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Institutional Instability and the Credibility of Audience Costs: Political Participation and Interstate Crisis Bargaining, 1816–1992*

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While considerable empirical evidence shows democratic dyads to be less prone to violence than other types of regime pairs, disagreement still exists on the causal factors inhibiting conflict among democratic states. Some scholars have concluded that increased attention needs to be given to identifying specific characteristics of democratic states that might mitigate or incite coercive foreign policy actions. This article begins to pull apart the Polity IIId regime index by assessing the role of political participation in crisis bargaining. If the ability of opposition groups to challenge government policies enables state leaders to communicate credibly their intentions and thus avoid conflict, increased attention needs to be given to the permanence of such structural features of the domestic political environment. What may facilitate efficient signaling is not only competitive political participation, but also the enduring nature of such participation. Regimes that oscillate between severe restrictions on political participation and regulated competition engage in more escalatory behavior because they fail to signal their preferences effectively. The results indicate that while democracy has little effect on MID reciprocation, factionalism among domestic political groups tends to be strongly associated with such a dispute response. Contiguity, military balance, and years at peace also appear to influence dispute reciprocation.

Introduction

The idea that democracy is inextricably linked to nonviolent conflict resolution endeavors has increasingly directed US foreign policy decisionmaking in the post-Cold War era. Not only did President Clinton use the democratic peace argument to defend the expansion of US trade ties, but the administration also argued that the enlargement of NATO into Eastern Europe would help cement the recent democratic gains in the region (see Lake, 1994; Albright,

1998). Former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott (1996: 63) articulated the administration's view when he wrote, 'democracies are demonstrably more likely to maintain their international commitments, less likely to engage in terrorism or wreak environmental damage, and less likely to make war on each other'. What's more, Talbott concluded his article by stating, 'Only in an increasingly democratic world will the American people feel themselves truly secure.'

While considerable empirical evidence shows democratic dyads to be less prone to violence than other types of regime pairs, disagreement still exists on the causal factors inhibiting conflict among democratic states (Gowa, 1995). Indeed, theoretical and empirical discrepancies in the regime type and

conflict literature led Eyerman & Hart (1996: 598) to conclude that increased attention needs to be given to identifying specific characteristics of democratic states that might mitigate or incite coercive foreign policy actions. Given that distinctions within the democratic community of nations have been found with regards to conflict propensity (Prins & Sprecher, 1999; Ireland & Gartner, 2001), a more nuanced understanding of institutional effects is needed to explain fully crisis bargaining behavior. Some scholars, for instance, have tested the relationship between conflict involvement and executive constraints (Partell, 1997; Partell & Palmer, 1999). In general, though, these findings do not differ drastically from what has been found with overall level of democracy.[1] To date, few other institutional elements of polities have been investigated systematically for their potential effect on conflictual foreign policy behavior. However, it may be that other features of the domestic political environment have an important effect on conflict proneness. If so, an index of these separate institutional elements that make up a polity might obscure a relationship between any one of them and foreign policy decisionmaking. Drawing on Schultz (1998) and Gartzke (2001), and following the suggestions of Eyerman & Hart (1996) and Gleditsch & Ward (1997), this article begins to pull apart a standard measure of polity characteristics. One conceptual element of a regime's makeup is examined: political participation.

The article proceeds as follows. First, I discuss crisis bargaining and Fearon's (1994) notion of audience costs. Next, I argue that the believability of audience costs and/or resolve depends in part on the stability of domestic political structures. Similar to Schultz (1998), I suggest that political

opposition is a key component of audience cost signaling, and therefore uncertainty regarding the stability of a regime's political competition naturally has an impact on foreign policy decisionmaking. To test this conjecture, I examine dispute reciprocation from 1816 to 1992. That is, given a dispute, does instability in political competition increase the likelihood of conflict reciprocation? The results indicate that while democracy has little effect on MID reciprocation, factionalism among domestic political groups (that is, non-institutionalized political participation) tends to be strongly associated with such a dispute response. Contiguity, military balance, and years at peace also appear to influence dispute reciprocation. I conclude by offering suggestions for future research.

Regime Type and Crisis Bargaining

According to Gleditsch (1995: 297), 'the importance of democracy lies in it being a near-perfect sufficient condition for peace'. At the dyadic level, in particular, the empirical evidence is both statistically and substantively strong, as well as robust to charges of specification bias. Not only have democracies rarely engaged each other in full-scale war, but democratic leaders also appear to avoid lower levels of militarized conflict with each other as well. Still, logical flaws in the primary explanations for the democratic peace have led some scholars to question the posited causal relationship between political institutions, norms of compromise, and pacific foreign policy behavior. Gartzke (2001), for example, insists that both the normative and structural arguments are fundamentally monadic and thus cannot fully explain the dyadic observation.[2] Both

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[1] This should not be all that surprising given the high correlation between the executive constraints measure in the Polity dataset and the overall democracy index (see Gleditsch & Ward, 1997).

[2] In fact, both of the explanations for the democratic peace derive pacific foreign policy behavior from nation-specific attributes: norms of compromise and domestic political institutions that constrain decisionmakers' use of military force.

Schultz (1998) and Gartzke (2001) also see a disconnect between models of crisis bargaining and democratic peace theory, and both suggest that liberal theories need to be better informed by the dynamics of crisis decisionmaking and theories of bargaining more generally.

Information Asymmetries and Costly Signaling

International crises or disputes provide opportunities for states to assemble crucial information about competitors. If both capabilities and resolve contribute to a state's willingness to fight, then uncertainty about either of these variables should at times convince states to question an adversary's ability or willingness to refuse a demand. Of course, with complete and perfect information, the initiation and escalation of disputes should rarely occur.[3] Given a demand, a weak state (one that lacks capability and/or resolve) will typically back down immediately, recognizing that a refusal to comply will only result in a more costly capitulation in the future. When incomplete information and uncertainty are introduced, however, initiation, escalation, and war can occur as states attempt to misrepresent their true preferences as well as their willingness to fight. In a world where a weak state refuses to acquiesce, all states may have an incentive to escalate disputes and force such weaker adversaries to capitulate. That is to say, in a crisis bargaining situation, a counter demand by state B might indicate one of two things. Either state B possesses a credible retaliatory capability and the necessary resolve to fight, or state B does not possess the needed capabilities or resolve but bluffs and hopes state A will back down.

In an environment where the misrepresentation of preferences is common, states clearly have incentives to challenge adversaries that are perceived as being weak. Accordingly, to avoid crisis escalation and facilitate more efficient bargaining outcomes, what is needed is a mechanism that allows state leaders to signal credibly their state's foreign policy preferences. How, though, does a state convince an adversary that its level of resolve is in fact real? Inasmuch as states discount signals from adversaries, one possible solution is to make signals costly. Costless signals, in contrast, provide little relevant information to an opponent. States can easily renege upon prior commitments. Agreements that result in some penalty for non-compliance are more believable and thus more effective.

According to Fearon (1994), democratic states more successfully convey their true intentions because of the political penalty democratic elites pay for foreign policy failure. This penalty, according to Schultz (1998), is directly tied to the mobilization of political opposition. Not only does domestic competition compel government leaders to be cautious and selective in their foreign policy demands, but such competition also increases the credibility of signals sent by the government. 'When there is weak political support for war', Schultz (1998: 830) writes, 'the opposition can reveal this fact by deciding to oppose the government's threat.' As a result, as Gartzke (2001: 7) concludes, 'the response of opposition parties makes it costly for liberal executives to bluff'.[4]

Fearon (1994) assumes that a regime's

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[3] Misperception may not be a necessary condition for war. In fact, one can conceive of conflicts resulting from such concerns as national honor, domestic insecurity, or anticipation of higher future costs. However, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that misperception plays a role in most conflict situations.

[4] Dixon (1993) and Raymond (1994) both maintain that democracies will resolve their disputes by utilizing nonviolent means of conflict resolution. As a result, democratic states will condition their behavior on the regime type of the initiating state (see Rousseau et al., 1996 for empirical evidence of such conditioning behavior). Fearon (1994) expects a similar outcome, but for different reasons. Fearon's (1994) argument rests on signaling and political costs for policy failure, rather than cultural and political norms of conflict resolution.

ability to generate audience costs is exogenously given prior to a crisis. That is, for short periods of time at least, a state either has or does not have the ability to generate audience costs. To be sure, the actual cost a leader might incur for policy failure is determined by the extent of the demands made.[5] Higher levels of escalation in a crisis are equated with larger policy demands, which, if not met, will result in significant political costs. Leaders, though, do not impose costs on themselves, but rather opponents decide whether to contest a policy action. Consequently, opposition groups in part determine the size of the cost incurred for policy failure. Political opposition, then, is a necessary component of effective crisis signaling.

Tests of Fearon's (1994) conjecture have primarily involved taking into account constraints on political action by governing elites (Partell & Palmer, 1999; Partell, 1997).[6] However, executive parity with, or subordination to, another institutional body such as a legislature does not necessarily capture the extent to which a leader will be punished if policy actions fail to accomplish stated political goals. One can easily conceive of a leader holding an overwhelming majority in the legislature or an international crisis prompting a rally-around-the-flag effect. In either case, little opposition arises to executive foreign policy actions. In addition, neither Fearon's model nor the subsequent empirical tests of Fearon's audience costs conjecture have considered instability in the political institutions that arguably influence crisis decisionmaking. Not only does political opposition function as the realization of

audience costs, but also the permanence of political opposition as an institutionalized element of the regime assures the believability of crisis signaling. That is to say, domestic political opposition can only validate leader preferences or intentions if the foreign adversary believes such opposition can in fact impose costs on a leader. Therefore, both the presence of political competition and the stability of such competition have important effects on crisis bargaining.

Political Participation and the Perception of Audience Costs

To date, the relationship between political change and conflict propensity remains poorly understood. However, it may be that fluctuations in domestic political structure affect the ability of state leaders to signal effectively the audience costs they face for foreign policy failure. Mansfield & Snyder (1995), for example, find that democratizing states have a much higher propensity to engage in warfare than other types of polities. They argue that the political norms and institutions that arguably constrain democratic political elites have yet to be fully absorbed into the foreign policy decisionmaking of these emerging liberal polities. As a consequence, these immature regimes face a precarious set of circumstances not conducive to avoiding conflict and perhaps not conducive to resolving disputes through more pacific means of diplomatic bargaining. While Thompson & Tucker (1997) admittedly find Mansfield & Snyder's (1995) results to be sensitive to the methodological choices these authors made and uncover no relationship between regime change and war involvement, their results only apply to war and not to other types of interstate conflict. This leaves open the possibility that political instability and/or change may still affect the initial stages of crisis bargaining. Interestingly, Gleditsch & Ward (2000) observe that while smooth transitions to democracy tend

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[5] Thanks go to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

[6] Using SHERFACS data, Eyerman & Hart (1996) find that disputes between democracies have fewer phases. In fact, only 13% of their conflicts between democratic states resulted in a threat or use of military force, compared to 35% for non-democratic states. They conclude that democratic leaders are better able to signal their foreign policy intentions, and thus quarrels are resolved more quickly.

to reduce conflict propensities, dramatic swings back and forth from democracy to autocracy often produce the opposite effect. This more nuanced explanation suggests that uncertainty may contribute to disputatious behavior by reducing the efficiency of signaling while simultaneously increasing the security concerns of neighboring states.

Foreign leaders who face unstable polities often find themselves in an information-deficient environment, and militarized disputes represent an attempt to determine an adversary's preferences.[7] If domestic political institutions and opposition allow state leaders to communicate their intentions credibly, unstable polities may have less success in conveying foreign policy preferences and thus avoiding militarized conflict. What may distinguish the conflict proneness of coherent polities from factional ones, then, is the believability of domestic audience costs. In fully institutionalized polities, stable sets of rules and norms exist that predictably constrain behavior by legitimating elite signaling. These longstanding features of the political environment ensure that bluffing (that is, the manipulation of audience costs) is more difficult. In transitional polities there is greater uncertainty about the role of domestic political institutions and how they structure elite decisionmaking.[8] Consequently, there may be a good deal of uncertainty regarding the actual political costs state leaders face from policy failure.

The difficulty political leaders have in interpreting signals may not so much involve restricted versus competitive political participation, but more the stability of the political process. While political opposition helps to validate elite signals, uncertainty contributes to continued probing behavior. So, states

characterized by unregulated, factional, and frequently violent political participation pose the most difficult challenges in crisis bargaining situations. The vacillation between intense factionalism and institutionalized political participation presumably increases the uncertainty levels of neighboring states and heightens their security concerns. Moreover, elites in factional polities often rely on exclusionary rhetoric to unify supporting domestic groups and subsequently to maintain their positions of authority. Unfortunately, as Snyder (2000: 66) notes, 'exclusionary forms of nationalism often make enemies of the excluded groups and their allies abroad'.

While Fearon (1994) expects states that cannot generate audience costs to engage on average in more costly and less efficient bargaining behavior, a democracy–autocracy distinction may not be the most useful in determining which states can or cannot generate audience costs. Indeed, conflict propensities differ within both the democratic and the non-democratic communities of nations. Certain states within both camps are simply better at signaling their preferences and resolve and thus determining conflicts more quickly and efficiently. On average, non-democracies should be more conflict-prone due to less efficient signaling. But, regimes with factional participation should be problematic regardless of the other institutional elements they might possess.[9]

In states with factional or unstable competition, not only might elites misperceive their own domestic political opposition, but signals from adversaries that suffer from unstable political participation should at times be discounted. We know, for instance, that the absence of an enduring institution to

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[7] If a reputation for resolve is as important as resolve itself, then leaders of unstable or transitional polities also may use disputes to establish a regional or international reputation.
[8] Gates et al. (2000) find that transitional or factional polities are more likely to fail than states with mutually reinforcing institutional arrangements.

[9] In the 1,705 disputes, the target state was democratic in 34%, and of these democratic states 24% possessed unstable political competition. Of the non-democratic targets, 32% possessed unstable political competition. Similar figures describe the initiating states.

legitimate elite signaling should increase the likelihood that leaders will bluff. And, as the ability of the initiating state to bluff increases, signals of resolve become less effective. The problem with polities characterized by the oscillation between severe restrictions on political opposition and competitive participation is that foreign adversaries are unsure whether opposition groups can challenge government policies and thus impose costs on leaders. So, uncertainty and intense factionalism lead to more escalatory crisis bargaining as elites attempt to ascertain each other's preferences and resolve.

Expectations

While Gleditsch & Ward (1997: 381) found constraints placed on the executive to be the most important factor determining a state's overall polity score, they reason that 'by looking inside the characteristics of polities rather than concerning ourselves only with whether they are classified at one extreme or the other, we may learn about the processes that undergird their fundamental behavioral differences'. It is argued here that non-institutionalized (that is, factional) political participation may help account for crisis bargaining behavior. This is because political instability prevents political elites from successfully signaling their true intentions and preferences in dispute situations. The research design presented below is intended to empirically test whether reciprocation rates vary depending on the instability of domestic political competition. Based on the discussion above, two basic hypotheses are proposed.

H1: Target states will be more likely to reciprocate militarized disputes if the initiating state possesses unstable political participation.

H2: Militarized disputes where both the initiator and target possess unstable political participation will more likely

be reciprocated than disputes where one or more of the regimes possesses more stable political participation.

Research Design

To test the above conjectures, the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) dataset has been used to generate a list of appropriate observations. While other data files, such as the Interstate Crisis Behavior Project (ICB), may also be appropriate to test theoretical conjectures regarding democratic dispute reciprocation, the MID dataset offers a large number of cases short of war, for a long period of time, where the initiating actor is provided. Admittedly, these events are generally not as severe as a crisis situation (as coded by ICB); however, these events were selected because of a heightened probability that military hostilities would result. Indeed, for a dispute to be included in the data file, the threat, display, or use of military force must have occurred. According to Jones, Bremer & Singer (1996: 166), MIDs are 'confrontations that [lead] politicians to invest energy, attention, resources, and credibility in an effort to thwart, resist, intimidate, discredit, or damage those representing the other side'. Furthermore, these events 'must be explicit, overt, nonaccidental, and government sanctioned' (Gochman & Maoz, 1984: 586).

The basic unit of observation in the following analyses is the interstate dispute. The updated version of the MID data file (version 2.10, 1996) contains 2,034 total disputes from 1816 to 1992. For the analyses below, only bilateral MIDs are included. Thus, any dispute that did not begin and end as a one-on-one confrontation is removed from the analysis. This is done to prevent any confounding effects from dispute joining. The decisionmaking process of third parties may be quite different than that of originating states. Therefore, to isolate the effects of regime type and political participation on

reciprocation, only bilateral MIDs are evaluated (see Partell & Palmer, 1999). This decision deletes 329 disputes. Also, for certain analyses, disputes with polities interrupted by war, occupied by a foreign power, or in a period of transition are also dropped.[10] This decision deletes 161 disputes for those analyses.

Dependent Variable: Dispute Reciprocation

Crisis bargaining can be empirically assessed in a number of different ways. Here it is conceptualized as a militarized interstate dispute that results in a counter-demand. In other words, the reciprocation of a threat, show, or use of force is used as an indication that the targeted state has opted to resolve the dispute through coercion rather than mutual accommodation. This measure captures whether a manifest increase in the hostility level of the bargaining relationship has occurred. A failure to terminate the dispute once a demand has been made, through negotiation or acquiescence, takes the quarrel to a new level. This new level has a heightened probability of significant conflict breaking out.[11]

[10] Polity uses the numerical values 88, 77, or 66 to code these types of states.

[11] While the MID dataset may not be particularly well suited to addressing questions of conflict escalation (see Gleditsch, 1999), the decision to reciprocate does provide some evidence of side B's indifference point and thus its level of bargaining resolve. Given that side B has chosen to respond with a militarized signal, it obviously is willing to incur some cost to secure its objectives. Certainly, distinguishing costly and non-costly signals is important in explaining many conflict questions. In a bargaining situation, to be sure, it is often difficult to identify the initiator and defender. It fact, it may be rather arbitrary to code one state as side A and the other as side B since much of the bargaining behavior has most likely gone unnoticed (it has not yet reached a severity level to trigger media attention). This does not present a real problem here, however. At a snapshot in time, one state is faced with the decision to continue the militarized quarrel (certainly increasing the likelihood that it will end in war or some less severe, but still costly, form of armed violence) or capitulate and meet the demands of its adversary. Consequently, reciprocation can be viewed as an indication of state B's resolve, a costly step taken to influence the decisionmaking of state A.

Similarly to Leeds & Davis (1997), initiator and target are operationalized using the 'Side-A' and 'Originator' codings in the MID data file. An initiating state is one that is involved on the first day of hostilities and is considered the state which first militarized the dispute. A defending state (target) is involved on the first day, but is not on the side that first militarized the quarrel. Of the 1,705 bilateral disputes, 46.6% (795) experienced some level of reciprocation. This leaves 910 other disputes that were resolved through less coercive diplomatic means.

Exogenous Variables

Political Participation Data on political participation come from the Polity IIId (McLaughlin et al., 1998) database. Of the elements that constitute the polity democracy and autocracy indices, the competitiveness and regulation of participation are of concern here. These measures capture whether diverse political preferences can be expressed, how they are expressed, and whether alternative leadership options are available (Gurr, 1997: 12).[12] Using this information, three separate variables are created to test the relationship between uninstitutionalized participation and crisis bargaining. First, a measure is constructed that indicates factional or transitional political participation. When the initiating state scores a two, three, or four on the competitiveness measure and a two or three on the regulation measure, this variable equals one,

[12] The extent of political competition and opposition represents the third authority trait recorded by the Polity II datafile. Information on two dimensions of political participation is provided. The first dimension, regulation of political participation, has five categories: (1) unregulated participation; (2) factional or transitional participation; (3) factional/restricted participation; (4) restricted participation; and (5) regulated participation. The second dimension, the competitiveness of participation, also has five categories: (1) suppressed competition; (2) restricted/transitional competition; (3) factional competition; (4) transitional competition; and (5) competitive competition, plus a category for missing.

otherwise zero.[13] Gurr (1997) writes, 'by combining scores on Regulation of Political Participation and the Competitiveness of Participation variables, a relatively detailed picture of the extent of political competition and opposition emerges'. With this measure, the decision by B is assessed without specifying its own polity characteristics. Second, a similar measure is constructed for both the initiating and target states combined. When both polities score a two, three, or four on the competitiveness measure and a two or three on the regulation measure, this variable equals one, otherwise zero. Joint measures are also created of the two constituent elements: competitiveness and regulation. That is, rather than combine competitiveness and regulation, the independent impact of each variable on dispute reciprocation is assessed. To be complete, I also create joint measures of regulated and competitive participation, with the excluded category confined to restrictive participation.

Regime Type   The level of democracy indicator also stems from Polity IIId and is an 11-point index (0–10) based on three salient facets of democratic polities: constraints on the chief executive, competitiveness of political participation, and openness of executive recruitment. As is customary, the 11-point coding has been re-scaled to a dichotomous democracy–non-democracy variable to capture basic threshold effects (see for example Dixon, 1994; Reed, 2000).[14] Polities with a democracy score of 0–5 are coded as non-democracies, while those with scores of 6 or greater are defined as

democratic states.[15] The overall regime index, while constructed in part from the measure of political participation, correlates only minimally (the coefficient is regularly less than .10).[16] This is consistent with Gleditsch & Ward's (1997) findings as well. Executive constraints tends to overdetermine democracy and autocracy scores, while political participation has a much more limited effect on the overall regime index. Democratic norms and institutional constraints are expected to lower the likelihood of dispute reciprocation.

Contiguity   A variable is also included to control for the costs of projecting force or influence abroad. As the distance of a dispute increases, the costs associated with responding with militarized force naturally increase as well. To measure geographical proximity, a dichotomous variable is constructed. The coding of this indicator follows the Correlates of War contiguity dataset: (1) contiguous by land; (2) contiguous up to 12 miles of water; (3) contiguous up to 24 miles of water; (4) contiguous up to 150 miles of water; and (5) contiguous up to 400 miles of water. For this analysis, states that share land borders or are separated by less than 25 miles of water are coded as contiguous. All others are considered non-contiguous.

Alliances   Using Bennett's dataset (see Bennett, 1997), alliance commitments are used to gauge preference or security alignment. For each bilateral dispute, it is

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[13] The middle categories code for participation that tends to be factional or transitional in nature. Lower rankings on the regulation and competitiveness measures indicate unregulated and suppressed participation, while higher rankings indicated regulated and competitive political participation.

[14] The Polity IIId data file also specifies whether regimes are in a period of transition, experiencing political collapse, or are interrupted, such as by military intervention. These cases were coded as non-democracies.

[15] Partell & Palmer (1999: 396) use 5 as the cutpoint.

[16] While the overall democracy index and the combined measures of political regulation and political competition (participation) are related only minimally, the relationship between democracy level and the constituent parts of participation are related a bit more strongly. The democratic index and competition, for example, correlate between .60 and .70, but only for states on side A. When the competition scores for both side A states and side B states are combined, the correlation with the overall democracy index drops considerably. Therefore, not only can democracy be distinguished from participation, but regulation can also be distinguished from competition.

determined whether the states in conflict have a binding defense pact (1), entente or neutrality agreement (2), or no formal agreement at all (3) in the year that the dispute originated. This variable has been re-scaled to a dichotomous alliance (defense pact only)–no alliance (ententes, neutrality agreements, or no formal commitments) variable. The exact specification of this variable has little if any influence on the results. The defense pact threshold is used because theoretically this type of formal commitment indicates a greater level of security concern or ideological similarity. Presumably, the likelihood of reciprocation decreases when a state finds itself in a dispute with a formal ally.

Military Balance   This variable uses Singer, Bremer & Stuckey's (1972) system capabilities composite measure to determine which state has relatively greater fighting capabilities. The Singer, Bremer & Stuckey (1972) score measures each state's proportion of total system capabilities based on six separate indicators: military expenditures and military personnel (military dimension), iron–steel production and energy consumption (industrial dimension), and total population and urban population (demographic dimension). For each indicator, the values of all states in the system are added together. An individual state's score on each indicator is a measure of its share of the total system capabilities. I construct a relative capabilities measure using each state's share of the system total. The variable is constructed as the capabilities of A divided by the sum of the system capabilities of both A and B. With this variable, increases indicate the growing strength of the initiating state. I expect that the likelihood of reciprocation by the targeted state will decrease as the relative capabilities of the initiating state increase (see Bennett & Stam, 2000).

Additional Controls   Three additional exogenous variables are included to help

prevent misinterpreting the relationship between regime type, political participation, and dispute reciprocation. The first variable takes into account past relations between the two states in conflict. Similar to Raknerud & Hegre (1997: 393), I assume that the probability of reciprocation will decrease as time passes, and I measure time since the last conflict by using their decay function. The function they create is defined as follows: exp (-Days in Peace/3162).[17] Basically, the effect of a past militarized dispute on reciprocation in a present dispute grows weaker the further two states move away from a militarized dispute with each other. Given that disputes do not happen in a vacuum, this variable helps control for the past bargaining relationship.

A second control is added to capture salient differences across militarized disputes. Not all MIDs are created equal. In fact, Toset, Gleditsch & Hegre (2000) argue that disputes involving no casualties should be distinguished from their more violent cousins. This is because the behavior of state leaders is fundamentally different depending on the nature of the dispute. Owing to a lack of variation, casualties cannot be used here to separate low-salience disputes from more serious quarrels.[18] However, seizure disputes certainly qualify as low-salience MIDs.

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[17] I also constructed a linear measure of time in peace. Both variables are significantly related to dispute reciprocation, and as expected increases in peaceful relations decrease the probability of reciprocation. In a model where both the linear and the non-linear measures are included, the non-linear version tends to better explain the variation in Y. Therefore, I chose to use the non-linear measure, as it had greater explanatory power. However, Reed (2000) uses linear versions of a peace years variable.

[18] Of the 1,705 bilateral disputes considered, only 260 (or 15%) resulted in any casualties. Therefore, if I were to use only casualty MIDs, nearly 85% of my original observations would be lost. Also, I do not use casualties as a dummy explanatory variable because such information would not be available to leaders ex ante. Technically, this may also be the case for the issue dummy as well. That is, the dispute is not coded for issue until after initiation. However, one would expect the issue to be known prior to reciprocation.

Often they merely represent cases in which fishing trawlers have been detained by national authorities, typically for violating maritime boundaries during fishing expeditions. To control for salience, then, a dummy variable is included that equals 1 if the dispute involves a naval seizure and 0 otherwise.

Lastly, to prevent confounding the effects of unstable political participation with state age, an additional variable capturing the combined length of time both states have been members of the international system is also included.[19] A preliminary analysis indicates that unstable political participation is correlated with the combined age of the disputing states. The relationship is negative, indicating that decreases in age are correlated with greater instability in regulation and competitiveness of participation. The absolute value of the correlation coefficient, however, is less than .15, indicating that these two variables are capturing different forces at work.

Data Analysis

Tables I–III present the results of 9 logit models that assess the influence of political participation, power, contiguity, regime type, alliance ties, and dispute salience on bilateral conflict reciprocation. Models 1 and 2 model the decisionmaking of the target state, while controlling only for the polity characteristics of the initiating state. Models 3–5 use joint measures of unstable and stable political participation, and models 6–9 include separate measures for the regulation and competitiveness of political participation. The results in Table I indicate that unstable political participation within the initiating state increases the likelihood of reciprocation

[19] Polity IIId was used to determine membership in the international system. Summing the ages of the two states involved in the dispute generated the combined age variable.

by the target. That is, factional or transitional political participation within state A contributes to escalatory crisis bargaining. With domestic opposition that may or may not possess the ability to challenge a leader, the initiating state's signal of concern and resolve contains a higher level of uncertainty. It appears that the target state is responding to such uncertainty with attempts to glean greater information from the initiating state.

As expected, the overall polity index of the initiating state, based on constraints, openness, and competitiveness, tends to reduce the target's propensity to reciprocate. While the statistical significance of this variable warrants some concern, it is interesting that target states, regardless of their regime type, reciprocate less often when the initiating state is a democracy. Holding all other variables at mean values, democratic initiators are reciprocated against 15% less than nondemocratic initiators. As Fearon (1994) expects, disputes appear to be resolved more quickly due to the more reliable signaling coming from the democratic initiator.

Despite the evidence on regime type in Table I, the results in Table II indicate that democratic targets do not necessarily condition their behavior on the regime type of the initiating state. Bilateral disputes where both sides are democracies do not have lower reciprocation rates than disputes between different regime types or disputes where autocracies face each other. This evidence does not support a norms argument of democratic foreign policy decisionmaking. That is, the regime type of the initiating state does not appear to have an impact on a democratic target's decision to reciprocate. If norms of compromise and coercion-avoidance play an important role in democratic crisis bargaining, a negative and significant relationship should be observed between the regime index and dispute reciprocation. This is not what is observed here. However, this evidence does suggest that

Table I. Logit Regression of Dispute Reciprocation, Controlling for the Political Characteristics of the Initiating State, 1816–1992

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Marginal effects model 2 %
Initiating state democratic	–	–.250*	–15
		(.15)	
Initiating state has unstable political participation	.277**	.327***	+16
	(.12)	(.12)	
Initiating state has stable political participation	–.003	.199	
	(.17)	(.20)	
Combined age	–.002***	–.002***	–20
	(.001)	(.001)	
Defense pact	–.037	–.029	
	(.18)	(.19)	
Contiguity	.834***	.830***	+37
	(.11)	(.11)	
Peace years	.692***	.700***	+24
	(.14)	(.14)	
Military balance	–.541***	–.503***	–20
	(.16)	(.16)	
Seizure cases	–.811***	–.820***	–40
	(.16)	(.16)	
Constant	–.490**	–.474**	–
	(.19)	(.20)	
N	1705	1705	
LL	–1078.3	–1076.9	
χ^2	164.6	167.8	
(p)	(.000)	(.000)	
Pseudo R^2	.09	.09	
% Correctly pred./Null model	64.9/53.4	65.2/53.4	

Robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is whether or not the dispute was reciprocated. Column 4 represents the change in probability Y, after fluctuating each independent variable one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean (except dichotomous variables, which are fluctuated from 0 to 1) while holding all other independent variables at their mean values.
***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .10$

target states, regardless of their polity type, react similarly to democratic or high audience cost initiators. If states use militarized disputes to reduce uncertainty, then more enduring political institutions, be they restrictive or competitive, provide more information about the preferences of, and constraints on, political elites.

Whereas joint democracy has little or no effect on crisis bargaining, joint political participation has an important impact. Bilateral disputes in which both states possess unstable political participation have a much higher likelihood of experiencing reciprocation. That is, initiator states with factional or transitional participation are much more likely to be challenged in disputes than more stable polities. Most likely, given the greater chance of bluffing, target states are testing the resolve of the initiator. This result is much stronger when both sides possess factional or transitional participation structures. In fact, the probability of reciprocation increases by over 18%, from 44% to 52%, when both

Table II.   Logit Regression of Dispute Reciprocation, Controlling for the Political Characteristics of Both Initiating and Target States, 1816–1992

Variable	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Marginal effects model 4 %	Marginal effects model 5 %
Jointly democratic	.110	–	.259		
	(.22)		(.24)		
Jointly unstable political participation	–	.300**	.301**	+17	+14
		(.15)	(.15)		
Jointly stable political participation	–	−.377	−.562		−28
		(.39)	(.43)		
Combined age	−.002***	−.002***	−.002***	−16	−16
	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)		
Defense pact	−.024	.014	−.011		
	(.19)	(.19)	(.19)		
Contiguity	.848***	.827***	.824***	+37	+36
	(.11)	(.11)	(.11)		
Peace years	.701***	.694***	.690***	+22	+20
	(.14)	(.14)	(.14)		
Military balance	−.582***	−.556***	−.557***	−18	−18
	(.16)	(.16)	(.16)		
Seizure cases	−.795***	−.791***	−.793***	−38	−38
	(.16)	(.16)	(.16)		
Constant	−.360***	−.416**	−.424**		
	(.19)	(.19)	(.19)		
N	1705	1705	1705		
LL	−1081.2	−1078.6	−1078.0		
χ^2	161.6	164.6	164.3		
(p)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)		
Pseudo R^2	.08	.08	.09		
% Correctly Pred./Null Model	64.3/53.4	64.8/53.4	64.9/53.4		

Robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is whether or not the dispute was reciprocated. Columns 5 and 6 represent the change in probability Y, after fluctuating each independent variable one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean (except dichotomous variables, which are fluctuated from 0 to 1) while holding all other independent variables at their mean values.
***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10

states in a militarized dispute suffer from unstable political participation.[20] This is markedly different from polities with either restrictive or competitive participation. The

[20] The marginal effects reported in Tables I and II are calculated by measuring the change in the probability of Y after fluctuating each independent variable one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean (except dichotomous variables which are fluctuated from 0 to 1) while holding all other independent variables at their mean values.

results indicate little difference in the influence of competitive versus restrictive political participation. Although not shown, when a combined measure of competitive and restrictive political participation is compared with unstable or factional participation, the results show a much stronger distinction. Restrictive and competitive participation tends to reduce the likelihood of conflict reciprocation, while factional participation tends to increase the

likelihood. This in part supports Fearon's audience costs conjecture. Institutional stability helps to facilitate more efficient and less costly outcomes in militarized disputes.

The relative power measure has an important effect on crisis bargaining as well. As expected, as the relative military strength of the initiating state increases, the likelihood of reciprocation decreases. In fact, a change in the relative capabilities ratio from one standard deviation below its mean to one standard deviation above its mean decreases the probability of reciprocation by nearly 20%. Bennett & Stam (2000) find a similar relationship between dispute involvement and relative military power. A more favorable balance of capabilities tends to increase the probability of dispute involvement for a state. The same applies for reciprocation. A more favorable balance of capabilities for the target state increases the likelihood of reciprocation, as one would expect. These results provide further support for the importance of relative power in crisis bargaining situations.

Contiguity and peace years also affect dispute reciprocation in the directions hypothesized. First, neighboring states have a higher probability of conflict reciprocation than states geographically farther apart. The effect is quite large, with the probability of reciprocation increasing by over 35%. It seems that for these militarized bargaining situations, distance often precludes even minor militarized responses. Second, the peace-years variable indicates that peace does beget peace, or at least longer periods of peace between two states results in less coercive foreign policy strategies. A change of one standard deviation around the mean decreases the probability of reciprocation by over 20%.[21] Given the construction of this variable, lower values actually equate with longer periods of peace, and this thus explains the positive sign on the coefficient.

Learning also appears to influence crisis bargaining behavior. The combined age of the states involved in the militarized dispute has a pacifying effect on reciprocation. That is, the likelihood of dispute reciprocation decreases as the combined age of the belligerents increases. In fact, going from a combined age of 58 years to a combined age of 224 years (a one standard deviation change around the mean) decreases the probability of reciprocation by over 16%. It appears that age may endow states with more effective signaling, allowing leaders to resolve conflicts earlier in the bargaining relationship.[22]

One of the most significant factors influencing dispute reciprocation is whether the dispute involved a maritime seizure. Seizure MIDs, it seems, rarely evoke retaliatory militarized demands. Indeed, the evidence from the logistic models indicates that only in rare circumstances are these quarrels reciprocated. With all other variables held at their mean values, a non-seizure dispute has about a 50% chance of reciprocation. In comparison, a seizure dispute has less than a 30% chance. Interestingly, formal alliance ties have little influence on dispute reciprocation. Although the defense pact measure, as expected, is inversely related to the decision by B to escalate (that is, security alignment tends to decrease the probability of conflict reciprocation), its substantive impact is quite small. It appears that while alliance ties may have an important effect on the outbreak of war, states with formal defense pacts demonstrate little reluctance to reciprocate militarized disputes.

Regulation and Competitiveness

The analysis in Table II combined the regulation and competitiveness indices. That is,

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[21] With the linear measure of peace years, a 19-year increase in peaceful relations decreases the likelihood of reciprocation by over 15%.

[22] Both time in peace and age show a temporal trend occurring in MID reciprocation. It is not exactly clear why such a trend is present, although learning, future expectations, stakes, and issue type are all probably playing some part.

only when both states suffered from instability
in both dimensions of political participation
did the variable get coded a one. There is no
reason, however, to think that these separate
measures will have an equivalent impact on
dispute reciprocation. As such, four additional
models are included to assess the independent
influences of these similar, yet distinct, factors.
Models 6 and 7 consider disputes where both
states suffer from factionalism in the regulation
of political participation, while models 8 and
9 do the same for political competition. As
before, measures of regulated and competitive
participation are also included.

The results in Table III indicate that the
regulation of political participation has a
stronger influence on dispute reciprocation
than competitiveness. It appears that the
degree of institutionalization of political
participation strongly affects crisis decision-
making. When regimes fluctuate between
regulated and unregulated participation,
mixed messages are being sent to foreign
adversaries. In fact, in disputes where both
states possess unstable political regulation, the
likelihood of conflict reciprocation increases
by 14%. Interestingly, militarized disputes
between democracies that are characterized
by non-institutionalized political partici-
pation, such as Honduras–Nicaragua in
1989, Peru–Ecuador in numerous years,
India–Pakistan, and Malaysia–Philippines in
1988, have a very high probability of recip-
rocation – nearly 60%. Bilateral disputes
involving non-democracies, such as Syria–
Lebanon in 1963, Argentina–Chile in 1900
and 1905, also have a high likelihood of rec-
iprocation, but over 10% less than demo-
cratic disputes. It seems that vacillation in
political regulation has a more dangerous
effect on regimes with some level of demo-
cratic political structure.

Given that the competitiveness of
political participation comes only after a
certain degree of regulation has been estab-
lished, a smaller secondary effect should be

expected. The primary impact stems from
whether the political environment experi-
ences significant fluctuation between insti-
tutionalized   and   non-institutionalized
political participation. However, in regulated
political contexts, patterns of political com-
petitiveness that oscillate between restrictive
and enduring competition do tend to
increase the likelihood of dispute reciproca-
tion. From a crisis bargaining perspective,
such behavioral differences make sense.
Political participation that is either restricted
or competitive provides a stable, well-
institutionalized political environment that
contributes to accurate signaling. The evi-
dence indicates that there is little difference
in terms of conflict propensity between states
that possess competitive participation and
those that have restricted participation. A
political environment that varies widely
between restriction and competition leads to
greater uncertainty and misperception in the
bargaining relationship. Escalatory behavior
is the observed result.

Conclusion

While democracies rarely initiate disputes
and even more rarely initiate against other
democracies, scholars still disagree on the
precise elements of a democratic state that
help to pacify foreign policy decisionmaking.
The conventional view of the democratic
peace maintains that political culture and
representative institutions that disperse war
powers help to prevent the use of violent
coercion against other democracies. Yet
neither an institutional nor a normative
argument effectively accounts for why or
how democratic states adjust their bargaining
behavior depending on the polity of the
opposing state. Fearon (1994) agrees that
democratic states should behave differently
than non-democracies in crisis contexts.
However, for Fearon pacific foreign policy
decisionmaking does not stem from political

Table III.   Logit Regression of Dispute Reciprocation, Controlling for the Political Characteristics of Both Initiating and Target States, 1816–1992

Variable	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Marginal effects model 6 %
Jointly democratic	.247		.226		
	(.25)	–	(.24)	–	
Jointly unstable	.297**	.284*			+14
political regulation	(.15)	(.15)	–	–	
Jointly stable	–.590	–.410			
political regulation	(.42)	(.37)	–	–	
Jointly unstable			.087	.085	
political competition	–	–	(.139)	(.14)	–
Jointly stable			–.621	–.463	
political competition	–	–	(.43)	(.39)	–
Combined age	–.002***	–.002***	–.002***	–.002***	–17
	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	
Defense pact	.056	.085	.066	.093	
	(.20)	(.20)	(.20)	(.20)	
Contiguity	.809***	.812***	.822***	.824***	+36
	(.12)	(.12)	(.12)	(.12)	
Peace years	.575***	.578***	.574***	.577***	+20
	(.15)	(.15)	(.15)	(.15)	
Military balance	–.580***	–.578***	–.597***	–.596***	–18
	(.17)	(.17)	(.17)	(.17)	
Seizure cases	–.806***	–.804***	–.808***	–.807***	–38
	(.16)	(.16)	(.16)	(.16)	
Constant	–.288	–.280	–.241	–.233	–
	(.20)	(.20)	(.20)	(.20)	
N	1544	1544	1544	1544	
LL	–979.1	–979.6	–980.9	–981.3	
χ^2	145.3	145.5	143.0	143.4	
(p)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	
Pseudo R^2	.08	.08	.08	.08	
% Correctly pred./Null model	65.3/52.8	65.4/52.8	65.2/52.8	65.2/52.8	

Robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is whether or not the dispute was reciprocated. Column 6 represents the change in probability Y, after fluctuating each independent variable one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean (except dichotomous variables, which are fluctuated from 0 to 1) while holding all other independent variables at their mean values.
***$p < .01$; ** $p < .05$; *$p < .10$

culture, but is a result of efficient signaling between political elites. Fearon (1994) maintains that a political penalty for foreign policy failure allows more efficient signaling during crises, thus allowing political elites to resolve their differences with little or no escalation. Since the nature of a democratic political system 'makes it costly for liberal executives to bluff', as Gartzke (2001: 7) insists, leaders are less likely to need threats and uses of military force to demonstrate resolve. According to Eyerman & Hart

(1996: 601), 'there is no political incentive [for a democracy] to escalate a conflict to war with another democracy'. Since each escalatory step is costly to democratic leaders, crises between democratic states should rarely escalate.

Fearon (1994: 581) provides no empirical measure of audience costs, although he does consider democratic leaders to pay on average a higher price for policy failure than non-democratic leaders. He suggests, however, that domestic political opponents provide the sanctioning element that is needed to 'improve a state's ability to commit and to signal resolve'. Gartzke (2001) and Schultz (1998) both agree and consider effective political competition an important element in efficient crisis signaling. Political opponents make bluffing costly by decrying the actions and intentions of the group in power. Yet, such domestic opposition only enhances signaling when elites in power (both foreign and domestic) believe such costs can and will be imposed for policy failure. In regimes where political competition is not well institutionalized, elites may discount signals and seek costly contests to acquire more accurate information.

The results here indicate that overall democracy has very little effect on MID reciprocation. However, factionalism among domestic political groups tends to be strongly associated with such a dispute response. Regimes with non-institutionalized political participation engage in more escalatory behavior. This finding supports the arguments of Fearon (1994), Schultz (1998), and Gartzke (2001). Each expects a relationship between crisis decisionmaking and domestic political competition. Still, the relationship appears more nuanced that previously recognized. It is not necessarily democratic political institutions that facilitate more efficient and less violent crisis bargaining, but rather stable political institutions. Institutional stability makes

possible more precise signaling. Interestingly, stability can come in two forms: stable and restricted or stable and competitive. There does not appear to be much difference in reciprocation rates between regimes with competitive political participation and restricted political participation.

In addition to political competition, the logit results indicate that contiguity, military balance, and the past bargaining relationship all have important effects on dispute reciprocation. These results indicate that the strategic environment and past conflict or cooperation between states certainly influence dispute reciprocation. But, the stability of political participation also plays an important role in crisis bargaining. Since the overall regime index is not significantly related to reciprocation, it appears that the separate structural indicators of a polity may influence crisis bargaining in different ways. Future research should continue to probe the different institutional structures that define states. Only by unpacking the state can scholars fully explain the relationship between regime type and conflict propensity.

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