, I am observing changes that often include this, but
25 also other changes in regimes that do not lead to leader change. The
26 Fujimori example mentioned earlier is notable here, too. Faced with
27 economic problems and two insurgencies in the field, he shut down
28 Congress and ruled as an autocrat. As I seek to test directly whether
29 military conflicts or regime changes are most likely to occur and which
30 comes first in periods where both occur, I use a categorical dependent
31 variable with five potential outcomes. The use of such a model requires
32 a multinomial regression estimator (because the outcomes are not
33 ordered).

34 **Construction of the Dependent Variables**

35 I investigated this question with three different categorical
36 dependent variables with each differing in regard to the interstate
37 conflict category. I examine militarized conflict initiations, conflicts
38

1 where fatalities occur, and situations where states may be the target of
2 foreign aggression. This is another benefit of the study in that I discern
3 the difference between conflicts that escalate to include fatalities, which
4 not only subsumes war, but also lesser disputes that entail threats,
5 displays, or uses of force. I also account for the possibility that domestic
6 problems in a state may make it a target by foreign aggressors. The
7 discrete nominal outcomes of the dependent variables are as such:
8 0 = status quo (no militarized interstate conflict or regime change in a
9 given year), 1 = occurrence of only an interstate conflict, 2 = occurrence
10 of only a regime change in any year, 3 = a regime change occurs prior
11 to a militarized conflict in the same year, 4 = a militarized interstate
12 state conflict occurs prior to a regime change in the same year. The
13 outcomes are mutually exclusive. Later, I discuss the construction of
14 the variables.

15 The nominal interstate conflict categories were formed by first
16 creating three binary variables based on the *Militarized Interstate*
17 *Dispute* (MID) 3.0 data set provided by the Correlates of War project
18 (Ghosn, Palmer, and Bremer 2003). An MID occurs when a state
19 threatens, displays, or uses force against another member of the
20 interstate system. The MID 3.0 data were first sorted by state before
21 selecting the dispute for each state based on the highest hostility level of
22 its disputes in a given year. The first binary conflict variable, *MID*
23 *initiation*, equals one when a state is an original participant on side A of
24 an MID, zero otherwise. The next binary conflict variable, *MID Target*,
25 measures whether a state is the target of a new MID in a given year, zero
26 otherwise. Another possibility discussed in the literature is that states
27 involved in domestic turmoil or weakened by a poor economy may be
28 vulnerable to foreign aggression as opposed to being the initiators. This
29 variable does not measure whether the target reciprocated with some
30 military behavior. Finally, *Fatal MID* is constructed in the same
31 manner as MID onset but limited to only those disputes where fatalities
32 occurred. Subsequent years of all disputes are coded as zeros.

33 I created a binary categorical variable for the outcomes that include
34 a regime change based on the updated data by Polity IV project
35 (Marshall and Jaggers 2000). This version includes the specific dates of
36 many regime changes and estimated dates for others that are useful in
37 gauging whether regime changes occur before or after interstate
38 conflicts. A regime change is a change in the polity score for a state in a

1 given year and involves some form of alteration of the government of a
2 state that can be observed as occurring on a specific date. However, a
3 leader may not be thrown from power.⁹ For example, a president may
4 dismiss the legislature and rule by decree, as did President Fujimori of
5 Peru or Hitler of Germany. Regime changes are coded based on the
6 EYEAR and EDATE variables.

7 The last two categories of the dependent variables require a
8 determination of whether a foreign conflict or regime change occurs
9 first when they both occur in a given year. For this purpose, the
10 variables denoting the start day and month of a MID were united
11 into one variable matching EDATE in the Polity data set ($\{\text{start}$
12 $\text{month} \times 100\} + \text{start day}$). For example, October 9 would equal 1009.
13 I then code the two outcomes based on which binary event, a MID or a
14 regime change, occurs first when they both happen in the same year.

15 Construction of the Explanatory Variables

16 The first theoretical independent variable examined here is
17 economic growth, which is operationalized as GDP growth based on
18 power purchasing parity data (Maddison 1995; 2001), using Penn
19 World Tables (PWT) 6.1. *GDP Growth* is lagged one year as well as
20 transformed into moving averages ranging from two to five years.¹⁰ I
21 expect that growth or stagnation over several years provides more
22 information regarding the degree of crisis and political problems than
23 what would be captured by a single year lag. I expect that higher rates
24 of GDP growth will be positively related to interstate conflict,
25 particularly when escalation-to-battle deaths occur, and negatively to
26 regime changes.

27 Whether or not states are capable of sustaining a war effort or
28 maintaining internal stability would appear related to the efficacy of
29 government institutions and the economic sophistication of society.
30 Weak states should be more susceptible to internal disarray and
31 collapse whereas stronger states may likely repress or co-opt opposition
32 in society. Jackman (1993) shows that economic development is highly
33 correlated with state efficacy. While I investigated several ways to
34 measure state efficacy, most were fraught by missing data. For this
35 reason, I use economic development as a proxy for state efficacy.
36 *Development* equals the natural log of energy consumption per capita,
37 based on data from the *National Material Capabilities Data Set* (Singer
38

1 and Small 1982) available on EUGene 3.030 software (Bennett, D. Scott
2 Jr., and Allan C. Stam 2000). I also expect that highly developed states
3 will be less likely to become involved in MIDs (Boehmer and Sobek
4 2005; Mueller 1989; Rosecrance 1986) or experience regime changes
5 (Bloomberg and Hess 2002; Londregan and Poole 1990).

6 The next two variables measure domestic conflict. As I previously
7 discussed, I examine political protest and rebellion as separate
8 variables. These variables are constructed using factor analysis.¹¹
9 *A priori* I separated six variables from the Cross-National Time
10 Series Archive produced by Arthur Banks (1999) into the two
11 variables. *Protest* is composed of strikes, riots, and antigovernment
12 demonstrations. *Rebellion* is comprised of major crises, guerilla warfare,
13 and revolutions (including coups). While some of the individual
14 domestic conflict events are highly correlated with each other, such as
15 riots and demonstrations, this is not the case for the two composite
16 variables (.26). The factor analysis yields only a single factor for each
17 variable.¹² I expect that these indices of domestic conflict will be
18 negatively related to interstate conflict, but positively related to regime
19 changes. Clearly, some form of social/domestic coercion will typically
20 be related to changes in government structures and leaders.¹³

21 The final two variables measure levels of democracy and major
22 power status. *Democracy* equals the *Polity* variable from the Polity IV
23 data set, which is an index ranging from negative to positive ten
24 (Democ—Autoc) for a given state for each year. I expect that higher
25 levels of democracy should reduce participation in MIDs and regime
26 changes. Last, *Major Power* is a binary variable marking states that are
27 major powers based on the Correlates of War coding (Singer and Small
28 1982) and is also available from EUGene. This variable is introduced
29 into the models to control for states that are often involved in foreign
30 conflicts and is of less interest in regard to the regime-change only
31 category. Major powers are more conflict-prone because they are
32 typically well armed (of course), possess many international interests,
33 and interact more with other states.

34 I regress each of the three categorical dependent variables, one
35 for each of the three types of foreign conflict measured, over the
36 explanatory variables using a multinomial logit estimator. The
37 estimations utilize robust standard errors clustered on each state's
38 country code to control for heteroscedasticity (White 1980). The base

1 category for the analysis is the zero outcome, which occurs when there
2 is no regime change or MID.

3 4 **Results**

5
6 I present three models where the type of militarized conflict, as a
7 part of the outcome categories of the dependent variable, is a MID
8 initiation, MID target, or Fatal MID. The GDP growth variable in each
9 model is lagged one year. I also ran the models with three- and five-year
10 moving averages of GDP growth, but found that this made little
11 difference in the results, and even then only marginally, with the Fatal
12 MID model. I will discuss that later. Think of the categories of the
13 dependent variables as five scenarios that a country could find itself in
14 during any given year. Such outcomes combine choices made by the
15 leaders of the state in question but are also contingent on the behavior
16 of internal opponents and external enemies.

17 18 **Under Duress: MID initiation or Regime Change?**

19 A tabulation of the first dependent variable, MID Initiation, shows
20 of course that the initiating of MIDs and occurrence of regime changes
21 are both rare events and their occurrence in the same year is particularly
22 uncommon. Of the 5,994 cases where data on the covariates are not
23 missing (with GDP growth lagged one year), the following are the
24 values for the categories: 0 = no MID or regime change (4,823),
25 1 = MID initiation only (676), 2 = regime change only (416), 3 = regime
26 change before MID initiation in the same year (34), 4 = MID before
27 regime change in the same year (45). The probabilities of being in these
28 particular states are respectively: 0 = .82, 1 = .10, 2 = .063, 3 = .004, and
29 4 = .006.

30 Table 1 shows the estimates for the model including MID
31 initiations. We can see that the coefficient for economic growth is
32 insignificant regarding scenarios where the state in question initiates an
33 MID (outcome 1). Lower or higher rates of economic growth do not
34 appear to lead to only an MID initiation in a given year. However,
35 higher rates of economic growth decrease the occurrence of a regime
36 change, but lower rates of growth raises the risk of a MID initiation
37 followed by a regime change. In other words, lower rates of economic
38 growth are statistically significantly related to regime changes and

Table 1. Economic Growth, Regime Change, and Conflict Initiations

MID Initiation	Coef.	R. Standard Error	p value	Significance
GDP growth lagged one year	-0.0019	0.0040	0.6370	
Development	-0.0141	0.0390	0.7180	
Protest	0.1088	0.0505	0.0310	*
Rebellion	0.0950	0.0344	0.0060	**
Major power	1.2598	0.2197	0.0000	***
Democracy	-0.0411	0.0122	0.0010	***
Constant	-2.1250	0.1110	0.0000	***
Regime Change				
GDP growth lagged one year	-0.0298	-0.0072	0.0000	**
Development	-0.0772	0.0287	0.0070	***
Protest	0.1699	0.0393	0.0000	***
Rebellion	0.1302	0.0363	0.0000	***
Major power	-0.7460	0.4913	0.1290	
Democracy	-0.0290	0.0103	0.0050	**
Constant	-2.4283	0.0800	0.0000	***
Regime Change then MID Initiation				
GDP growth lagged one year	0.0006	0.0091	0.9450	
Development	-0.1687	0.0639	0.0080	**
Protest	-0.2324	0.2510	0.3550	
Rebellion	0.2311	0.0566	0.0000	***
Major power	0.6076	0.6263	0.3320	
Democracy	-0.0431	0.0213	0.0430	*
Constant	-5.2641	0.2557	0.0000	***
MID Initiation then Regime Change				
GDP growth lagged one year	-0.0376	0.0159	0.0180	*
Development	-0.1204	0.0915	0.1880	
Protest	0.1708	0.0439	0.0000	***
Rebellion	0.1653	0.0477	0.0010	***
Major power	0.5676	0.5807	0.3280	
Democracy	-0.0405	0.0220	0.0650	#
Constant	-4.7868	0.2078	0.0000	***
Number of obs	5994		Wald chi ²	242.02
Log likelihood	-3869.4		Prob > chi ²	0.0000
Pseudo R ²	0.0397			

Note: Two-tailed tests. 0 is the comparison category.
 # p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

1 situations where a MID is initiated that is then followed by a regime
 2 change. Are these initiated MIDs diversion attempts? If so, the results
 3 suggest that they are unsuccessful because some regime change
 4 apparently becomes politically necessary. It is also the case that the
 5 coefficient for the MID initiation only category (which is by default
 6 MIDs that are unrelated to years where there is a regime change) is
 7 statistically insignificant. This is interesting that poor economic growth
 8 can increase the risk of an MID initiation, but specifically under the
 9 circumstances when it may fail to externalize internal pressure or
 10 conflict, although this effect is a small.

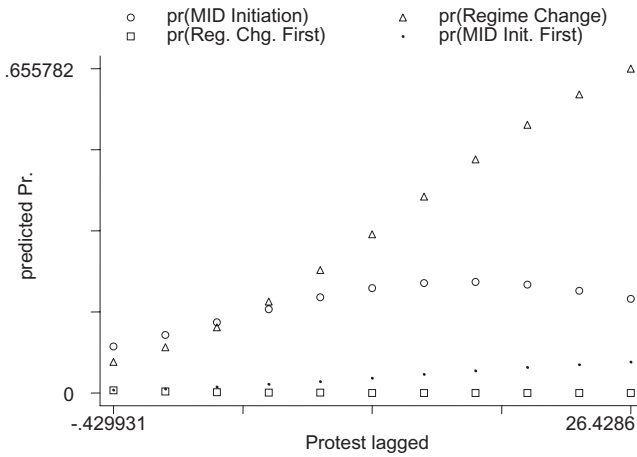
11 As expected, both protest and rebellion are related positively to the
 12 four non-status quo outcomes, with the exception of protest and regime
 13 change followed by MID initiation (outcome 3). Table 2 shows that
 14 political protest typically has a slightly larger positive effect than
 15 rebellion on the initiation of an MID. However, the effects of protest
 16 and rebellion can be compared across the range of the variables for all
 17 four outcome scenarios (non-status quo), as depicted in Figures 1 and 2
 18 respectively. Indeed, as a state's level of protest increases the odds of
 19 both a regime change and an MID initiation increase; nevertheless, the
 20 risk of a regime change eclipses that of MID initiation around the
 21 middle range of the protest scale and then climbs at an accelerating rate
 22 from thereon. A similar pattern exists between the relationship between
 23 rebellion and MID initiation. The risk of each outcome climbs as
 24 rebellion increases but regime change remains the more probable event,
 25 and this holds even when both events occur in the same year. The results

27 **Table 2. Predicted Probabilities of MID Initiations and Regime Changes**

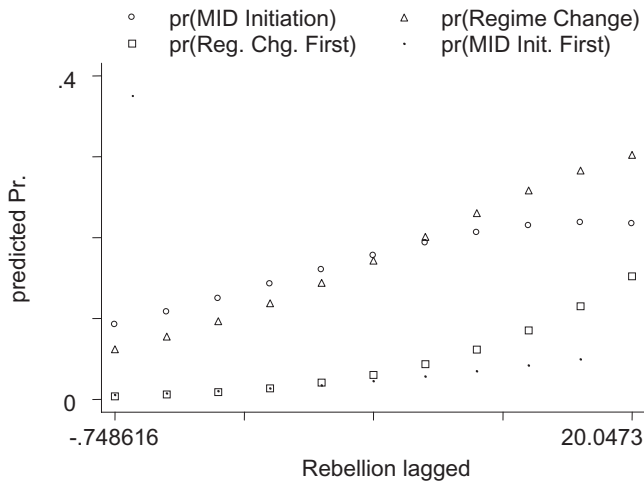
	MID Initiation	Regime Change	Change First	Initiation First
Pr. (y/x)	0.1057	0.0637	0.0046	0.0065
Changes in the Pr. with an increase of one standard deviation				
GDP Growth	0.0004	-0.0147	0.0001	-0.0019
Protest	0.0129	0.0133	-0.0017	0.0014
Rebellion	0.0118	0.0104	0.0015	0.0014
Development	-0.0013	-0.0090	-0.0015	-0.0015
Democracy	-0.0285	-0.0111	-0.0013	-0.0017

1 **Figure 1. Change in Pr. of each Outcome across range of Political Protest** 22

2



3 **Figure 2. Change in Pr. of each Outcome across range of Political Rebellion**



1 show that there may be some logic to diversionary strategy under some
2 conditions, but with high levels of domestic conflict, some form of
3 regime change occurs.

4 Higher levels of democracy generally reduce both militarized
5 interstate conflicts and regime changes across all the dependent
6 variables examined. As reported in Table 2, a one standard deviation
7 (7.8) increase in a state's democracy score (for a score of about 8) from
8 the mean (.3) reduces the probability of an MID initiation to .077
9 (almost a 30 percent decrease). Democracy also has a rather strong
10 pacifying effect relative to the other covariates, as shown in Table 2. In
11 general though, it suffices to say that autocracies are more likely to
12 initiate MIDs.

13 **Domestic Problems and Foreign Threat**

14 The earlier results show that there are situations where states under
15 duress from a poorly performing economy and higher levels of domestic
16 conflict may initiate an MID or undergo a regime change, or both.
17 Another possibility is that such situations offer an opportunity for other
18 states to exploit or undermine a state by outright military aggression or
19 possibly the aiding of the target state's internal opposition. This appears
20 to have happened on several occasions, such as Uganda undermining
21 the Tutsi leadership in Rwanda in the 1990s. Blainey (1988) also
22 discusses the possibility of "Death-watch Wars" where aggressor states
23 seek to exploit moments of weaknesses in their potential enemies. We
24 can conceive of this type of behavior with both policy and regime
25 changes in mind as well as attempts to seize territory. I do not delve
26 deeper into such possibilities here and reserve that for a later project,
27 and instead seek to first explore the degree to which this phenomenon
28 may occur.

29 I present the results of the models in Table 3 that take into account
30 a state being targeted by other states. GDP growth has no statistically
31 significant effect on the risk of being targeted in an MID. Yet internal
32 conflict does invite foreign aggression, although protest does this more
33 than rebellion. The probability of being targeted in an MID is .122,
34 presented in Table 4, and a one standard deviation in protest increases
35 this to .135. Notice that the baseline probability of being targeted by a
36 foreign state is higher than a state initiating against a foreign target. The
37 effects of the remaining covariates are weak on MID targeting. Lower
38

Table 3. Economic Growth, Regime Changes, and MID Target

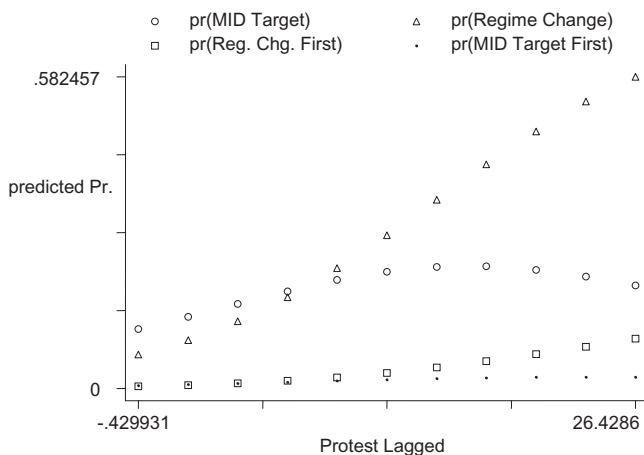
MID Target	Coefficient	R. Standard Error	p value	Significance
GDP growth lagged one year	0.0048	0.0044	0.2800	
Development	-0.0147	0.0335	0.6620	
Protest	0.0945	0.0329	0.0040	**
Rebellion	0.0578	0.0298	0.0530	#
Major power	0.9587	0.2253	0.0000	***
Democracy	-0.0010	0.0110	0.9310	
Constant	-1.9786	0.0908	0.0000	***
Regime Change				
GDP growth lagged one year	-0.0246	-0.0078	0.0020	**
Development	-0.0924	0.0274	0.0010	***
Protest	0.1569	0.0423	0.0000	***
Rebellion	0.1337	0.0353	0.0000	***
Major power	-0.4122	0.3308	0.2130	
Democracy	-0.0247	0.0095	0.0100	**
Constant	-2.4297	0.0787	0.0000	***
Regime Change then MID Target				
GDP growth lagged one year	-0.0514	0.0130	0.0000	***
Development	0.0635	0.1068	0.5520	
Protest	0.1913	0.0646	0.0030	**
Rebellion	0.1864	0.0522	0.0000	***
Major power	-0.8784	0.9880	0.3740	
Democracy	-0.0617	0.0260	0.0180	**
Constant	-4.9824	0.2345	0.0000	***
MID Target then Regime Change				
GDP growth lagged one year	-0.0278	0.0190	0.1430	
Development	-0.1666	0.1163	0.1520	
Protest	0.1238	0.1079	0.2510	
Rebellion	-0.0127	0.1061	0.9050	
Major power	-28.8565	0.4899	0.0000	***
Democracy	-0.0128	0.0229	0.5750	
Constant	-4.8928	0.2394	0.0000	***
Number of obs	5994		Wald chi ²	7741.1
Log likelihood	-4025.8		Prob > chi ²	0.0000
Pseudo R ²	0.028			

Note: Two-tailed tests. 0 is the comparison category.
 # p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Table 4. Predicted Probabilities of MID Target and Regime Changes

	Target MID	Regime Change	Change First	Target MID First
Pr. (y/x)	0.1228	0.0659	0.0041	0.0009
Changes in the Pr. with an increase of one standard deviation				
GDP growth	0.0063	-0.0129	-0.0017	-0.0002
Protest	0.0125	0.0125	0.0010	0.0001
Rebellion	0.0075	0.0115	0.0010	0.0000
Development	-0.0017	-0.0114	0.0006	-0.0003
Democracy	0.0010	-0.0116	-0.0019	-0.0001

Figure 3. Change in Pr. MID Target and Regime Change from Political Protest



rates of economic growth do, however, increase the risk that a state will be targeted in an MID following a regime change. The odds of this occurring are rather low to begin with, but when it rains it appears to pour. As one would expect, protest and rebellion increase the risk of regime changes in the same model examining MID targeting. Both variables are positive and statistically significant, but protest has a particularly strong effect on regime changes, as shown in Figure 3.

Economic Growth and Fatal MIDs

The theory presented earlier predicts that lower rates of growth suppress participation in foreign conflicts, particularly concerning conflict initiation and escalation to combat. To sustain combat, states need to be militarily prepared and not open up a second front when they are already fighting, or may fear, domestic opposition. A good example would be when the various Afghani resistance fighters expelled the Soviet Union from their territory, but the Taliban crumbled when it had to face the combined forces of the United States and Northern Alliance insurrection. Yet the coefficient for GDP growth and MID initiations was negative but insignificant. However, considering that there are many reasons why states fight, the logic presented earlier should hold especially in regard to the risk of participating in more severe conflicts. Threats to use military force may be safe to make and may be made with both external and internal actors in mind, but in the end may remain mere cheap talk that does not risk escalation if there is a chance to back down. Chiozza and Goemans (2004b) found that secure leaders were more likely to become involved in war than insecure leaders, supporting the theory and evidence presented here. We should find that leaders who face domestic opposition and a poorly performing economy shy away from situations that could escalate to combat if doing so would compromise their ability to retain power.

Table 5 presents the results where the external conflict measure is Fatal MID onset. A few points are in order before discussing the results. First, I measure growth in this model with a three-year moving average considering that the decision to engage in foreign clashes, which involve combat, may likely be based on several years of growth or domestic stability, although the results are similar for a one-year lag or moving averages of other durations between two and four years. Second, although my theory specifies a directional relationship claiming that economic growth should increase the likelihood of conflict, the results are presented based on a two-tailed test to be consistent with the rest of the models. Thus, the results are biased against my theory and the statistical significance is stronger than presented. Economic growth is positively related to the onset of foreign conflicts that lead to fatalities and this is significant below the .05 level with a one-tailed test. This part of my theory is thus supported.

Table 5. Economic Growth, Regime Change, and Conflict Escalations

Fatal MID	Coefficient	R. Standard		Significance
		Error	p value	
GDP growth avg. three years	0.0228	0.0132	0.0840	#
Development	-0.1244	0.0437	0.0040	**
Protest	0.1064	0.0415	0.0100	**
Rebellion	0.1188	0.0365	0.0010	***
Major power	1.1981	0.2231	0.0000	***
Democracy	-0.0295	0.0151	0.0500	*
Constant	-3.1317	0.1448	0.0000	***
Regime Change				
GDP growth avg. three years	0.0504	0.0120	0.0000	***
Development	-0.0992	0.0295	0.0010	***
Protest	0.1462	0.0381	0.0000	***
Rebellion	0.1362	0.0323	0.0000	***
Major power	-0.7179	0.3552	0.0430	*
Democracy	-0.0262	0.0098	0.0080	**
Constant	-2.3432	0.0813	0.0000	***
Regime Change then Fatal MID				
GDP growth avg. three years	-0.0630	0.0679	0.3530	
Development	-0.1673	0.1232	0.1750	
Protest	0.1836	0.0693	0.0080	**
Rebellion	0.0994	0.1304	0.4460	
Major power	0.8679	0.8477	0.3060	
Democracy	-0.0590	0.0390	0.1310	
Constant	-5.8845	0.4091	0.0000	***
Fatal MID then Regime Change				
GDP growth avg. three years	-0.0130	0.0920	0.8870	
Development	-0.3404	0.1144	0.0030	
Protest	0.1723	0.0619	0.0050	**
Rebellion	0.1288	0.1035	0.2130	
Major power	0.1167	1.0174	0.9090	
Democracy	-0.0017	0.0321	0.9590	
Constant	-5.9312	0.4831	0.0000	***
Number of obs	5826		Wald chi ²	183.62
Log likelihood	-2865.5		Prob > chi ²	0.0000
Pseudo R ²	0.042			

Note: Two-tailed tests. 0 is the comparison category.

p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

The baseline probability of a Fatal MID in this model is .048, as depicted in Table 6. A one standard deviation in GDP growth, protest, and rebellion all have the same approximate substantive increase in probability of .006 to .007, whereas democracy and development have a similar pacifying effect of $-.01$. Figures 4 through 6 map the range of probabilities of GDP growth, protest, and rebellion respectively. Economic Growth increases the risk of a Fatal MID whereas regime

Table 6. Predicted Probabilities of Fatal MID Onset and Regime Changes

	Fatal MID	Regime Change	Change First	Fatal MID First
Pr. (y/x)	0.0477	0.0691	0.0022	0.0026
Changes in the Pr. with an increase of one standard deviation				
GDP growth	0.006	-0.018	-0.001	0.000
Protest	0.006	0.013	0.001	0.001
Rebellion	0.007	0.012	0.000	0.000
Development	-0.010	-0.012	-0.001	-0.002
Democracy	-0.010	-0.012	-0.001	0.000

Figure 4. Change in Pr. Fatal MID and Regime Change from GDP Growth

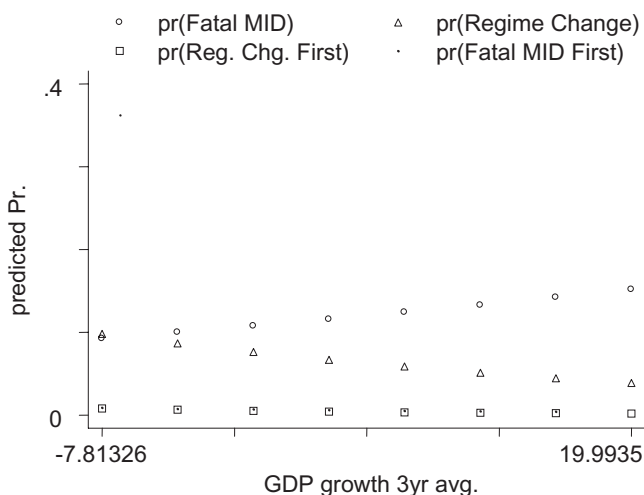
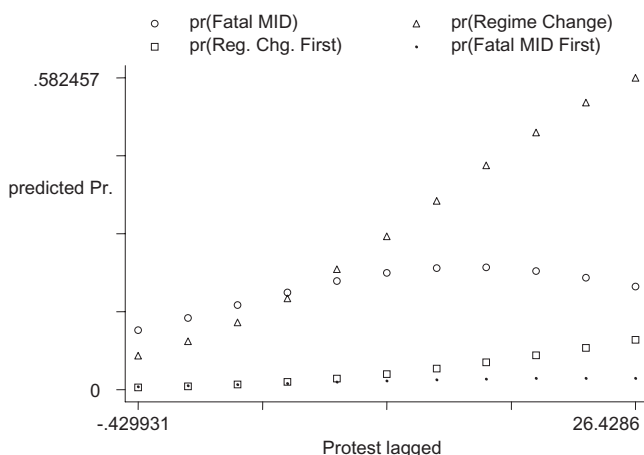
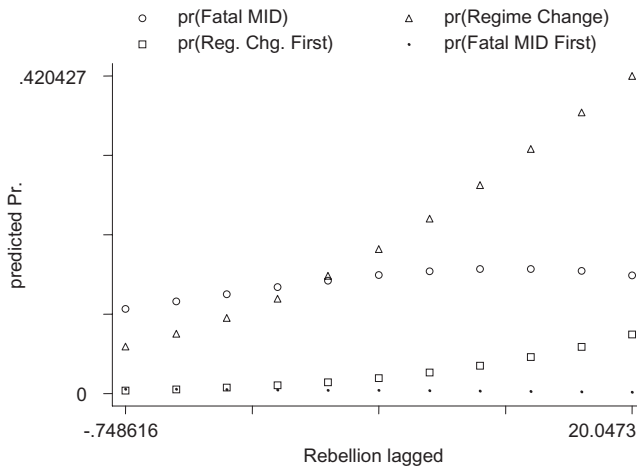


Figure 5. Change in Pr. Fatal MID and Regime Change from Political Protest



change becomes less likely (Figure 4).¹⁴ Again though, a graph can give us a more complete picture compared to the information in Table 6. Figure 5 shows that the effect on political protest is more severe over the full range of the scale. Whereas the risk of a Fatal MID levels off and drops, the relationship between protest and regime change is linear and continues upward. We see a similar pattern in Figure 6 with regard to rebellion. Therefore, when we look at the middle range of probabilities for the three variables, they appear to have similar effects, but at the highest levels of domestic conflict (beyond one standard deviation), the risk of a Fatal MID actually decreases. In this manner, there is support for the theory that economic growth indeed raises the probability of interstate conflicts that result in fatalities, whereas domestic conflict likewise increases this risk, but only to a point. The highest levels of domestic conflict actually reduce MID initiation, MID targets, and Fatal MIDs. Hence, if state leaders attempt to divert because of domestic conflict, they clearly avoid escalating external conflicts to the point of fatalities and risking war.

Figure 6. Change in Pr. Fatal MID and Regime Change from Rebellion



Concluding Remarks

I have theorized in this study that economic growth should be positively related to militarized interstate conflicts while at the same time it should reduce the risk of domestic regime changes. I also expected that domestic conflict would reduce the risk of interstate conflict. The research design used here specifically allows for a comparison of the relative probabilities of both interstate conflict and regime changes. I find only partial support for both my theory and the conclusions often made in studies of diversionary conflict that lower rates of economic growth should lead to interstate conflict, although in cases where this occurs, this is in fact followed by some form of regime change, suggesting that diversion was not successful or the only tactic politically necessary.

In fact, the alternative theory presented here was supported in regard to the most severe interstate conflicts. Higher levels of economic growth are positively related to the onset of deadly interstate conflicts. However, the results concerning domestic conflict are interesting and both support and contradict my theory. Indeed, domestic conflict

1 increases the threat of both regime changes and interstate conflict, but
2 only to a point. The effects of protest and rebellion are generally
3 nonlinear where only the middle levels contribute to interstate conflict.
4 The highest levels of protest and rebellion actually reduce the risk of
5 interstate conflict. This suggests that state leaders may attempt
6 diversion as long as protest and rebellion are not so severe, although
7 beyond some middle-range threshold leaders shy away from especially
8 the most severe interstate conflicts. One *post hoc* rationale could be
9 that leaders are insulated from domestic opponents to some degree
10 and are not constrained until domestic conflict reaches a certain
11 threshold.

12 An alternative explanation, and one also suggested by the results
13 here, is that the risk of regime change rises much more quickly with
14 higher levels of protest and rebellion, but especially the former, relative
15 to the opportunity to initiate a foreign conflict. Probabilistically, the
16 opportunity to divert decreases as the chance to be toppled or
17 institutionally altering the government increases first. While the results
18 show that some leaders initiate interstate conflicts and then undergo
19 regime change, a likely outcome for those facing high levels of
20 domestic conflict is that they are removed before they can pull the
21 trigger on a “gambling-for-resurrection” strategy. The results also
22 show that this would be a very, very rare behavior on the part of
23 democratic leaders, given the results of the democracy variable and the
24 low probabilities of the events measured. Of the 755 country-years
25 where a militarized interstate conflict was initiated, 79 of these foreign
26 conflicts (11 percent) were related somehow to regime change. This
27 means that some attempts to divert (if they were so) failed, while
28 others following MIDs may be completely unrelated to diversionary
29 behavior or possibility even a penalty for it. Moreover, these MID
30 initiations likely include many conflicts which most would agree
31 were not diversionary, such as U.S. interventions into Bosnia or
32 Afghanistan, which is the common problem associated with this
33 theory. This means that the risk of regime change for states under
34 duress is probably even higher than the results show, which would be
35 the times leaders would most prefer to divert.

36 In summary, this study shows circumstantial evidence that supports
37 aspects of diversionary conflict theory. At least some domestic conflict
38 appears to increase the risk of interstate conflict. Yet, the results here

1 present a more complex picture than other studies in that diversionary
2 strategies (1) appear to occur less often than regime change, or (2)
3 regime change occurs anyway after a foreign conflict has been initiated.
4 Lower economic growth and domestic conflict both seem to lead to
5 desperate situations where interstate conflicts are initiated, but again
6 seem unsuccessful. Diversionary attempts appear quite rare and
7 desperate in nature.

8 Still, the results here show a more complex picture that partly
9 contradicts aspects of diversionary theory. First, the odds are actually
10 higher that states with domestic problems will be a target of foreign
11 aggression than they would be an aggressor. This finding suggests
12 predatory behavior on the part of other states. Moreover, leaders
13 facing domestic problems associated with domestic conflict and poor
14 economic growth avoid foreign conflicts that entail the loss of life.
15 Instead, states are more likely to become involved in such violent
16 disputes when economic growth is high and state leaders and their
17 regimes appear secure, meaning they face manageable levels of internal
18 protest and rebellion.

19
20 **Appendix A**
21 **Factor Loading for the Domestic Conflict Variables**
22 **Oblique Rotation (promax)**

23

24 Protest	25 Factors 1	26 Uniqueness
27 Strikes	0.3999	0.8401
28 Riots	0.7202	0.4813
29 Demonstrations	0.6772	0.5414
30 Rebellion		
31 Government Crises	0.4088	0.8329
32 Guerilla Warfare	0.4499	0.7976
Revolutions	0.4704	0.7787

33

Appendix B

Table B1. Statistics for the Independent Variables

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Development	1,0222	-0.96	2.26	-12.13	4.48
Rebellion	7788	0.04	1.63	-0.75	40.04
Protest	7790	0.03	1.32	-0.43	26.43
GDP Growth 3 yr moving avg.	7850	3.68	5.11	-31.48	133.49
GDP Growth lagged 1 yr	7912	3.67	8.10	-92.45	388.91
Democracy	9779	-0.23	7.33	-10	10
Major Power	1,1496	0.07	0.26	0	1

Table B2. Correlational Matrix for the Independent Variables

Correlations	Develop	Rebellion	Protest	GDPma3	GDPgr1	Dem	Maj. Power
Development	1.00						
Rebellion	-0.08	1.00					
Protest	0.10	0.26	1.00				
GDPma3	-0.04	-0.05	-0.03	1.00			
GDPgr1	-0.03	-0.06	-0.05	0.62	1.00		
Democracy	0.31	-0.01	0.14	-0.03	-0.01	1.00	
Major Power	0.19	0.05	0.21	-0.03	-0.02	0.11	1.00

Notes

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¹Quantitative studies of the American case show that the use of military force in interstate crises appears related to election cycles and poor economic conditions such as high unemployment or low growth (DeRouen 1995; Fordham 1998; Foster 2006; Hess and Orphanides 1995; James and Oneal 1991; Mitchell and Moore 2002; Morgan and Bickers 1992; Ostrom and Job 1986; Wang 1996). Yet Meernik and Waterman 1996 demonstrate that *low* misery ratings and high approval *increase* the use of force by American presidents in foreign crises. [5]

²Cross-national studies of diversionary behavior show an inverse relationship between economic growth and interstate conflict (Bennett and Nordstrom 2000; Enterline and Gleditsch 2000; Heldt 1999; Miller 1995 and 1999; Russett 1987, 1990). Leeds and Davis (1997) find no such relationship. Sobek (2007) found that oligarchies of Renaissance Italy were prone to external conflict during times of internal unrest. Sprecher and DeRouen (2002) have found a similar result in Israel as Morgan and Anderson (1999) of Great Britain.

1 ³A few studies have at least examined the consequences of winning or losing wars on leadership
2 duration. Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson (1995) found that democratic leaders were prone to
3 removal for losing wars. Goemans (2000) found that the punishment of losing a war varied with the
4 degree of the defeat for democratic leaders but was the same for leaders of mixed regimes, whereas
5 autocrats were only removed when losing disastrously. Chiozza and Goemans (2003) find that
6 leaders at risk of removal are less apt to initiate conflicts but the heightened risk of foreign crisis
7 also leads to leader removal. However, separating wars from crises, Chiozza and Goemans (2004a)
8 find that war is detrimental to leader duration. 6

9 ⁴Other studies at the systemic level and national levels of analysis argue that higher rates of
10 economic growth are positively related to interstate conflict (Choucri and North 1975; Doran 1983,
11 1985; Goldstein 1988; Kondratieff 1984; Mansfield 1988; Pollins 1996; Pollins and Murrin 1999;
12 Pollins and Schweller 1999). 7

13 ⁵The most direct measures are based on leader approval through polling. However, other indirect
14 measures are used as proxies, such as the state of the economy, assuming that economic growth
15 leads to less domestic conflict (Bennett and Nordstrom 2000; Heldt 1999).

16 ⁶On the one hand, Russett (1987, 1990) and Gelpi (1997) find evidence that democracies are more
17 prone to diversion, although Gelpi does not include economic conditions in his analysis. On the
18 other hand, Miller (1995, 1999), Heldt (1999), and Enterline and Gleditsch (2000), present evidence
19 to the contrary—less-developed autocracies may be the states most likely to initiate interstate
20 conflicts during times of low growth. Bennett and Nordstrom (2000) do not find any relationship
21 between polity type and diversionary behavior.

22 ⁷I previously found that missing economic data typically leads to a bias in samples skewed toward
23 the more highly developed states, which has the effect biasing coefficients for economic growth and
24 conflict. This problem likely occurs in most of the cross-national studies cited here and is
25 particularly damaging in dyadic studies where it takes missing data in only one state to skip over
26 an observation (Boehmer 2002), doctoral dissertation. 8

27 ⁸There has been some research on the question of democratization leading to conflict, as argued by
28 Mansfield and Snyder (1995, 1997, 2002), although no other studies have been able to replicate this
29 finding. Still, most scholars tend to cite this finding despite the other studies showing null results
30 (Enterline 1996; Thompson and Tucker 1997).

31 ⁹I plan to further investigate this topic using the data used to measure leader survival created by
32 Bueno de Mesquita and others (1999) in the future, if it is released to the public.

33 ¹⁰The GDP variable was created by converting the PWT data into GDP from GDP per capita and
34 rescaling the Maddison GDP data to fit the PWT data. The variable is built upon Maddison (1995).
35 Then I ran an update merge with the replace option in Stata, filling in missing data in Maddison
36 (1995) with data from Maddison (2001). This stage expands the GDP variable to include many
37 countries missing from Maddison (1995) (which only included 56) while also replacing existing
38 values between 1950 and 1992. Growth rates were calculated separately in each source before
39 merging (Maddison, PWT 6.1). Finally, the PWT GDP growth rates were used to fill in the missing
40 data in the Maddison sample. Note however, that one should carefully consider whether data from
41 different sources are compatible. See Maddison (1995) for a discussion of the methodologies used to
42 create power purchasing parity data and comparability across different sources. The method used by
43 Maddison is similar to that used by Heston, Summers, and Aten (2002), but not without some error.

1 ¹¹ The construction of these variables was inspired by Enterline and Gleditsch (1999) who created 9
2 a single domestic conflict variable from the eight Banks variables. I believe their analysis mixed the
3 differences between the lesser and more severe types of conflict events, resulting in the *a priori*
4 specification I discuss here. The factor analysis was used to confirm that these events belong in
5 separate variables. Stata 7 was used to construct the variables based on the factor weightings using
6 the Score command. See Vincent (1971) and King (1989) about factor analysis.

7 ¹² The results were not sensitive to either an oblique (promax) or orthogonal (varimax) rotation.
8 The results of the factor analysis can be viewed in the Blackwell Synergy online Supplementary
9 Material for this article.

10 ¹³ Future work should better capture the interaction of different types of domestic conflict with
11 different regime types. The correlation between democracy and Protest is .15 but $-.0019$ with
12 Rebellion.

13 ¹⁴ The graph only shows the middle range of rates of growth states would normally see and cuts a
14 few extreme values that hide the variation in the middle range.

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