

# A Unified Explanation of Territorial Conflict

POSC 3610 – International Conflict

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## Goal for Today

*Highlight why disputes, once initiated, escalate to war and why selection matters.*

# Territorial Disputes and War

Vasquez (1993, 1995) argues territorial issues are a root cause of war.

- He draws from evolutionary psychology, primitive anthropology, and sociobiology to make that argument.
- However, data limitations hindered an issue-politics paradigm in IR.

The release of version 2.0 of CoW-MID changed this.

- From there, a slew of scholarship argued territorial MIDs are more likely to lead to war.

# Non-Random Sampling and Selection Bias

However, MIDs are not a “random data-generating process” (DGP).

- i.e. Second Kashmir War (MID#1312) was not a roll of the dice.
- The India-Pakistan dyad is not randomly drawn from an urn.

# Non-Random Sampling and Selection Bias

However, *all* our statistical models assume random DGP.

- This is the inference in inferential statistics.
- i.e. we infer about the population with a sample of the population.

MIDs are not randomly sampled. They're event data.

# Non-Random Sampling and Selection Bias

Important for our purposes. MIDs are events that, by definition, carry a higher probability of war.

- We don't know yet if territorial issues are truly war-prone.
- We just know territorial MIDs are more likely to lead to war and most wars are fought over territory.

# Possible Relationships Between Territory and War

TABLE 1. Theoretical Expectations Based on a Territorial Explanation of Conflict and War

	<i>Territory Impact at the Escalation to War Step</i>		
		<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
Territory Impact at the Dispute Onset Step	Positive	Most Consistent <i>a</i>	Mixed Results <i>b</i>
	Negative	Mixed Results <i>c</i>	Exact Opposite <i>d</i>

*a* = Territorial claim increases the likelihood of a MID and a Territorial MID increases the likelihood of escalation to war

*b* = Territorial claim increases the likelihood of a MID and a Territorial MID *decreases* the likelihood of escalation to war

*c* = Territorial claim *decreases* the likelihood of a MID and a Territorial MID increases the likelihood of escalation to war

*d* = Territorial claim *decreases* the likelihood of a MID and a Territorial MID *decreases* the likelihood of escalation to war

## Table 1 in Senese and Vasquez (2003)

Our intuition suggests the top-left quadrant.

- i.e. disputed territory leads to MIDs.
- MIDs over distribution of territory lead to war.



## Table 1 in Senese and Vasquez (2003)

Other empirical scenarios are plausible and consistent with the data.

- States may have a lot of territorial MIDs but those rarely escalate (i.e. top-right)
- Territorial MIDs lead to war but states are reticent to initiate MIDs (i.e. bottom-left)
- We're all wrong about the bellicosity of territorial issues (i.e. bottom-right)

## Senese and Vasquez (2003)

Senese and Vasquez (2003) will use a selection model to test the following:

- Dyads with territorial claims are more likely to culminate in MIDs.
- Territorial MIDs are more likely to escalate toward war.

## Senese and Vasquez's (2003) Design

*DVs:*

- onset of a MID, war as highest fatality-level

This is functionally similar what Reed (2000) did in his model.

# Senese and Vasquez's (2003) Design

## *Primary IVs:*

- Selection model: territorial claim (Huth, 1996)
- War/escalation model: Policy/Regime/Other MIDs to baseline of territorial MIDs.

## If the steps-to-war intuition is correct:

- Dyad-years with territorial claims are more likely to lead to MIDs. And:
- MIDs over other issues should be less war-prone than territorial MIDs.

# Senese and Vasquez's (2003) Design

## *Other IVs (i.e. controls)*

- Contiguity
- Minimum democracy (i.e. weak-link specification)
- Joint alliance
- Economic development
- Great power status (i.e. major-major, minor-minor)
  - Baseline: a major-minor (e.g. USA-Canada) dyad-year

# Senese and Vasquez's (2003) Design

Important methodological notes:

- Model includes peace years/splines for temporal auto-correlation.
- *Unit of analysis*: non-directed dyad-years
- *Temporal domain*: 1919-1992
- *Statistical method*: Heckman selection model
  - This will model selection into MID and then escalation to war simultaneously.

TABLE 2. Effect of Territory on Dispute and War Onset (within five years), 1919–1992  
(Probit Estimates)

Variables in Model	Base Model		Model w/Controls	
	War Onset	Joint Model	War Onset	Joint Model
<b>Y<sub>1</sub>: MID Onset</b>				
MID Constant	—	– <b>2.171</b> (0.017)	—	– <b>1.501</b> (0.034)
Territorial Claim	—	<b>1.558</b> (0.025)	—	<b>0.716</b> (0.036)
Minimum Democracy	—	—	—	– <b>0.034</b> (0.002)
Allies	—	—	—	0.027 (0.033)
Contiguity	—	—	—	<b>0.941</b> (0.032)
Economic Development	—	—	—	<b>0.222</b> (0.021)
Major-Major Status	—	—	—	<b>0.457</b> (0.069)
Minor-Minor Status	—	—	—	– <b>0.615</b> (0.026)
Peace Yrs <sup>a</sup>	—	– <b>0.165</b> (0.007)	—	– <b>0.199</b> (0.009)
<b>Y<sub>2</sub>: War Onset</b>				
War Constant	– <b>0.337</b> (0.049)	– <b>0.489</b> (0.124)	0.084 (0.107)	– 0.302 (0.234)
Policy MID <sup>b</sup>	– <b>1.223</b> (0.085)	– <b>1.244</b> (0.090)	– <b>1.107</b> (0.097)	– <b>1.095</b> (0.101)
Regime MID <sup>b</sup>	– <b>1.095</b> (0.145)	– <b>1.119</b> (0.147)	– <b>1.081</b> (0.175)	– <b>1.066</b> (0.175)
Other MID <sup>b</sup>	– <i>1.331</i> (0.471)	– <i>1.359</i> (0.476)	– 0.913 (0.509)	– 0.867 (0.509)
Minimum Democracy	—	—	– <i>0.023</i> (0.011)	– <i>0.022</i> (0.011)
Allies	—	—	– <i>0.273</i> (0.120)	– <i>0.255</i> (0.120)
Contiguity	—	—	– 0.193 (0.100)	– <i>0.326</i> (0.155)
Economic Development	—	—	– <b>0.391</b> (0.105)	– <b>0.388</b> (0.104)
Major-Major Status	—	—	<b>0.618</b> (0.175)	<i>0.563</i> (0.184)
Minor-Minor Status	—	—	– <i>0.316</i> (0.104)	– <i>0.258</i> (0.120)
ρ	N/A	0.069 (0.052)	N/A	– 0.094 (.091)
Wald $\chi^2$ (df)	<b>232.15</b> (3)	<b>212.78</b> (3)	<b>205.94</b> (9)	<b>197.01</b> (9)
# of Observations	1705	446,929	1395	319,872

NOTE: **Bold** =  $p < .001$ , *Italics* =  $p < .05$  (all two-tailed). Robust standard errors in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>The spline coefficients are not reported.

<sup>b</sup>As compared to the reference category of Territorial MID.

# What Do We Know About War Onset?

Senese and Vasquez (2003) have the following findings about war onset:

- Regime and Policy MIDs are much less likely to escalate to war than territorial MIDs.
  - Other MIDs drifts negative but estimated effect is diffuse.
- Joint democracy “weak-link” has a small but discernible negative effect on escalation.
- Allies are unlikely to escalate MIDs to war.
- Economic developed dyads are unlikely to escalate MIDs to war.
- Major-Majors (e.g. France-Germany) are more war-prone than Major-Minors (e.g. USA-Canada).
  - Also: Minor-Minors (e.g. Canada-Mexico) are less war-prone than Major-Minors.



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# What Do We Know About Conflict?

Implications of Senese and Vasquez's (2003) unified model:

- *Importantly:* territorial claims lead to MIDs and MIDs over territory are the most war-prone.
  - This is ultimately what they're focused on testing.

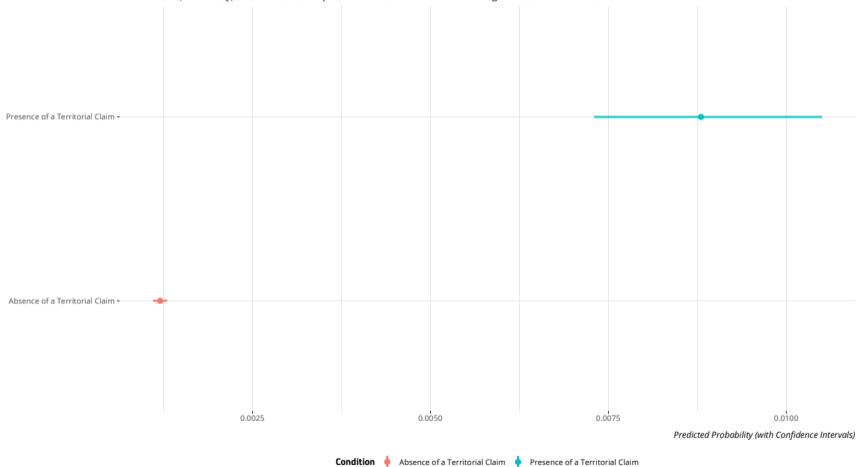
# What Do We Know About Conflict?

## Other findings:

- Joint democracy is pacifying at both phases of conflict.
- Economically developed states have more MIDs, but are unlikely to escalate.
  - Both are inconsistent with Reed (2000) whose findings may be sensitive to his temporal domain.
- Contiguity leads to MIDs but most wars involve non-contiguous states.
  - This is still the case, btw, in the GML MID data.

## The Presence of a Territorial Claim Increases the Likelihood of MID Onset by Over 600%

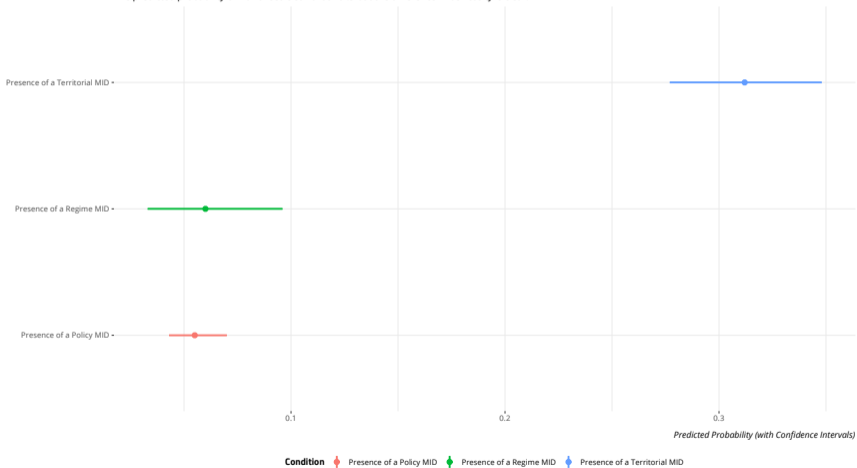
MIDs are still (fortunately) rare events but the presence of a territorial claim has a large effect on conflict initiation.



Reproduction of first two rows in Table 3 of Senese and Vasquez (2003)

## Territorial MIDs are More than Four Times as Likely to Culminate in War Relative to MIDs Over Other Issues

The predicted probability of war onset is still around .3 but the difference in bellicosity is clear.



Reproduction of first three rows in Table 3 of Senese and Vasquez (2003)

# Conclusion

Senese and Vasquez (2003) present a unified explanation of territorial conflict.

- Territorial claims between states are likely to become militarized.
- Territorial MIDs are likely to lead to war.

It's important to separate correlates of dispute onset from dispute escalation.

- Factors that promote MID onset need not promote war onset.

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