Why Do Leaders Fight Futile Wars?
Optimistic Constituents and Agency Dilemmas in
Crisis Decision-Making

Brandon Merrell

Yale University

July 22, 2019

Abstract

Why do leaders wage wars they cannot hope to win? I argue that political leaders sometimes engage in military actions they believe will prove costly and counterproductive because they would face domestic backlash if they instead pursued peaceful settlements. In short, leaders possess private information about the costliness and riskiness of war and confront a series of strategic difficulties and disincentives to sharing this information with citizens. As a result, citizens may remain naïvely optimistic about the desirability of using military force. In these circumstances, domestic institutions that hold leaders accountable to their constituents can encourage rather than deter leaders from behaving aggressively. I provide two forms of empirical support for the theory. First, I examine territorial transfers that occurred between 1816 and 2014 and show that elected leaders consistently fight—and ultimately lose—asymmetric wars that autocrats avoid. Second, I provide qualitative evidence from several historical crises. The results challenge the prevailing view that democratic institutions encourage leaders to exercise discretion. Instead, domestic constraints can systematically compel accountable officials to fight riskier, costlier, and more lopsided wars than their unconstrained peers.

1   Introduction

In the spring of 1940, German armies rolled across Europe. As his soldiers marched into Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, Hitler presented the political leaders of each successive country with a choice: if they surrendered quickly, incumbent governments would retain their titles and a large degree of administrative influence throughout the subsequent occupation. If they resisted, however, Berlin would forcibly depose the leadership and install a new, more cooperative regime. As Hollander (2017, p. 46) summarizes "Germany had given each of these of these countries an offer it could not refuse." Despite the overwhelming odds, each country but Denmark—even tiny Luxembourg—refused the offer anyway.

Why did these governments choose to wage wars they could not hope to win? Several of our most prominent theories of conflict are unconvincing. Surely optimism, for example, was not the motivating factor.[1] None of the leaders could genuinely hope to win a war against Germany, nor did any expect that fighting would allow them to reveal unexpected strength or obtain more favorable settlements in future negotiations. A second proposal—that the leaders were unwilling to commit to peace because they anticipated large shifts in the balance of power—is equally unsatisfying.[2] Germany could already credibly threaten regime change and severe punishment in the states it conquered, so the defending countries should have viewed further tilts in favor of Berlin as largely immaterial. Finally, it seems unrealistic that the leaders believed their constituencies would be better served by war than peace.[3] After all, fighting would not only trigger substantial casualties in the short term but would also cause the Germans to impose significant punishments during the subsequent occupation. Why, then, did the various governments decide to mount a futile defense?

---

[1]   Countries may, for example, fail to reach settlements when they are overly optimistic about their respective prospects in war and are either unable or unwilling to share their private information with one another. See Fearon 1995, Morrow 1989, Slantchev 2003, Slantchev and Tarar 2011, Fey and Ramsay 2011, and Lindsey 2019.

[2]   Actors may decline to compromise if they believe the distribution of power will change significantly in the future. See Fearon 1995, Powell 2006, Leventoğlu and Slantchev 2007, Krainin 2017, and Merrell and Abrahams 2019.

[3]   Although canonical models assume that fighting is costly, states may tolerate war when the price of sustaining peace is exorbitantly high—for example due to the necessity of participating in an arms race or the need to service debt obligations incurred during combat. See, for example, Coe 2012, and Slantchev 2012b.

In contrast to these existing explanations, I argue that the rationale for war is often grounded in domestic politics. The central finding of this paper is that leaders often engage in and escalate military operations so as to satisfy the demands of their political constituents. Across a wide range of cases and circumstances—from the failed defense of Europe in 1940 to the escalation of American involvement in Vietnam two and a half decades later—leaders have pursued aggressive military behavior out of fear that doing otherwise would permanently jeopardize their domestic reputation or political standing at home. Indeed, even in Denmark, the only country to accept Hitler's bargain, officials continued to discuss a symbolic defense even as German troops swarmed the capital.[4]

I develop the theory using an analytic stylization of a military crisis in which government leaders possess private information about the costs and risks of escalation. Because accurate information about relative power is not publicly available, the leader's constituents may under some circumstances harbor naïvely optimistic beliefs about the desirability of using force. Indeed, citizens may even threaten to penalize leaders who pursue peaceful settlements. In these situations, leaders who seek to avoid violence face a dilemma: although they could attempt to dispel their constituents' martial enthusiasm by sharing sobering information about the true costs of war, in doing so they would run two risks. First, a signal may not fully attenuate their constituents' support for war. If voters misinterpret the message as evidence that the leader is either unskilled in military affairs or simply dovish, citizens may react by penalizing the leader or installing an alternative who would escalate with greater intensity, thereby negating the predecessor's effort to avoid conflict. On the other hand, a leader who successfully reveals the country's weakness to a domestic audience may inadvertently also share the information with international observers. Such disclosures could jeopardize the nation's bargaining position by emboldening the opponent to demand costlier concessions than they might otherwise attempt to extract or, alternatively, by dissuading potential allies from offering support. These risks motivate leaders to conceal their true pessimism about war. Instead, leaders will sometimes pursue escalation despite private knowledge that accepting a settlement would leave the country better off.

---

[4] See Dethlefsen (1996, p. 25) and Merrell (2019).

To demonstrate the plausibility of the mechanism, I provide two forms of empirical support. First, I analyze international territorial exchanges that occurred between 1816 and 2014. I find evidence of a systematic relationship between regime type and crisis behavior in asymmetric conflicts. Among states that face territorial demands from a relatively strong opponents, democracies are less likely to concede territory peacefully than are autocracies. Instead, democratic leaders consistently fight—and ultimately lose—lopsided wars that autocratic countries are able to avoid. I complement the data by providing additional evidence from several historical cases in which the behavior and personal beliefs of state executives mirror the predictions of the theory.

My results yield several important theoretical and policy implications. First, whereas a long research tradition argues that "accountability to the public can restrain the war-making proclivities of leaders,"[5] this project demonstrates that public optimism for war can also motivate peace-loving leaders to reject viable settlements and engage in counterproductive escalation. As a result, theoretical and empirical studies of conflict will remain incomplete until they account for the preferences of influential domestic constituencies. Second, whereas prevailing research argues that democratic leaders are "are highly selective... [and] prefer to negotiate when they do not anticipate military success,"[6] I show that leaders who are accountable to the public are under some circumstances more likely to fight futile wars than their autocratic counterparts. Third, the theory contrasts with popular conceptions of domestic "audience costs."[7] Whereas conventional theories suggest that leaders can obtain bargaining advantages by "activating" domestic hard-liners, I show that leaders sometimes seek to *suppress* domestic enthusiasm for war but struggle to fully pacify their constituents. Finally, the results suggest important implications regarding counter-terrorism policy. If domestic opinion can compel leaders to escalate conflicts, democracies may present appealing targets for violent groups attempting to provoke draconian government behavior.[8] As a result, countries may be better able to deter terrorism by developing institutions that inhibit leaders from unnecessary retaliation.

---

[5]   Holsti 1992, p. 440. See also Lake (1992).
[6]   Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, p. 236.
[7]   Fearon 1994.
[8]   See, for example, Lake 2002, Kydd and Walter 2006, Carter 2016.

2 The Agency Dilemma

Leaders function as the agents of their constituents. In both democracies and autocracies, citizens and elites attempt to select representatives whose policies will reflect the desires of their supporters. Unfortunately for the interested parties, once in office public officials also face incentives to select policies that diverge from the interests of their constituents, either because they seek to secure private benefits that are unavailable to the constituency as a whole, or, alternatively, because they hope to insulate themselves from risks to which their supporters are exposed. To minimize this moral hazard problem, citizens can impose a system of incentives and punishments that discourage elected officials from deviating from the wishes of their constituents. For example, citizens may observe the policies their representatives enact—and the outcomes that result from those policies—and then re-elect or dismiss the officials on the basis of those outcomes.[9]

Policy divergences between leaders and their constituents, however, are not always rooted in the leader's own self-interest. Well-intentioned and sociotropic public servants may possess private information about the state of the world or the implications of potential policies that convinces them that their constituents' preferred strategies are misguided. In this case the same mechanisms that reduce moral hazard instead create perverse incentives for public pandering. A leader who anticipates punishment if she deviates from her constituents' instructions may opt to appease her constituents by selecting a popular policy even if she privately believes that the policy will harm those constituents in the long run.[10]

This tradeoff—wherein tightening the reins to reduce moral hazard diminishes an official's ability to exercise discretion or draw upon private knowledge while crafting policy—is particularly acute in the context of wartime decision making. Relative to the general public, elected officials possess significant informational advantages in areas relating to national security. Leaders often have access to classified information about the state's own capabilities, estimates of enemy strength, strategic and tactical plans, appraisal's of the adversary's likely negotiating behavior, information

---

[9] Downs and Rocke 1994.

[10] Canes-Wrone 2001, Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson 2007, Bas 2012, Schneider and Slantchev 2018.

about the behavior of potential allies, and many other details that may be denied to members of the broader public and even other government officials. Moreover, during military crises leaders are often unable to disclose relevant information without either jeopardizing their country's strategic position or opening themselves to domestic criticism.[11] Finally, the public is both uniquely attentive to government decision making during the opening phases of international conflict and is also poorly equipped to evaluate the net effects of security policies as time elapses. The combination of private government information, barriers to information disclosure, and an impassioned citizenry lays the groundwork for the selection of suboptimal policies.

Public Military Optimism

Theories of public attitudes toward war often suggest that citizens are more dovish than their leaders. Although small interest groups may hold hawkish preferences, the public at large is thought to acknowledge the costs of war;[12] to disapprove of conflict with other democracies;[13] and to react unfavorably to increases in the amount, duration, or intensity of conflict-related casualties.[14] As Morgan and Campbell 1991, p. 189 summarize, "the key feature of democracy is government by the people and… the people, who must bear the costs of war, are usually unwilling to fight." As a result, researchers typically argue that public sentiment acts as a useful constraint upon belligerent executives who might otherwise initiate controversial and costly wars.[15] Because "American military operations require public support,"[16] public intolerance for military adventurism forces electorally-vulnerable leaders to behave more cautiously than their autocratic peers.[17] Overall, these

---

[11] Merrell 2016.

[12] Doyle 1986

[13] Tomz and Weeks 2013

[14] Aldrich et al. 2006; Baum and Potter 2008.

[15] See, prominently, Lake (1992), although note also that the prevailing view contrasts with earlier work that found public opinion fickle and its influence potentially damaging. See, for example, Lippmann (1955), Lindsey and Lake 2014, and even Alexander Hamilton, who wondered in Federalist 6 whether "republics [have] in practice been less addicted to war than monarchies?" and concluded that "The cries of the nation… have, upon various occasions, dragged their monarchs into war, or continued them in it, contrary to their inclinations, and sometimes contrary to the real interests of the State" (quoted in Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 2008).

[16] Klarevas 2002, p. 419.

[17] Chiozza and Goemans 2003; Filson and Werner 2004.

assumptions cultivated a belief that democratic institutions had a pacifying influence on crisis behavior. According to Moravcsik (1997, p. 531), liberal democracies are unlikely to provoke wars "because influence is placed in the hands of those who must expend blood and treasure." Baum and Potter (2015, p. 45) echo the sentiment, claiming that "public scrutiny may, under at least some circumstances, deter leaders from using military force by disproportionately raising the expected costs of doing so." Likewise, Caverley (2014, p. 9) describes a "remarkable consensus" within political science, "that when democracy 'works' a moderate, effective foreign policy results."

In contrast to prevailing theories of public pacifism, the historical record suggests that voters can exhibit either hawkish preferences or naíve optimism regarding the use of force. Significant proportions of Americans advocated swift intervention in Afghanistan following the attacks of September 11, 2001, and against Japan in the wake of the Pearl Harbor bombing. Similarly, polls conducted prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq report that 72% of Americans supported a potential invasion even though as few as 13-37% could locate Iraq on a map. Such instances of optimism about war have earned minimal attention from researchers because they pose no political dilemma when coupled with the assumption that leaders are inherently bellicose.[18] After all, when citizens and leaders *jointly* align in favor of military action it is not surprising that war will result. However, an alternative relationship between citizens and leaders remains largely unaddressed: under certain conditions, citizens are either more optimistic than their leaders about the use of military force or, alternatively, more hesitant to support a settlement.[19] Voters' support for escalation should exceed that of their leaders whenever available information leads the public to overestimate the threat posed by an adversary or underestimate the likely costs of conflict.[20]

The existence of pessimistic leaders and optimistic citizens raises the possibility that institutions designed to enhance leader accountability may encourage those leaders to executive the desires

---

[18] Several recent papers also document hawkish sentiment on behalf of the public. See, for example, Fang et al. 2017, and Kreps, Saunders, and Schultz 2018.

[19] Consider the case of Colombian voters, who rejected a settlement that their government forged with the FARC, or of Danish citizens who rebelled against their own government when it cooperated with Nazi occupiers during World War II (Merrell 2019).

[20] Caverley (2014) contends that the median voter may support interventionism because the costs of conflict are disproportionately borne by a minority of the population.

of an aggressive domestic audience. When bellicose constituents are willing to penalize officials for exercising or advocating restraint, public officials may feel compelled to pander to their constituents by engaging in wars that they privately believe are less desirable than otherwise viable settlements. This is possible when three minimal conditions hold. First, the leader and the public must diverge on the expected payoff of fighting, with the public more optimistic than the leader and therefore unwilling to tolerate a settlement the leader would privately accept. Second, there must be a low probability that public support for an aggressive strategy will rapidly evaporate once such action is underway. In other words, if public support for war will vanish rapidly once the true costs of fighting are revealed, then so too may public support evaporate for leaders who blunder into unnecessary wars. Finally, the leader must face some obstacle or disincentive that prevents her from going public with information that could temper public hawkishness.

Barriers to Information Transfers

Consider a bargaining interaction that closely resembles that advanced by Fearon (1995), in which a leader (L) and a foreign adversary (F) compete for control of a continuously divisible good represented by the unit interval $[0, 1]$. Division of the good can occur in two ways. The first is by mutual agreement to impose a particular division x, in which case L obtains x while F obtains $1 - x$. Alternatively, the two sides can fight a costly all-or-nothing war if they are unable to agree on a potential division.

Using her knowledge of each country's military equipment and personnel, the type of combat that could occur, the terrain around which fighting would take place, and various other factors, L identifies L_o as the expected outcome of war if one should occur. She further identifies c_L as the expected cost that her country would incur while fighting. Given these values, L would accept any settlement x such that $x > L - c_L$. In a departure from Fearon, assume that L is accountable to a domestic actor (D) who lacks access to the same information as L and who is therefore overly optimistic about the expected outcome or costs of fighting. As a result of its optimism, D calculates an expected war outcome $D_o > L_o$ and expected cost of combat $c_D \leq c_L$. These values cause D to

prefer settlement to war only when $x > D - c_D > L - c_L$.

To depict L's accountability to D, I further assume that D can penalize L for accepting divisions that fall outside of the range that D would prefer. In practical terms, such penalties could include physical violence, financial harm, removal from office, political opposition to L's preferred domestic policies, or even deliberate replacement with a more aggressive alternative. If the intensity or likelihood of D's punishment scales with the difference between the division x that L accepts and the minimal division $x = D_o - c_D$, then L should be increasingly unwilling to accept settlements the further they diverge from D's desires. Figure 1 below illustrates this relationship graphically.

Figure 1: Bargaining with Domestic Constraints

Range of divisions x that L would accept.

Range of divisions x that D would accept.
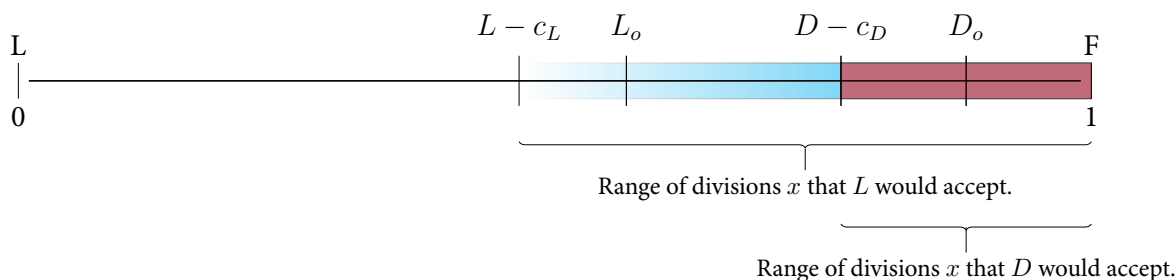
Domestic Signaling Challenges

Within this framework, potential settlements are only problematic when they fall in the blue area of disagreement between L and D. For example, if the foreign adversary, F, insisted on division $x < L - c_L$, both the leader and domestic group would prefer to reject this proposal. Similarly, if F offered a settlement $x > D - c_D$, the leader would accept and the domestic group would approve of her decision. However, proposals in the region between $L - c_L$ and $D - c_D$ cause disagreement, with L preferring to accept and D preferring to reject such proposals.

Consider the result if L accepts a settlement in the controversial region. In this case, war does not occur and D remains ignorant of the true outcome and costs that would have been produced through combat. As such, D's optimism regarding the use of military force may not be diminished and D may seek to penalize L for exhibiting military restraint. To avoid this penalty, L may attempt

to temper D's optimism about the expected outcome and/or costs of war by sharing informative information while the crisis is ongoing but before settlement or conflict occurs. However, L may face several challenges that restrict her from fully persuading D that a settlement is optimal. First, D may simply be insufficiently responsive to new information about the likely costs of conflict. In other words, even an earnest effort to share information with domestic hawks may fall on deaf ears or fail to motivate a shift in deeply entrenched opinions.[21] Historical evidence also suggests that leaders fear that domestic hawks are difficult to persuade. As I discuss later in this paper, Lyndon Johnson believed that his three presidential predecessors had thoroughly primed Americans to worry about the threat of communism. As such, Johnson doubted that he could convince voters that American support for South Vietnam was unnecessary or risky.[22] Leaders may likewise face difficulty tempering domestic optimism even when audiences are highly attuned to public messages. Signals from leaders do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, leaders must compete for attention with opposing politicians, members of the media, and other actors who may advocate military aggression rather than settlement.[23] Domestic audiences may struggle to discern which of these sources can provide accurate information about the desirability of war or settlement.[24]

Two additional barriers to information revelation relate to the domestic group's perception of L's inherent characteristics. Although the stylized depiction assumes that L can perfectly calculate the expected costs and outcome of war, in reality leaders can only form estimates. Domestic audiences may doubt a leader's military knowledge and may therefore conclude that the leader's prediction about the likely payoff of combat is incorrect. Alternatively, D may suspect that different types of leaders exist who are distinguished by their personal sensitivity to the costs of war.

---

[21] In related work, I provide experimental support for this possibility: in a survey experiment assessing support for military action, respondents' support for troop deployments and drone strikes did not significantly deteriorate after exposure to information that such military actions may be highly costly.

[22] Skowronek 1997, p. 343-344.

[23] For example, Baum and Groeling (2005) show that opposition party criticism of incumbent politicians is prevalent before and in the immediate aftermath of domestic "rally" events, while Baum and Groeling (2009) show that the media tends to overrepresent in-party criticism of a leader's decisions while underreporting supportive rhetoric.

[24] Kahneman and Renshon (2009) argue that citizens' psychological biases can make individuals more receptive to and more easily persuaded by hawkish arguments than less aggressive messages, while Ashworth and Shotts (2010) show that voters apply an asymmetric burden of proof to incumbents based on whether those leaders pursue popular or unpopular policies.

Put another way, some leaders may be innately dovish and therefore highly sensitive to costs incurred while fighting, while others are hawkish or relatively insensitive to casualties and other costs associated with war. If optimistic domestic audiences believe that L is extremely dovish, they may conclude that her reluctance to fight stems from personal aversion to costs that the nation as a whole will not bear.

Leaders who anticipate such challenges may avoid signaling attempts altogether. This is particularly true if the leader fears that by advocating restraint or revealing her relative pessimism about the expected outcome of war she may provoke domestic backlash.[25] For example, prior to his assassination President Kennedy debated whether to reduce American involvement in Vietnam despite public support for an expansion of the conflict. As he privately remarked to an aide, "If I tried to pull out completely now from Vietnam we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands."[26] Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson, similarly feared that the public would respond to an American draw-down in Southeast Asia by electing his more radical and hawkish opponent, Barry Goldwater. To prevent the election of a successor who would blunder into an even more costly conflict, Johnson underplayed his own opposition to escalation in the buildup to the election and instead pursued a moderately aggressive policy he hoped would appease hawkish audiences—particularly following the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

Mixing Signals with Multiple Audiences

An additional set of signaling challenges emerge when one considers the existence of F, the foreign adversary. Let F form his own predictions about the expected outcome of war and the expected costs of combat, F_o and c_F, respectively. Because F obtains $1 - x$ in the event of peaceful settlement, F would accept any settlement x such that $x < F + c_F$. Figure 2 provides an example of this bargaining interaction in which both D and F are privately optimistic about the likely results of war. Thus, F would accept only divisions in which x is relatively small, while D would accept only those divisions

---

[25] In related work, I find that leaders who refrain from military escalation and face criticism for such inaction face significant losses of respondent support relative to those who pursue escalation, even in the face of similar criticism.

[26] Quoted in Gardner (1995, p. 72).

in which x is quite large.

**Figure 2: Bargaining with Multiple Audiences**
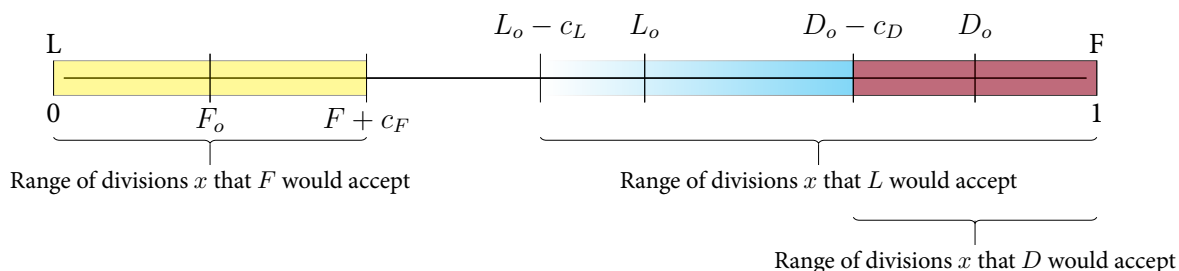
With this distribution of initial beliefs, L faces the challenge of facilitating a convergence in expectations for F and D. Although L may be able to accomplish this goal by convincing the other actors that the likely costs of war, c_F and c_D are much larger than either initially assumes, the realities of the conflict may be such that sending such a message is unrealistic. Instead, L may need to convince F that L's military is *stronger* than F perceives while simultaneously persuading D that L's military is *weaker* than D believes. Sending both messages simultaneously and convincingly may present a difficult challenge for L.

Finally, L may face difficulty creating convergence even when L and F's initial beliefs enable them to easily locate potential settlements. Figure 3 illustrates such a scenario. In this case, the leader and the foreign adversary would both agree to and division such that $L - c_L < x < F_o + c_F$. However, D remains optimistic and refuse any settlement in which $x < D - c_D$. In this case, L need not send mixed messages to F and D. However, L's willingness to attempt convergence depends on two issues. The first is the efficiency with which L can dispel D's optimism, and the latter is the size of the bargaining range that remains after L_o and F_o converge.

The bottom half of Figure 3 illustrates the problem: in this case, L has exerted effort to signal the true expected outcome of war. As a result, F has updated its belief F_o to converge with L_o. However, in this case D updated its beliefs about D_o less substantially. Although L may continue to share information in hopes of further removing D's optimism, the act of sharing information credibly may force L to incur a cost. If the cost of facilitating convergence between D and F exceeds

the size of the bargaining range—in other words, $(F_o + c_F) - (L_o - c_L)$, then L will prefer to reject a settlement and pursue war rather than attempt further signaling. The costs of signaling, combined with the risk of any penalties D could impose if convergence does not succeed, may motivate L to forgo signaling attempts and to pursue costly wars even though L recognizes that viable settlements exist.

Figure 3: Bargaining when F and L Initially Agree

Initial Beliefs

Updated Beliefs
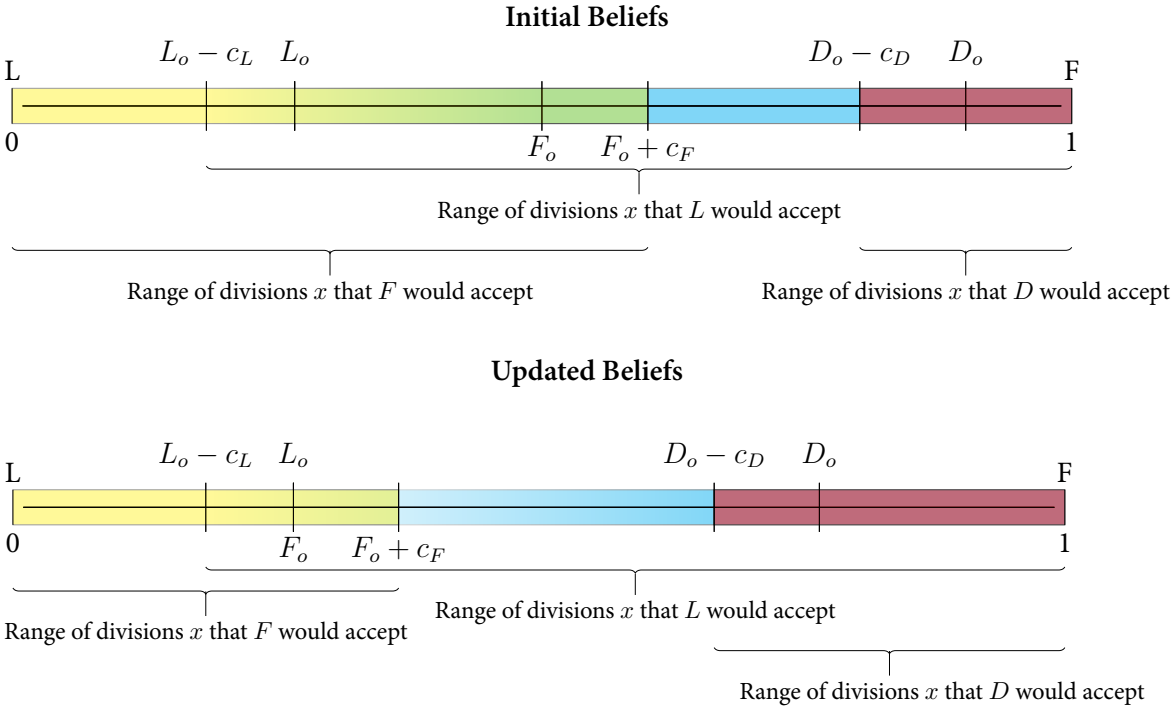
3   Cross-National Evidence

Setup, Data, and Variables

The theory suggests that leaders may be punished not only for failing to win wars, but also for failing to attempt wars that their constituents believe should have been fought. Rather than attempt the difficult, risky, and costly task of persuading a domestic audience that settlement is optimal, leaders may instead engage in violence that they know is counterproductive for the country as a whole. This theoretical framework yields two testable predictions. First, leaders who are account-

able to optimistic domestic groups should be less likely to settle and more likely to escalate crises than leaders who are not similarly accountable. Second, leaders who are accountable to optimistic constituents should perform less successfully in conflicts conditional on escalation.

Testing these predictions is complicated by the fact that international crises result from strategic selection: the set of countries that are targeted during crises may differ from the set of states that are never targeted. To address this concern, I use data from the Tir et al. (1998) Territorial Change (v5) dataset, which encompasses all international territorial changes that occurred between 1816 and 2014 that involved at least one nation-state. In general, territories change hands when one state is coerced or compelled to offer a concession to another. However, countries sometimes offer territory freely. As such, I further restrict my analysis to the subset of observations in which territory was exchanged as a result of conquest, annexation, or the presence of a threat. Because my sample includes only cases in which (A) one country levied a territorial claim against another, and (B) the claim eventually succeeded, I am able to at least partially reduce heterogeneity related to strategic selection of target states on behalf of the claim-initiator.

My dependent variable in the analysis is whether the conceded territory was exchanged peacefully. When concessions occur without fighting, the variable assumes a value of "1," even if an implicit threat of force existed. In cases where fighting occurred prior to the change of territory, the variable takes a value of "0." Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, I use logistic regression throughout my analysis.

The independent variable of interest is an interaction between two terms. The first term is the polity score of the conceding state, which characterizes the degree to which a country is either an autocracy or democracy.[27] The second term is dichotomous. It assumes a value of "1" when the conceding state is less powerful than the country to whom it grants territory, as determined by comparing the two countries' "Composite Index of National Capabilities" (CINC) scores in the year that the concession occurred.[28] Henceforth, I refer to this as a "power deficit." In each model, I

---

[27] The polity variable ranges from -10 to 10, with higher values reflecting greater levels of democracy (see Marshall and Jaggers 2002). In other specifications, I use binary indicators of whether a country (1) engages in executive elections or (2) engages in parliamentary elections. Results are generally consistent across these specifications.

[28] The CINC index is a composite figure derived from a country's population, urban population, iron and steel produc-

control for several additional variables that may affect a country's willingness to fight rather than settle. These include the size of the contested territory in square kilometers, whether or not the territory was contiguous with the main body of the targeted state, and the population of the disputed territory.

Expectations and Results

Because aggressors levy territorial claims strategically and the dataset is composed of observations in which territory ultimately changed hands, I expect to find no relationship between a power deficit and the likelihood of a settlement in autocratic states, where leaders make sober decisions about whether to accept the new division of territory or to wage war.[29] However, I do not expect this to hold true in democracies, where leaders are subject to influence from their constituents. Among democratic states, I expect that leaders whose countries face power deficits will be more likely to fight than those who do not face such an imbalance of power.

My explanation for this prediction is that when aggressors target relatively weak democracies, they issue demands that are calibrated based on the *observable* balance of power but which do *not* account for potentially hawkish preferences among the domestic population of the target state.[30] In other words, aggressor countries may issue territorial demands that appear likely to succeed based on an objective reading of each country's relative power, but against democracies a subset of those demands will ultimately fail because constituents within the targeted country are naively optimistic and refuse to tolerate the requisite concessions.[31]

---

tion, energy consumption, military personnel, and military expenditure (see Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972). In other models, I compare military spending and the number of active military personnel rather than CINC scores as proxies of relative military power.

[29] When a country issues a credible demand for territory, it calibrates the size of its demand based on its expectation that the opponent will acquiesce as well as the expected cost of a conflict if the opponent chooses to fight. Because fighting is more costly than settling, aggressor states should issue the largest possible demand that they think an opponent would accept with satisfactory probability. Unless risk acceptance or the availability of information about the opponent's capability are correlated with relative power, relative power should not be associated with the target state's likelihood of settling rather than fighting.

[30] I assume countries can observe an adversary's military capability more easily than the enemy's latent public opinion.

[31] For evidence that voters resist settlements in territorial disputes, see Zellman (2018) and Fang et al. 2017. Note that this assumes aggressors who issue territorial demands would suffer a cost for scaling back those demands should they realize that the likelihood of conflict is greater than anticipated. Absent such a cost, the aggressor could simply fail

Table 1 displays results from the baseline model as well as versions that include several control variables.[32] The results are consistent with my expectations. Across each model, the interaction between a country's polity score and its relative strength is significantly associated with the likelihood that a country concedes territory peacefully. For easier interpretation of the interaction, Figure 4 depicts the estimated marginal effect of a power deficit on the likelihood of settlement across various Polity scores for the targeted state. In autocracies, a power deficit is not significantly associated with a change in the likelihood that a territorial dispute will end peacefully. However, democracies who face power deficits are more likely to fight before conceding territory compared to democracies that do not face such an imbalance in relative power. Figure 5 provides a graphical depiction of a similar interaction, but with the continuous Polity score replaced with a dichotomous "Executive Elections" variable.[33] Finally, Figure 6 provides predicted probabilities of settlement conditional on whether the targeted state is democratic or autocratic and the size of the defender's power deficit, measured as the difference between the aggressor and defender's CINC scores. Autocracies become more likely to settle as their power deficit increases, but the same is not true of democracies. This relationship contrasts with a wide literature that argues (1) democratic leaders should exercise caution when escalating conflicts, and (2) that autocrats should be more averse to making concessions than elected officials.[34] Instead, the results suggest democratic leaders feel compelled participate in conflicts that they subsequently lose, but which their autocratic counterparts are able to avoid.

---

to act upon the threat it issued once it became apparent that resistance was likely (see, similarly, Ramsay 2017).

[32] As anticipated, states are less likely to peacefully concede contiguous territories and highly populated regions than alternative regions.

[33] Results are similar if I instead use a dichotomous "Democracy" variable that takes a value of 1 when the defender's Polity Score exceeds 6.

[34] See, for example, Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003), Debs and Goemans (2010), Horowitz, Stam, and Ellis (2015), and Reiter and Stam (2002).

Table 1: Dispute Settlement, Democracy, and Relative Strength

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Polity × Power Interaction	−0.114***	−0.088**	−0.116***	−0.105**	−0.082*
	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.044)
Loser's Polity Score	0.109***	0.087**	0.109***	0.093***	0.073*
	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.032)	(0.036)	(0.038)
Less Powerful	−0.317	−0.296	−0.308	−0.256	−0.229
	(0.305)	(0.313)	(0.306)	(0.308)	(0.317)
Contiguous Territory		−0.679*			−0.682*
		(0.373)			(0.376)
Area (Sq. Kilo.)			−0.0005		−0.001
			(0.001)		(0.001)
Joint Democracy				0.364	0.246
				(0.509)	(0.516)
Constant	1.478***	1.892***	1.608***	1.370***	1.990***
	(0.241)	(0.345)	(0.317)	(0.262)	(0.427)
Observations	298	283	298	292	277

Notes: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Figure 4: Estimated Effect of a Power Deficit
(Polity Score : Power Deficit Dummy)
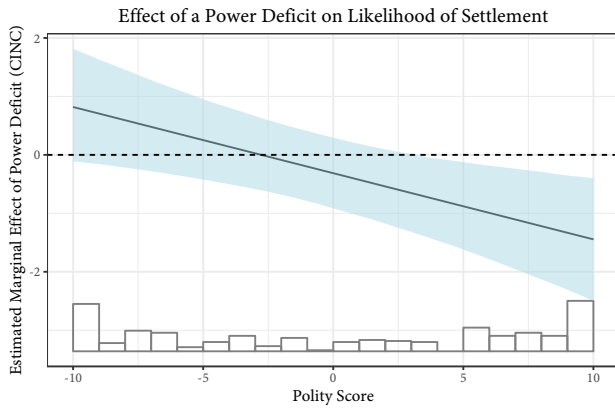
Effect of a Power Deficit on Likelihood of Settlement

Figure 4 plots the marginal effect of the defender suffering a *power deficit* across a range of *Polity scores* for the defender. The shaded region depicts 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 5: Estimated Effect of a Power Deficit
(Election Dummy : Power Deficit Dummy)

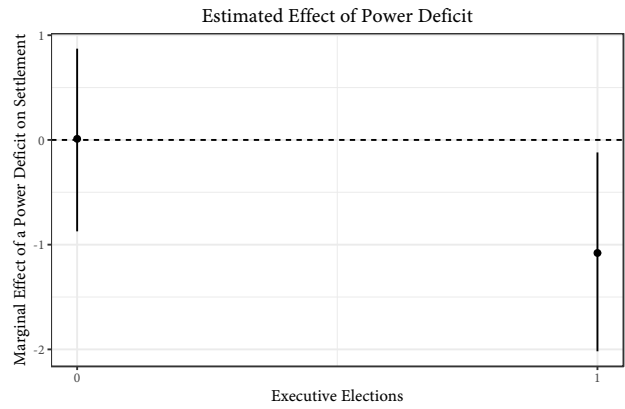Estimated Effect of Power Deficit

Figure 5 plots the marginal effect of the defender suffering a *power deficit* when the defender does not (0) or does (1) exhibit *executive elections*. The vertical lines depict 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 6: Probability of settlement conditional on size of *Power Disadvantage* and *Polity Score*

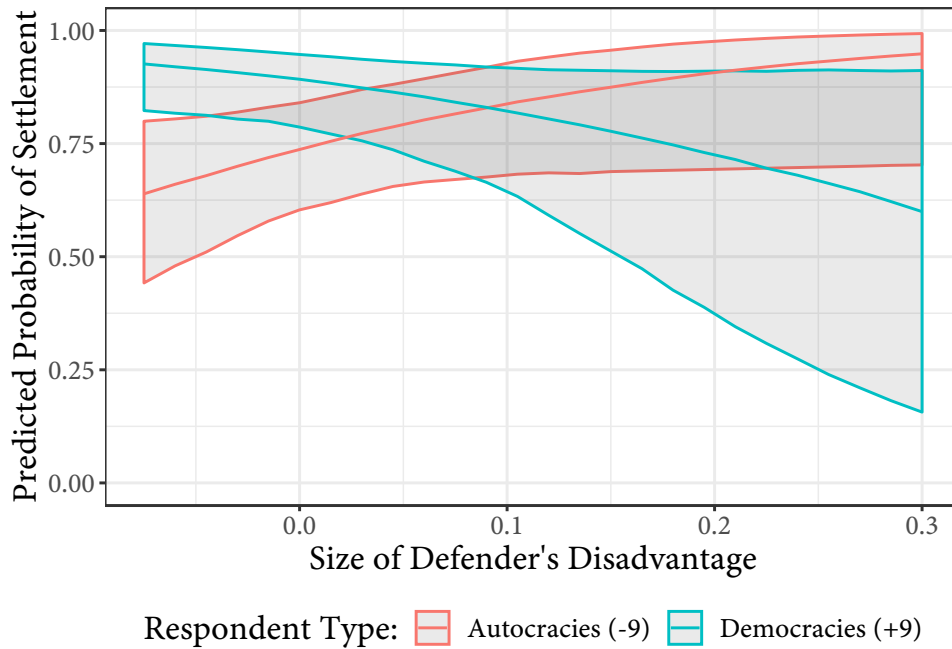Respondent Type: Autocracies (-9)   Democracies (+9)

Figure 6 plots the predicted probability a territorial dispute ends in settlement rather than war, given the size of a defender's *disadvantage* in relative CINC score and whether the defender is an *autocracy* or *democracy*. Shaded regions depict 95% confidence intervals.

4   Historical Episodes

The analysis of territorial settlements identifies a relationship between military behavior and the domestic constraints that leaders face. However, the pattern may result from mechanisms other than public pressure. Alternatively, public optimism about war may be endogenous to leader behavior, as in "audience cost" models where leaders deliberately activate hawkish opinion during crises. To address these concerns, I supplement the statistical results with three historical analyses of executive behavior. Across each of these examples, citizens were more optimistic about the payoffs of military escalation than was their head of state. Furthermore, none of the leaders deliberately cultivated public optimism; instead, they frequently lamented their inability to sway public opinion in favor of deescalation or settlement. Finally, each leader eventually adopted more aggressive military behavior than he would likely have attempted in the absence of public pressure. As such, the cases demonstrate that leaders sometimes *believe* that their constituents will penalize leaders who decline to escalate.

Although the cases are not intended to test the mechanism at work in the theory, they may enhance our confidence that it is a plausible explanation for the cross-national patterns evidence in the previous section. Moreover, the cases suggest that the mechanism may apply across a broad range of difficult circumstances. For example, the behavior of the Chilean, Bolivian, and Peruvian presidents in the War of the Pacific illustrates that public pressure can simultaneously influence the decisions of several opponents at once, forcing each to participate in a war that none desire. Second, the hesitation of French leaders to surrender to Nazi Germany in 1940 demonstrates that politicians may feel pressure to persist in costly and unnecessary wars even when their constituents are familiar with the costs of war and are relatively pacifistic as a result. Finally, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson secured an overwhelming electoral victory shortly before increasing American military presence in Vietnam. The fact that he succumbed to political pressure and engaged in costly and inefficient escalation demonstrates both that the theoretical mechanism applies to offensive wars fought abroad as well as those intended to protect home soil and, moreover, that even very popular leaders may escalate when they believe failure to do so could jeopardize their domestic agenda.

The War of the Pacific

Background to the Crisis

The Atacama Desert runs along the western edge of South America from roughly 21° to 27° south latitude. The driest region on earth, the Atacama offers little trace of life. As a result, when Bolivia and Chile obtained their independence from the Spanish Empire in the early 1800s they wasted no time squabbling over where precisely to draw their border in the desert. Only after guano and nitrate deposits were discovered in 1840—and when their use as fertilizers was publicized the following year—did either country recognize the inherent value of the region. In 1842, as investors clamored for mining rights, the Chilean government officially defined its northern border for the first time, declaring a boundary line of 23° south. The proposal stretched several hundred kilometers into territory that Bolivians considered their own. However, because La Paz was not prepared to contest the Chilean claim militarily, its complaints were largely ignored in Santiago until 1864, when the two countries agreed to set a new border at 24° south but to divide equally all duties from extraction conducted between 23° and 25° south.

Bolivia and Chile revisited the issue of the Atacama again in 1874. They agreed that Santiago would relinquish its claim to all territory north of 24° south and, in exchange, Bolivia would impose a twenty-five year moratorium on any tax increases that could affect Chilean firms. Three years later, in the summer of 1877, a tremendous tidal wave struck the Pacific coast. Antofagasta, the capital of Bolivia's Atacama province, was particularly hard-hit by the disaster. In response, the town's municipal council imposed a small property tax as well as an emergency export tax of roughly ten centavos per 100 pounds of nitrates.[35] The Chilean company most severely affected, the Compañía de Salitres y Ferrocarril (CSFA), refused to pay its dues, citing the tax moratorium that was agreed in 1874. The Bolivian legislature, however, denied the CSFA's appeal, arguing that the federal government was legally prohibited from invalidating municipal tax laws.

Chile's ambassador in La Paz, Pedro Nolasco Videla, announced that Bolivia's actions constituted an abrogation of their 1874 agreement and warned that in response Chile might reclaim the

---

[35] Farcau 2000, p. 40.

region between the 23rd and 24th parallels. The statement, however, was largely bluster—even the CSFA confided that they would prefer to avoid any conflict that might disrupt the nitrate trade. So eager was the company for a restoration of normalcy that they offered to make a voluntary payment of 1,600 pesos per year to the local government, a sum thought sufficient to cover a large proportion of Antofagasta's reconstruction costs. Even so, Videla's bluff succeeded in persuading La Paz to rethink the issue of taxation. In the wake of the Chilean threat, Bolivian Foreign Minister Manuel Ignacio Salvatierra announced that although the federal government could not formally nullify the tax, they could assure Chile that it would not be collected.

The Fierro-Sarratea Treaty and Domestic Outcry in Chile

Even in the midst of the taxation dispute with Bolivia, Chile's diplomatic attention was focused elsewhere. To the east, the Argentine Republic was rapidly expanding its navy. Longtime rivals, the two countries disputed ownership of the Strait of Magellan and Patagonia. Seeking a permanent solution to the conflict, President Aníbal Pinto dispatched a history professor, Diego Barros Arana, to negotiate with Buenos Aires. Although Pinto had instructed Arana to offer Patagonia to the Argentines in exchange for the Strait, Arana instead surrendered the former while securing only joint custody of the latter. When Pinto received the news, he asked to reopen negotiations. Buenos Aires agreed and this time dispatched their own delegate to negotiate with Pinto directly. Their choice, Manuel Bilbao, authored a series of articles in Santiago's major newspaper, *El Ferrocarril,* that thoroughly disparaged the Chilean people for their poor negotiating skills. In response, thousands of Chilean citizens rioted in the capital, destroying a statue erected in honor of Argentina and urging the president to reject territorial compromise.

Despite public outrage, Pinto acknowledged that his country could ill afford to fight a war. In early December he proposed a deal whereby Chile and Argentina would share custody of the Strait until an international arbitrator could settle the dispute once and for all. The Chilean public was incensed. Members of the press denounced the "miserable policy" and predicted that the legislature

would reject a document that "so shamelessly betrays Chile."[36] Nevertheless, two days after Pinto signed the agreement, the upper house of the Chilean congress followed his lead. The lower house, more inclined to follow the sentiments of the public and already jockeying for position an the upcoming congressional election, was more reluctant. They still had not agreed to the peace treaty six weeks later when word arrived of a new crisis involving Bolivia.[37]

Escalation

When Bolivian president Hilarión Daza learned that Pinto had adopted a soft line in territorial disputes with Argentina, he assumed Pinto would be equally easy to bully on the issue of Antofagasta. Shortly after the Fierro-Sarratea Treaty was signed in Santiago, Daza declared that the ten-centavo tax that his government had assured would never be collected was not only reinstated but also applied retroactively.[38] Unfortunately for Daza, Pinto called his bluff by deploying an ironclad, the *Blanco Encalada,* to the Antofagasta harbor and ordering the remainder of the Chilean fleet to mobilize for war. Rather than back off, Daza doubled down and declared that the CSFA's contract was now void and that the company's property would be auctioned off in mid-February.[39]

In Santiago, the people demanded action. Already frustrated with Pinto's concessions to Argentina, Chileans would not tolerate a similar outcome with Bolivia. They argued that national honor was at stake. The Chilean newspaper *El Taller* warned that if Chile would appear a "nation of shameless imbeciles" and would sacrifice the respect of the continent if Pinto accepted Bolivia's actions.[40] In a letter to Pinto, Interior Minister Antonio Varas summarized the public sentiment when he remarked that rioters were "marching beneath my window with an enthusiasm which I have not witnessed in my life. Either we occupy Antofagasta or they [the war opponents] will kill you and me."[41] Pinto privately held substantial reservations, but eventually he was persuaded to

---

[36] Sater 1986, p. 8.
[37] Burr 1967, p. 135.
[38] Farcau 2000, p. 41.
[39] Sater 1986, p. 5
[40] Sater 1986, p. 9.
[41] Sater 2007, p. 40.

act. Four days before the proposed sale of CSFA property, Ambassador Videla reiterated his claim from the previous autumn: by implementing a new tax, Bolivia had violated the 1874 moratorium. Unless Daza repealed the tax or agreed to international arbitration within forty-eight hours, Chile would feel justified in reoccupying all territory south of the 23rd parallel. When Daza refused, Videla requested his passports and severed diplomatic ties. Two days later, on the day of the auction, two hundred Chilean troops occupied Antofagasta, though they allowed Bolivian officials to retreat peacefully to Cobija.[42] Pinto's troops arrived in the knick of time. As one of his deputies asked, "Who knows what action the public would have taken if the government had delayed one day more in occupying the littoral?"[43]

Word of Antofagasta's capture soon reached Daza. Curiously, the president waited more than a week to respond—allegedly because he did not want to distract from ongoing Carnival celebrations.[44] However, when eight to ten thousand protestors massed in the capital, demanding weapons with which to oust the Chileans, Daza declared that Chile's actions had imposed a "state of war" between the two countries.[45] Even this statement, however, did not constitute an official declaration of hostilities, nor did it commit Bolivia to a specific response. Instead, Daza appealed to President Mariano Prado of Peru for a means of extricating himself from the situation.

Prado was acutely aware of his own country's limited capacity for conflict, lamenting to the Bolivian foreign minister that "Peru has no navy, has no army, has no money; it has nothing for a war."[46] Rather than announce military support for Bolivia, Prado offered to help Bolivia negotiate a peace agreement. With Daza's permission, Prado dispatched an emissary to Santiago, José Antonio Lavalle, with instructions to convince Pinto to accept a reinstatement of conditions that existed before the Antofagasta tax was imposed.[47]

Unfortunately, when Lavalle arrived in Chile, President Pinto rejected the terms. Although the

---

[42] Farcau 2000, p. 42.

[43] Sater 1986, p. 16.

[44] Farcau 2000, p. 42.

[45] Sater 2007, p. 28.

[46] Sater 2007, p. 36.

[47] Farcau 2000, p. 42.

Chilean leader conceded that he personally preferred to accept the proposal, he also insisted the Chilean public would not tolerate an agreement that would restore Bolivian control of the Atacama. Instead, Pinto offered to restrict nitrate exports from his newly-acquired territory, thereby giving Peru a regional monopoly on the product—an economic outcome that amounted to a significant gain for Peru relative to pre-crisis conditions. Lavalle responded that the Peruvian public would force the government to refuse these terms and to support their Bolivian allies.[48] Observing that each actor's capacity to compromise was constrained by forces beyond their control, the Chilean Foreign Minister summarized the situation by lamenting that, "Moral victories… will satisfy no one. The war might truly be a calamity, but we will have to endure it."[49]

As negotiations failed, Bolivia declared war on Chile; Santiago reciprocated two weeks later. In Peru, Prado also succumbed to the force of public opinion. Just as Lavalle predicted, it became clear that failure to aid Bolivia would "arouse the most intense indignation."[50] According to an American visitor in Lima, Prado announced his decision to wage war when "a furious mob appeared before the doors of the municipal palace and demanded [Prado's] intentions... [and] Prado saw he must renounce Chile or lose his life."[51]

Discussion and Alternatives

What, then, was the most proximate cause of the war? By the time the first bullets were fired, none of the combatants were confident that they would win. Likewise, all recognized that the costs of fighting vastly outweighed any benefits that their country may reap. Nor did the leaders initiate conflict in order to enrich themselves personally.[52] Finally, there is no evidence that the Chilean, Bolivian, or Peruvian governments deliberately activated domestic audiences in order to gain a bar-

---

[48] The Chilean Ambassador in Lima received a similar response when he presented the offer directly to President Prado (Farcau 2000, p. 42).

[49] Sater 1986, p. 12.

[50] Sater 2007, p. 42.

[51] Sater 2007, p. 39-40.

[52] A vocal minority of investors in Chile so thoroughly feared the economic consequences of war that they offered President Pinto a personal bribe of two million pesos to forgo fighting and to reinstate the terms of the 1874 agreement (Sater 2007, p. 38).

gaining advantage. Instead, each head of state was trapped by a hawkish domestic population that he felt unable to appease.

At its heart, the war occurred because Daza misjudged how Pinto would respond to provocation. After observing that Pinto was willing to sacrifice territory to avoid armed conflict with Argentina, Daza manufactured his own crisis in hopes that Pinto would offer similar concessions in the Atacama. In some sense, Daza was correct: Pinto *personally* believed the border territory was unworthy of fighting over; he would happily have offered concessions rather than risk a costly military defense. Unfortunately, Daza also erred by underestimating the extent to which hawkish Chilean opinion would inhibit Pinto from offering the concessions he personally endorsed. Although Pinto explained these domestic constraints to his enemies once the crisis began, by that stage war was unavoidable and each leader was locked into a conflict they preferred to avoid.

Is it possible that Pinto exaggerated the militaristic preferences of his constituents as a negotiating tactic? Was he bluffing in hopes of forcing Peru and Bolivia to back down? Such an interpretation would appear a misreading of available evidence. The Chilean press depicted Pinto's decision as a forced choice: they claimed that the people were deeply concerned with the country's national dignity, an asset that "no government would be sufficiently strong or audacious to compromise without being torn apart and thrown from the Moneda like one throws garbage into the street."[53] The American ambassador in Santiago expressed a similar opinion, noting, "It is doubtful, indeed, if the administration could have taken another course and sustained itself."[54] Perhaps Bolivian envoy, José Antonio de Lavalle summarized best when he wrote, "It was impossible, completely impossible [for Pinto] to arrive at a peaceful solution, although Pinto's government would have been disposed to go to any lengths to avoid this end… if [the dispute] had been resolved peacefully, Pinto would have been violently overthrown and the war would still have taken place."[55]

---

[53] Sater 1986, p. 14.
[54] Sater 2007, p. 40.
[55] Lavalle 1994, p. 62, as quoted in Chiozza and Goemans 2011.

The Fall of France

Background to the Dispute

Germany launched its western invasion of Belgium, the Netherlands, and France on May 10, 1940. Five days later, Winston Churchill awoke to a telephone call from French prime minister Paul Reynaud, who reported that German tanks and armored vehicles had broken the front near Sedan and that his country had "been defeated... we are beaten; we have lost."[56] The Dutch army surrendered the following morning, by which time Reynaud, acutely aware that not "a single corps of soldiers" stood between the German armies and the French capital, was likewise debating whether to order his government to evacuate Paris or merely sue for peace.[57] In the end, Reynaud chose a third option: he postponed a withdrawal from the capital and also refrained from approaching his German adversaries about armistice terms. Instead, the French government prolonged the conflict for more than a month at the price of roughly 85,000 French lives.[58]

By what calculus did the French prime minister choose to persist with his futile defense? Surely optimism was not a determining factor. Maurice Gamelin, commander-in-chief of the French Armed forces at the onset of the invasion, concluded by the eve of May 15 that counterattacks were impossible and that continued fighting would lead only to the "destruction of the French armies."[59] There is also no evidence the French hoped that continued fighting would enable them to obtain a more favorable settlement in future negotiations. In a meeting on May 25, President Albert Lebrun argued that prolonged fighting would diminish French military capabilities and therefore the "government's freedom [to negotiate]."[60] Gamelin's replacement, Maxime Weygand, likewise hoped that France would secure a peace deal "while the Allies still held some cards in their hand."[61] The

---

[56] Churchill 1949, p. 20.

[57] Jackson 2004, p. 9.

[58] La Gorce 1988, p. 496. Shepperd 1990, p. 88 lists French casualties as 90,000 killed, 200,000 wounded, and another 1.9 million missing or captured.

[59] Jackson 2004, p. 10. Gamelin was replaced three days later by Maxime Weygand, who subsequently raised the possibility of surrender on May 25.

[60] Gates 1981, p. 138.

[61] Jackson 2004, p. 132. On May 24 Weygand similarly noted that France should get "out of the ordeal which is is undergoing" if she was ever to "rise again" (Jackson 2004, p. 104).

"commitment problem" explanation for war is similarly unconvincing in this situation. The theory argues that leaders may fail to commit to peace when they anticipate that an adversary will experience a rapid increase in power, but Germany could already credibly threaten to occupy the French homeland and replace the French government; further power shifts in favor of Berlin were largely immaterial. Finally, it seems unrealistic that French leaders believed their constituents would be better served by sustained war rather than peace. After all, prolonged fighting would not only trigger substantial casualties in the short term but could also create internal turmoil if no government or army remained to prevent anarchy following the German conquest.[62]

Concerns About Public Opinion

In contrast to the unitary-state explanations, I argue that the French leadership delayed their surrender because they feared that quick capitulation would permanently jeopardize their political reputation with French citizens. As early as May 15, deputy premier Camille Chautemps, worried that the cabinet's withdrawal from Paris would provoke "adverse public reaction, which would interpret the government's departure as desertion."[63] Likewise, reports from May 27 suggest that Reynaud "considered the indefinite prolongation of hostilities as chimerical," but felt "publicly committed" to continuing the war against Hitler.[64] British Ambassador Ronald Campbell similarly noted his belief that "there was not a single Frenchman [in government] who did not feel, even if he would not admit it, that France was beaten,"[65] and that the "forces in favor of surrender" were sufficiently strong that such an outcome "may come more quickly than we expect."[66]

Why did Reynaud feel compelled to persist in a hopeless defense? After all, the French population had suffered tremendous costs during the Great War. Given their knowledge of the costliness of fighting, one might reasonably expect French citizens prefer that their government avoid unnecessary combat rather than mount a prolonged resistance. However, as Adamthwaite (1995, p. 169)

---

[62] Weygand was among the most significant proponents of this view. See Jackson 2004, p. 132

[63] Gates 1981, p. 214.

[64] Gates 1981, p. 155.

[65] Gates 1981, p. 155.

[66] Baxter 2006, p. 191.

notes, "pacifism waned after 1936." Hucker (2007, p. 3) similarly clarifies that the particular form of pacifism normally attributed to French citizens in the interwar period "did not induce the defeatism" with which it is so often associated. Indeed, an opinion poll conducted in October 1938 showed that although 57% of the French population supported appeasement at Munich, a further 70% of respondents favored resisting additional German demands.[67]

In the time since Munich, government officials and members of the press also inadvertently stoked the public's desire to defend French territory. In December 1938, prime minister Edouard Daladier announced in a speech that "France will not cede an inch of territory" to Italian irredentists in Corsica.[68] At the same time, prominent newspaper pundits argued in favor of national defense. As Pierre-Antoine Cousteau asserted, when "our possessions are targeted, the peace of Munich is not a precedent."[69] Finally, officials and the media cultivated the sentiment that the country could wage its upcoming war successfully. General Weygand announced in a speech at Lille on July 14, 1939, that "the French army is a more effective force than at any other time in its history; it possesses equipment and fortifications of first class quality, excellent morale, and a remarkable high command."[70] Likewise, officially sanctioned films included statements such as "[France] is capable of facing all attacks and all challenges."[71] As Hucker (2007, p. 20) summarizes, "representations of French opinion in early 1939 demonstrated that the French people were prepared, if necessary, to forcibly resist unreasonable demands... encouraging the French government to pursue a foreign policy of firmness rather than capitulation."[72]

---

[67] Even during the Munich negotiations, former French prime minister Pierre-Étienne Flandin remarked that although public opinion "is more likely to be in the direction of non-intervention than that of intervention," several influential groups "are leading us into this war [and] are determined to push us into it." (Quoted in Hucker 2007, p. 13)

[68] Hucker (2007, p. 18). Daladier followed the speech with a widely-publicized tour of the island the following month.

[69] Hucker (2007, p. 19). Other newspapers drew attention to the remilitarization campaign then underway, writing headlines such as, "Is France resigned to die or does she have the will to live?" (Hucker (2007, p. 18)).

[70] Jackson 2004, p. 10.

[71] Cited in Laborie 2001, p. 119.

[72] Jackson 2004, p. 123 similarly argues that Daladier's enthusiasm for intervention in Finland was motivated by concerns about those in the "opposing camp who felt he was prosecuting the war insufficiently energetically."

Blame Shifting and Eventual Capitulation

On June 5, the day following the final evacuation of Dunkirk, the Germans renewed their attack by pushing southward. General Weygand by this point believed "the military situation to be irreparable."[73] He warned Reynaud that a final rupture of French defenses could occur at any moment and insisted that although the army would "continue to resist, if the Council [so] orders… the ending of hostilities must be considered soon."[74] Reynaud replied that although Weygand was offering "extremely competent advice about the military sphere… the question of continuing the war was a political matter."[75] Churchill, who had visited his French allies earlier in the day, further recalled that Marshal Pétain "had quite made up his mind that peace must be made. He believed that France was being systematically destroyed by the Germans, and that it was his duty to save the rest of the country from this fate," but that Pétain was ashamed to present the argument to Reynaud.[76] Instead, it would be nearly two weeks before the French government pursued an armistice and a further week until peace terms were signed.

We can attribute this delay in seeking peace to disagreement over who should take public responsibility for the armistice. On June 12, Weygand, supported by "virtually all the senior army commanders," announced to the Council of Ministers that the war was irretrievably lost and that it was essential for the French government to seek an armistice.[77] However, several members of the Council, including Chautemps, rejected the proposal "because public opinion was not yet prepared for it."[78] Reynaud's detractors would likewise claim after the war that "he believed an armistice to be inevitable and that the stands he took, the speeches he made, the orders he gave were all… mere posturing intended for public consumption" (Gates 1981, p. 190). Of particular concern to Reynaud was that soliciting an armistice would "shift the responsibility for the defeat [from the military] to

---

[73] Gates 1981, p. 170.

[74] Gilbert 2000, p. 145.

[75] Gates 1981, p. 174.

[76] Churchill and Cook 2013, p. 290.

[77] Gates 1981, p. 183.

[78] Gates (1981, p. 184). Chautemps privately agreed that France should exit the war (Jackson 2004, p. 137).

the politicians."[79] Instead, the prime minister proposed an alternative: Weygand, as commander-in-chief of the French military, should declare a ceasefire while the Council relocated to North Africa to maintain at least the appearance of resistance. Weygand refused, declaring that he would "never agree to bring such disgrace on the flags of the French army," and claiming that Reynaud was merely trying to deflect responsibility for defeat away from the Cabinet.[80]

In the end, Reynaud chose to resign rather than concede.[81] On June 16 he was replaced by Marshal Pétain, who sought to open peace negotiations with Germany, an act for which Pétain and other members of the Vichy regime would find themselves on trial after the war. Others in the cabinet, notably Charles de Gaulle, moved abroad and became popular rallying points for a 'Free France' both during and after the war.[82] On paper the German peace terms were surprisingly lenient: France would continue to exist as a sovereign state, would maintain jurisdiction of its overseas territories, and could even maintain small local military units to ensure domestic order.[83]

The Anglo-French Alliance

Although this paper argues that French politicians hesitated to settle with Germany because they feared that doing so would cost them public support, one alternative possibility merits discussion. Some argue that the French leadership worried that rapid capitulation would trigger backlash not from French citizens but rather from the British allies on whose fortunes France would rely for liberation. Indeed, the two countries had reached an agreement on March 28 that neither would sign a peace treaty with Germany without the other ally's consent.

Nevertheless, there are several reasons to doubt that maintaining Allied support was Reynaud's primary motivation when refusing to settle. First, the French leaders openly expressed their military

---

[79] Jackson 2004, p. 104.

[80] Shlaim 1974, p. 40.

[81] According to testimony taken after the war from three former ministers—two supporters of Reynaud, the other an opponent—on the day of his resignation there was still a slight majority in the Council opposed to an armistice (Jackson 2004, p. 139).

[82] As Jackson (2004, p. 142) quips, Reynaud "missed the chance to be de Gaulle," an error for which he "never forgave himself."

[83] Gilbert 2000, p. 149.

pessimism to their British allies throughout the engagement. If Reynaud was concerned about losing British support, he might instead have feigned commitment to the war effort. Second, Churchill on several occasions indicated that the British could provide very little military assistance to France.[84] French leaders not only acknowledged that British capabilities were constrained, they further believed that Britain would quickly succumb to Germany, thereby negating any hopes that the alliance would pay off long-term.[85] Third, the French politicians ought not have felt obliged to abide by their commitments against unilateral peace. When Reynaud broached the subject of French capitulation, Churchill reportedly instructed his colleague that "If it is thought best for France in her agony that her Army should capitulate, let there be no hesitation on our account."[86] Finally, when total German victory over the French seemed imminent, the British offered France an opportunity to form a political union that would permanently bind the two states. If prioritizing the alliance with Britain in hopes of achieving long-term victory was essential to the French, they should have accepted this offer rather than capitulate to Germany. Instead, they rejected it.[87] Thus, it seems the French cabinet was more concerned with the need to appease domestic audiences than the desire to reassure their British allies.

Escalation in Vietnam

Background and Preferences

When Lyndon Johnson assumed the U.S. presidency, he opposed the expansion of American military operations in Vietnam. As vice president, Johnson drafted a prophetic memo to President Kennedy in which he described the risks of deploying U.S. combat forces: "We had better remember the experience of the French who wound up with several hundred thousand men in Vietnam and were still unable to [succeed]… Before we take any such plunge we had better be sure we are

---

[84] When Weygand requested British air reinforcements, arguing that "Now is the decisive moment" and that it was "wrong to keep any squadrons back in England," Churchill refused, replying that "This is not the decisive point and this is not the decisive moment. That moment will come when Hitler hurls his Luftwaffe against Great Britain" (Churchill 1949, p. 147.

[85] Jackson 2004, p. 103.

[86] Churchill 1949, p. 148.

[87] Pétain famously quipped that such an agreement would be akin to "fusion with a corpse" (Shlaim 1974, p. 53).

prepared to become bogged down chasing irregulars and guerrillas over the rice fields and jungles of Southeast Asia while our principal enemies China and the Soviet Union stand outside the fray and husband their strength."[88] After Kennedy's assassination, Johnson continued to resist calls to deploy troops or increase bombing operations in Vietnam. In April 1964, he lamented that the military was "trying to get me in a war over there…I turned them down three times last week."[89] The following month, the president expressed his private reservations to McGeorge Bundy, explaining that with Vietnam it "looks to me that we're getting into another Korea…I don't see what we can hope to get out of this."[90]

Pressure to escalate military operations came not only from Johnson's military advisors but also from the public at large. American voters, primed by three successive administrations to consider Southeast Asia a national security priority, supported American efforts to secure the region against the communist threat. Johnson was acutely attuned to such foreign policy hawks, who he referred to as the "great lurking monster" of American politics.[91] McGeorge Bundy observed that the "Goldwater crowd" of war-hawks was "more numerous, more powerful, and more dangerous than the fleabite professors,"[92] and General William Westmoreland similarly admitted in an interview that Johnson was substantially more concerned with appeasing hawkish public opinion than he was with the anti-war movement.[93] Johnson himself acknowledged that because "1964 was an election year" he would be forced to "take some action to show that his administration was on top of the situation" in Vietnam.[94]

---

[88] Quoted in Warner (1994). Although there is considerable debate over whether Kennedy would eventually have withdrawn from Vietnam, evidence suggests that he worried about the political consequences of doing so. He intimated privately to Senator Mike Mansfield, "I can't do it [withdraw] until 1965—after I'm re-elected" (Asprey and Asprey 1994, p. 761-762)."

[89] Gardner 1995, p. 119.

[90] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 325.

[91] Herring (1995, p. 134). Johnson knew from personal experience how politically damaging hawkish critiques could cause for a president. As a freshman senator, Johnson had criticized Truman for rejecting the Joint Chiefs' recommendations to increase U.S. air power in Korea, asserting that "all [the administration's] effort is seemingly directed toward staying out of the war we are already in" (McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 52).

[92] Herring 1995, p. 140.

[93] See Charlton and Moncrieff 1978, p. 115.

[94] Stempel 1965, p. 221, as quoted in Caverley 2014.

Defusing the War Hawks

Despite his concerns about hawkish pressure, Johnson initially followed his personal preferences and positioned himself as the 'peace' candidate in contrast to Barry Goldwater in the 1964 election. During the campaign, Johnson sought to reduce American support for the intensification of violence in Southeast Asia. When General Westmoreland recommended that the Administration adopt a "people-to-people program, to get the American people... some emotional attachment to the South Vietnamese," Johnson shot down the idea for fear that if Americans became emotionally aroused the "hawks might take over control."[95] As Press Secretary Bill Moyers claimed, the administration's conclusion was that public debate on Vietnam should be kept at "as low a level as possible."[96] The president hoped that public hawkishness could be kept at a low simmer; he feared that if the topic gained a foothold in public discourse the resulting attitude would create irresistible pressures for escalation. Secretary of State Dean Rusk further explained that the administration deliberately avoided "military parades through the cities [and] beautiful movie stars selling out war bonds... we felt that in a nuclear world it is just too dangerous for an entire people to get too angry and we deliberately played this down."[97]

Johnson's attempt to defray public concern with Vietnam was also motivated by his fear that the topic would distract from his domestic agenda. The president sought to push his Great Society legislation through Congress as quickly as possible after election; if Vietnam became a contentious topic it could divert congressional attention or create political divisions that would be difficult to bridge.[98] Johnson viewed the Great Society as his opportunity to create a lasting political legacy of reform. Although the president personally objected to the escalation of American involvement, the possibility that he would lose, as he put it, "the woman I really loved" for "that bitch of a war

---

[95] Charlton and Moncrieff 1978, p. 137.

[96] Herring 1995, p. 122.

[97] Charlton and Moncrieff 1978, p. 115. Likewise, when Johnson learned that General Curtis LeMay was considering retirement—at which point the general planned to openly criticize the administration's policy in Vietnam, Johnson confronted LeMay at a cocktail dinner and first offered LeMay an ambassadorship, then reappointed him for another year to prevent him from going public with his misgivings (McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 86-88).

[98] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 194.

on the other side of the world" was intolerable.[99] From his installment in office until the spring of 1968, LBJ continually fretted that public criticism that he was 'not doing enough' on Vietnam would undermine his legislative goals. He therefore sought to downplay the conflict in Southeast Asia and plotted a course that would safeguard his political capital and insulate him from criticism.

Escalatory Incentives

In the late summer and autumn of 1964, a series of incidents tested Johnson's capacity to maintain the peace. The first was the so-called "Gulf of Tonkin Incident" of August 2, 1964, in which the the *USS Maddox* exchanged gun fire with several North Vietnamese torpedo boats. The president was convinced the incident occurred in response to U.S. covert operations in the gulf and decided to downplay the event to deflect calls for retaliation. However, two days later McNamara received word that both the *Maddox* and the *USS Turner Joy* were being followed by North Vietnamese vessels and were preparing for an attack. This time, Johnson's advisors warned the president that a military response was essential in order to deny Goldwater an opportunity to "accuse him of vacillating or being an indecisive leader."[100] The administration also worried that absent some response that would appease the Republicans, they "might take such an action that would…put the administration in a position where we had to do things we thought would be very unwise, that might involve bringing in the Chinese or offending somebody else."[101] To ward off this possibility, Johnson ordered a series of retaliatory air strikes and called on Congress to pass a resolution giving him the authority to "take all necessary measures in support of freedom and in defense of peace in southeast Asia." When Congress adopted the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution on August 7, 1964, Johnson's popularity surged.[102]

Although Ambassador Maxwell Taylor and the Joint Chiefs of Staff advocated a sustained bombing campaign in the wake of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Johnson was reluctant to increase

---

[99] Herring 1995, p. 130.

[100] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 125.

[101] Gardner 1995, p. 135.

[102]Some allege that Johnson and McNamara deliberately manufactured the second Gulf of Tonkin incident in order to justify their plans for interventionism, but this account is suspicious. If Johnson sought a reason to retaliate, he could have done so following the fist incident. Instead, he waited to respond until McNamara received intelligence—later revealed to be faulty—that a second military exchange had taken place.

U.S. operations. Instead, he approved only the resumption of U.S. naval patrols as well as aerial reconnaissance, maritime raids, and leaflet drops.[103] In a message to Taylor, the president declared that he would not be drawn into a war against North Vietnam merely because "our own people are careless or imprudent."[104] Five days after the destroyer patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin were resumed, Johnson received word of another skirmish between U.S. forces and Vietnamese patrol boats. Urged to authorize a new round of retaliatory attacks, Johnson once again deflected: "Hell... those dumb, stupid sailors were probably just shooting at flying fish."[105] Rather than commit himself to a bombing campaign, he asked Ambassador Taylor to draft more optimistic assessments of the situation in Vietnam, once again hoping to appease hawks and downplay the desirability of escalation.[106] In a campaign event in Manchester, New Hampshire at the end of September, the president reminded voters of the need to be "very cautious and careful" and noted that his administration would go on the offense against Vietnam "only as a last resort."[107]

Finally, on November 1, 1964, just days before the election, the North Vietnamese successfully conducted a mortar attack on Bien Hoa air base in which 27 U.S. aircraft were damaged or destroyed. When Ambassador Taylor asked the president to consider retaliation, Johnson once again declined, though he first asked Special Assistant Bill Moyers to inquire with pollsters whether "failure to respond to this attack immediately will be taken by the voters as a sign of weakness."[108] He continued to advocate an approach of relative restraint, optimistic that the sorties he approved following the Gulf of Tonkin incident were sufficient to allay public criticism for the time being.

Protecting the Domestic Agenda

After his election, Johnson focused his effort on pushing through his Great Society legislation. Although public pressure to escalate in Vietnam was rising, Johnson had reason to doubt that aerial

---

[103] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 153.

[104] Gardner 1995, p. 161.

[105] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 161.

[106] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 151.

[107] Johnson 1971.

[108] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 174.

bombing would yield reliable results. On October 5, 1964, George Ball delivered a memo to the president that criticized current U.S. policies. According to Ball, that there was little evidence that even a substantial air campaign could convince Hanoi to "permanently abandon its aggressive tendencies."[109] Indeed, the memo argued that escalatory tactics might inspire the North to reciprocate, forcing the U.S. to deploy ground troops and creating a costly spiral from which the Johnson would be unable to extricate himself. By January 27, 1965, Bundy and McNamara had similar concerns. Although the current policy of limited involvement had temporarily appeased the hawks, it would eventually lead to "defeat and an invitation to get out in humiliating circumstances."[110] Bundy and McNamara noted that the president now faced a choice: he could either use unrestricted military power to appease the hawks or begin the process of draw-down and withdrawal "with no major addition to our present military risks."[111]

Administration opinions on the dilemma were split. Ball noted the enormous costs and minimal benefits of the war, and encouraged Johnson to exit the conflict as gracefully as possible. Vice President Humphrey similarly urged Johnson to "cut his losses in Vietnam," arguing that the president's sweeping victory in November granted him a mandate to ignore Republican critics who preferred escalation[112] Unfortunately, appeasing Republican senators remained a high priority for Johnson, who believed he needed their support to ensure the adoption of his Great Society Legislation. Bundy and McNamara were also concerned with appeasing the hawks. "You need Vietnam to save your administration," they wrote. "If we lose because we have withheld our military power, you will be blamed, and nothing can undo the damage."[113] Bundy reiterated this claim when, on February 7, he returned from a visit to Vietnam and cautioned that the current limited intervention campaign was ineffective. As such, he recommended that the president select a new policy that would "damp down the charge that we did not do all we could have done." Although under an escalated policy "U.S. casualties would be higher," this price would be politically "cheap" compared

---

[109] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 166-167.
[110] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 214.
[111] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 215.
[112] Skowronek 1997, p. 343.
[113] Gardner 1995, p. 167.

to the cost of withdrawal or defeat.[114] Confiding to Carl Rowan that "Just between you and me, all I want to do is bloody their noses a little bit" Johnson approved "Rolling Thunder," an eight-week air campaign against the North Vietnamese.[115]

Although he was willing to approve a bombing campaign to appease the war hawks and avoid criticism as a dove, Johnson still doubted the desirability of committing U.S. troops. He granted a request from General Westmoreland for roughly 1,500 soldiers to defend the air base at Da Nang, but when the Joint Chiefs recommended that Johnson deploy a full 90,000 troops to Vietnam, the president objected and delivered only five thousand men. Johnson likewise sought to draw down the aerial bombing, even though he worried that doing so would cost him public support. A Gallup poll from April 1965 found that only 21% of respondents thought that the U.S. should stop its bombing; 59% recommended that it continue. Despite these figures, Johnson agreed to a week-long hiatus that he hoped would encourage the North to negotiate. During the break, the president fretted to McNamara, "the public has never wanted us to stop the bombing… we don't want to [stop] too long else we lose our base of support."[116] When the ceasefire ended without successful negotiations, pressure mounted for more aggressive military action. In another poll from June, 47% of respondents supported "sending more troops to defend South Vietnam," and a further 19% recommended that the U.S. maintain current troop deployments; only 11% of respondents preferred to take most troops out.

Finally, on June 5, Johnson assembled his primary advisors, including Ball, Bundy, McNamara, and Rusk for a decisive policy meeting about Vietnam. The questions the president posed in the meeting reveal his caution, uncertainty, and political motivations. Johnson acknowledged that his advisers had "no plan for victory militarily or diplomatically," but also that he "shudder[ed] to think what all 'em [in the public] would say" if he chose to withdraw.[117] McGeorge Bundy similarly

---

[114] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 219.

[115] Gardner (1995, p. 169). Polls from the period suggest that there was very little public enthusiasm for either negotiation or withdrawal. In a Gallup poll gathered before Johnson announced the expanded air campaign, 67% of respondents thought the U.S. should continue its present efforts in Vietnam, 47% of respondents thought that the U.S. should persist even if doing so risked nuclear war. Only 20% of those surveyed preferred withdrawal.

[116] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 285.

[117] McMaster and Williams 1997, p. 297.

recalled that despite the president's reservations about escalating the war, "his unspoken object was to protect his legislative program."[118] In the end, the least costly course of action when judged by immediate domestic politics was to deploy additional troops, and in July 1965 Johnson announced that he was increasing U.S. combat strength to 125,000 personnel, committing the U.S. to a conflict he never intended to fight and had no plan to win. As Herring (1995) summarizes, "Johnson's inability to wage war in cold blood produced what appears on the surface a great anomaly—one of the shrewdest politicians of the twentieth century committing a form of political suicide by taking the nation into a war he would have preferred not to fight."[119]

5   Conclusion

The finding that domestic political pressure can motivate leaders to initiate crises has important implications for international relations theory. First, although others have argued that domestic politics can influence conflict behavior, to my knowledge this paper is the first to argue that latent public enthusiasm for war can directly compel leaders to engage in combat. In other popular theories, the public is not *initially* reluctant to settle. For example, when leaders activate "audience costs" they deliberately cultivate hawkish public preferences in order to gain an international bargaining advantage.[120] In contrast, the "agency dilemma" pertains to cases in which leaders consistently sought to suppress public enthusiasm for fighting but were unable to sway public sentiment sufficiently. As such, this project highlights the fact that future analyses of war must account for the foreign policy preferences of the political constituents within each belligerent nation as well as the rational interests of the unitary state.

Second, I show that democracies in some cases appear more willing than autocracies to participate in costly and futile military campaigns. This finding contrasts with the prevailing view that "democracies are not eager to pursue wars they do not expect to win" and that democratic lead-

---

[118] Gibbons 2014, p. 426.

[119] Herring 1995, p. 173.

[120] See, for example, Fearon 1994, Haynes 2012, Kurizaki and Whang 2015.

ers "are highly selective; they prefer to negotiate when they do not anticipate military success."[121] Identifying conditions in which hawkish constituents can compel leaders to engage in inefficient fighting should also yield important policy implications given our emerging understanding of the "provocation" strategies that belligerent groups often pursue.[122] If citizens demand retaliation or escalation in the wake of violent episodes, then democratic states may present appealing targets for groups who aim to provoke a draconian response. As a result, states may be better able to dissuade transnational violence by tying their hands in ways that would *prevent* significant retaliation rather than by enhancing their capacity to respond with force.

The project therefore suggests several directions for future work. First, researchers should investigate specific conditions in which leaders are particularly likely to modify their crisis decision-making in response to public opinion.[123] This may include the role of term limits, electoral competition and the proximity of political challengers, the ease with which foreign policy failures can be attributed, as well as domestic pressures that autocrats face.[124] Models that allow leaders to select private or public negotiations, conditional on the preferences of their constituents, may also be worthwhile.[125] A third branch of research should analyze environments and attributes that make foreign policy a particularly salient public issue, including the domestic economic environment, military conscription policies, and female enfranchisement.[126] Finally, researchers should investigate whether constituent optimism can promote violent outcomes or encourage 'revolutionary momentum' in situations involving domestic violence, such as military coups and civil movements.[127]

---

[121] Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, p. 236. See also Reiter and Stam 2002.

[122] Carter 2016; Kydd and Walter 2006.

[123] Prins 2003, Risse-Kappen 1991.

[124] Haynes 2012, Gowa 1998, Weeks 2008, Gordon and Huber 2009, Narang and Staniland 2018.

[125] For similar work, see Kirpichevsky and Lipscy 2018, Carson and Yarhi-Milo 2017, and Carnegie and Carson 2018.

[126] Shaver et al. (2015), for example, shows that audiences are particularly optimistic when employment is high, while Trager et al. (2018) suggest in a recent conference paper that women are less optimistic about the use of force and that female voting participation is related to a decline in violence by democratic states.

[127] See, for example, Abrahams and Merrell 2019.

References

Abrahams, Alexei and Brandon Merrell (2019). "Monopolies of Violence: Civil Insurgency and the Accountability Paradox". Working paper.

Adamthwaite, Anthony P (1995). *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe, 1914–1940*.

Aksoy, Deniz (2014). "Elections and the timing of terrorist attacks". *The Journal of Politics* 76.4, pp. 899–913.

Aldrich, John H, Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, Jason Reifler, and Kristin Thompson Sharp (2006). "Foreign policy and the electoral connection". *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 9, pp. 477–502.

Ashworth, Scott and Ethan Bueno De Mesquita (2014). "Is voter competence good for voters?: Information, rationality, and democratic performance". *American Political Science Review* 108.3, pp. 565–587.

Ashworth, Scott and Kristopher W Ramsay (2009). *Optimal Domestic Constraints in International Crises*. Tech. rep. Working paper.

Ashworth, Scott and Kenneth W Shotts (2010). "Does informative media commentary reduce politicians' incentives to pander?" *Journal of Public Economics* 94.11-12, pp. 838–847.

Asprey, Robert B and Robert B Asprey (1994). *War in the shadows: the classic history of guerrilla warfare from ancient Persia to the present*. W. Morrow.

Bas, Muhammet A (2012). "Democratic inefficiency? Regime type and suboptimal choices in international politics". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56.5, pp. 799–824.

Baum, Matthew A (2004a). "Going private: Public opinion, presidential rhetoric, and the domestic politics of audience costs in US foreign policy crises". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48.5, pp. 603–631.

— (2004b). "How public opinion constrains the use of force: The case of Operation Restore Hope". *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34.2, pp. 187–226.

Baum, Matthew A and Tim Groeling (2005). "What gets covered? How media coverage of elite debate drives the rally-'round-the-flag phenomenon: 1979-1998". *In the public domain: Presidents and the challenges of public leadership*, pp. 71–106.

— (2009). "Shot by the messenger: Partisan cues and public opinion regarding national security and war". *Political Behavior* 31.2, pp. 157–186.

Baum, Matthew A and Philip BK Potter (2008). "The relationships between mass media, public opinion, and foreign policy: Toward a theoretical synthesis". *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 11, pp. 39–65.

— (2015). *War and democratic constraint: How the public influences foreign policy*. Princeton University Press.

Baxter, Christopher (2006). "A Very Great Clerk: Sir Ronald Campbell and the Fall Of France, May–June 1940". *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17.4, pp. 821–834.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph M Siverson, and James D Morrow (2003). *The logic of political survival*.

Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan and Eric S Dickson (2007). "The propaganda of the deed: Terrorism, counterterrorism, and mobilization". *American Journal of Political Science* 51.2, pp. 364–381.

Burr, Robert N (1967). *By Reason or Force: Chile and the balancing of power in South America, 1830-1905*. Vol. 77. Univ of California Press.

Butler, Daniel M and Adam M Dynes (2016). "How politicians discount the opinions of constituents with whom they disagree". *American Journal of Political Science* 60.4, pp. 975–989.

Canes-Wrone, Brandice (2001). "The president's legislative influence from public appeals". *American Journal of Political Science*, pp. 313–329.

Carnegie, Allison and Austin Carson (2018). "The Spotlight's Harsh Glare: Rethinking Publicity and International Order". *International Organization* 72.3, pp. 627–657.

Carson, Austin and Keren Yarhi-Milo (2017). "Covert communication: the intelligibility and credibility of signaling in secret". *Security Studies* 26.1, pp. 124–156.

Carter, David B (2016). "Provocation and the strategy of terrorist and guerrilla attacks". *International Organization* 70.1, pp. 133–173.

Caverley, Jonathan D (2014). *Democratic militarism: voting, wealth, and war*. Vol. 131. Cambridge University Press.

Charlton, Michael and Anthony Moncrieff (1978). *Many reasons why: the American involvement in Vietnam*. Ashgate Publishing.

Chiozza, Giacomo and Hein E Goemans (2003). "Peace through insecurity: Tenure and international conflict". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47.4, pp. 443–467.

Chiozza, Giacomo and Hein Erich Goemans (2011). *Leaders and international conflict*. Cambridge University Press.

Churchill, Winston (1949). *The Second World War-Volume 1: The Gathering Storm*. Rosetta Book LLC.

Churchill, Winston and Fred Cook (2013). *The second world war*. A&C Black.

Clare, Joe (2014). "Hawks, doves, and international cooperation". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58.7, pp. 1311–1337.

Coe, Andrew J (2012). "Costly peace: A new rationalist explanation for war".

Cohen, Michael D (2016). "Live and Learn: Availability Biases and Beliefs about Military Power". *Foreign Policy Analysis* 13.4, pp. 968–985.

Crisman-Cox, Casey and Michael Gibilisco (2018). "Audience Costs and the Dynamics of War and Peace". *American Journal of Political Science* 62.3, pp. 566–580.

De Mesquita, Bruce Bueno, James D Morrow, Randolph M Siverson, and Alastair Smith (2004). "Testing novel implications from the selectorate theory of war". *World Politics* 56.3, pp. 363–388.

Debs, Alexandre and Hein E Goemans (2010). "Regime type, the fate of leaders, and war". *American Political Science Review* 104.3, pp. 430–445.

Dethlefsen, Henrik (1996). "Anpassung, Kollaboration, Widerstand: Kollektive Reaktionen auf die Okkupation". In: ed. by Wolfgang Benz, Johannes Houwink ten Cate, and Gerhard Otto. Berlin: Metropol, pp. 25–41.

Downs, George W and David M Rocke (1994). "Conflict, agency, and gambling for resurrection: The principal-agent problem goes to war". *American Journal of Political Science*, pp. 362–380.

Doyle, Michael W (1986). "Liberalism and world politics". *American political science review* 80.4, pp. 1151–1169.

Dugan, Laura and Erica Chenoweth (2012). "Moving beyond deterrence: The effectiveness of raising the expected utility of abstaining from terrorism in Israel". *American Sociological Review* 77.4, pp. 597–624.

Fang, Songying, Xiaojun Li, Atsushi Tago, and Daina Chiba (2017). "Territorial Indivisibility and Domestic Preference for Dispute Resolution: Evidence from Japan". In: American Political Science Association Annual Meeting.

Farcau, Bruce W (2000). *The Ten Cents War: Chile, Peru, and Bolivia in the War of the Pacific, 1879-1884*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

Fearon, James (2002). "Selection effects and deterrence". *International Interactions* 28.1, pp. 5–29.

Fearon, James D (1994). "Domestic political audiences and the escalation of international disputes". *American Political Science Review* 88.3, pp. 577–592.

— (1995). "Rationalist explanations for war". *International Organization* 49.3, pp. 379–414.

— (1998). "Domestic politics, foreign policy, and theories of international relations". *Annual Review of Political Science* 1.1, pp. 289–313.

Ferejohn, John and Frances McCall Rosenbluth (2008). "Warlike democracies". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52.1, pp. 3–38.

Fey, Mark and Kristopher W Ramsay (2011). "Uncertainty and Incentives in Crisis Bargaining: Game-Free Analysis of International Conflict". *American Journal of Political Science* 55.1, pp. 149–169.

Filson, Darren and Suzanne Werner (2004). "Bargaining and fighting: The impact of regime type on war onset, duration, and outcomes". *American Journal of Political Science* 48.2, pp. 296–313.

Fox, Justin and Richard Van Weelden (2012). "Costly transparency". *Journal of Public Economics* 96.1-2, pp. 142–150.

Gardner, Lloyd C (1995). *Pay any price: Lyndon Johnson and the wars for Vietnam*. Vol. 134. Chicago.

Gates, Eleanor M (1981). *End of the affair: the collapse of the Anglo-French alliance, 1939-40*. Univ of California Press.

Gelpi, Christopher (1997). "Democratic diversions: Governmental structure and the externalization of domestic conflict". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41.2, pp. 255–282.

Gibbons, William Conrad (2014). *The US Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part IV: July 1965-January 1968*. Vol. 4. Princeton University Press.

Gilbert, Adrian (2000). *Germany's Lightning War: The Campaigns of World War II*. Motorbooks International.

Gordon, Sanford C and Gregory Huber (2009). "The effect of electoral competitiveness on incumbent behavior".

Gowa, Joanne (1998). "Politics at the water's edge: Parties, voters, and the use of force abroad". *International Organization* 52.2, pp. 307–324.

Groeling, Tim and Matthew A Baum (2009). "Journalists? incentives and media coverage of elite foreign policy evaluations". *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 26.5, pp. 437–470.

Hafner-Burton, Emilie M, Stephan Haggard, David A Lake, and David G Victor (2017). "The behavioral revolution and international relations". *International Organization* 71.S1, S1–S31.

Hamilton, Alexander, James Madison, and John Jay (2008). *The federalist papers*. Oxford University Press.

Haun, Phil (2015). *Coercion, Survival, and War: Why Weak States Resist the United States*. Stanford University Press.

Haynes, Kyle (2012). "Lame ducks and coercive diplomacy: Do executive term limits reduce the effectiveness of democratic threats?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56.5, pp. 771–798.

Herring, George C (1995). *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War*. McGraw Hill.

Hlavac, Marek (2013). "stargazer: LaTeX code and ASCII text for well-formatted regression and summary statistics tables". *URL: http://CRAN. R-project. org/package= stargazer*.

Hollander, Ethan J (2017). *Hegemony and the Holocaust*. Springer.

Holsti, Ole R (1992). "Public opinion and foreign policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann consensus". *International studies quarterly* 36.4, pp. 439–466.

Horowitz, Michael C, Allan C Stam, and Cali M Ellis (2015). *Why leaders fight*. Cambridge University Press.

Hucker, Daniel (2007). "French public attitudes towards the prospect of war in 1938–1939: pacifism or war anxiety". *French history* 21.4, pp. 431–449.

Jackson, Julian (2004). *The fall of France: The Nazi invasion of 1940*. Oxford University Press.

Johnson, Lyndon Baines (1971). *The vantage point: Perspectives of the presidency, 1963-1969*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston New York.

Kahneman, Daniel and Jonathan Renshon (2009). "Hawkish biases". *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation Since* 9.11, pp. 79–96.

Kertzer, Joshua D (2017). "Resolve, time, and risk". *International Organization* 71.S1, S109–S136.

Kertzer, Joshua D and Thomas Zeitzoff (2017). "A Bottom-Up Theory of Public Opinion about Foreign Policy". *American Journal of Political Science* 61.3, pp. 543–558.

Kirkpatrick, Frederick Alexander (2013). *Latin America: a brief history*. Cambridge University Press.

Kirpichevsky, Yevgeniy and Phillip Y Lipscy (2018). "The Dark Side of Democratic Advantage: International Crises and Secret Agreements".

Klarevas, Louis (2002). "The essential domino of military operations: American public opinion and the use of force". *International Studies Perspectives* 3.4, pp. 417–437.

Koch, Michael T and Stephen P Nicholson (2016). "Death and turnout: The human costs of war and voter participation in democracies". *American Journal of Political Science* 60.4, pp. 932–946.

Krainin, Colin (2017). "Preventive war as a result of long-term shifts in power". *Political Science Research and Methods* 5.1, pp. 103–121.

Kreps, Sarah E, Elizabeth N Saunders, and Kenneth A Schultz (2018). "The Ratification Premium: Hawks, Doves, and Arms Control". *World Politics* 70.4, pp. 479–514.

Kriner, Douglas L (2010). *After the Rubicon: Congress, Presidents, and the Politics of Waging War*. University of Chicago Press.

Kriner, Douglas L and Francis X Shen (2014). "Reassessing American casualty sensitivity: The mediating influence of inequality". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58.7, pp. 1174–1201.

Kriner, Douglas, Breanna Lechase, and Rosella Cappella Zielinski (2018). "Self-interest, partisanship, and the conditional influence of taxation on support for war in the USA". *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35.1, pp. 43–64.

Kurizaki, Shuhei and Taehee Whang (2015). "Detecting audience costs in international disputes". *International Organization* 69.4, pp. 949–980.

Kydd, Andrew H and Barbara F Walter (2006). "The strategies of terrorism". *International Security* 31.1, pp. 49–80.

La Gorce, Jérôme de (1988). *Un proche collaborateur de Lully: Philippe Quinault*. Société d'étude du XVIIe siècle.

Laborie, Pierre (2001). *L'opinion française sous Vichy. Les Français et la crise d'identité nationale, 1936-1944*.

Lake, David (1992). "Powerful pacifists: Democratic states and war". *American Political Science Review* 86.1, pp. 24–37.

Lake, David A (2002). "Rational extremism: Understanding terrorism in the twenty-first century". *Dialogue IO* 1.1, pp. 15–28.

Lee, Jong R (1977). "Rallying around the flag: Foreign policy events and presidential popularity". *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 7.4, pp. 252–256.

Leventoğlu, Bahar and Branislav L Slantchev (2007). "The armed peace: a punctuated equilibrium theory of war". *American Journal of Political Science* 51.4, pp. 755–771.

Levy, Jack S (1988). "Domestic politics and war". *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18.4, pp. 653–673.

Lindsey, David (2019). "Mutual Optimism and Costly Conflict: The Case of Naval Battles in the Age of Sail". *The Journal of Politics* 81.4, pp. 000–000.

Lindsey, David and David Lake (2014). *The Moral Foundations of Individual-Level Foreign Policy Preferences*. Tech. rep. Working Paper, University of California, San Diego.

Lippmann, Walter (1955). *Essays in the public philosophy*. Transaction Publishers.

Marshall, Monty G and Keith Jaggers (2002). "Polity IV project: Political regime characteristics and transitions, 1800-2002".

McDermott, Rose (2001). *Risk-taking in international politics: Prospect theory in American foreign policy*. University of Michigan Press.

McMaster, Herbert R and Jake Williams (1997). *Dereliction of duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Mc-Namara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the lies that led to Vietnam*. Vol. 51. HarperCollins New York.

Merrell, Brandon (2016). "Pandering to War: Military Escalation in Response to Public Demand". In: American Political Science Association Annual Meeting.

— (2019). "Denmark, 1940-1945: Armed Resistance and Agency Slippage in Germany's Model Protectorate". In: *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence Through Local Agents*. Ed. by David Lake and Eli Berman. Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press. Chap. 2, pp. 53–79.

Merrell, Brandon and Alexei Abrahams (2019). "The Secrecy Gambit: Clandestine Power Shifts and Preventive Conflict". Working paper.

Miller, Steven V and Douglas M Gibler (2011). "Democracies, territory, and negotiated compromises". *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28.3, pp. 261–279.

Mitchell, Sara McLaughlin and Brandon C Prins (2004). "Rivalry and diversionary uses of force". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48.6, pp. 937–961.

Moravcsik, Andrew (1997). "Taking preferences seriously: A liberal theory of international politics". *International organization* 51.4, pp. 513–553.

Morgan, T Clifton and Sally Howard Campbell (1991). "Domestic structure, decisional constraints, and war: so why Kant democracies fight?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35.2, pp. 187–211.

Morrow, James D (1989). "Capabilities, uncertainty, and resolve: A limited information model of crisis bargaining". *American Journal of Political Science*, pp. 941–972.

— (1993). "Arms versus allies: trade-offs in the search for security". *International Organization* 47.2, pp. 207–233.

Nanes, Matthew J (2017). "Political Violence Cycles: Electoral Incentives and the Provision of Counterterrorism". *Comparative Political Studies* 50.2, pp. 171–199.

Narang, Vipin and Paul Staniland (2018). "Democratic Accountability and Foreign Security Policy: Theory and Evidence from India". *Security Studies*, pp. 1–38.

Oakes, Amy (2006). "Diversionary war and Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands". *Security Studies* 15.3, pp. 431–463.

— (2012). *Diversionary war: Domestic unrest and international conflict*. Stanford University Press.

Powell, Robert (1999). *In the shadow of power: States and strategies in international politics*. Princeton University Press.

— (2004). "The inefficient use of power: Costly conflict with complete information". *American Political Science Review* 98.2, pp. 231–241.

— (2006). "War as a commitment problem". *International Organization* 60.1, pp. 169–203.

Prins, Brandon C (2003). "Institutional instability and the credibility of audience costs: Political participation and interstate crisis bargaining, 1816-1992". *Journal of Peace Research* 40.1, pp. 67–84.

Ramsay, Kristopher W (2004). "Politics at the water's edge: Crisis bargaining and electoral competition". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48.4, pp. 459–486.

— (2017). "Information, Uncertainty, and War". *Annual Review of Political Science* 20, pp. 505–527.

Rathbun, Brian C, Joshua D Kertzer, and Mark Paradis (2017). "Homo diplomaticus: Mixed-method evidence of variation in strategic rationality". *International Organization* 71.S1, S33–S60.

Reiter, Dan and Allan C Stam (2002). *Democracies at war*. Princeton University Press.

Renshon, Jonathan, Julia J Lee, and Dustin Tingley (2017). "Emotions and the micro-foundations of commitment problems". *International Organization* 71.S1, S189–S218.

Richards, Diana, T Clifton Morgan, Rick K Wilson, Valerie L Schwebach, and Garry D Young (1993). "Good times, bad times, and the diversionary use of force: A tale of some not-so-free agents". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37.3, pp. 504–535.

Risse-Kappen, Thomas (1991). "Public opinion, domestic structure, and foreign policy in liberal democracies". *World Politics* 43.4, pp. 479–512.

Sater, William F (1986). *Chile and the War of the Pacific*. University of Nebraska Press.

— (2007). *Andean tragedy: fighting the war of the Pacific, 1879-1884*. U of Nebraska Press.

Saunders, Elizabeth N (2011). *Leaders at war: how presidents shape military interventions*. Cornell University Press.

— (2017). "No Substitute for Experience: Presidents, Advisers, and Information in Group Decision Making". *International Organization* 71.S1, S219–S247.

Saunders, Elizabeth N and Scott Wolford (2016). "Elites, Voters, and Democracies at War".

Schneider, Christina J and Branislav L Slantchev (2018). "The domestic politics of international cooperation: Germany and the European debt crisis". *International Organization* 72.1, pp. 1–31.

Schultz, Kenneth A (2001a). *Democracy and coercive diplomacy*. Vol. 76. Cambridge University Press.

— (2001b). "Looking for audience costs". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45.1, pp. 32–60.

Shaver, Andrew et al. (2015). "Employment Status and Support for Wartime Violence: Evidence from the Iraq War".

Shepperd, Alan (1990). *France 1940: Blitzkrieg in the West*. Vol. 3. Osprey Publishing.

Shlaim, Avi (1974). "Prelude to Downfall: The British Offer of Union to France, June 1940". *Journal of Contemporary History* 9.3, pp. 27–63.

Singer, J David, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey (1972). "Capability distribution, uncertainty, and major power war, 1820-1965". *Peace, war, and numbers* 19, p. 48.

Skowronek, Stephen (1997). *The politics presidents make: leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*. Harvard University Press.

Slantchev, Branislav L (2003). "The principle of convergence in wartime negotiations". *American Political Science Review* 97.4, pp. 621–632.

Slantchev, Branislav L (2006). "Politicians, the media, and domestic audience costs". *International Studies Quarterly* 50.2, pp. 445–477.

— (2012a). "Audience cost theory and its audiences". *Security Studies* 21.3, pp. 376–382.

— (2012b). "Borrowed power: Debt finance and the resort to arms". *American Political Science Review* 106.4, pp. 787–809.

Slantchev, Branislav L and Ahmer Tarar (2011). "Mutual optimism as a rationalist explanation of war". *American Journal of Political Science* 55.1, pp. 135–148.

Smith, Alastair (1996). "Diversionary foreign policy in democratic systems". *International Studies Quarterly* 40.1, pp. 133–153.

— (1998). "International crises and domestic politics". *American Political Science Review* 92.3, pp. 623–638.

Stempel, John D (1965). *Policy/Decision making in the Department of State: The Vietnamese problem, 1961-1965*. University of California.

Tarar, Ahmer (2006). "Diversionary incentives and the bargaining approach to war". *International Studies Quarterly* 50.1, pp. 169–188.

Tir, Jaroslav, Philip Schafer, Paul F Diehl, and Gary Goertz (1998). "Territorial changes, 1816–1996: Procedures and data". *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 16.1, pp. 89–97.

Tomz, Michael (2007). "Domestic audience costs in international relations: An experimental approach". *International Organization* 61.4, pp. 821–840.

Tomz, Michael and Jessica Weeks (2013). "Public opinion and the democratic peace". *American political science review* 107.4, pp. 849–865.

Tomz, Michael and Jessica LP Weeks (2015). "Military Alliances and Public Support for War". *Unpublished manuscript, Stanford University*.

Tomz, Michael, Jessica Weeks, and Keren Yarhi-Milo (2016). "How and why does public opinion affect foreign policy in democracies?" In: American Political Science Association Annual Meeting.

Trager, Robert, Allan Dafoe, Elizabeth Nathan Saunders, and Joslyn N. Barnhart (2018). "The Suffragist Peace". In: American Political Science Association Annual Meeting.

Warner, Geoffrey (1994). "President Kennedy and Indochina: the 1961 decisions". *International Affairs* 70.4, pp. 685–700.

Weeks, Jessica L (2008). "Autocratic audience costs: Regime type and signaling resolve". *International Organization* 62.1, pp. 35–64.

Zellman, Ariel (2018). "Uneven Ground: Nationalist Frames and the Variable Salience of Homeland". *Security Studies*, pp. 1–26.