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Buhaug (2006) Replication and Extension: The Addition of Foreign Aid

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Abstract

Buhaug (2006) contributes both empirically and theoretically to the literature on civil war onset by disaggregating civil wars into two types based on rebel motivations determined by their capability. The puzzle Buhaug (2006) addressed relates to the mixed findings of ethnic fractionalization as a variable in the previous civil war onset literature, wherein some found it to be significant and others did not. Buhaug (2006) argued that this is because prior studies mostly failed to distinguish between territorial (secessionist) and governmental (state takeover) conflicts, instead treating civil war as a single category (e.g., Fearon and Laitin 2003). Ultimately, he finds evidence for his preferred method of disaggregating civil wars. While valuable, we argue that Buhaug (2006)'s work is limited because it fails to account for the possibility of outside actors' influence on potential rebel capabilities and objectives, specifically, foreign aid's potential to raise rebel capability if it is co-opted. We find evidence that foreign aid does have an impact on the likelihood of civil war onset, but the direction and magnitude of that relationship are dependent on both the type of conflict and type of aid. This implies it is worthwhile to disaggregate both types of civil wars as posited by Buhaug (2006), but it is likewise valuable to include and disaggregate foreign aid inflows.

Introduction

Buhaug (2006) identifies a reason behind the disjointed findings in the civil war literature by accounting for the differing capabilities of rebels and how those shape their objectives. The puzzle the author is addressing relates to the mixed findings of ethnic fractionalization as a variable in the previous civil war onset literature, wherein some found it to be significant and others did not. Prior studies mostly failed to distinguish between territorial (secessionist) and governmental (state takeover) conflicts, instead treating civil war as a single category (e.g., Fearon and Laitin 2003). Buhaug highlights how studying these differing objectives is vital because they involve different causal mechanisms.

While some of the literature Buhaug (2006) engages with did recognize the heterogeneity of civil wars, it was focused on the dimensions of ethnic versus ideological conflict (Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Licklider 1995; Reynal-Querol 2002; Sambanis 2001). The literature had mixed findings on ethnic conflict's relationship with civil war onset. For example, Fearon and Laitin (2003) found little to no effect. Conventional wisdom presumed that ethnic conflicts were almost synonymous with secessionist conflict, but that is not the case. While some ethnic conflicts are indeed secessionist, other ethnic conflicts are actually governmental in nature (e.g. Rwanda, Burundi) (Buhaug 2006).

Buhaug (2006) attributes the literature's shortcomings in this respect to an incomplete consideration of the capability of rebels to overthrow (governmental) or to challenge the sovereignty of (secessionist) the main government. Previous work posited that poor and institutionally weak states are more prone to civil war onset (e.g., Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003). Buhaug (2006) expands upon this by arguing that weak states are vulnerable to rebellions aiming to seize the government. Strong states (including democracies) may still face territorial challenges, especially if they are large and have many remote regions and marginalized groups.

The author finds that the conventional wisdom of the "inverted U" relationship between democracy and civil war only holds for governmental conflicts, so when there is more democracy, there is a higher risk of territorial conflicts (Buhaug 2006). In line with conventional wisdom, higher GDP per capita reduces the risk of both types of civil conflict. Further, oil-exporting nations are especially prone to governmental conflict, though some evidence shows oil may also drive secessionist conflict under different thresholds. Larger countries are much more likely to face territorial conflicts. Ethnic fractionalization increases the risk of territorial conflict but has little effect on governmental conflict.

We argue that Buhaug (2006) is somewhat limited because, while he addresses the different types of civil conflict in the forms of governmental and territorial, he does not address the presence of influence from external factors. We theorize that foreign aid is a missing component in the existing literature on rebel objectives. We include foreign aid as a key variable in our extension due to its potential to influence rebel capabilities through co-optation. Through our four-part extension, we first alter Buhaug (2006)'s Model 2, a multinomial logistic regression on the likelihood of territorial and governmental conflict onset; we alter Model 2 by adding moderators of aid x GDP (logged) and aid x Polity Score (squared, logged). Second, we re-run that analysis with an interaction between ethnic fractionalization and foreign aid. Third, we perform that analysis with disaggregated types of aid into the top ten most common categories. Finally, we interact ethnic fractionalization with each of the disaggregated aid types. We run these analyses in order to expand upon Buhaug's initial argument by testing whether these state characteristics are instrumental in determining rebel capabilities and objectives. Ethnic fractionalization was of particular interest because of the puzzling mixed findings in the literature as well as the degree of transformation that was seen between Buhaug (2006)'s analysis and our analysis when the foreign aid moderators were included.

Ultimately, we find results that support Buhaug (2006)'s argument that the literature should differentiate between territorial and governmental conflict. There are marked differences in the estimates for civil conflict onset between these types and between different types of foreign aid. Generally, foreign aid has a statistically significant effect on conflict onset, but whether that is positive or negative depends on both the type of foreign aid and whether it is interacted with ethnic fractionalization.

Theory

While Buhaug's article provides an account of the structural characteristics that shape rebel group objectives, he focuses on regime type, economic development, and ethnic diversity as control variables. These control variables may actually have a role as interactive factors shaping how external factors influence conflict dynamics. Our extension builds upon Buhaug's framework through the introduction of a new variable, foreign aid. Foreign aid is used as a critical external factor that influences the objectives of rebel groups. The control variables come into play as an extension of foreign aid, in which aid is conditional on these various state characteristics. Regime type, economic capacity, and ethnic composition describe the state and may influence the allocation of foreign aid, which could in turn influence the objectives of the rebel groups. Our theory outlines the interactions of these variables and the implications they hold for rebel group objectives and the overarching conflict literature.

Buhaug (2006) outlines a framework focused on internal state characteristics and the way they shape rebel strategies and objectives. However, a gap in this model is the identification of external variables as influential in shaping rebel capability. We theorize that foreign aid is a critical external resource that can shift rebel strategy. Foreign aid is a widely discussed topic in

conflict literature and can influence rebel objectives because, depending on state characteristics, aid can be diverted or captured by non-state actors, contributing to their relative capabilities. Aid is also a variable that can influence both the rebel and state actors in a conflict, which can impact the strategic choices made by rebel actors. Additionally, aid can be seen as a potential negative externality that can indirectly empower rebel actors through several types of incentives (Wood and Sullivan 2010). This makes foreign aid a particularly compelling variable to extend Buhaug's study. The conventional literature has found that the presence of aid can fuel competition for resources (Nielsen et al. 2011), can create incentives for civilian targeting (Wood and Sullivan 2010), can influence economic growth (Bearce and Tirone 2015), and can be influenced by the governance or regime type of a state (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009). The existing literature has identified the impact potential of foreign aid on conflicts and rebel group objectives.

However, foreign aid does not impact all rebel groups and states in the same way. The effect of foreign aid is conditional on the structure of the recipient state. Regime type, economic development, and ethnic composition are all factors that shape the structure of a state. Regime type can influence the negotiations between donor and recipient countries, as well as the implementation of aid (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009). Oftentimes, foreign aid is a product of political concessions from the recipient country. Democratic regimes may be more apt to transparently allocate aid and use it for the efficient increase in state capacity (Bearce and Tirone 2010). Alternatively, autocratic regimes may divert aid to sectors fueling regime survival, which may not be shared with certain groups or may not enhance development (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009). The presence of foreign aid could fuel grievances or empower rebel actors to loot or to assert their authority through violent means (Nielsen et al. 2011; Wood and Sullivan 2015). Evidently, these governance structures can moderate the impact of aid, which ultimately can influence rebel group capability and strategy.

Lastly, ethnic composition is another critical structural variable that can shape foreign aid's impact on rebel objectives. Ethnic power structure and the inclusion or exclusion of ethnic groups from access to state institutions can influence conflict dynamics (Wimmer et al. 2009). States that have one ethnic group dominating the central political structure may promote conflict due to other groups feeling excluded and wanting to mobilize (Wimmer et al. 2009). Buhaug argues that ethnic diversity may increase the likelihood of violence (2006). Additionally, he asserts that heightened fragmentation in a state can increase feelings of exclusion and marginalization, which may lead to greater grievances (Buhaug 2006). This variable clearly has implications for rebel objectives. This structural imbalance can be applied to our extension of foreign aid. If one ethnic group has primary structural power, it likely can distribute aid as it sees fit. This may further reinforce exclusion and cause groups to mobilize.

Building upon the conventional literature, we argue that the impact of our foreign aid extension is conditional on structural features of the recipient state. We focus on three mechanisms: regime type, economic development, and ethnic fractionalization. Regime type can shape how aid is absorbed and constrained (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2009). Foreign aid

can stimulate economic growth, but it can also cause aid volatility and shocks (Nielsen et al. 2011). Lastly, ethnic fractionalization can indicate power structure and reinforce grievances (Wimmer et al. 2009). We would expect that foreign aid will be more likely to influence rebel group objectives in scenarios in which these structural conditions are present.

Replication

The main empirical component of the paper consists of two main models, a logit and a multinomial. The independent variables include democracy, anocracy, GDP per capita, oil exports, country size (log), ethnic fractionalization, and a decay function. Democracy and anocracy are based on polity ranges (Buhaug 2006). The Polity score measures and the GDP per capita variable are stand-ins for institutional capacity (Buhaug 2006). The decay function represents "the time since the end of the previous civil war or year of independence" to account for the particular countries' differences in conflict timelines (Buhaug 2006). The traditional logit model assesses the impact of the independent variables on intrastate conflict onset (1946 - 1999) for all conflict types together. The multinomial logit estimates the impact of the independent variables on two different types of conflict onsets separately (Territorial and Governmental) (Buhaug 2006).

Model 1 and Model 2 (Territorial & Governmental) Estimates

Variable	Model 1 (All)	Model 2 (Territorial)	Model 2 (Governmental)	
dem	0.347 (1.62)	0.896*** (2.95)	-0.133 (0.42)	
mix	0.428** (2.38)	0.228 (0.73)	0.568*** (2.67)	
gdpenl	-0.16*** (-3.91)	-0.167** (2.11)	-0.158*** (3.37)	
oil	0.709*** (3.78)	0.585* (1.89)	0.838*** (3.7)	
lnlandar	0.201*** (4.23)	0.494*** (5.74)	0.035 (0.63)	
ethfrac	0.911*** (3.4)	1.566*** (3.72)	0.529 (1.58)	
decay2	1.901*** (9.08)	3.169*** (9.69)	0.89*** (2.85)	

Note: Robust z-scores in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Extension

To evaluate how foreign aid influences rebel objectives, we chose to merge Buhaug's dataset with data from AidData Core Research Release Level 1 v3.1 (AidData 2017). AidData included data at the project-level analysis that included recipient country, year, donor,

commitment amounts (in USD), and the purpose of the project. Buhaug (2006) uses a dyad-year unit of analysis, but AidData uses a project-level unit of analysis (AidData 2017). Due to the structure of AidData, we had to aggregate all aid flows by recipient country and year in order to make a country-year panel. This allowed us to merge with Buhaug's dataset using COW country codes and year. This change in unit of analysis means that our dependent variable captures the most prominent rebel objective in a given country-year rather than specific actions. This may be seen as a limitation due to not distinguishing between multiple rebel groups in a country-year, but it allowed us to get the most comprehensive look at state-level aid flows and how they interact with domestic characteristics. We also filtered the data to ensure it aligned with Buhaug's data timeline of 1946-1999.

Extension 1: Using AidData 3.1 to add moderators for aid*GDP (logged) and aid*Polity Score (squared, logged)

Our first extension examines the addition of foreign aid on rebel objectives. This inclusion of foreign aid was accompanied by the conditional variables of regime type and economic development. The conventional literature has shown that foreign aid can be misallocated or captured by rebel actors. As such, it is important to include foreign aid with other structural characteristics as moderator variables. To evaluate this, we included interaction terms between foreign aid and two state characteristics. Buhaug controlled for regime type using Polity2 and for economic development using logged GDP per capita (2006). We maintained the same variables to use as moderators instead. We modeled rebel objectives using a multinomial logistic regression. We maintained Buhaug's other control variables that were found to influence rebel strategies (2006).

The results of our first extension supported our conditional hypothesis. We found that foreign aid was significantly associated with increased likelihood of territorial conflict (coefficient = 0.232, $p < 0.01$). This reflects that aid has the potential to indirectly empower these groups, particularly in large or ungoverned territories. The interaction between foreign aid and regime type (aid x Polity2) was found to be positive and statistically significant for government-targeting conflict (coefficient = 0.028, $p < 0.05$), indicating that in more democratic regimes, foreign aid is more strongly associated with central regime challenges. The interaction between foreign aid and economic development (aid x GDP) was not statistically significant, but the negative direction is consistent with our theoretical expectation that aid can be more destabilizing in poorer states. These results confirm our assumption that foreign aid has an impact on rebel objectives, but that this impact is shaped by structural aspects of the recipient country.

Multinomial Logistic Regression: Adding Foreign Aid + Aid x GDP Logged

	Dependent variable:	
	territorial	government
	(1)	(2)
ethfrac	2.553***	0.540
	(0.628)	(0.448)
lgdpenl	-0.512**	-0.356**
	(0.220)	(0.181)
polity21	0.098***	-0.004
	(0.023)	(0.019)
foreign_aid	0.232***	-0.050
	(0.069)	(0.139)
aid_x_lgdpenl	-0.101	-0.014
	(0.062)	(0.091)
aid_x_polity2	-0.003	0.028**
	(0.007)	(0.014)
oil	0.835**	0.887***
	(0.355)	(0.322)
lnlandar	0.656***	0.044
	(0.122)	(0.081)
Constant	-13.859***	-4.167***
	(1.686)	(0.977)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,316.459	1,316.459
Note:		*p**p***p<0.01

Extension 2: Ethnic Fractionalization x Foreign Aid

Our second extension examined another interaction variable, ethnic fractionalization. Buhaug found that ethnic fractionalization significantly increases the likelihood of territorial conflict, notably in cases where ethnic groups are concentrated in a region (2006). Ethnic fractionalization can lead to political exclusion, which may promote grievances (Wimmer et al. 2009). In these cases, the inclusion of aid could further exacerbate the power inequalities in different ethnic groups. To capture this, we created an interaction term between foreign aid and ethnic fractionalization. We used the same ethfrac variable as Buhaug, which measures demographic diversity (2006). We used a multinomial logit model to estimate the likelihood of territorial versus government-targeting rebel objectives. We maintained the control variables.

The results of the second extension were positive and statistically significant for territorial conflict (coefficient = 0.779, $p < 0.01$). The interaction between foreign aid and ethnic fractionalization increases the risk of violence. The results demonstrate that higher ethnic fractionalization may indirectly fuel conflict. The findings support Buhaug's original argument and reinforce that aid in fractionalized regions may be more likely to empower

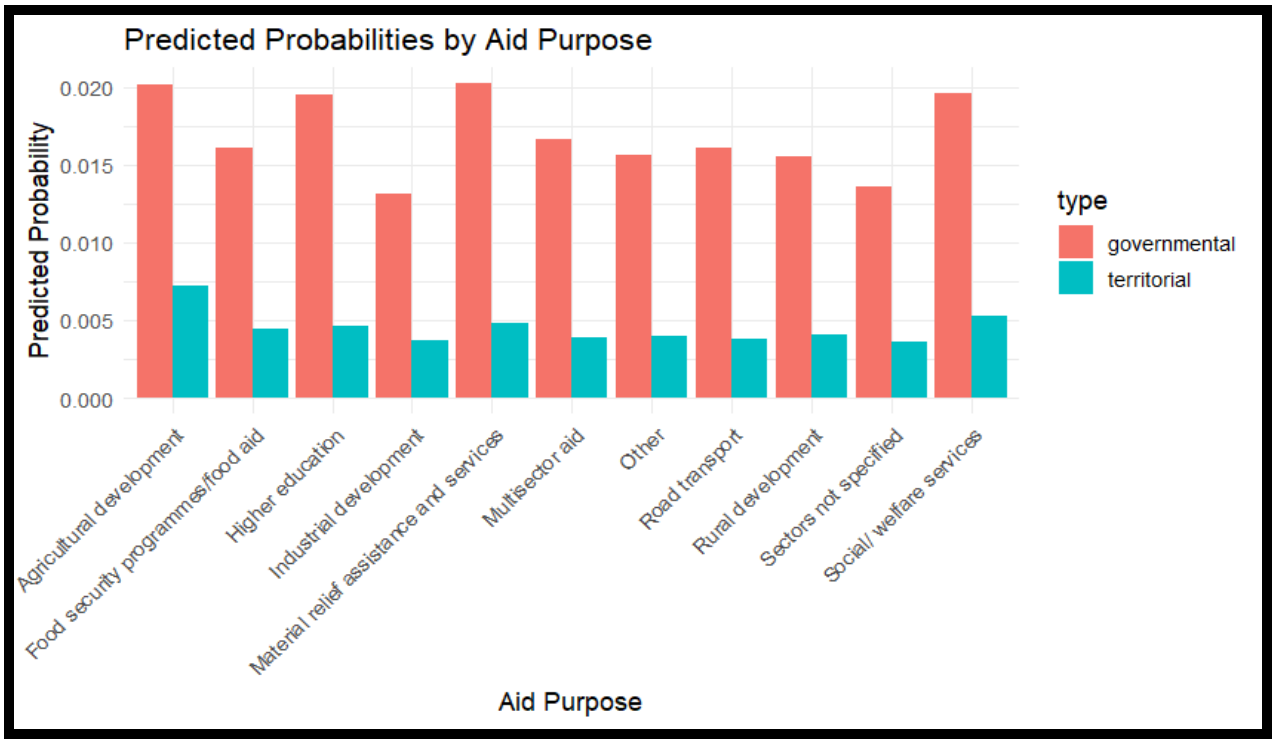
territorially-focused rebel groups. These results further confirm our assumption that foreign aid has an impact on rebel objectives as shaped by the structural makeup of the recipient country.

Multinomial Logistic Regression Results: Ethfrac X Foreign Aid

	Dependent variable:	
	territorial	government
	(1)	(2)
ethfrac	1.197*	0.380
	(0.703)	(0.487)
foreign_aid	-0.372	-0.181
	(0.267)	(0.225)
lgdpenl	-0.764***	-0.386**
	(0.232)	(0.186)
polity21	0.099***	-0.004
	(0.023)	(0.019)
aid_x_lgdpenl	0.097	0.037
	(0.103)	(0.113)
aid_x_polity2	-0.007	0.028**
	(0.008)	(0.014)
oil	0.924**	0.893***
	(0.363)	(0.323)
lnlandar	0.739***	0.046
	(0.127)	(0.081)
ethfrac:foreign_aid	0.779***	0.207
	(0.296)	(0.255)
Constant	-14.064***	-4.101***
	(1.726)	(0.983)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,308.870	1,308.870
Note:		*p**p***p<0.01

Extension 3: Multinomial Regression with AidData Categories

For the third portion of our extension project, we chose to re-run Buhaug's multinomial regression in Model 2 with AidData Categories separated to see if different categories of aid have a distinct relationship with civil conflict onset. These key results are visualized in the table below and the full regression table is beneath that.



To set up our analysis we first, as is customary, dropped the missing values of the key variables (onset05, commitment_amount_usd_constant_sum, coalesced_purpose_name). Then, we simplified the categories of aid to the top 10 purposes (purpose_simplified) receiving funding and labeled the rest as "Other". Then, we converted the simplified purpose variable to a factor for the analysis. The top 10 categories of aid in the data include food security, higher education, industrial development, material relief assistance and services, multisector aid, other, road transport, rural development, unspecified, and social/welfare services. As is visible in the above graph, there are marked differences between the estimates for conflict onset depending on the type of conflict (governmental or territorial) and the type of aid in question. The full regression table is below.

Multinomial Logistic Regression Results

	Dependent variable:	
	1	2
	(1)	(2)
dem	-0.529***	-1.042***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
mix	-1.352***	0.086***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
gdpenl	-0.648***	-0.339***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
oil	0.373***	1.826***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
lnlandar	0.411***	-0.132***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac	2.182***	1.556***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
decay2	3.695***	1.530***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
commitment_amount_usd_constant_sum	0.000	-0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedFood security programmes/food aid	-0.493***	-0.228***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedHigher education	-0.447***	-0.036***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedIndustrial development	-0.685***	-0.438***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedMaterial relief assistance and services	-0.411***	0.004***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedMultisector aid	-0.624***	-0.194***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedOther	-0.614***	-0.260***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedRoad transport	-0.654***	-0.233***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedRural development	-0.583***	-0.267***

	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedSectors not specified	-0.714***	-0.404***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedSocial/ welfare services	-0.320***	-0.029***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant	-8.801***	-1.747***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	19,435.780	19,435.780
Note:		*p**p***p<0.01

Extension 4: Ethnic Fractionalization Interacted with AidPurpose

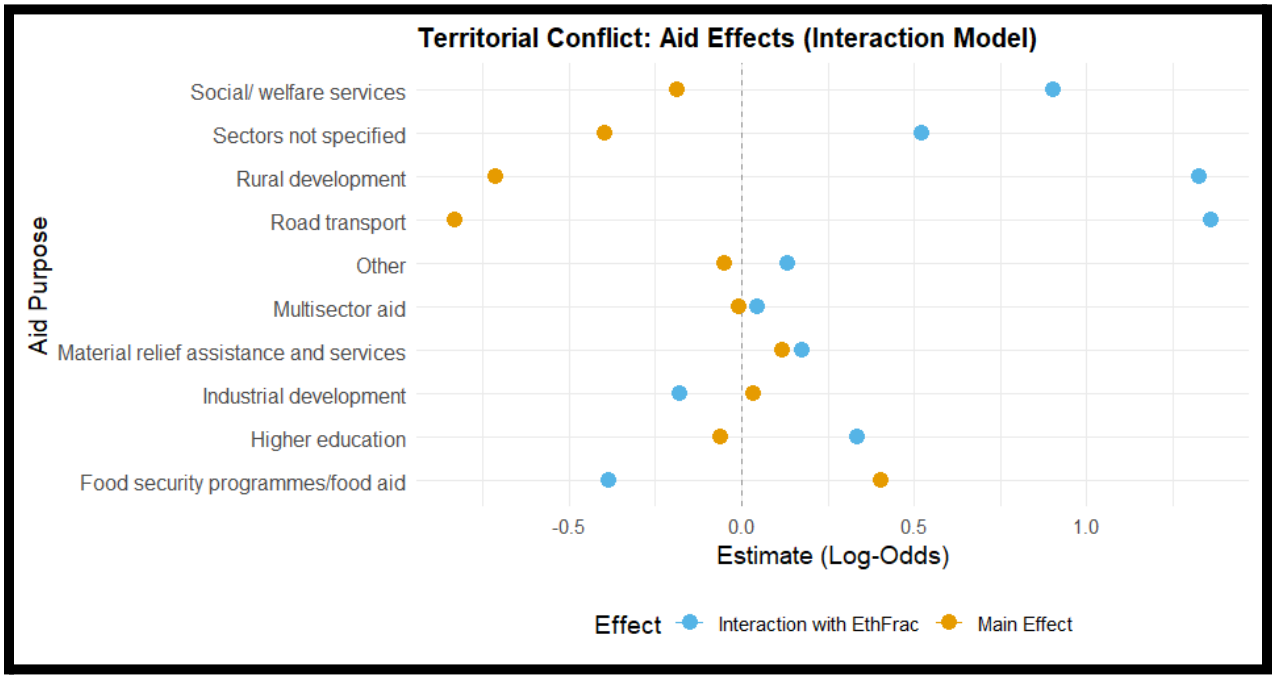
Finally, for our fourth extension, we ran another multinomial logistic regression model with an interaction between ethnic fractionalization and each of the "purpose simplified" categories of aid. We chose to include this extension because there was a substantial difference between the estimates of ethnic fractionalization's relationship with conflict onset in Buhaug (2006)'s Model 2 and our Extension Part 3. Model 2's estimates were 1.566*** for territorial and 0.529 (no significance) for governmental, and for those respective categories in our Extension 3 the estimates were 2.182*** and 1.566*** respectively. These results, in particular the change in both the magnitude and significance of the estimate for ethnic fractionalization in governmental conflict when foreign aid moderators were present, suggested that we may find some interesting results if we interacted that variable with the different categories of foreign aid.

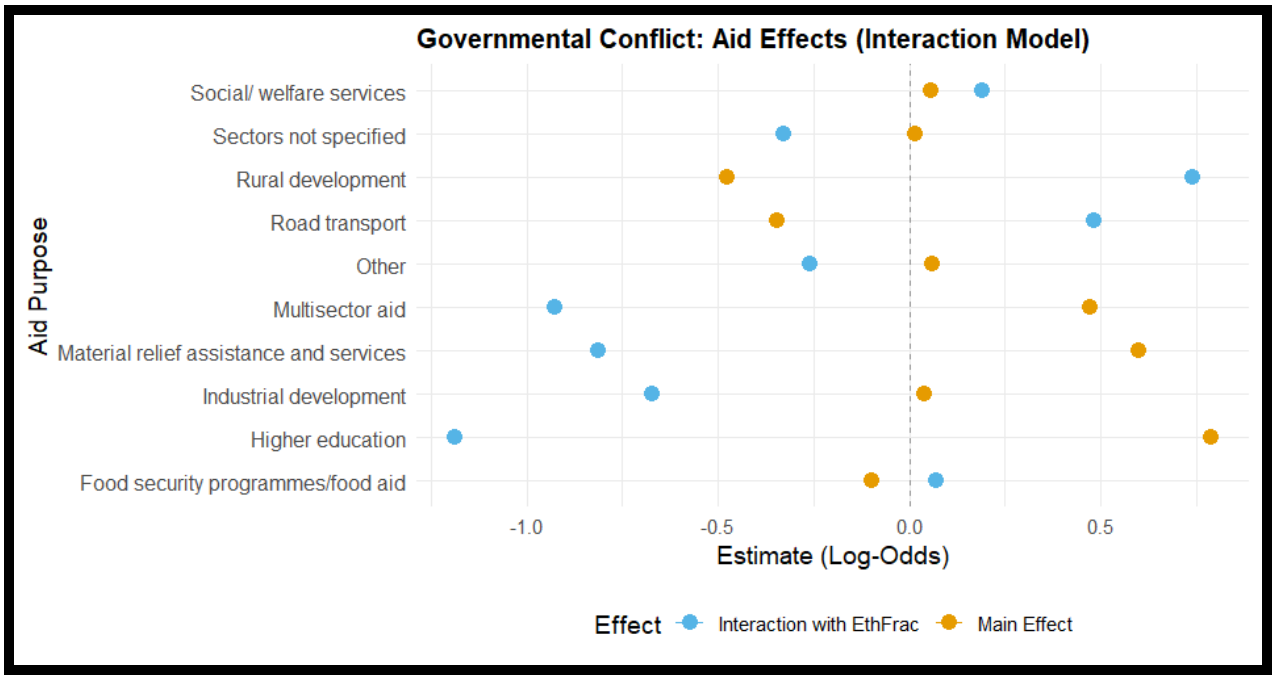
The results of our Extension 4 analysis are very interesting and support Buhaug (2006)'s insistence that researchers disaggregate between territorial and governmental civil conflicts. They also support our argument that a foreign aid component, especially a disaggregated one, may be important to include in analyses of civil conflict onset. In this model overall, the variable "ethfrac" has a statistically significant and positive estimate for both kinds of conflict; however, territorial is higher than governmental. As for the aid purposes, there are several instances where the direction of the estimates differs between types of conflict. There are also several instances where there is a change in the direction of the estimates from the purpose of aid on its own to the interaction with ethnic fractionalization.

To highlight a few notable results, because all are statistically significant, the highest positive estimates for territorial conflict onset among the types of aid were road transportation (1.362***), rural development (1.328***), and social/welfare services (0.903***). Alternatively, there were only negative estimates for the aid types of food programs (-0.383***) and industrial

development (-0.173***), with the rest being positive. For governmental conflict, the highest positive estimates for conflict onset were also the categories of road transportation (0.481***), rural development (0.741***), and social/welfare services (0.189***). However, unlike territorial conflict, food programs had a positive likelihood of conflict onset when interacted with ethnic fractionalization (0.069***). The rest of the aid types had negative estimates, with higher education (-1.188***), multisector aid (-0.926***), material relief assistance/services (-0.813***), and industrial development (-0.671***) being of the greatest magnitudes.

In addition to the raw estimates, some categories of aid showed a particular difference between the interacted and un-interacted estimates by aid type. For example, regarding territorial conflict, food-related aid goes from having a positive estimate in the main effect (0.405***) to a negative estimate when interacted with ethnic fractionalization (-0.383***). In instances of governmental conflict, aid for higher education also goes from having a positive estimate (0.789***) to a negative estimate (-1.188***) when undergoing the interaction.




Governmental Conflict: Aid Effects (Interaction Model)
Aid Purpose
Social/ welfare services
Sectors not specified
Rural development
Road transport
Other
Multisector aid
Material relief assistance and services
Industrial development
Higher education
Food security programmes/food aid
-1.0
-0.5
0.0
0.5
Estimate (Log-Odds)
Effect
Interaction with EthFrac
Main Effect

Multinomial Logistic Regression Results with Interaction

	Dependent variable:	
	1	2
	(1)	(2)
ethfrac	2.072***	1.876***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedFood security programmes/food aid	0.405***	-0.099***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedHigher education	-0.061***	0.789***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedIndustrial development	0.035***	0.038***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedMaterial relief assistance and services	0.119***	0.598***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedMultisector aid	-0.008***	0.473***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedOther	-0.048***	0.058***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedRoad transport	-0.831***	-0.346***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedRural development	-0.713***	-0.475***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedSectors not specified	-0.397***	0.014***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
purpose_simplifiedSocial/ welfare services	-0.188***	0.057***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
dem	-0.522***	-0.997***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
mix	-1.267***	0.125***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
gdpenl	-0.595***	-0.313***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
oil	0.100***	1.744***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
lnlandar	0.688***	-0.079***

	(0.000)	(0.000)
commitment_amount_usd_constant_sum	0.000	-0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)
decay2	3.802***	1.491***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac:purpose_simplifiedFood security programmes/food aid	-0.383***	0.069***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac:purpose_simplifiedHigher education	0.335***	-1.188***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac:purpose_simplifiedIndustrial development	-0.178***	-0.671***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac:purpose_simplifiedMaterial relief assistance and services	0.175***	-0.813***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac:purpose_simplifiedMultisector aid	0.047***	-0.926***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac:purpose_simplifiedOther	0.134***	-0.259***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac:purpose_simplifiedRoad transport	1.362***	0.481***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac:purpose_simplifiedRural development	1.328***	0.741***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac:purpose_simplifiedSectors not specified	0.521***	-0.329***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
ethfrac:purpose_simplifiedSocial/ welfare services	0.903***	0.189***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Constant	-13.291***	-2.802***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	19,323.690	19,323.690
Note:		*p**p***p<0.01

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed an extension of Buhaug (2006)'s paper on how state characteristics shape rebel capabilities and objectives across two different types of conflict (territorial and governmental). This was accomplished through a series of four multinomial logit regression analyses, including additional measures of foreign aid times logged GDP, foreign aid times squared/logged polity score, disaggregated varieties of foreign aid, and foreign aid interacted with ethnic fractionalization. We came to the broad conclusion that it is worth

separating territorial and governmental conflict in addition to including measures of foreign aid in future research on civil conflict onset, because the results vary significantly between the two. Furthermore, foreign aid was found to be significantly impactful on estimates of onset (both positively and negatively) depending on the type of aid in question and whether or not it interacted with a state's measure of ethnic fractionalization. However, it is important to recognize possible endogeneity concerns with these findings. Countries with worse conflicts may receive more aid and have a higher likelihood of recurrence, rather than aid itself being the contributing factor to the recurrence itself.

Future research could also include measures of foreign aid on analyses that split conflict into ideological or ethnic to examine the results, or they could further expand upon Buhaug (2006)'s theory by aggregating all four varieties of civil conflict into one analysis to account for the overlapping combinations (e.g. ethnic and governmental, ideological and territorial) for a more comprehensive view.

The findings of our extensions have several relevant implications. These implications can assist in policy development within the conflict sphere as well as the foreign aid sphere. Foreign aid has been shown to influence rebel behavior and strategic choices. As such, decisions about aid and allocation have the risk of empowering rebel groups. We extended Buhaug (2006)'s theory of rebel objectives by outlining how external factors such as foreign aid can influence strategic decision-making. This is especially salient when certain structural characteristics of the aid recipient state are present. Consistent with prior work on the misuse of aid (Wood and Sullivan 2015; Nielsen et al. 2011), our extension found that foreign aid is significantly associated with increased risk of territorial conflict. This shapes concerns of aid providing resources to rebel groups or increasing grievances if allocated unequally.

An additional implication is the overall aid effectiveness, as shown to be dependent on the structural characteristics of the recipient state. We found that regime type, economic development, and ethnic fractionalization can alter how foreign aid impacts rebel group objectives. Aid effectiveness can be defined as the ability of foreign aid to promote economic growth and to promote development in the receiving country (Bearce and Tirone 2015). Whether the aid is effectively distributed can depend on the structural characteristics of the recipient state. States with ethnic fractionalization may have structural power problems that contribute to unequal distribution of aid (Wimmer et al. 2009). This becomes an implication for rebel objectives because if policymakers and donors ensure increased aid effectiveness, this may decrease the risk of foreign aid contributing to increased grievances, mobilization, and rebel objectives.

Overall, the contribution of this extension to the literature is the importance of considering external factors and internal structural characteristics as primary mechanisms. This extension builds upon Buhaug's relative capability findings (2006) to show that foreign aid can influence the capability environment, shaping rebel objectives. Understanding foreign aid and other external influences can greatly benefit how conflict is studied. This extension can

contribute to predicting conflict onset, understanding rebel behavior and strategy, and strategies for foreign aid provisions.

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Appendix

Buhaug (2006) Main Results (For Comparison with Our Replication):

Table II. Logit and Multinomial Logit Regression of Civil War Onset, 1946–99

	Model 1	*Model 2*		
	All conflicts	*Territorial*	*Governmental*	$p(\beta_T = \beta_G)$
Democracy $_{t-1}$	0.347	0.896	–0.133	0.02
	(1.62)	(2.95)**	(0.42)	
Anocracy $_{t-1}$	0.428	0.228	0.568	0.36
	(2.38)*	(0.73)	(2.67)**	
GDP per capita $_{t-1}$	–0.160	–0.167	–0.158	0.92
	(3.91)**	(2.11)*	(3.37)**	
Oil exporter	0.709	0.585	0.838	0.50
	(3.78)**	(1.89)	(3.70)**	
Country size (log)	0.201	0.494	0.035	<0.01
	(4.23)**	(5.74)**	(0.63)	
Ethnic fractionalization	0.911	1.566	0.529	0.05
	(3.40)**	(3.72)**	(1.58)	
Decay function	1.901	3.169	0.890	
	(9.08)**	(9.69)**	(2.85)**	
Constant	–6.558	–12.483	–4.405	
	(10.31)**	(11.60)**	(5.88)**	
No. of conflicts	203	80	123	
N	5,411	5,411		
Log pseudolikelihood	–751.11	–846.32		

Robust z scores are in parentheses. The final column gives the probability that the variable estimates for the two alternative outcomes in Model 2 are similar. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Replication Code:

Buhaug (2006) Model 1:

```r
# Model 1: Logit regression for all conflicts
model1 <- glm(onset05 ~ dem + mix + gdpenl +
                oil + lnlandar + ethfrac + decay2,
              family = binomial(link = "logit"),
              data = data)

summary(model1)

####################Model 1 w/ Robust SE ############

# Load required libraries
library(sandwich)
library(lmtest)

# Step 2: Get robust standard errors
robust_vcov <- vcovHC(model1, type = "HC1")
robust_se <- sqrt(diag(robust_vcov))

# Step 3: Extract coefficients
coefs <- coef(model1)

# Step 4: Compute robust z-scores
robust_z <- coefs / robust_se

# Step 5: Put into a data frame
results <- data.frame(
  Estimate = coefs,
  Robust_SE = robust_se,
  Robust_Z = robust_z
)

# View results
round(results, 3)
```

```
> round(results, 3)
             Estimate Robust_SE Robust_Z
(Intercept)    -6.558     0.637  -10.302
dem             0.347     0.214    1.620
mix             0.428     0.180    2.379
gdpenl         -0.160     0.041   -3.903
oil             0.709     0.188    3.778
lnlandar        0.201     0.048    4.227
ethfrac         0.911     0.268    3.401
decay2          1.901     0.209    9.078
```

Buhaug (2006) Model 2:

```r
# ------------------------------
# BOOTSTRAPPED ROBUST Z-SCORES
# ------------------------------

# Load required packages
library(haven)
library(nnet)
library(boot)
library(dplyr)

# Step 1: Load and prepare data
data <- read_dta("Replication_data_BuhaugJPR06.dta")

# Ensure outcome variable is a factor with correct reference level
data$m_onset05 <- relevel(factor(data$m_onset05), ref = "statusquo")

# Step 2: Fit multinomial logit model
model2 <- multinom(m_onset05 ~ dem + mix + gdpenl + oil + lnlandar + ethfrac + decay2,
                   data = data, trace = FALSE)

# Step 3: Extract coefficients as flat vector
orig_coefs <- as.vector(t(coef(model2)))

# Step 4: Define bootstrap function
boot_fun <- function(data, indices) {
  d <- data[indices, ]
  fit <- tryCatch(multinom(m_onset05 ~ dem + mix + gdpenl + oil + lnlandar + ethfrac + decay2,
                           data = d, trace = FALSE),
                  error = function(e) return(rep(NA, length(orig_coefs))))
  return(as.vector(t(coef(fit))))
}
```

```r
# Step 5: Bootstrap with error handling
set.seed(123)
boot_out <- boot(data = data, statistic = boot_fun, R = 500)

# Step 6: Compute robust SEs and z-scores
clean_boot <- boot_out$t[complete.cases(boot_out$t), ]
boot_se <- apply(clean_boot, 2, sd)
robust_z <- orig_coefs / boot_se

# Step 7: Format output to match Buhaug Table II
coef_matrix <- coef(model2)
z_table <- data.frame(
  Category = rep(rownames(coef_matrix), each = ncol(coef_matrix)),
  Variable = rep(colnames(coef_matrix), times = nrow(coef_matrix)),
  Estimate = round(orig_coefs, 3),
  Z = round(robust_z, 2)
)

# Extra: Combine into "coef (z)" style strings
z_table$Formatted <- paste0(z_table$Estimate, " (", z_table$Z, ")")
print(z_table)
```

```
> print(z_table)
   Category    Variable Estimate      Z        Formatted
1         1 (Intercept)  -12.483 -10.62 -12.483 (-10.62)
2         1         dem    0.896   2.84     0.896 (2.84)
3         1         mix    0.228   0.73     0.228 (0.73)
4         1      gdpenl   -0.167  -2.02   -0.167 (-2.02)
5         1         oil    0.585   1.77     0.585 (1.77)
6         1    lnlandar    0.494   5.43     0.494 (5.43)
7         1     ethfrac    1.566   3.62     1.566 (3.62)
8         1      decay2    3.169   9.47     3.169 (9.47)
9         2 (Intercept)   -4.405  -6.16   -4.405 (-6.16)
10        2         dem   -0.133  -0.41   -0.133 (-0.41)
11        2         mix    0.568   2.62     0.568 (2.62)
12        2      gdpenl   -0.158  -3.41   -0.158 (-3.41)
13        2         oil    0.838   3.65     0.838 (3.65)
14        2    lnlandar    0.035   0.65     0.035 (0.65)
15        2     ethfrac    0.529   1.49     0.529 (1.49)
16        2      decay2    0.890   2.83      0.89 (2.83)
```

Extension Code:

Extension 1 Code (Data Prep and Model) - Aid + Economic Development/Regime Type:

```r
#Libraries
library(tidyverse)
library(haven)
library(nnet)
# Data
df <- read_dta("Replication_data_BuhaugJPR06.dta")

# Filter to match Buhaug's timeframe: 1946–1999
df <- df %>% filter(year >= 1946 & year <= 1999)

# AidData
aiddata <- read_csv("AidDataCoreDonorRecipientYear_ResearchRelease_Level1_v3.1.csv")

# Aggregate to country-year level
aid_country_year <- aiddata %>%
  group_by(recipient, year) %>%
  summarize(total_aid_usd = sum(commitment_amount_usd_constant_sum, na.rm = TRUE)) %>%
  ungroup()

# COW Mapping
cow_mapping <- c(
  "Afghanistan" = 700, "Albania" = 339, "Algeria" = 615, "Angola" = 540, "Argentina" = 160,
  "Armenia" = 371, "Azerbaijan" = 373, "Bangladesh" = 771, "Belarus" = 370, "Belize" = 80,
  "Benin" = 434, "Bhutan" = 760, "Bolivia" = 145, "Bosnia and Herzegovina" = 346,
  "Botswana" = 571, "Brazil" = 140, "Bulgaria" = 355, "Burkina Faso" = 439, "Burundi" = 516,
  "Cambodia" = 811, "Cameroon" = 471, "Cape Verde" = 402, "Central African Republic" = 482,
  "Chad" = 483, "Chile" = 155, "China" = 710, "Colombia" = 100, "Comoros" = 581,
  "Congo, Democratic Republic of" = 490, "Congo, Republic of" = 484, "Costa Rica" = 94,
  "Croatia" = 344, "Cuba" = 40, "Cyprus" = 352, "Czech Republic" = 315, "Czechoslovakia" = 315,
  "Denmark" = 390, "Djibouti" = 522, "Dominican Republic" = 42, "Ecuador" = 130,
  "Egypt" = 651, "El Salvador" = 92, "Equatorial Guinea" = 411, "Eritrea" = 531,
  "Estonia" = 366, "Ethiopia" = 530, "Fiji" = 950, "Finland" = 375, "France" = 220,
  "Gabon" = 481, "Gambia" = 420, "Georgia" = 372, "Germany" = 255, "Ghana" = 452,
  "Greece" = 350, "Guatemala" = 90, "Guinea" = 438, "Guinea-Bissau" = 404, "Guyana" = 110,
  "Haiti" = 41, "Honduras" = 91, "Hungary" = 310, "India" = 750, "Indonesia" = 850,
  "Iran" = 630, "Iraq" = 645, "Ireland" = 205, "Israel" = 666, "Italy" = 325,
  "Ivory Coast" = 437, "Jamaica" = 51, "Japan" = 740, "Jordan" = 663, "Kazakhstan" = 690,
  "Kenya" = 501, "Korea, North" = 731, "Korea, South" = 732, "Kuwait" = 690,
  "Kyrgyz Republic" = 703, "Laos" = 812, "Latvia" = 367, "Lebanon" = 660, "Lesotho" = 570,
  "Liberia" = 450, "Libya" = 620, "Lithuania" = 368, "Macedonia" = 343, "Madagascar" = 580,
  "Malawi" = 553, "Malaysia" = 820, "Maldives" = 750, "Mali" = 432, "Mauritania" = 435,
  "Mauritius" = 590, "Mexico" = 70, "Moldova" = 359, "Mongolia" = 712, "Montenegro" = 341,
  "Morocco" = 600, "Mozambique" = 541, "Myanmar" = 775, "Namibia" = 565, "Nepal" = 790,
  "Netherlands" = 210, "Nicaragua" = 93, "Niger" = 436, "Nigeria" = 475, "Norway" = 385,
  "Oman" = 698, "Pakistan" = 770, "Panama" = 95, "Papua New Guinea" = 910, "Paraguay" = 150,
  "Peru" = 135, "Philippines" = 840, "Poland" = 290, "Portugal" = 235, "Romania" = 360,
  "Russia" = 365, "Rwanda" = 516, "Saudi Arabia" = 670, "Senegal" = 433, "Serbia" = 345,
  "Sierra Leone" = 451, "Slovakia" = 317, "Slovenia" = 349, "Somalia" = 520,
  "South Africa" = 560, "Spain" = 230, "Sri Lanka" = 780, "Sudan" = 625, "Suriname" = 115,
  "Swaziland" = 572, "Sweden" = 380, "Switzerland" = 225, "Syria" = 652, "Tajikistan" = 702,
  "Tanzania" = 510, "Thailand" = 800, "Togo" = 461, "Trinidad and Tobago" = 52,
  "Tunisia" = 616, "Turkey" = 640, "Turkmenistan" = 701, "Uganda" = 500, "Ukraine" = 369,
  "United Arab Emirates" = 698, "United Kingdom" = 200, "United States" = 2, "Uruguay" = 165,
  "Uzbekistan" = 704, "Vanuatu" = 947, "Venezuela" = 101, "Vietnam" = 816, "Yemen" = 678,
  "Zambia" = 551, "Zimbabwe" = 552
)
```

```r
# Add COW code to aid data
aid_country_year$ccode <- cow_mapping[aid_country_year$recipient]

# Drop any unmatched rows
aid_country_year <- aid_country_year %>% filter(!is.na(ccode))

# Merge aid data into Buhaug dataset
df <- left_join(df, aid_country_year, by = c("ccode", "year"))

# Convert aid to billions (optional for easier interpretation)
df$foreign_aid <- df$total_aid_usd / 1e9

# Construct dependent variable: rebel objective
df$goal_type <- NA
df$goal_type[df$terrons05 == 1] <- "territorial"
df$goal_type[df$govons05 == 1] <- "government"
df$goal_type[df$terrons05 == 0 & df$govons05 == 0 & !is.na(df$incide05)] <- "local"
df$goal_type <- factor(df$goal_type, levels = c("local", "territorial", "government"))

# Interaction terms
df$aid_x_lgdpenl <- df$foreign_aid * df$lgdpenl
df$aid_x_polity2 <- df$foreign_aid * df$polity2l

model <- multinom(goal_type ~ ethfrac + lgdpenl + polity2l + foreign_aid +
                    aid_x_lgdpenl + aid_x_polity2 + oil + lnlandar, data = df)

summary(model)

z_scores <- summary(model)$coefficients / summary(model)$standard.errors
p_values <- 2 * (1 - pnorm(abs(z_scores)))
print(p_values)
```

```
Coefficients:
            (Intercept)   ethfrac    lgdpenl     polity2l foreign_aid aid_x_lgdpenl aid_x_polity2      oil
territorial   -13.85937 2.5534706 -0.5119054  0.097569650  0.23217197   -0.10062886  -0.002654157 0.835345
government     -4.16663 0.5398851 -0.3563871 -0.003734515 -0.05026057   -0.01411274   0.028199153 0.887438
             lnlandar
territorial 0.6555071
government  0.0436754

Std. Errors:
            (Intercept)   ethfrac   lgdpenl   polity2l foreign_aid aid_x_lgdpenl aid_x_polity2       oil
territorial   1.6856918 0.6279133 0.2199540 0.02302481  0.06904193    0.06185603   0.006511864 0.3549338
government    0.9768468 0.4478770 0.1811393 0.01924605  0.13885787    0.09141746   0.013631098 0.3224397
              lnlandar
territorial 0.12157244
government  0.08055805

Residual Deviance: 1280.459
AIC: 1316.459
>
>
> z_scores <- summary(model)$coefficients / summary(model)$standard.errors
> p_values <- 2 * (1 - pnorm(abs(z_scores)))
> p_values
             (Intercept)      ethfrac    lgdpenl     polity2l  foreign_aid aid_x_lgdpenl aid_x_polity2
territorial 2.220446e-16 4.770459e-05 0.01994776 2.259346e-05 0.0007716526     0.1037745     0.6835762
government  1.995559e-05 2.280367e-01 0.04912849 8.461441e-01 0.7173842255     0.8773126     0.0385708
                     oil     lnlandar
territorial 0.018596435 6.971438e-08
government  0.005918546 5.877078e-01
```

Extension 2 Code - Model With Interaction Between Ethnic Fractionalization and Foreign Aid:

```
model_ethfrac_x_aid <- multinom(goal_type~ethfrac*foreign_aid + lgdpenl + polity2l +
                    aid_x_lgdpenl + aid_x_polity2 + oil + lnlandar, data = df)
```

```
> summary(model_ethfrac_x_aid)
Call:
multinom(formula = goal_type ~ ethfrac * foreign_aid + lgdpenl +
    polity2l + aid_x_lgdpenl + aid_x_polity2 + oil + lnlandar,
    data = df)

Coefficients:
            (Intercept)   ethfrac foreign_aid    lgdpenl     polity2l aid_x_lgdpenl
territorial  -14.064253 1.1974032  -0.3720070 -0.7642926  0.099335620    0.09688097
government    -4.100648 0.3800479  -0.1807498 -0.3862128 -0.004185331    0.03654640
            aid_x_polity2       oil   lnlandar ethfrac:foreign_aid
territorial  -0.006801104 0.9242272 0.73944914           0.7789810
government    0.027969950 0.8927417 0.04553159           0.2065057

Std. Errors:
            (Intercept)   ethfrac foreign_aid   lgdpenl   polity2l aid_x_lgdpenl
territorial   1.7264272 0.7025018   0.2669863 0.2316932 0.02324464     0.1029830
government    0.9832789 0.4869494   0.2247848 0.1856364 0.01931395     0.1131521
            aid_x_polity2       oil   lnlandar ethfrac:foreign_aid
territorial   0.007513097 0.3630857 0.12679508           0.2959100
government    0.013839368 0.3225420 0.08108387           0.2548045

Residual Deviance: 1268.87
AIC: 1308.87
```

Extension 3 Code - Model with Different Types of Aid:

```
####################Aid Data with Purpose ######################################

# Load the merged dataset
df <- read_csv("Merged_Buhaug_and_AidData_with_Purpose.csv")

# Drop rows with missing values in the key variables
df_clean <- df %>%
  filter(!is.na(onset05),
         !is.na(commitment_amount_usd_constant_sum),
         !is.na(coalesced_purpose_name))

# Simplify aid purpose: use top 10 purposes and label the rest as "Other"
top_purposes <- df_clean %>%
  count(coalesced_purpose_name, sort = TRUE) %>%
  slice_head(n = 10) %>%
  pull(coalesced_purpose_name)

df_clean <- df_clean %>%
  mutate(purpose_simplified = ifelse(coalesced_purpose_name %in% top_purposes,
                                     coalesced_purpose_name,
                                     "Other"))

# Convert simplified purpose to a factor
df_clean$purpose_simplified <- factor(df_clean$purpose_simplified)


# Run logistic regression with full set of predictors
model <- glm(onset05 ~ commitment_amount_usd_constant_sum +
               purpose_simplified +
               dem + mix +
               ethfrac + oil +
                gdpenl +
               lnlandar + decay2,
             data = df_clean,
             family = binomial(link = "logit"))
```

NOTE: RESULTS FROM STARGAZER TABLE ARE ALREADY IN THE PAPER, RAW RESULTS TOO MESSY/LARGE TO FIT HERE

Extension 4 Code - Model with Interaction between Aid Purpose and Ethfrac:

```
model2_AD_interact <- multinom(m_onset05~ethfrac*purpose_simplified + dem + mix + gdpenl
                               + oil + lnlandar + commitment_amount_usd_constant_sum + decay2, data = df_clean)
```

NOTE: RESULTS FROM STARGAZER TABLE ARE ALREADY IN THE PAPER, RAW RESULTS TOO MESSY/LARGE TO FIT HERE

More Bang for Your Buck? Earmarked Funding Stringency and Project Costs

Hannah Bray
MAIR 2025

Abstract

This capstone project proposes a research plan built on the emerging literature of earmarked funding in international relations. Earmarked funding (EF) is both on the rise and increasingly stratified between funds that are stringently earmarked and those that are less stringently earmarked. Previous works have found a negative relationship between EF and cost efficiency, as well as an increase in budget overruns from intended contributions, but fewer works have examined the stringency aspect. What is the relationship between the level of stringency of EF and cost overruns in projects implemented by international organizations (IOs)? I posit that the level of stringency, or the level of requirements put on funds to be used by implementing IOs by donors, is an explanation for cost overruns because it necessitates additional resources and labor to implement projects while meeting a higher number of donor requirements.

Introduction

'Earmarked funding' (EF) is money that donors designate to international organizations (IOs) for a specific purpose (e.g., project, region, state, sub-entity), and 'core funding' is a pool of funds that the IO can allocate itself (Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya 2024). Donors have purported to increase EF in recent years, albeit further stratified into EF with more and less stringent requirements, while other recent literature over the past decade points to the inefficiency of EF in terms of raising project costs when compared to similar projects (e.g., Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023).

However, there is little work that disaggregates between types of EF and EF stringency due to the recency of the available data (Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya 2024). Stringency in the context of this paper refers exclusively to the severity of conditions that donors place upon the use of their earmarked funds by international institutions rather than upon recipients. This is not to be confused with conditionality, which most often refers to the requirements put in place for loans by either a bilateral donor or a multilateral institution (e.g., the International Monetary Fund (IMF)) on a recipient country (Babb and Carruthers 2008).

With this gap in the literature in mind, what is the impact of different levels of EF stringency (across the dimensions of thematic and institutional EF) on IO project costs? I argue that greater stringency in earmarked funding increases the likelihood of higher overrun costs for projects because of higher demands for labor and the higher transaction costs that are incurred in the process of meeting the more specific expectations for funds from the donors.

The policy implications offered by the answers to this question would be especially salient for donors and implementing development organizations to understand which types of earmarked funding rules may hinder project cost efficiency. This is especially key to understand, considering the potential loss in IO effectiveness that some scholars have already attributed to EF's increased administrative costs (Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023; Reinsberg and Siauwijaya 2024).

Literature Review

What are the differing explanations for project cost efficiency in the international relations literature? What implications does this have for the functioning and funding rules of international organizations (IOs)?

Firstly, what qualifies as efficient or inefficient is in the eye of the beholder, because it changes from the perspective of states, IOs at large, and the technocrats on the ground.

In the context of this paper, efficiency means getting 'more bang for your buck' or good value from money that is spent so as not to go over budget. The differing explanations for cost efficiency can be divided into the macro-level (e.g., higher IO politics) and the meso-micro levels (e.g., staff impact or project-level features).

As for the macro and meso levels of analysis, explanations to the questions posed above in the literature are typically rooted in the principal-agent framework, wherein the donors

(usually states) are the principles that delegate tasks to the agents (IOs) but they face challenges like the shirking of duties or bureaucratic preferences that differ from the donors (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Nielson and Tierney 2003; Graham 2014).

The literature offers many explanations at the micro or project-level of analysis (Chasanah, Gunawan, and Baroudi 2024). Explanations of overall project performance and cost efficiency include the size and complexity of a project (Denizer, Kaufmann, and Kraay 2013), the weather and terrain of the region (Al-Hazim, Abu Salem, and Ahmad 2017), the capacity and corruption level of a recipient state (Niazi and Painting 2017), the sources of funding (Ashton et al 2023), the quality of supervision/monitoring (Ika and Feeny 2022), the IO staff quality (Ika and Donnelly 2017), and many other factors.

While not the only factor of importance, as displayed in the above literature, I argue that earmarked funding and, particularly, the stringency of EF, an overlooked factor contributing to project cost inefficiency. Earmarked funding has a significant impact on project costs for IOs, primarily by increasing administrative burdens and transaction costs. Studies highlight that EF leads to higher transaction costs for IOs (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021). These costs come about through applying for grants, negotiating contracts, and reporting back to donors (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Weinlich et al 2020). This burden is substantial within the UN system (Graham 2017) and applies to the IOs themselves, donors, and implementing actors involved in these projects (Weinlich et al 2020). Donors also face administrative costs in managing and overseeing earmarked funds, which requires allocating significant resources (Weinlich et al 2020).

A notable consequence of EF is the increased administrative burden placed on IOs (Weinlich et al 2020; Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023). Each earmarked contribution requires negotiation, typically involving donor-specific contracts and reporting requirements (Weinlich et al 2020). IOs have to manage a multitude of contract forms, resulting in high labor costs (Weinlich et al 2020). The trend towards funding smaller and shorter projects worsens these inefficiencies, as the transaction costs corresponding with negotiating and reporting apply to each project regardless of size (Weinlich et al 2020). This labor-intensive process diverts staff time away from their primary mandates, including project design and implementation (Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023; Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Reinsberg 2023).

Specifically, looking at the project-level, EF is shown to increase the supervision costs of development projects (Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023). Studies comparing earmarked projects to comparable core-funded projects have found that earmarked projects cost more to supervise (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023). Quantitative analysis suggests that earmarked projects can be approximately 1.5 times as expensive to supervise as comparable core-funded projects (Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023). The additional administrative procedures required by earmarking contribute to the increased time staff must spend on supervision, thereby increasing costs (Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023).

Furthermore, earmarked funding often does not cover institutional overhead costs (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021). This lacuna in funding, alongside the administrative burden, can strain both an IO's budget and capacity (Weinlich et al 2020). Some sources suggest that overheads for highly customized or restrictive earmarked funding should be increased, or donors should be charged for extra reporting, to better reflect the true administrative burden and associated inefficiencies (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024).

This inefficiency may stem from donor intentions that can diverge from pursuing cost efficiency. States use the rules allowing EF to gain influence (Graham 2015; Graham 2017) to circumvent the voting rules and/or egalitarian culture (i.e., one member, one vote) as represented by those rules (Graham and Serdaru 2020) of an institution that would otherwise be less favorable to donor state policy preferences. Bringing the discussion back to practical challenges for project implementation, donors may also give EF to bypass countries with weak governance (Eichenauer and Reinsberg 2017) and reward well-performing organizations **(**Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya 2024)**.** Furthermore, researchers posit that audience costs influence a state's funding decisions to IOs. Survey experiments have shown that when provided with information on IOs, there is an increase in public support for earmarking funds (Bayram and Graham 2022). Notably, most studies on EF are focused on the reasons why state donors allocate money the way they do and how EF impacts differing metrics of project performance, but there's less literature that covers the impact different types and levels of EF have on project performance and/or costs.

Despite donors' increasing focus on performance and accountability, driven by the desire to track how taxpayer money is spent (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023), the added costs and administrative complexities introduced by earmarking can undermine the cost-effectiveness of aid delivery (Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023). The literature indicates that while donors seek power over IOs and their projects through EF, the resulting inefficiencies may limit the ability of IOs to deliver on their mandates as effectively as they could otherwise (Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023). This implies a trade-off where the domestic political accountability benefits perceived by donors may come at the price of increased costs and potentially reduced effectiveness at the project-level.

Theory and Hypothesis

Building off of existing literature, I posit that variation in the stringency of EF increases the transaction costs (labor/operating costs) for projects. The interaction between stringency of EF and performance hasn't been examined in detail in the literature because of the recency of available data (e.g., Reinsberg and Taggart 2025). In sum, there is evidence that EF impacts performance, which differs across types, but not much about the degree to which that occurs based on the EF stringency.

Using the definitions of stringency from Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya (2024), thematic earmarking is either nonexistent, softly earmarked for a broad theme, or strictly

earmarked to a niche purpose or project. Institutional earmarking can be softly earmarked at the meso-level (specific IO units) or micro-level (to specific IO staff actors). It can also be strictly earmarked when it involves the requirement that the country's staff must work in the IO unit responsible (12).

Alongside the noted trend of increased EF, a critical challenge has emerged: EF often does not fully cover the necessary administrative and staffing costs required to manage these specific interventions (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Reinsberg 2023). However, not all levels of EF stringency are equal. I argue that the interaction between the specific requirements imposed by theme and project-based earmarking, alongside the underfunding of the administrative functions needed to manage them, significantly increases transaction and labor costs for IOs, impacting their operational cost efficiency.

I argue that the literature has overlooked how the stringency of EF is related to project process performance, particularly across types of stringency (theme, institutional/staffing). This theory is partially based on assumptions from the principal-agent framework, wherein the donors (usually states) are the principals that delegate tasks to the agents (IOs), but they face challenges like the shirking of duties or bureaucratic preferences that differ from the donors (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Nielson and Tierney 2003; Graham 2014). However, in attempting to implement control over IO funding, the donors end up undermining the mandates by increasing the costs of implementing projects (Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023). This theory is salient for research because EF is on the rise in recent years (Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya 2024), and it's important to clarify the debate in the literature.

Theme or project-specific earmarking often involves individual delegation contracts negotiated between IO teams (e.g., country offices or project teams) and individual donors or small groups of donors (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024). This contrasts with the collective principal model of core funding (Reinsberg 2023; Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024). Each specific funding arrangement comes with its own set of modalities and customized requirements (Weinlich et al 2020). Managing a multitude of these specific, tailored funding arrangements for different themes or projects is inherently more complex and time-consuming than managing pooled, flexible resources (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Weinlich et al 2020). Negotiation, administration, and maintaining relationships with numerous individual donors or small donor groups for specific projects adds a significant burden compared to managing core funding from an executive board (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021).

A major source of increased cost is the demand for additional, often tailored, monitoring and reporting requirements from donors for their specific contributions (Weinlich et al 2020; Reinsberg 2023; Heinzel and Reinsberg 2024). These reports are often required to cater to the wants of donors (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021) and can be challenging to compile, especially at the program level (Reinsberg 2023). This requires substantial human resources and

labor (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Weinlich et al 2020; Reinsberg 2023).

Donors frequently specify funds for thematic or project activities but provide less support for the necessary administrative overhead, core functions, or staffing required to implement them (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Reinsberg 2023). Earmarked funds frequently do not (or don't entirely) cover program support costs (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Reinsberg 2023). Donors may prefer not to pay for overhead costs that cannot be directly attributed to specific results (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Weinlich et al 2020). This creates a situation where IOs must implicitly rely on their core funding or general administrative capacity to manage the administrative burden imposed by earmarked funds (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Reinsberg 2023). Short-term or unpredictable earmarked funding, often associated with project-specific grants, makes it challenging to maintain stable institutional structures and hire qualified, long-term staff for necessary administrative and support functions (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Weinlich et al 2020; Reinsberg 2023).

The Interaction Effect: Compounding Transaction and Labor Costs

When there is a higher degree of stringency to earmarked funding, transaction and labor costs can interact to exacerbate costs. When administrative budgets or core funding capacities are strained (due to underfunding or slow growth relative to earmarked funds) (Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Weinlich et al 2020), IO staff and units face pressure to secure resources (Reinsberg 2017). Entrepreneurial staff may actively pursue theme or project-specific earmarked funds as a way to bring resources into their area or cover operational needs, sometimes driven by a desire for visibility or to support "pet projects"(Reinsberg 2017; Baumann 2020; Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024). However, this pursuit and subsequent management of numerous, often small, or highly specific earmarked grants is precisely what generates high transaction costs (Weinlich et al 2020) and demands intensive labor (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Schmid, Reitzenstein, and Hall 2021; Weinlich et al 2020; Reinsberg 2023).

The labor costs are particularly high because staff time is increasingly diverted from their primary responsibilities like project design, implementation, and technical supervision towards administrative tasks such as fundraising, negotiating contracts, complying with myriad tailored reporting requirements, and managing specific donor relationships (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024; Reinsberg 2023; Heinzel and Reinsberg 2024; Weinlich et al 2020). This diversion occurs because the earmarked funds don't cover the full administrative expense, leaving existing staff to deal with the brunt of the gap in funding (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024).

The fragmentation resulting from managing many distinct thematic or project-specific grants necessitates significant labor-intensive efforts at the country or program level to coordinate activities and attempt to build coherent programs from scattered projects. This

struggle to coordinate across numerous specific initiatives adds to overall labor costs without directly contributing to programmatic impact (Weinlich et al 2020).

The pressure to satisfy the requirements of specific donors for their earmarked themes/projects, especially when administrative resources are stretched, can lead to a focus on easily achievable, short-term outputs ("low-hanging fruit") rather than addressing complex, long-term challenges (Weinlich et al 2020; Heinzel, Reinsberg and Zaccaria 2024). This operational rigidity and potential misalignment can further increase the effective labor cost per unit of meaningful development outcomes (Heinzel, Reinsberg, and Zaccaria 2024).

An Inefficient Cycle

The combination of theme-specific earmarking's inherent administrative complexity and the tendency for donors not to fully cover the associated administrative and staffing costs creates an inefficient cycle (Baumann 2021). This is compounded by the presence of additional EF requirements, like project-specific EF or direct staff secondment to positions.

IOs and their staff spend disproportionate time and resources on managing the mechanics of fragmented, specifically themed, or project funds, tasks that do not directly contribute to development results on the ground. These increased transaction and labor costs, coupled with the diversion of staff time from core functions, ultimately undermine the overall efficiency, strategic capacity, and effectiveness of IOs despite potentially increasing the total volume of funds mobilized. In particular, I am focused on the direct impact these issues have on the cost-effectiveness of projects. Cost-effectiveness refers to the ability of the project to achieve its goal without going over budget. With this theory in mind, I present the following hypothesis:

H1: Greater stringency in earmarked funding increases the likelihood of higher overrun costs for projects.

Research Design

I will model the estimated change in project costs caused by the interaction between levels of thematic and institutional earmarking using a large-n OLS regression analysis with interaction terms, robust standard error analysis, and logged disbursement to account for the skewed continuous outcome variable. The unit of analysis is at the project-level. The sample is panel data consisting of 38,806 donor disbursements of funding with available project codes across 26 international organizations and 26 different donor states from the years 1990-2020. I am primarily using the Tracking Earmarked Funding Dataset by Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya (2024) with the non-applicable (vacant) values removed. The large sample size and relative recency of this data allow for my project to come to a generalizable answer as to the impact of differing levels of EF on predicted project overrun costs.

The main independent variables are all binary but represent different levels of stringency in EF. They include thematically specific earmarking (*thm*- broader), project-specific earmarking

(*prj* - stricter), and institutional earmarking at the meso level (*inst* - broader) and the micro level (*staffco* - broader, *staffbi* - stricter) (Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya 2024). Thematic earmarking is coded as 0 if there's no theme (i.e., sector) for the funds, *thm* = 1 if the theme is broad (e.g., education), and *prj* = 1 if the theme is narrow (e.g., a particular project). These two variables can not simultaneously be coded as 1, because a disbursement is either broadly or narrowly focused. Institutional earmarking is coded as *inst* = 1 if the donor chooses a specific sub-organization under the umbrella of a parent organization, *staffco* = 1 if a donor financially supports a position that already exists that isn't based on nationality, and *staffbi* = 1 when donors require the secondment of one of their nationals to a staff position. The main outcome variable is the project overrun amount (Disbursement - Commitment).

I will perform a multivariate OLS regression analysis with interaction terms to answer my question. First, I will prepare the data by ensuring that the variables of year, donor code, sector code, and purpose code are set as factors because they're qualitative. This creates a dummy variable for each. I will then perform the OLS models. The first model will contain an interaction between the variables representing the presence of project EF (*prj*) and institutional (i.e., staff-related) EF (*inst*). The second model will contain an interaction between *prj* and the variable representing staff secondment to a project by a donor (*staffbi*). The final model will contain no interactions.

I am examining the causal impact of EF stringency (thematic and institutional) on project costs. EF stringency may be endogenous or non-random (e.g., donors may assign stricter EF to more politically sensitive or expensive projects). I am using a logged disbursement measure to account for the right-skewed data that could make OLS problematic without it (similar to Heinzel, Cormier, and Reinsberg 2023). I will log-transform only when the variable "disb_minus_commit" is greater than zero to exclude under-budget or on-budget projects.

I'm also using a fixed effect for donor (*donorcode*) to control for differences across donors in funding style, capacity, and priorities, funding sector (*sectorcode*) to control for sector-specific cost structures or implementation patterns, fund purpose (*purposecode*) to control for more granular categorizations of project intent than sector, project year (*year*) to control for changes over time, and trust fund (*tf*) to control for structural/administrative differences in how those funds are managed (such as being more specific to a purpose area) (Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya 2024).

At the recipient country level, I will control for the income of a country using the variable "*incomegroupcode*" from the OECD Creditor Reporting System data because lower-income countries may require more monetary assistance (OECD 2023). I will control for government capacity and measures of corruption for the same reason (Coppedge et al 2025). Finally, I will include a dummy indicating whether the government changed during a project because this could be a source of instability for a project (Dummy from Heinzel and Liese 2021, with data from Cruz, Keefer, and Scartascini 2016).

At the donor level, I will control for major donor status (one of the four largest OECD DAC Commitments in a year) because those are anticipated to give larger disbursements (OECD

2024) I will control for EU member state status (EU 2024), whether the donor is a liberal market economy (World Bank 2024), and the (logged) total official development assistance committed (OECD 2024) for the same reason. I will control for whether development affairs are integrated into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, because those who have such an integration might be more avid donors (To Be Coded Individually, idea based on Reinsberg and Taggart 2025).

At the project-level (all from Tracking Earmarked Funding Dataset by Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya 2024), I will control for the sum of disbursements for that project code to account for larger and smaller projects. I'll control for sector and purpose codes as a proxy for differing project objectives. I'll also control for the number of donors and the funding type/instrument.

Additionally, on account of a lack of available data on the final cost of these projects, I employ other robust controls. To account for potential endogeneity issues, omitted variable bias, and measurement errors, I will use matching as an additional robustness measure. The treatment variables will be *prj*, *thm*, and *staffbi* in three separate analyses. The matching variables for each will be *donorcode*, *sectorcode*, *purposecode*, *year*, *recipientcode*, *tf* (trust fund), and *agencycode*.

My research design faces a number of limitations. I chose to have the cost overrun as my outcome variable rather than the ultimate project cost because of data availability issues. The Tracking Earmarked Funding dataset is rather unique, and while it does use the CRS data as a base, it was still difficult to source control data that could merge with it. Furthermore, while I attempted to control for important variables, there could be omitted variables in the complex process of donors funding projects through international organizations that result in a biased outcome. The filtered data that I'm using only includes 26 donor states, which do comprise most of the funding because they are OECD DAC countries and the EU, but it's not a sample generalizable to smaller donor countries.

Conclusion

In this capstone paper, I have proposed a plan for research based on the emerging literature of earmarked funding in international development projects. Earmarked funding has increased in recent years, but the proportion of less stringently earmarked funding is now rivaling the proportion of more stringently earmarked funding (Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya 2024). Why do donors continue to give, and why is there a divergence in the levels of stringency in funding? I have argued that this is because of the heterogeneity of earmarked funding stringency's impact on project cost efficiency. While earmarked funding has been argued to have a largely negative impact on different types of project performance, including project cost efficiency, this is partially dependent on the level of stringency placed upon that funding. Higher stringency can entail earmarking funds for a particular project or requiring the placement of a national from a donor country on the project staff, while less stringent funding may simply require that the funding be placed towards a broad theme (e.g., water purification). The more

complex the requirements, the higher the labor and transaction costs for implementing the project are. Do to the fact that IO employees must balance budgets for topics of the mandate underserved by donors, facilitate donor demands, and complete donor reporting requirements that would not have been present if the project were funded by core dollars.

This implies that, while not necessarily erasing the negative consequences presented by earmarked funding, donors can give at lower levels of stringency to potentially account for both their desire for cost efficiency and checks on the IOs' power. When this lower level of stringency is present, it may be able to balance the tedious see-saw of donor desires and IO autonomy to come to a final product that funds cost-effective projects. Future researchers should take advantage of the newly available data to incorporate EF stringency into their studies on funding rules and project outcomes in the international relations literature and beyond. Furthermore, additional work needs to be done to make the Tracking Earmarked Funding Dataset (Reinsberg, Heinzel, and Siauwijaya 2024) compatible for merging with more datasets with project-level characteristics to facilitate more granular studies of EF funding rules and project outcomes.

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Who Joins and Who Suffers?
The Impact of Rebel Recruitment and Foreign Fighters on Anti-Civilian Violence

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Abstract

Current literature agrees that the inclusion of foreign fighters (FFs) increases violence against civilians. However, the evidence behind this claim is mixed, with some groups limiting violence despite FFs in their ranks. This study considers rebel groups' preexisting dynamics before FFs arrive- primarily their recruitment styles. Through a combination regression utilizing two novel datasets, this study argues that FFs' impact on anti-civilian violence is conditional on how rebel groups solicit and socialize their recruits. This contributes to ongoing shifts toward interpersonal dynamics as explanations for violence, highlighting foreign fighters as predictors of overall rebel group behavior.

Introduction

How do rebel groups' recruitment of foreign fighters (FFs) impact anti-civilian violence? One frequently cited explanation for FF violence is their lack of shared identity with local civilian populations, which reduces empathy and accountability (Hegghammer, 2010; Malet, 2013). As cultural outsiders, FFs are often unfamiliar with local customs, norms, and communities, making them more likely to disregard civilian welfare. This disconnect results in weaker ties, less restraint, and more brutal behavior toward civilians.

Despite conventional wisdom touting foreign fighters as definite amplifiers of violence, the evidence behind this claim is surprisingly mixed. This puzzle can be illustrated with a comparison of two Syrian al-Qaeda splinter groups: the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra. While both groups recruited foreign fighters and drew from the same ideologies, they perpetuated starkly different outcomes of civilian harm.

ISIS utilized an indiscriminate recruitment strategy, accepting a diverse array of FFs regardless of ideological resonance, cultural competence, or military experience. Consequently, many of the recruited FFs prioritized material and personal gain over the ideological goals of the group. Once in ISIS, these FFs received preferential treatment in the forms of higher pay, priority access to civilian loot, and privileged social status relative to local fighters. These privileges sowed rifts between local and foreign fighters, sparking factionalism and internal competition within the group.

Moreover, ISIS FFs often imposed themselves on the local population. They used threats of violence to extract goods and services, and engaged in psychological abuse, including sexual violence and looting. In part due to their recruitment tactics and organizational structure, ISIS's inclusion of unchecked, materially driven FFs caused civilian harm.

Contrarily, Jabhat al-Nusra was far more selective and ideologically rigorous about their recruitment. The group only admitted (1) Arabic-speaking FFs, (2) those with the explicit goal of toppling the Assad regime, and (3) individuals committed to adhering to the group's interpretation of jihadist principles. Unlike ISIS, al-Nusra discouraged looting and prohibited its FFs from public-facing roles to limit their interaction with the civilian population. Moreover, al-Nusra had a decentralized command structure that enforced FF accountability to local fighters and civilians. These institutional features helped to mitigate some of the risks commonly associated with foreign fighters. While not free of infighting or misconduct, al-Nusra's selective recruitment strategy and organizational discipline allowed it to maintain lower levels of noncombatant harm, despite having FFs in their ranks.

This comparison suggests that the presence of foreign fighters may not automatically lead to civilian victimization. Although both groups recruited FFs, their impact on anti-civilian harm was vastly different. The relationship between foreign fighter presence and anti-civilian violence may be conditional on how FFs are recruited and integrated into rebel groups. Are all FFs equally harmful to civilian populations, or do internal group dynamics, such as recruitment strategy and socialization, shape how they behave? Some rebel groups may seek out highly

motivated fighters who resonate with the group's ideologies. Other groups may attract materially driven individuals who prioritize looting and other personal gains over the goals of the group. The question is not simply whether FFs are recruited into rebel groups, but how they are recruited and under what conditions they operate.

By combining rebel recruitment strategies with counts of FFs, I analyze the interaction between recruitment style and foreign fighter presence in determining anti-civilian violence. This study advances discussions about rebel organizational behavior, particularly how internal decisions shape external violence. It also highlights foreign fighters as active participants in rebel organizational change, rather than monolithic background actors. Lastly, it offers a conditional theory of civilian harm, emphasizing how group-level structures influence individual-level violence.

Literature Review

Rebel groups employ strategic tactics when recruiting new members to their ranks. To fit their growing organizational needs, rebel groups must think of their members as embedded in social environments that reshape their interests (Checkel 2017). This involves appealing to a mix of rebels' material and ideological needs. When screening potential new members, rebel groups must seek out signs that are too costly for mimics to fake, but affordable for the genuinely trustworthy recruit (Hegghammer 2013). They propagate an alarmist discourse and emphasize external threats (Hegghammer 2011). In comparison to those that recruit based on material incentives, groups that rely more on ethnic or ideological appeals (i.e. assuaging an ethnic grievance, toppling a regime) will be less likely to perpetrate sexual violence against civilians (Soules 2023, Eck 2010).

Moreover, rebel groups are more likely to strategically recruit experts when in periods of rebuilding, transitioning, or striving for dominance (Perkoski and Worsnop 2025). While the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset measures the degree to which the rebels rely on material and ideological appeals to recruit (Soules 2023), it does not account for the *type* of person the group is recruiting – especially foreign fighters.

A rebel group is more likely to commit one-sided violence (OSV) when it feels the need to signal strength (Raleigh, 2012) or when there is competition with another group (Nemeth, 2014). This desire to signal strength permeates within armed groups as well, with its members perpetrating one-sided violence to project their own reputations of strength (Stretesky & Pogrebin 2007). OSV was also shown to be a socialization method among fragmented groups, especially those whose members contained children (Cohen & Nordås, 2015), women (Cohen, 2013), or abductees (Cohen, 2016; 2017). Since rebel group infighting is more likely to occur with a high number of factions and low institutionalization (Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour, 2012), fragmented rebel groups are more likely to use OSV to signal strength and rally its members together.

Social Cohesion

Recent literature has shifted toward analyzing organizational variation among rebel groups, examining how recruitment, socialization, and command structure impact group cohesion and civilian treatment (Perkoski &Worsnop, 2025; Soules, 2023; Checkel, 2017). This literature argues that acts of aggression can be used as a method to strengthen armed groups, viewing rebels as embedded in larger social dynamics that both constrain and incentivize them to act (Checkel, 2017; Fujii, 2017). Uniting under similar ideologies and motivations, diverse groups of fighters and actors – including civilians- can form a coherent group (Sanín & Wood, 2014).

Armed groups with marginalized members are more likely to perpetrate OSV. The more disparate a rebel group's power balance is, the less likely they are to be cohesive as a group (Bakke et al., 2012) and thus in need of a bonding mechanism. Groups who use abduction tactics to recruit their members were found to be more fragmented, and thus more likely to commit conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) (Cohen, 2016). The same was true for groups containing women, who were found to be abducted at higher rates than men (Cohen, 2013). Moreover, militias that have recruited children are associated with higher levels of CRSV (Cohen and Nordås 2015). The greater the social disparities are amongst rebel group members, the more likely the group is to seek out a social activity to bring said members together.

If one is made to feel like an outsider due to their age, gender, or abduction status, public acts of violence might be seen as cultivating a sense of belonging (Cohen, 2017; Fujii, 2017). Committing acts of violence helped gang members project a tough reputation (Stretesky & Pogrebin, 2007), which can help alleviate feelings of isolation in an armed environment. If rebel groups are socializing its recruits with violent norms (Gates, 2017), violence may be a way for marginalized members to gain social acceptance in the group.

The social cohesion literature focuses on outsiders who are forcefully integrated into rebel groups, such children or abductees. Due to them being forcibly recruited, these outside recruits are more likely to differ from the group, causing the group to be fragmented and inflict OSV. While these studies have highlighted the importance of recruitment and socialization on organizational outcomes, they rarely address the specific roles of foreign fighters, who complicate this relationship. Though often seen as "outsiders," FFs join voluntarily and are thus not fully represented by the existing literature on coercive outsider recruitment.

What Makes FFs Different?

I utilize the Doctor and Willingham (2022) definition of a foreign fighter, which is an actor who has "(1) Joined an active, armed nonstate group; (2) lacks citizenship of the state in conflict; and (3) is not a member of an official military organization." Although they are all rebels, foreign fighters differ from their local counterparts in crucial ways. FFs often bring expertise and knowledge from abroad, giving them privilege relative to local fighters who join at similar times. FFs often solicit funds from their home countries and are more likely than their local counterparts to participate in suicide missions (Mironova, 2019). Additionally, the inclusion of FFs reduces the need to capture the 'hearts and minds' of civilians (Salehyan et al., 2014; Doctor,

2021) making them key assets to rebel groups. These benefits make FFs highly coveted in their recruitment pools.

However, FFs also introduce risks. Due to prior combat experience at home, FFs may earn higher positions and get paid more money than they would have otherwise. Depending on how their groups organize them, FFs can utilize their privilege to redirect group resources for personal gain, ruining social cohesion with the rest of the group. Moreover, rebel groups with FFs often faced nationality, skin color, and language-based cleavages (Mironova 2019), resulting in infighting among group members. However, co-ethnic rebel alliances tend to be shallow, with co-ideological alliances being deeper and more formal (Balcells et al., 2022), suggesting that personal differences can be set aside for the ideological cause of the rebel group.

The literature generally agrees that foreign fighter inclusion increases OSV toward civilians. Groups with foreign fighters are more likely to inflict conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) than groups that do not (Doctor, 2021). Additionally, rebel groups without inclusive civilian structures caused more OSV when they had FFs then those that did not (Schwartz, 2024). Although rebel groups with FFs cause more OSV (Moore 2019; Schwartz 2023), groups with co-ethnic foreign fighters are less likely to abuse civilians (Moore, 2019). Thus, while the trend is clear, the mechanisms behind it remain contested.

Organizational Factors

Organizational factors are those that pertain to rebel management. Rebel groups that have FFs and centralized command structures are more likely to abuse civilians than those with decentralized command structures (Doctor & Willingham, 2022; Doctor, 2021). Additionally, groups that fostered violent norms (Gates, 2017; Nemeth, 2014) were also found to increase anti-civilian violence. Splinter factions are less likely to commit violence than the parent group (Robinson & Malone, 2024) but once FFs are introduced, violence increases (Schwartz, 2023).

Rebel-Civilian Relations

The second literature camp regards *rebel-civilian relations* as the mechanism behind FFs' impact on anti-civilian violence. Assuming FFs are somewhat disconnected from civilians, this camp argues that incentives for civilian victimization are shaped by the rebel groups' material and personal connections to civilians. Since FFs reduce the incentive to rely on civilians, groups with FFs are more likely to abuse civilians (Wood, 2014; Mironova, 2019; Doctor, 2021). Rebel groups with foreign territorial control are more likely to deploy anti-civilian violence (Stewart & Liou, 2017; Moore, 2019) than those with domestic territories.

Although 'foreignness' seems to be an indicator of increased violence, positive civilian perceptions of rebels can reduce violence, making the relationship between rebels and civilians somewhat mutual. Rebel groups who adopt inclusive governing structures, such as building schools and hospitals, create community embeddedness for FFs, which reduces anti-civilian violence (Schwartz, 2024). Moreover, FFs having ideological resonance with civilians were

shown to positively affect insurgency strength (Bakke, 2014), with fractionalized civilian bases associated with higher levels of anti-civilian violence (Ottman, 2017; Fjelde & Hultman, 2014).

While much has been written on how civilians are recruited, the current literature lacks sufficient analysis into how foreign fighters are recruited. The literature directly pertaining to FFs does not note the means in which they appear in these groups, and how that can shape their actions as rebels. As voluntary actors with a relative amount of privilege, foreign fighters are in a unique position that goes understudied in the current recruitment literature. Additionally, most studies treat FF presence as a binary variable, overlooking the number or proportion of FFs within a group, potentially limiting the studies' nuance.

As voluntary outsiders, FFs should, in theory, be more ideologically resonant with the rest of the group, reducing violence. If ideological resonance lowers OSV, then FF presence should also lower OSV. However, empirical studies suggest the opposite. FF inclusion is shown to *increase* anti-civilian violence, suggesting that ideological resonance alone does not fully explain FFs' behavior.

Theory and Hypotheses

I argue that the extent to which foreign fighters increase OSV depends on how rebel groups recruit and integrate them into their organization. While FFs are often associated with increased civilian victimization, this effect is not solely a result of their outsider status. Instead, FF impact on anti-civilian violence is conditional on rebel group dynamics, particularly recruitment style . This theory assumes that FFs voluntarily join rebel groups and that they are not kidnapped or otherwise forcibly recruited. This theory also assumes that rebel groups face a heterogeneous array of potential FFs with diverse motivations for joining.

Rebel groups differ vastly in their tactics used to recruit rebels. Some groups emphasize ideological commitment, such as political, nationalist, or religious ideology; others use material incentives like salaries, status, or access to civilian loot (Soules, 2023). Through their recruitment strategies, rebel groups are not only signaling their goals but inadvertently shaping the type of people that join them.

FFs bring crucial benefits through diasporic support, language skills, and former combat experience, making them highly coveted by rebel groups. As a result, FFs are often privileged relative to local recruits. They may receive higher pay, priority access to looted goods, or greater freedom during group operations. However, this preferential treatment of FFs can produce unintended consequences that can be detrimental to the group. When rebel groups recruit based on material benefits, they are more likely to recruit 'profit-driven' FFs, who join for material gain rather than for the advancement of the group's aims. As they are less constrained by the group's ideopolitical mission, these profit-driven FFs should be more likely to perpetuate self-interested behaviors, including theft, exploitation, and anti-civilian violence.

ISIS, which recruited indiscriminately, prioritized and rewarded foreign fighters who were materially driven. Moreover, the group allowed these more self-interested fighters to roam

free and act on those personal incentives. This aligns with literature that suggests that materially motivated fighters- especially those in groups with weak discipline structures- are more likely to perpetuate violence. If foreign fighters are recruited for similar material benefits, these risks of violence should increase. Not only do FFs lack sociocultural ties to the local population that might make them more likely to respect civilians, but their materially driven rebel groups encourage or otherwise fail to restrain their violence. To prove their loyalty and toughness to their peers, FFs may engage in performative violence. When rebel groups reward anti-civilian violence in the form of looting or sexual slavery, FFs become active contributors to noncombatant harm.

H1: FFs are more likely to increase OSV when they are in groups who recruit on material incentives.

In contrast, rebel groups that recruit on ideological grounds are more likely to discipline their members to advance the goals of the group. Not only does this bond disparate members together under a common goal, but this also allows for the group to adopt restraint towards civilians. As it only recruited ideologically resonant fighters, Jabhat al-Nusra screened and disciplined its FFs to better advance the goals of the group. Since the group's main goal was not necessarily material gain, they were less overt about harming civilians as they were preoccupied with advancing their ideological goals.

In hostile groups that may otherwise cast doubt on their commitments, FFs can use violence to signal strength and bond with the rest of the group. Contrarily, if a rebel group aims to project a positive image of themselves to civilians, they should be less likely to harm civilians. In cases like these, rebel groups discourage disrespect or harm of civilians, lest the group's reputation be tarnished. The inclusion of FFs, who are more likely to misunderstand civilian culture, could create friction between rebels and civilians. However, ideologically driven FFs will strive to fit in and prove themselves– thus not perpetuating violence for the sake of the group's reputation.

H2: Foreign fighters are more likely to increase OSV when their primary motivation for joining is material gain rather than ideological commitment.

Research Design

To test this theory, I will conduct a negative binomial regression using a combination of two novel datasets, the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset and the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset. I analyze 250 group-conflict-years from 1989 to 2011, encompassing the datasets' temporal and group-conflict availability.

Independent Variable: Recruitment of Foreign Fighters

The first half of the independent variable is *recruitment type*, measured with the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID) from Soules (2023). The RAID contains information on recruitment styles of 232 rebel groups from 1989-2011, using an ordinal measure of the extent to which they rely on ideological (relative to material) appeals.

To tailor this study to foreign fighters, I also include a variable for *foreign fighter count* in a rebel group from the Rebel Foreign Fighter Dataset (RFFD) presented in Schwartz (2024). The RFFD includes explicit coding for the counts of foreign fighters, which I felt was missing in prior research. Building off previous datasets like Malet (2016) and Hegghammer (2010), the RFFD includes 535 observations from 65 conflicts from 1985-2022. The RFFD's *FF Best* variable gives a count of the best estimate of foreign fighter number in a particular conflict.

Through an interaction of *recruitment type* and *FF count* variables*,* I aim to analyze whether either effect is conditional on the other. Since both datasets contain variables with names of rebel groups, I will join the datasets along this variable.

Outcome Variable: One-Sided Violence

The outcome variable is *anti-civilian violence,* measured with a count of the recorded number of civilians killed by a rebel group in a conflict-year according to the UCDP One-Sided Violence Dataset. It is especially useful in that it distinguishes between state and nonstate actors.

Since both dependent variables are count-based, a negative binomial model seems to be the most appropriate. Moreover, since anti-civilian violence can occur infrequently in large spikes, the data has the potential to be overdispersed, making negative binomial the more suitable choice. Before running this model, I will need to filter the OSV data for deaths by rebel groups, as the dataset includes OSV perpetuated by state actors as well.

Control Variables

I control for conflict intensity, as higher intensity often leads to more violence, regardless of if FFs are involved. This control is a count best estimate of battle-related deaths from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. Since rebel groups are more likely to form in autocratic regimes, causing these autocracies to respond with violence, I also control for regime type using the Polity V Score and for military intervention using the Military Intervention by Powerful States dataset.

Moreover, I control for rebel group notoriety using the Big Allied and Dangerous 2 Dataset's (BAAD2) measures of media attention and transnational activity, to account for more widely known groups potentially recruiting FFs at higher rates or having more material benefits to offer their recruits.

Challenges and Limitations

Since I am joining datasets, especially on group names, I run the risk of mismatching different cases. For example, if one dataset contains "ISIS" and the other contains "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria", these would not match even though they are referring to the same rebel group.

Additionally, the FF estimates in the RFFD have varying source reliability, which Schwartz (2024) accounts for with a *reliability* variable on a 1-4 scale. These estimates were rated a 4 if the number was reported by an academic, government, or institutional body and corroborated by a second document. Estimates and averages from these bodies with no corroboration received 3's. Estimates from secondary news sources received 2's and 1's depending on their corroboration. While the dataset prioritizes reliable sources and codes for unreliable ones, my main independent variable having varying reliability can muddy any of my findings.

On the dependent variable side, the UCDP OSV dataset only reports on conflicts with at least 25 confirmed fatalities per year per perpetrator. While this reduces 'noise' from smaller events, this exclusion possibly limits my study's generalizability to smaller conflicts.

Conclusion

While prior studies show how rebels impact violence, this study examines how the types of rebels recruited shapes violence. Moreover, this study adds to the growing literature around rebel motivations, which are notoriously difficult to study, and applies them to the unique foreign fighter context. Building upon previous works, this study will contribute to foreign fighter literature that proactively treats foreign fighters as predictors of rebel group behavior, rather than as a supplementary detail of the group. This study also utilizes two novel datasets to analyze the interaction of the extent to which foreign fighters join rebel groups and how they increase anti-civilian violence. Since wartime violence rarely exists in a vacuum, conducting studies with multi-causal explanations better captures the realities of rebel group dynamics.

The findings from this study may prove useful regarding dispute settlements involving rebel groups. For instance, if groups that use ideological recruitment are less likely to harm civilians, they may be more receptive to negotiated settlements – especially if those settlements contain clauses that protect civilians. However, the inclusion of foreign fighters has the potential to ruin cohesion and spoil the groups' bargaining tactics, making negotiation more difficult. If policymakers screened for transnational support or an ideological recruitment style, the findings from this study may better inform them about the organizational actions of these rebel groups. Moreover, if materially based recruitment of FFs is linked with less cohesion and more violence, then policymakers who wish to locate rebel group bases may choose to target transnational flows of coveted resources and money into conflict zones.

While this study focuses on a rebel group's recruitment tactics, their social dynamics, like norm fostering or fragmentation, also play a role in shaping violence. Often lacking familiarity with local customs, language fluency, and social ties to local populations, FFs are almost always positioned as cultural outsiders. FFs' outsider status can create tension within the rebel groups, particularly when they are treated preferentially. Preferential treatment can cause resentment

among fighters, weakening social cohesion and sparking factional cleavages. A potential avenue for future research lies in the interaction between foreign fighter inclusion and social dynamics, and their impact on overall rebel violence.

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When to Migrate: The Role of Social Networks in Shaping Migration Timing

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Abstract

How does the strength of social networks influence the timing of migration decisions? This paper argues that the timing of migration is significantly shaped by the strength of a migrant's social network. Drawing on a vignette survey experiment that examines individuals who migrated during key election years—from Mexico to the United States and from Turkey to Germany—I expect to find that migrants embedded in stronger social networks relocated more quickly, as they possessed greater social capital in the form of resources and information. These findings offer important implications for migration literature, particularly in understanding how social capital accelerates migratory responses to political events. By emphasizing when people migrate, not just where, this paper shifts the focus from individual decision-making to the collective, network-based dynamics that influence the timing and coordination of migration.

Introduction

Migration decisions are rarely made in isolation. Instead, they are deeply shaped by the social relationships, networks, and flows of information that surround potential migrants. A key concept for understanding these dynamics is social capital, which Bourdieu (1985) defines as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition." Social capital has long been recognized as a central driver of migration, particularly in shaping where individuals choose to go. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to when individuals decide to move. Although scholars broadly agree on the importance of social networks and social capital in migration, most existing literature has concentrated on destination outcomes. The role these factors play in shaping the timing of migration remains underexplored, a gap this paper seeks to address.

Understanding the timing of migration is just as critical as understanding where and why it occurs. In 2024 alone, the World Migration Report estimated that there were 281 million international migrants (International Organization for Migration, 2025). In a rapidly changing global landscape, the ability to act quickly can be just as important as the choice of destination. Shifting the focus from understanding migration destinations to analyzing the timing of migration decisions, this paper aims to answer the question: How does the strength of social networks influence the timing of migration decisions?

This paper argues that the timing of migration is significantly influenced by the strength of a migrant's social network—specifically those rooted in the host country. These networks serve as a vital channel through which migrants access social capital (Jochim & Macková, 2024). Migrants embedded in strong networks – characterized by trust, reciprocity, and tightly-knit relationships – are better positioned to access timely and reliable information and support. This, in turn, allows quicker responses to time-sensitive opportunities or sudden policy changes. In contrast, weaker networks – characterized by loose, fleeting connections – are less effective in transmitting timely, actionable information, often resulting in delayed decision-making resulting in lower levels of social capital. As digital connectivity continues to expand, migrants increasingly are involved in a range of social networks. However, I argue that those engaged in stronger, more cohesive networks are generally more capable of acting quicker in response to migration-related opportunities.

Building on theories of social capital (Bourdieu, 1985; Glanville & Bienenstock, 2009) and migration network theory (Massey et al., 1993), this framework explores how variations in network strength affect not only the migration decision but also when the decision occurs. Rather than viewing migration as the outcome of isolated, individual calculations, I emphasize how the structure and strength of social ties shapes the timing of migration. By analyzing how social capital influences the speed and quality of information transmission within migrant networks, I aim to show that the timing of migration is closely tied to the structure and reliability of the relationships through which migration-related support and knowledge are accessed. In doing so,

this paper highlights the network level as a critical yet underexplored dimension of migration, decision-making. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing a more comprehensive view of migration flows.

To examine the relationship between network strength and the timing of migration, I employ a vignette survey experiment designed to assess how recently relocated migrants from Mexico and Turkey—who moved to the United States and Germany, respectively—were influenced by varying levels of social capital embedded in different types of social networks. Using hypothetical scenarios, the survey assesses how differences in social capital affect individuals' decisions about when to migrate. Specifically, I investigate whether access to strong, cohesive networks accelerates migration by enabling faster decision-making. In the U.S. context, I sample Mexican migrants who arrived during the 2016, 2020, and 2024 presidential election years—periods characterized by intensified immigration debates and shifts in enforcement. For the German case, I focus on Turkish migrants who relocated during or shortly after the 2017, 2021, and 2025 federal elections, which similarly coincided with changes in migration discourse and policy.

As immigration becomes increasingly politicized and anti-immigration rhetoric intensifies worldwide, understanding how the strength of social networks influences the timing of migration decisions is more important than ever. This paper contributes to migration studies by shifting the focus beyond destination choice to also consider when migrants choose to move. While previous literature has emphasized destination selection, this study brings attention to the timing of migration – a factor that can be equally critical in shaping migration outcomes. Understanding the patterns and timing of relocation is essential not only for advancing academic understanding but also for informing responsive and effective policy. The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers, particularly in designing integration strategies and support services that align with the realities of migrant decision-making timelines. These implications will be discussed in the following sentence.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, I review existing migration literature, emphasizing the gap concerning the role of social networks in shaping the timing of migration, rather than just the destination. I then present my theoretical framework and outline the empirical strategy used to investigate the relationship between network strength and timing of migrant-decision making. Following an analysis of the main findings, I discuss their broader implications, highlighting the critical role that network strength and social capital play in understanding migration patterns.

Literature Review

Existing migration literature has largely concentrated on the push and pull factors that shape migration flows. On the supply side, scholars emphasize how economic hardship, violence, political instability, and corruption serve as major drivers of out-migration (Carbajal & de Miguel Calvo, 2021; Cerrutti & Parrado, 2015; Urbański, 2022; Auer et al., 2020; Bernini et

al., 2024). More recent studies have added environmental factors such as climate change and ecological degradation to the list of emerging push drivers (Afifi, 2011; Obokata et al., 2014; Millock, 2015). On the demand side, research has focused on the characteristics of destination countries – such as political environments, civil rights protections, and migrant integration policies – that make them attractive to migrants (Fitzgerald et al., 2014; Ferwerda & Gest, 2021; Carbajal & de Miguel Calvo, 2021; Beverelli, 2022). While these studies help explain why and where migration occurs, far less attention has been given to when individuals choose to migrate.

Timing is a critical, yet underexplored dimension of migration decision-making. A small but growing body of work has begun to explore this question. For instance, Holland and Peters (2020) link worsening conditions in origin countries to accelerated migration decisions, and Schewel (2020) provides unique insight into the concept of immobility, arguing that understanding why migrants choose to stay can shed light on the timing and conditions under which the decision to relocate eventually occurs. However, this literature often lacks attention to the mechanisms through which information flows to migrants – and how those mechanisms, particularly social networks, may influence the timing of migration.

Social networks have long been recognized as a core factor in shaping migration patterns (Massey, 1990; Massey et al., 1993; Haug, 2008). A migration network refers to the web of interpersonal relations—often involving family or friends—through which migrants access information and support (Haug, 2008). These networks often provide emotional support, economic assistance, and knowledge to help individuals navigate the migration process (Fitzgerald et al., 2014; Falck et al., 2018; Bernini et al., 2024). Comola and Mendola (2015), as well as Carbajal and de Miguel Calvo (2021), argue that these networks function as pull factors by lowering the costs and risks of migration. However, this literature focuses heavily on how these networks influence the destination of migration, and less on how they shape the timing of migration decisions. Yet the timing of migration is just as critical to understand as the decision of where to relocate.

At the core of these networks is social capital, which scholar Bourdieu (1985) defines as the actual or potential resources available through a durable network of mutual relationships. Migrant networks act as key means through which this capital can be accumulated among migrants. Scholars widely agree that social capital plays a vital role in migration by helping migrants navigate bureaucratic processes, secure housing or employment, and gain access to vital information (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Jochim & Macková, 2024; Manchin & Orazabayev, 2018; Williams et al., 2020). While it is well-established that social capital significantly influences migrant decision-making (Dolfin & Genicot, 2010; Garip & Asad, 2016; Haug, 2008), there remains a need to better understand the specific aspects of social capital that drive migration and the mechanisms through which it does. Less attention has been paid to the mechanisms through which social capital functions—and how variations in network strength might shape the timing of migration decisions.

Despite recognition of the importance of social capital in lowering migration barriers, there remains a notable gap in understanding how variations in the strength of social networks

influence the timing of migration decisions. Specifically, little is known about how quickly information spreads within different types of networks, how migrants interpret that information or resources, and how that affects their ability to act in a timely manner. This study aims to address this gap by shifting the focus from the well-studied questions of why and where migration occurs, to explore when it occurs – and how social capital shapes that timing. By examining the strength of migrant networks as a key mechanism for information transmission and resource mobilization, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role that social ties play in shaping not just migration outcomes, but the speed of decision-making.

Theory

The timing of migration decisions is often just as critical as the destination itself, particularly in contexts where migrants must respond rapidly to changes in immigration policies, employment opportunities, or socio-political conditions. In this theoretical framework, I build on existing research by shifting focus from where migration occurs to when it occurs, and I argue that the strength of social capital – particularly within social networks based in the host country – is central to understanding this timing.

Scholars Glanville & Bienenstock (2009) identify three core components that characterize social capital: network structure, trust and reciprocity, and the resources that are exchanged within networks. I contend that these components don't just affect whether migration happens but directly influence how quickly it occurs. These migrant networks – specifically those located in the host country – serve as crucial platforms for sharing time-sensitive information and offering support that can determine when a potential migrant decides to act. Strong networks can offer faster access to both information and resources that are critical to reducing uncertainty and facilitating quicker migration decisions.

Engaging in social networks is a core way migrants accumulate social capital (Jochim & Macková, 2024). However, not all networks are equally effective in influencing migration timing. According to Bourdieu (1985), the amount of social capital accessible to an individual is determined by both the number of network connections a migrant can count on as well as the total amount of capital – whether financial, cultural, or human - each member of the network has. Therefore, even if individuals participate in multiple networks of varying strengths, the presence of a strong network significantly enhances their ability to respond rapidly to migration opportunities or policy shifts. In other words, while migrants may have access to both strong and weak networks, I argue those embedded in stronger networks are better positioned to make more timely migration decisions.

According to the network theory outlined by Massey et al. (1993), a migrant's decision-making process is greatly influenced by their embeddedness in social relationships, meaning that potential migrants are often guided by the relationships and resources available within their existing networks. Massey's (1990) cumulative cause theory suggests that migration isn't a one-time event, but rather an ongoing process that builds on prior migration experiences

and knowledge. These relationships impact the accessibility and speed of information exchange, and as networks evolve and expand, the flow of information and resources shift, making migration more accessible and likely over time. Crucially, these dynamics are not just about whether information is available – but how fast it is communicated, received, and acted upon. My theory highlights the dependence of migration on social networks, suggesting that migration is more likely to occur in well-established networks where information is easily accessed and shared.

I argue that the strength of a migrant's social network is critical in understanding the timing of migration. Specifically, strong networks – those characterized by close personal relationships with family members (Garip & Asad, 2016) – facilitate the flow of social capital, enabling quicker responses to time-sensitive information. Trust, as noted by Díaz de León (2023) and Jochim & Macková (2024), plays a critical role in ensuring the credibility and usability of this information. According to Glanville and Bienenstock (2009), social capital cannot exist without some level of trust of reciprocity present. In the context of migration timing, trust is foundational for making sure migrants not only receive information but feel confident enough to act on the information. In contrast, weaker networks – those composed of loose, frequently changing connections rather than traditional tightly-knit communities (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014), often transmit information that is delayed, inconsistent, or perceived as less reliable.

Strong networks also facilitate access to concrete resources, such as financial assistance, formal and informal employment opportunities, and housing options, which can drastically reduce the time needed to prepare for migration and make migrants feel more secure in their decision to relocate (Dolfin & Genicot, 2010; Belabbas et al., 2022). Dolfin and Genicot (2010) and Garip and Asad (2016) note that informational assistance provided by household members has a more significant impact than assistance from the broader community. Furthermore, the presence of social capital within strong networks also offers emotional and material support, reducing the overall uncertainty migrants face, and encouraging quicker decision-making. Migrants with strong social networks are better positioned to adapt, securing resources or finding different pathways for relocation that allow them to migrate more quickly than those who don't have access to such networks.

A faster flow of information and resources enables migrants to quickly assess the viability of migration opportunities and respond to external changes, such as shifts in immigration policies or employment prospects. When information and resources are transmitted more rapidly and reliably through strong social networks, migrants are able to make informed decisions more quickly. This can help reduce the uncertainty and anxiety that often influences the migration process. This reduction in uncertainty not only accelerates the decision-making process but also increases the likelihood of timely action, allowing migrants to act quickly on opportunities. In short, strong host-country-based networks help migrants act faster by delivering both information and material support in a timely fashion. It's important to note that information and resources flow alongside each other—access to one isn't dependent on the other, but both play a key role in expediting migration.

On the other hand, migrants relying primarily on weak networks – like acquaintances or social media connections – often face delays in both information and resources. While some scholars have argued that weak networks can provide access to a broader range of individuals (Belabbas et al., 2022; Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Liu, 2013), I contend that the speed and trustworthiness of this information can be compromised, as they don't offer the same social capital available within stronger networks. In fact, work by Dekker et al. (2018) finds that social media information originating from existing social ties is seen as more trustworthy. Weak social networks, however, have a slower information flow due to limited or no levels of social capital, causing information to take longer to reach migrants or possibly be incomplete, resulting in delayed migrant timing decisions. Additionally, these networks are less effective in mobilizing the kind of resources that would accelerate migration decisions, such as financial support or employment opportunities. The lack of immediate assistance and coordination often forces migrants in weak networks to delay their decisions until they can successfully secure the necessary support.

Strong networks also create opportunities for coordination and collective action among migrants. The role of trust and reciprocity within these networks can reduce the risks and costs associated with migration by pooling resources, facilitating group movement, and providing emotional support. These characteristics help ease the burden of migration and can significantly accelerate the decision-making timeline of relocation. Migrants embedded in strong networks are more capable of acting quickly because they can efficiently and effectively mobilize, and count on support both before and after their relocation. Even if migrants in weak networks receive similar information, the lack of coordination within these networks' contrasts with the support and collective action found in strong networks. They lack the infrastructure for coordination, making it harder for individuals to align their decisions with others or confidently navigate rapidly changing environments.

However, while quicker migration decisions can be beneficial – particularly in volatile or transitional periods when opportunities or legal windows may shift rapidly – it is important to acknowledge that strong networks might also lead to strategic delays. Migrants embedded in strong, reliable networks may choose to wait until migration conditions are most favorable because they have confidence that their support system will remain intact. In this sense, strong networks can provide the flexibility and security to delay migration until the timing is optimal. While my theory emphasizes that strong networks generally facilitate faster decisions, they can also empower migrants with the ability to be more strategic about when to move. That said, because this paper focuses on periods of transition in the host country when responsiveness is critical, timely decision-making remains a central concern, and strong networks are key in aiding that responsiveness.

Thus, my theory links social capital directly to the timing of migration decisions. Specifically, I argue that migrants embedded in strong, host-country-based networks – characterized by trust, reciprocity, and resource-sharing – are more likely to facilitate timely migration decisions. These networks facilitate faster and more efficient information transmission

and resources, which in turn reduce uncertainty and enable quicker action for relocation. Weak networks, while they can be expansive, offer slower and less reliable flows of information and resources, resulting in delayed migrant timing decisions. Essentially, the strength of a migrant's social network directly affects the transmission of information and resources, which in turn impacts the timing of their decision-making. This leads me to my hypothesis:

H1: Migrants embedded in strong social networks based in the host country will make migration timing decisions more quickly than those embedded in weak networks

Research Design

To test my hypothesis and explore how social capital within migrant networks influences the timing of migration decisions, I implement a vignette survey experiment. Based on my theory, I hypothesize that migrants embedded in strong, host-country-based networks relocate more quickly due to higher levels of social capital – both informational and material. When embedded in dense, cohesive networks, this social capital plays a critical role not only in determining whether migrants relocate but also when they do so. To empirically evaluate this relationship, I adopt Kinne's (2024) structural approach, which emphasizes how patterns of connectivity – specifically third-party ties – shape cooperative outcomes. I extend this logic to migrant networks, theorizing that network structure facilitates or delays migration by shaping access to timely, trusted support.

This study focuses on two well-established migration corridors: Mexico to the United States and Turkey to Germany. Both reflect longstanding migration patterns and are ideal for examining how social networks in destination countries influence successive waves of migration, consistent with Massey et al.'s (1993) network theory. These corridors not only reflect high-volume, long-standing migration patterns but also offer variation in political context and policy environments, making them especially valuable for assessing how social capital operates across different institutional and cultural sites. Surveying migrants from these specific migration corridors provides a unique opportunity to examine how the strength of social networks influences the timing of migration.

To understand how social networks affect the timing of migration, the survey targets migrants who relocated during or shortly after key political transitions within the host countries of the United States and Germany. For the U.S., I sample migrants who arrived during the 2016, 2020, and 2024 U.S. election years. These are periods marked by heightened immigration policy debates and significant shifts in enforcement and migration rhetoric. Similarly, for Germany, I sample Turkish migrants who relocated during or following the 2017, 2021, or 2025 federal elections. These years represent critical moments when external changes could have pressured migrants to act more swiftly. By anchoring the study in these political periods, I am able to evaluate whether migrants embedded in stronger networks were able to respond more quickly to

shifts in policy or environmental changes – an important test of how social capital interacts with these time-sensitive decisions.

The survey will be distributed online to a sample of migrants who relocated within the past two years, focusing on those who moved during the political windows outlined above. This group was selected because their decision-making process is still recent enough to recall with accuracy, while far enough removed to allow for reflection on the influences behind their move. Survey participants will be anonymous and must be 18 years or older, originally from Mexico or Turkey, and currently residing in the United States or Germany, respectively. To address concerns about self-selection bias and data quality, I will utilize stratified sampling to ensure representations across age, gender, and socioeconomic status. While internet-based surveys may underrepresent migrants with limited internet access, stratification will help reduce potential bias and increase generalizability. This approach enables me to capture not only the act of migrating but also the temporal dynamics of decision-making, which are often overlooked in traditional migration studies that tend to focus solely on outcomes like destination. Targeting migrants who relocated during these political periods allows me to assess whether network strength helps migrants act more swiftly in response to policy shifts.

The dependent variable in this study is migration timing, measured as the time elapsed between when a respondent first seriously considered migration and to the actual relocation. To capture this, I will ask respondents open-ended questions such as, "When did you first begin considering migration seriously?" and "On what date did you relocate?" The number of days or weeks between these dates will be used as a continuous measure of decision-making speed. This provides a nuanced understanding of how quickly migrants move from contemplation to action.

The independent variable is network strength, conceptualized as a structural property of the social networks' migrants are embedded in. Drawing from Kinne (2024), I define network strength using two key structural features: network density (how interconnected a network is) and the presence of transitive triads (when two people in a network become connected through a mutual contact). A network's structural features – meaning its density and occurrence of transitive triads– reflect the degree to which migrants are embedded in cohesive, supportive networks, and serve as proxies for the amount of social capital, in the form of trust, coordination, information, and resources, available to them. My theory posits that migrants embedded in denser, more transitive networks will relocate more quickly due to faster and more reliable access to the tools necessary for migration.

Using a vignette-based survey experiment enables me to test the impact of network strength on migration timing. This approach allows me to simulate various network conditions through hypothetical scenarios. I present respondents with a series of randomized, hypothetical situations in which they are embedded in host-country networks of differing structural configurations. The key features that vary across vignettes are network density and the presence or absence of transitive triads. For example, in a high-density/high-transitivity scenario, all network members are connected and coordinate regularly; in a low-density/low-transitivity scenario, the migrants receive support from sources that aren't connected to each other and don't

coordinate. After each scenario, participants will be asked how quickly they would migrate in that situation, using a five-point Likert scale of urgency and a categorical time frame (e.g., "within one month", "within six months" etc.). This outcome measure is used to approximate migration timing, capturing how perceived urgency varies depending on the structural design of available network support.

This allows me to directly test whether higher structural network strength leads to greater urgency and shorter hypothetical migration timelines. By varying network attributes across different hypothetical scenarios, I can isolate their causal impact on migration timing. Though the scenarios are hypothetical, they are grounded in realistic dynamics observed in migrant communities. I will analyze the data using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, testing how differences in structural conditions influence migration urgency. Although the dependent variable is based on survey responses, I treat it as a continuous measure of migration timing, making OLS an appropriate choice for estimating the average effects of different network conditions.

To address possible endogeneity concerns, I will include individual-level control variables including age, gender, education level, and marital status. These factors can influence the timing of migration, which is why it is important to isolate their effect when looking at network strength. Furthermore, I will control for socioeconomic status (Auer et al., 2020), educational background (Holland & Peters, 2020), political stability and the absence of violence and terrorism (Auer et al., 2020), and proximity to migration destinations (Fitzgerald, 2014). These variables are known to influence both the decision to migrate and the timing of that migration. Controlling for these variables helps to ensure that the results are not confounded by factors external to network dynamics. Since this study specifically focuses on how social network strength influences migration behavior, accounting for these background variables is critical to accurately capture the causal mechanisms.

By embedding hypothetical network scenarios into an experimental survey, this study offers a novel approach to understanding how the structure and strength of migrant networks shape not just where migrants go, but when they choose to go. It bridges the social capital and migration literature with experimental methods, applying Kinne's structural logic to real-world migration behavior. In doing so, it offers important insights into how migrants respond to external shocks and shifting opportunities, and how the networks they rely on can compress or extend the decision-making timeline.

Implications and Conclusion

This paper investigates how the strength of migrants' social networks influences not only whether and where people migrate, but also when they choose to relocate. Theoretically, I argue that strong host-country-based networks – characterized by trust, reciprocity, and coordination – play a crucial role in accelerating migration timing by facilitating the fast and reliable transmission of both information and resources. Based on this framework and my empirical design, I would expect to find that migrants embedded in strong, cohesive networks relocate

more quickly than those in weak or fragmented ones. These networks accelerate migration timing by reducing uncertainty, providing timely and reliable information, and mobilizing resources such as housing, employment opportunities, or financial support. Understanding how different levels of social capital influence the timing of migration provides a more comprehensive view of migrant-decision making. Migration is not just a matter of where and why, but also when. This timing can be extremely important in shaping migrant outcomes, especially during key periods of rapid political, economic, or environmental change.

This study makes several key contributions to migration literature. First, it extends social capital theory and migration network theory by emphasizing timing as a critical dimension of migration behavior. While past work has highlighted that social ties help facilitate migration, I look at how the specific structure and quality of those ties determine not just migration feasibility, but the speed of that decision in this paper. Additionally, by using a vignette-based survey experiment, this study provides a unique approach to measuring hypothetical responses to realistic, time-sensitive migration conditions. This helps capture both the structural network dynamics and decision-making urgency that come with varying levels of social capital. Lastly, by analyzing migration decisions within the context of recent political transitions (e.g., U.S. and German election years), this paper highlights the reality that migrants often operate under pressure and must be able to respond quickly to shifting external conditions. Timing, in these cases, is often an intentional response that is either expedited or hindered by network-based social capital access. As immigration policy and rhetoric continue to be greatly debated, expanding our theoretical understanding of migration timing is crucial for better understanding how migrants respond to shifting conditions.

From a policy perspective, the proposed findings carry several important implications. First, in terms of managing migration flows and decision-making processes, policymakers must recognize that timely migration decisions are not solely individual but instead are heavily influenced by the social networks within which migrants are embedded. Therefore, interventions aimed at improving migration outcomes must account for how migrants' access to social networks, specifically strong, coordinated networks, affects their ability to act quickly and efficiently in response to opportunities or policy changes. Additionally, organizations that support migrants play a crucial role in helping to foster these networks. By encouraging community-building, facilitating mentoring programs, and helping disseminate accurate and timely information through established and trusted social ties, these organizations can help foster robust, trust-based networks that allow for quicker and more informed migration decisions. For programs that are designed to enhance network cohesion, they can indirectly help accelerate migration processes, ensuring that migrants are well-informed and able to act more swiftly when needed.

While this study focuses primarily on voluntary migration, the insights gained may also be relevant to forced migration contexts. In situations of sudden shifts in migration policy or political upheaval, migrants embedded in strong networks are better positioned to respond quickly and access better outcomes. The findings from this paper can guide policymakers in

identifying groups with weaker social ties who may face delays in their migration processes. By recognizing these weaknesses, resources can be allocated more equitably and proactively to ensure more timely and safe migration for all migrants.

Importantly, this paper challenges the dominant individualistic framing of migrant-decision making by highlighting the collective nature of network-based influence. Migrants often make decisions not in isolation but as members of tightly connected communities where information and resources are shared. By focusing on the role of social networks, this study highlights how group-level dynamics, particularly the strength and cohesion of these networks, serve as a key determinant of migration timing. This reframing contributes to a growing body of literature that views migration not as a purely individual decision, but as a socially embedded process that is shaped by access to this collective dynamic.

In conclusion, this paper shifts the traditional migration lens from destination selection to migration timing. As global migration flows continue to increase, understanding the timing behind migration is more critical than ever. I provide a deeper understanding of how migrants respond to migration-related opportunities and what influences the timing of relocation. This paper highlights the central role of network strength and social capital in shaping not only whether migration occurs but how fast it does. By showing that the timing of migration is a function of the structure and quality of migrants' social network, this research helps lay the groundwork for important future migration studies and policies that engage with the lived realities that influence migrant-decision making. Future research could explore how the strength of social networks varies across different migrant communities and how specific types of social capital within these networks contribute to migration timing.

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Autocratic Isolation: How the Club of Autocrats Undermines Sanctions

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Abstract

Sanctions remain a central tool in international relations to influence or punish states violating global norms. Yet, their effectiveness against authoritarian regimes is debated, as such regimes frequently adopt sophisticated survival strategies. This research addresses an empirical puzzle: why are sanctioned autocracies shifting from isolationist mechanisms toward collective cooperation via authoritarian international organizations (IOs)? Through mixed-methods analysis combining quantitative data (1990–2023) and qualitative case studies of Russia, Iran, and Syria, this study investigates how authoritarian IO membership enhances regime stability by mitigating sanctions' impacts. The study identifies three mechanisms: material substitution, diplomatic shielding, and strategic coordination that authoritarian IOs use to circumvent sanctions collectively. Findings suggest that membership in such organizations increases regime durability and decreases leadership turnover under sanction-induced pressure. Consequently, policymakers should rethink traditional sanction designs, targeting authoritarian alliances, the “Club of Autocrats” that offer economic, diplomatic, and strategic support. This research underlines the limits of sanctions and suggests a broader strategy combining economic pressure with diplomacy and support for liberal institutions to erode authoritarian resilience.

Introduction

Up until today, sanctions have remained a prominent tool used by both states and International Organizations (IOs) to punish violators of international norms or force a state to change its foreign policy. Clearly, sanctions are seen as a less destructive alternative than direct military confrontation. However, their effectiveness and impact on target states remains debated, especially in the cases of autocratic regimes. Some believe that sanctions undermine such regimes by damaging their economies, increasing domestic unrest, and causing higher probabilities of leadership turnover (Marinov, 2005; von Soest and Wahman, 2014; Escribà-Folch and Wright, 2010, 2015; Yu, 2024). Meanwhile, others argue that authoritarian leaders use sanctions to solidify their power and tighten control over their citizens (Pape, 1997; Fathollah-Nejad, 2014; Grauvogel and von Soest, 2014; Hellmeier, 2021; von Soest, 2023). This raises an important question: How do authoritarian states manage to survive and maintain their regimes under the colossal pressure of international sanctions and global isolation?

For quite some time, autocratic regimes have relied heavily on isolationist strategies, such as developing shadow economies or implementing sanction-busting strategies, like trading with third parties to mitigate the destabilizing effects of sanctions. Bryan Early's (2009, 2012, 2019) works highlight how sanctioned states circumvent global economic and political restrictions through profit-driven firms and informal economic networks, allowing them to endure international pressure. Yet, recent geopolitical trends highlight a notable shift away from purely isolationist survival mechanisms toward active engagement in authoritarian international and regional organizations (IOs and ROs) (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018, 2019; Debre, 2022, 2025; Cottiero and Haggard, 2023). Such transition underscores a significant empirical puzzle: Why are sanctioned autocracies increasingly shifting from isolationist survival strategies to collective cooperation through authoritarian ROs and IOs?

This shift in behavior is particularly puzzling considering traditional views that autocratic states generally prioritize national sovereignty and self-reliance over multilateral cooperation (Ginsburg, 2020; Libman, Obydenkova, 2018). Recently, however, numerous autocracies have established or joined organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and others. These entities not only serve as political and economic alliances but also play a critical role in countering the isolating and destabilizing effects of sanctions.

To illustrate this phenomenon clearly, consider the contrasting outcomes of sanctions on Belarus and Libya. Belarus, under intense Western sanctions following the 2020 fraudulent presidential election, utilized its membership in authoritarian ROs, particularly its alliance with Russia within the EEU and CSTO, to sustain its regime economically and politically despite significant external pressure (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2023; Council of the EU, 2025; Centre for East European and International Studies, 2024). Conversely, Libya under Muammar Gaddafi faced severe international isolation without substantial institutional backing from authoritarian regional alliances. The country implemented various survival strategies, including the creation of a shadow economy (for instance, Libya illicitly traded oil with third parties)

(Eaton 2018; Nephew, 2018). Consequently, the lack of support networks, despite the implementation of various survival strategies, eventually contributed to the regime's demise in 2011, highlighting the potential stabilizing effects provided by authoritarian IOs.

Current literature on sanctions effectiveness reveals substantial contradictions and mixed findings. While Marinov (2005) suggests sanctions increase leadership turnover, particularly in democratic contexts, Early (2009, 2012), Early and Peksen (2019) demonstrate that authoritarian states successfully utilize various survival strategies to mitigate sanctions' impacts. Moreover, literature on authoritarian regionalism increasingly recognizes these IOs' roles in providing diplomatic shielding, material substitution, and strategic coordination. Nevertheless, there are not many works that specifically link authoritarian IO membership to enhanced regime survivability under sanctions, which underlines a significant research gap.

Addressing these theoretical gaps, this study explores how authoritarian IOs institutionalize and enhance collective sanctions circumvention, thus contributing to regime stability in autocratic states. This paper emphasizes three primary mechanisms used by autocratic IOs to mitigate sanctions' effects: material substitution, diplomatic shielding, and strategic coordination. Material substitution refers to authoritarian IOs providing economic alternatives and financial support, thus enabling regimes to offset the direct economic costs imposed by sanctions. Diplomatic shielding involves offering political legitimacy and collective backing, thus effectively reducing the isolating effects of global condemnation. Finally, strategic coordination includes collaborative efforts among authoritarian states to develop and implement policies that strengthen internal stability and collective resistance against a myriad of external pressures.

This study employs a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative analysis and qualitative case studies. Quantitatively, the analysis uses a time-series cross-sectional dataset covering authoritarian regimes from 1990 to 2023. The key dependent variables include regime stability and leadership turnover, measured through regime duration and instances of irregular leadership transitions. The primary independent variables focus on authoritarian IO membership, operationalized through an ordinal measure of engagement and a weighted IO participation score, which examines the strength and institutional significance of autocratic IOs. Sanctions severity is classified through an ordinal scale of economic coercion intensity. Qualitatively, detailed case studies of Russia, Iran, and Syria will complement the statistical findings, illustrating how IO membership, or lack thereof, influences regime survival under sanctions.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to understand how modern authoritarian states adapt strategically to global pressures through institutionalized cooperation, thus redefining the geopolitical landscape in the era of increasing economic and political conflicts. By examining the conditions under which authoritarian states successfully utilize IOs and ROs to circumvent sanctions, this study aims to enhance our understanding of the complex relationship between international economic coercion and authoritarian resilience.

Literature review

To develop my theory and argument, I draw on a wide range of existing research. My literature review can be grouped into several different categories. The first group covers the topic of sanctions and their effectiveness, the second group focuses on the methods states use to bypass sanctions, and the third group examines the emergence and spread of a new trend, authoritarian regionalism.

I will first focus on literature covering sanctions and their effectiveness. Pape (1997), Fathollah-Nejad (2014), Grauvogel and von Soest (2014), and Hellmeier (2021) argue that sanctions are ineffective since they prevent democratization in autocratic regimes. They instead have a rally 'round the flag effect, which strengthens the domestic political standing of authoritarian leaders and fuels nationalist sentiments in target states. The number of domestic players is also crucial when evaluating the success and effectiveness of economic sanctions. For instance, Jeong and Peksen (2019) argue that states with more internal veto players face greater institutional constraints, making it harder for leaders to adjust policies or implement sanctions countermeasures, as a result increasing the likelihood of compliance with sanctions and restrictions.

Sanctions may not always be effective and successful in forcing target states to comply; however, a simple threat of imposing sanctions can have a stronger impact. As seen in Drezner's (2003) paper, he argues that simple threats of economic coercion can be more effective, as the imposition of sanctions can provoke retaliatory consequences for the countries enforcing them. He also argues that economic coercion ends at that very threat stage and thus such episodes are quite often excluded in empirical research that focuses on sanctions and their effect. This could explain the prevalence of negative discourse surrounding sanctions.

It may seem that sanctions are ineffective since they result in unintended consequences; they usually cannot result in a significant policy change or even a regime change. Nonetheless, this may not always be true. In his paper, Marinov (2005) argues that sanctions can, in fact, destabilize political leaders. By analyzing panel data from 136 countries between 1947 and 1999, Marinov finds that sanctions significantly increase the likelihood of leadership transition, especially in democratic regimes, where leaders are more vulnerable to public and institutional pressures. He underlines that sanctions can result in a 28% average increase in the risk of a leader losing power. Sanctions can also affect autocracies since they can result in a dangerous political opening (e.g., protests or any other forms of dissent).

If sanctions do indeed increase the probability of leadership turnover, then how come many autocratic states manage to survive despite enormous global pressure? Such states implement various survival strategies. Early and Peksen (2019) and Meyer et al. (2023) argue that international sanctions significantly disrupt the institutional framework of international and local businesses, as well as the lives of ordinary citizens. They emphasize that sanctions result in the significant growth of the shadow economy, which may significantly limit the effectiveness of sanctions and allow target states to mitigate the impact of economic restrictions. Something we

can see in the case of Russia with its implementation of the "parallel import" policy from friendly third countries (UNCTAD, 2022; Shmagun, 2024; Reuters, 2023).

In his 2009 study, Early develops competing realist and liberal explanations for sanctions-busting, ultimately finding stronger support for the liberal perspective that emphasizes the role of profit-maximizing firms and commercial interests. He stresses that profit-seeking firms in third-party states are the primary drivers of sanctions evasion, lobbying their governments to avoid participating in sanctioning efforts or turn a blind eye to sanctions-busting trade. The key contribution of Early's research is his finding that close allies of the sender state are often more likely to sanctions-bust than other third-party states, especially when they have substantial commercial relationships with the sanctioned target, which refutes the common realist belief that allies of the sending states would align their foreign policy with the sanctioning country.

In his follow-up 2012 paper, Early further refines his argument by theorizing that the effect of alliance relationships on sanctions enforcement is conditional on the economic dependence between third-party states and the sanctioned target. He argues that while allies with weak commercial ties are likely to support sanctions, those with significant economic stakes are more inclined to circumvent them, knowing that their alliance status provides a degree of protection from coercive enforcement. Early's empirical analysis of ninety-six U.S. sanctions episodes supports this logic, demonstrating that the allies whose cooperation is most critical for sanctions success are often the ones most likely to defect.

I also focus on the literature which covers the emergence and increasing prominence of ROs and their impact on the survival of authoritarian regimes, the phenomenon which became known as 'authoritarian regionalism'. Libman and Obydenkova (2018, 2019), Debre (2022, 2025), and Cottiero and Haggard (2023) argue that autocratic regimes form such international bodies in order to withstand external pressure and ensure the survival of their regime. They draw a parallel between democratic ROs and autocratic ROs and argue that such ROs help stabilize and legitimize autocratic rule, since such entities significantly stall democratization among their members. Furthermore, Debre (2022) introduces a novel concept of "Club of Autocrats", IOs or ROs, where all or most members are countries with authoritarian regimes.

While existing research has explored sanctions and authoritarian regionalism, important gaps still remain. First of all, we can notice significant contradictions and mixed findings regarding the effectiveness of sanctions. Marinov argues that sanctions significantly increase the likelihood of leadership turnover, particularly in democratic regimes. In contrast, Early and Peksen emphasize that autocratic regimes employ sophisticated survival strategies, such as developing shadow economies, exploiting profit-driven third-party actors, and leveraging alliances to circumvent economic restrictions, often successfully mitigating sanctions' destabilizing effects. These conflicting findings highlight a gap in understanding the true effectiveness of sanctions across different political regimes. Secondly, despite emerging research on authoritarian ROs and IOs, the literature has not thoroughly examined how these "Clubs of Autocrats" specifically facilitate economic resilience and sanctions evasion collectively. The

papers on authoritarian regionalism examine how these entities stall democratization among their members and how they shield their members from external threats, but there is not much work focusing specifically on authoritarian IOs' effects on sanctions' circumvention and increased regime survivability. Consequently, this study addresses these gaps by analyzing how authoritarian IOs institutionalize and enhance collective sanctions circumvention, providing a deeper understanding of regime survivability under international economic pressure.

Theory

The theoretical approach of my Capstone project is founded on several assumptions. Firstly, authoritarian leaders are primarily focused on maintaining their regimes and ensuring their political survival in office, often achieved through collaboration with fellow regimes (von Soest 2015; Ginsburg, 2020; Cottiero and Emmons, 2024). This assumption primarily draws from a realist school of thought, which argues that regimes prioritize self-preservation above other objectives. Secondly, economic and political sanctions can indeed trigger political instability and can even result in regime change. We noticed such transformations when sanctions were imposed on Nicaragua in 1996, and on Thailand in 1993 (von Soest and Wahman, 2014). However, such an outcome heavily depends on internal political structures, regime types (personalist regimes are more likely to comply with sanctions), and other factors (Escribà-Folch and Wright, 2010). Lastly, today, authoritarian regimes are actively engaged in strategic regional and international alliances, which was described by Maria Debre as the "Club of Autocrats", an entity that counteracts external pressure and global isolation (Debre 2022, 2025).

The key actors that I am planning to focus on include authoritarian regimes, as well as states that are subjects of significant international pressure. I primarily focus on the state level, which includes the regime and its institutional structure responsible for strategic decision-making and survival. Rather than focusing on individual leaders or public opinion, this study treats the state as the principal and key agent through which survival strategies and policies, including alliance formation and sanctions evasion, are implemented. I will also focus on international and regional authoritarian organizations, like the SCO, the EEU and others, which act as crucial actors that provide diplomatic solidarity, economic support, and strategic coordination, consequently strengthening the regime resilience of their members. On the other side, sanctioning entities include Western democracies and IOs, such as the US, the EU, the UN, G7. These actors design, coordinate, and enforce sanctions, aiming to exert maximum pressure on target regimes and force them to comply with their demands, or even result in regime change.
My theoretical framework consists of three primary mechanisms that explain how membership in authoritarian IOs enhances the resilience of sanctioned regimes.

The first mechanism includes material substitution. Authoritarian IOs introduce economic alternatives that help member states offset the direct costs of sanctions. As underlined in Cottiero et al.'s paper (2024), financial aid can significantly bolster the resilience of authoritarian regimes. In autocratic IOs, most of the aid comes from wealthy illiberal member states with the intent of

supporting fellow authoritarian co-members' resilience. The received aid and funds can be used to support development projects that are popular with the domestic audience; these resources can be used to deal with crises, and they can be used to sustain elite patronage networks (Cottiero et al., 2024).

The second mechanism involves diplomatic shielding. Autocratic alliances offer collective political backing, normative legitimacy, and a platform to counteract international condemnation, thereby reducing the isolating effects of sanctions. Authoritarian IOs endorse illiberal incumbents and promote norms such as "unlimited sovereignty". Although many authoritarian IOs (just like many democratic IOs) prefer a non-interference policy when dealing with domestic issues, autocratic IOs are more likely to support regimes restricting activities that democracies would tolerate, for instance, protests (Cottiero et al., 2024).

Finally, strategic coordination. Authoritarian IOs often serve as platforms for sharing best practices and collaborative strategies that could damage the standing of regimes. For instance, counter-regime protests, coups d'état as well as sanctions. Through such close coordination, member states agree on collective responses to threats, introduce common messaging, and undertake legislative actions to bolster regime stability (Cottiero et al., 2024).
Overall, the mechanisms can be summarized in the diagram below.

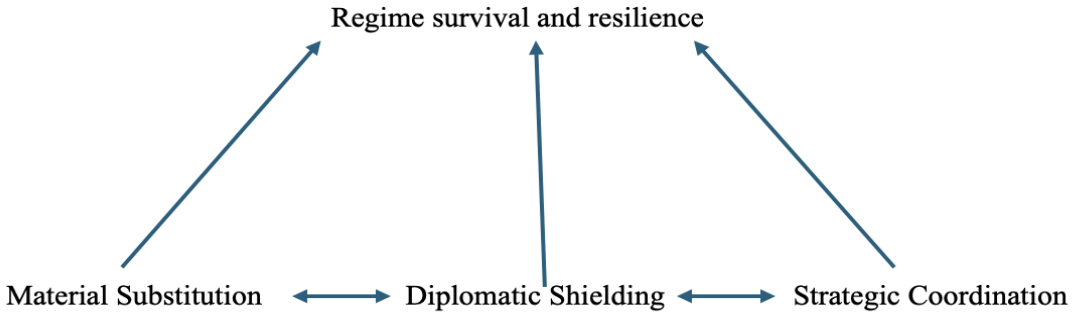

Figure 1. Mechanisms of Sanctions Circumvention and Regime Resilience

Based on the previous literature and the theoretical mechanisms I have outlined earlier, I argue that, today, authoritarian regimes actively form autocratic ROs and IOs, the "Club of Autocrats". The literature on autocratic alliances and authoritarian regionalism emphasizes that these entities aim to safeguard regime stability among their members, withstand any forms of external pressure, as well as inhibit democratization (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018, 2019; Debre, 2022, 2025; Cottiero and Haggard, 2023, 2024). I further underline that such alliances, aside from preventing democratization, provide sanctioned regimes with diplomatic solidarity, economic material support, and strategic cooperation. Consequently, participation in such IOs or ROs significantly improves sanctioned regimes' diplomatic standing and economic resilience, which allows them to resist external pressures more effectively.

Building off the literature gaps and the theoretical mechanisms above, I suggest several testable hypotheses:

H1: Membership in authoritarian alliances significantly enhances the ability of autocratic states to resist sanctions and maintain regime stability.

H2: Participation in authoritarian alliances significantly reduces the likelihood of leadership turnover in autocratic states subjected to international sanctions.

The first hypothesis implies that authoritarian ROs and IOs provide vital diplomatic support, economic resources, and offer strategic cooperation, which enables regimes to mitigate economic hardships and international isolation caused by sanctions. As a result, regimes in these alliances are better equipped to maintain internal stability and political cohesion.

The second hypothesis underscores that autocratic alliances help regimes sustain domestic legitimacy and satisfy elites through diplomatic recognition and external economic support. This significantly reduces internal pressures and elite defections, thus decreasing the probability of forced leadership changes under sanction-induced stress.

Overall, this theoretical framework provides insight into the complex dynamics through which authoritarian regimes manage to mitigate the effects of international sanctions and global isolation. While sanctions inherently aim to destabilize regimes by creating severe economic and political pressures, authoritarian states implement various strategies to combat these effects. My hypotheses build directly from previous literature, emphasizing that membership and active participation in authoritarian ROs and IOs, the "Club of Autocrats", significantly strengthen regime stability and reduce the likelihood of leadership turnover. By examining these mechanisms empirically, with the focus on both sending and target states, my research seeks to expand the understanding of how authoritarian alliances allow sanctioned regimes to survive despite extreme external pressure.

Research Design

The unit of analysis in this paper is country-year, which allows for a time-series cross-sectional analysis of authoritarian regime stability and leadership turnover from 1990 to 2023. The sample includes all countries classified as authoritarian regimes based on the Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (GWF) dataset, Polity5 scores, and V-Dem regime classifications (Geddes, Wright, Frantz, 2014). Based on these datasets, I classify an authoritarian state if at least 2 out of 3 datasets classify it as autocratic (GWF dictatorship / Polity ≤ 5 / V-Dem LDI < 0.42) (Kasuya, Mori, 2019). I use this classification since there are many mixed regimes. In case both datasets depict the regime as mixed, I can manually review a state and decide whether to include the regime or not. I include only surviving authoritarian regimes, those that faced international sanctions and those that did not. The latter will be used to examine the baseline condition of an

autocratic regime without any external pressure. The time period from 1990 to 2023 was specifically chosen to reflect the post-Cold War era, the period characterized by two key trends. First, international sanctions became the most prominent tool of international economic and political coercion. Second, authoritarian IOs and ROs began rapidly emerging and gaining geopolitical significance (e.g., SCO, EEU, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and many others).

This study includes two key dependent variables. My first DV is regime stability. I define it as the durability or longevity of the authoritarian regime. I plan to operationalize it through: regime duration (in years) from the GWF dataset; regime failure events (binary), defined by major breakdowns or shifts in regime type, 0 no major changes, 1 major shifts in regime. I will use GWF as my primary dataset (Geddes, Wright, Frantz, 2014). It is particularly suited for this analysis due to its comprehensive focus on autocratic regimes and their transitions. To ensure the robustness of my findings, I will cross-validate the results using the Polity5 and V-Dem datasets, which provide alternative measures of regime characteristics and changes. My second DV is leadership turnover. I define it as the stability of political leadership. I plan to operationalize it through irregular leadership transitions (e.g., coups) using the Archigos dataset (Goemans, Gleditsch, Chiozza, 2009).

My independent variables include membership in authoritarian IOs. I define an authoritarian IO as an entity predominantly composed of autocratic member states and structured in ways that strengthen regime survival rather than promote liberal-democratic norms. Such IOs provide material, political, and ideational resources that enable member regimes to withstand external democratic pressures and resist liberalizing influences, consistent with definitions in the literature on autocratic regionalism (Debre, Libman, Cottiero). Building on this foundation, I further refine the concept by incorporating the framework of Tallberg et al. (2020), who demonstrate that liberal IOs are characterized by high democratic density among their members and commitments to liberal norms such as democracy promotion, human rights, and sustainable development. On the contrary, I identify authoritarian IOs as those with low average democratic density, which is measured via Polity or V-Dem scores, weak or absent commitments to liberal norms, and institutional designs that limit pooling of authority, delegation to supranational bodies, and access for transnational actors. Membership in such IOs is thus defined not only by the regime type of participants but also by the organization's normative orientation and institutional structure.

I plan to operationalize my first IV through an ordinal measure to see whether a state is a full member of a recognized authoritarian IO/RO (e.g., SCO, EEU, CSTO, and others), where 0 = not a member, 1 = observer, 2 = full member. I am also planning to examine a Weighted Autocratic IO Engagement Score. It will allow me to examine not only if a state is a member of one or several autocratic IOs but also assess the relative strength of each IO. If an autocratic state is a member of several strong authoritarian IOs, the effect of the autocratic club on sanctions effectiveness and regime stability would be more significant. To complete this examination, I will have to identify the relevant IOs and then assign a weight based on the IO characteristics.

For instance, the degree of institutionalization (does an IO have strict binding treaties), military capacity (any defense guarantees), economic integration (free trade area, customs union, economic union, etc.), membership size, and political alignment (similar ideology). The weights can be based on a scoring rubric like military capacity +0.4; economic integration +0.3; membership size + 0.2; political alignment: +0.1.
I envision the formula to look like:

$$Autocratic\ IO\ score_i = \sum_{j=1}^{n} (Membership_{ij} \times Weight_j)$$

Where i refers to the country index (e.g., Russia, Iran, Syria, etc.); j is the IO index (e.g., SCO, CSTO, EEU, etc.); n is the total number of IOs included in the score calculation; $Membership_{ij}$ is the membership status of a country i in an IO j: 0=not a member; 1=observer; 2=full member. $Weight_j$ is the assigned weight for the IO j, which depicts the IO's strength or importance.

My other IV includes sanctions severity, which I define based on the escalation stages model from Glasl's (1982) paper and the coercive strategies framework developed by Pape (1996). I outline four stages of sanctions escalation: (1) initial warning measures (e.g., travel bans, limited asset freezes, symbolic diplomatic actions); (2) targeted sector sanctions (focused restrictions on specific industries while avoiding essential goods); (3) broader economic measures (expanded restrictions affecting multiple sectors and financial systems); and (4) comprehensive sanctions involving near-total economic isolation. Sanctions severity will be coded using the Global Sanctions Database (GSDB) and the Threat and Imposition of Economic Sanctions (TIES) datasets and operationalized as an ordinal scale (0 = no sanctions; 1 = warning measures, 2 = targeted, 3 = financial, 4 = comprehensive). I will also examine duration and number of concurrent sanctions, since some authoritarian regimes are heavily sanctioned or have been under such restrictions for more than several decades.

My study will also include several control variables that can explain authoritarian resilience. These include GDP per capita to account for economic capacity, fossil fuel income as a percentage of GDP to capture resource-based regime financing, and regime type (e.g., personalist, military, single-party), which affects how regimes respond to pressure, and since some regimes are more susceptible to international pressure (Escribà-Folch, Abel, and Wright, 2010). I also control for the number of institutional veto players, which may constrain leadership flexibility (Jeong, Peksen, 2019), and trade volume with non-sanctioning countries as a proxy for access to alternative economic support. In addition, I include fixed effects (μ_i) to account for unobserved, time-invariant differences between countries, such as political history or geographic location.

To empirically test my hypotheses, I use two main quantitative models to test how sanctions severity and membership in authoritarian IOs influence regime stability and leadership

turnover. To test my first hypothesis, I will utilize the Cox proportional hazards model. I decided to use this model since it would allow me to estimate the hazard rate, the probability that an authoritarian regime will fail (collapse or experience a major breakdown) at a specific point in time, given that it has survived up until that point. The model formula is going to look like:

$$h(t) = h_0(t) \times exp(\beta_1 \times SanctionsSeverity + \beta_2 \times AutocraticIOScore + \beta_3 \times (SanctionsSeverity \times AutocraticIOScore) + \chi_\gamma)$$

Where $h(t)$ is the hazard rate: the probability that the regime fails at time; $h_0(t)$ is the baseline hazard rate; $\beta_1 \times SanctionsSeverity$ is the effect of sanctions severity on the hazard of regime failure; $\beta_2 \times AutocraticIOScore$ is the effect of authoritarian IO membership on the hazard; $\beta_3 \times (SanctionsSeverity \times AutocraticIOScore)$ is the interaction term (does IO membership moderate (weaken or strengthen) the effect of sanctions?); finally, χ_γ are my control variables.

For my second hypothesis, I will be using a random effects logistic regression model. I will be using this model because it will allow me to estimate the probability that a regime experiences regime failure (1 = failure, 0 = stable), or a leader experiences irregular turnover (e.g. through a coup). The model formula is going to look like:

$$\Pr Pr\left(Y_{it} = 1\right) = \backslash logit^{-1} \times (\beta_0 + \beta_1 \times SanctionsSeverity + \beta_2 \times AutocraticIOScore + \beta_3 \times (SanctionsSeverity \times AutocraticIOScore) + \chi_\gamma + \mu_i)$$

Where Y_{it} is a leadership turnover in country i, year t (1 = turnover, 0 = no turnover); $\backslash logit^{-1} \times$ is a logistic function converting linear predictor into probability (between 0 and 1); μ_i is a random intercept for each country (accounts for unobserved, time-invariant country characteristics).

In addition to the quantitative analysis, in this study, I will include qualitative case studies of Russia, Iran, and Syria (under Bashar al-Assad) to explore how these authoritarian regimes have navigated international sanctions and membership (or lack of such) in authoritarian international organizations affected their regime stability and decreased the effectiveness of the sanctions imposed against them. These cases were specifically selected for their variation in both sanction exposure and IO engagement. Russia, as a founding member of multiple autocratic alliances such as the SCO, the EEU, the CSTO, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), offers a critical case for understanding how these institutions bolster regime stability during periods of intense international pressure. Iran, while heavily sanctioned, has historically operated more independently and had more of an isolationist foreign policy; however, more recently, the country has increasingly sought closer ties with authoritarian states and institutions. Syria, on the other hand, lacked substantial IO membership but had relied on bilateral support from authoritarian allies like Russia and Iran.

Although my research design is extensive, I do believe that there are multiple challenges that might arise when conducting this study. First, there is a problem of endogeneity, as more

stable regimes may be more likely to join authoritarian IOs, which creates potential reverse causality. This can be addressed by using lagged IVs, robustness checks, or instrumental variables. Secondly, Authoritarian IOs vary in strength and function, and membership may not reflect meaningful support (some IOs are more symbolic than strategic). This can be mitigated by developing a weighted index of IO participation, which I mentioned. Finally, data limitations. Sanctions data may differ between datasets, which can affect the sample size or misrepresent patterns. This problem can be handled through cross-validation with multiple datasets and transparent coding.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that orthodox traditional approaches to sanctions are becoming less and less relevant in the context of growing authoritarian collaboration through IOs and ROs. Policymakers should rethink sanction design to account for the broader networks that sustain autocratic regimes. Rather than focusing solely on individual states, future sanctions should target the authoritarian alliances themselves, which provide critical material, diplomatic, and strategic support. This could include imposing secondary sanctions on firms, banks, or state entities operating within these authoritarian-led organizations, thus disrupting the structural foundations that enable sanctioned regimes to survive international pressure.

A second implication underlines the need to counter diplomatic shielding provided by authoritarian alliances. These organizations offer their members political legitimacy and collective resistance against international condemnation, decreasing the effectiveness of isolation strategies. Western democracies and liberal IOs should prioritize delegitimizing authoritarian IOs by exposing their role in sustaining repression and engaging diplomatically with neutral or non-aligned states to prevent their drift into authoritarian spheres of influence.

Third, the international community should focus on strengthening alternative liberal IOs, alliances, and partnerships, specifically, in the context of authoritarian states' attempts to gain support from developing countries. By providing attractive economic, political, and security alternatives to authoritarian alliances, liberal democracies can reduce the incentives for vulnerable states to seek support from authoritarian networks. Expanding access to international development initiatives, trade agreements, and diplomatic forums focusing on commitment to democratic norms can help tilt the balance in favor of liberal institutions and diminish the appeal of the "Club of Autocrats". In other words, the liberal international community should win the battle for hearts and minds.

Finally, this research underscores the necessity of recognizing the limits of sanctions. While sanctions remain a key tool of international pressure, they often fail when authoritarian regimes can rely on external alliances for material and diplomatic support. Policymakers must view sanctions not as standalone measures, but as one component of a broader strategy that combines economic coercion with diplomatic engagement, support for civil society, and information campaigns to erode authoritarian resilience. Without such a multidimensional

approach, sanctions are likely to remain strong but ineffective instruments in the struggle against autocracies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolving dynamics of authoritarian regimes under international sanctions reveal a novel relationship between global coercion and strategic resilience. This study has demonstrated that traditional sanction approaches, targeting individual states through economic isolation, frequently fail in their objectives when sanctioned states utilize collective responses from authoritarian alliances. As can be seen through quantitative analyses and illustrative case studies of Russia, Iran, and Syria, authoritarian IOs and ROs have emerged as pivotal mechanisms enabling sanctioned states to mitigate sanctions' intended pressures.

The research outlined three critical mechanisms: material substitution, diplomatic shielding, and strategic coordination, that authoritarian alliances utilize to counteract sanctions. Through material substitution, these alliances provide sanctioned regimes with crucial economic resources and alternative financial funds, reducing their dependence on global economic systems dominated by sanctioning states and allowing them to satisfy their domestic audiences. Diplomatic shielding further empowers these regimes, offering political legitimacy and collective diplomatic backing, thereby effectively weakening the international community's ability to isolate targeted states. Lastly, strategic coordination facilitates a unified authoritarian front, promoting shared tactics and collective strategies that reinforce internal regime stability and external resistance.

This study's empirical findings could suggest a clear pattern: membership in authoritarian IOs significantly enhances regime durability and decreases the likelihood of leadership turnover under sanctions-induced stress. The implications of these findings are profound for policymakers aiming to counter authoritarian resilience. Effective future sanctions policies must adopt a broader, network-focused perspective rather than isolated, state-specific approaches. By targeting authoritarian alliances and disrupting their capacity to provide material, diplomatic, and strategic support, sanctions could regain significant efficacy and hurt authoritarian regimes.

Furthermore, democratic states and IOs must actively engage in diplomatic efforts aimed at delegitimizing authoritarian IOs, countering the normative narratives these organizations promote. Moreover, strengthening liberal IOs and providing appealing alternatives to authoritarian alliances could significantly diminish the allure of authoritarian regionalism.

Ultimately, this research underscores the necessity of adopting a comprehensive strategy, combining economic coercion with diplomatic engagement, enhanced support for civil society, and strategic communication initiatives. Sanctions alone, without consideration of the complex institutional and diplomatic networks sustaining authoritarian regimes, will likely remain inadequate and ineffective. By recognizing and addressing the strategic adaptability of autocratic states, the international community can better design measures that effectively support

democratic governance and international norms, even in the face of sophisticated authoritarian collaboration

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Reviving the Dead?

Bureaucratic Structure and the Persistence of Zombie IOs

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Abstract

Why do some zombie international organizations (IOs)—those that persist in existence but deliver little output and fail to fulfill their founding missions—remain inactive and stagnant, while others manage to revive and regain functionality? This study argues that an IO's bureaucratic structure, specifically its degree of organizational fragmentation and level of bureaucratic expertise, plays a critical role in shaping its trajectory after zombification. It proposes two key hypotheses: (1) higher fragmentation increases the likelihood of a zombie IO persisting, and (2) higher bureaucratic expertise increases the likelihood of a zombie IOs' revival. To test this argument, the study develops a new dataset on IO vitality, encompassing organizations established between 1950 and 2014. It employs logistic regression to examine the effects of internal bureaucratic characteristics on revival outcomes. By focusing on internal dynamics, this research contributes to scholarship on IO resilience and reform, and offers practical insights for policymakers seeking to overcome institutional stagnation and enhance global governance.

Introduction

International organizations (IOs) are widely regarded as essential tools for promoting international cooperation, but not all manage to sustain their effectiveness or relevance over time. Some institutions, despite retaining formal structures, become what scholars call zombie IOs—organizations that continue to exist but produce minimal output and fail to achieve their original goals (Gray 2018). While some of these zombie organizations manage to revive themselves, others remain trapped in this stagnant state.

A notable example of a zombie IO that was able to revive itself is the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), a North African trade organization established in 1988 to promote economic and political integration among Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia (Arab Maghreb Union). Just months after its creation, political unrest in Algeria and tensions between member states brought the organization's operations to a standstill. For nearly two decades, the AMU remained largely dormant due to ongoing political and economic tensions between member states (Zunes 1995). The organization's stagnation was broken in 2012, when it held its first summit in nearly two decades, signaling an effort to revive regional cooperation (Achy 2012). Since then, the AMU has re-emerged as a functioning IO, appointing a new Secretary-General and reestablishing basic institutional operations (Assad 2024).

In contrast, the Organization of Central American States (ODECA) is an example of a zombie IO that has remained zombified. Founded in 1951, ODECA was established to promote Central American unification and support economic, social, and cultural development among Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture). Despite its initial ambitions, ODECA struggled to assert influence and failed to resolve internal disputes, highlighting the organization's inability to maintain cohesion and marked its descent into a zombie state (U.S. Department of State). Although a new charter was signed in 1962 in an attempt to revitalize the organization, ODECA remains largely inactive with minimal regional influence, ultimately persisting as a nominal entity without achieving its original objectives (European Parliament).

Both the AMU and ODECA were established with the common goal of fostering regional political and economic cooperation, and both faced similar internal political and institutional challenges. While both attempted to revive after entering a zombie phase, only one succeeded in doing so. This contrast leads to a key empirical question: Why was the AMU able to recover, while ODECA was not? To explore this variation in post-zombification trajectories, this study addresses the central research question: Why do some zombie IOs remain stagnant, while others manage to revive and regain functionality?

Understanding why some IOs remain stagnant as zombies while others successfully revive is essential for creating more resilient and effective international institutions. By exploring the factors behind this divergence, we can pinpoint the conditions that trap zombie IOs in an ineffective, transitional state. Gaining this insight can help prevent organizations from enduring prolonged stagnation. Moreover, this research may identify strategies for revitalizing IOs that

have already entered a zombified state, offering pathways for their renewal and re-engagement in meaningful international cooperation. In turn, this work not only supports the survival of these institutions but also strengthens the broader system of global governance, ensuring that IOs are better prepared to tackle the challenges of the modern world.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows: It begins with a review of the existing literature on IO survival, institutional reform, and IO agency. While the IO survival literature offers valuable insights into how external shocks and internal features shape institutional endurance, it largely relies on a binary framework that overlooks organizations trapped in a zombie state. Although recent scholarship has begun to acknowledge zombie IOs, there remains a lack of systematic analysis explaining why some remain stagnant while others recover. Moreover, the institutional reform and IO agency literatures have yet to develop a clear framework for understanding the conditions that drive this post-zombification divergence.

The second section of this paper outlines its theoretical argument, asserting that an IO's bureaucratic structure—specifically its level of organizational fragmentation and bureaucratic expertise—plays a crucial role in determining whether it remains a zombie or achieves successful revival. These structural features influence both the coordination challenges the IO faces and its ability to develop and implement meaningful reforms.

The final section of this study presents an empirical analysis evaluating whether an IO's bureaucratic structure influences its likelihood of revival following zombification. Utilizing an original dataset on IO vitality, the analysis focuses on organizations founded between 1950 and 2014 that exhibited no formal activity for at least three consecutive years. These cases are categorized as alive, zombie, or dead using a newly developed IO Vitality Score (IOVS). The dataset, structured at the IO-year level, enables a logistic regression analysis to assess the impact of key bureaucratic variables on revival outcomes. The study concludes by discussing the broader implications for international cooperation and future research directions.

Literature Review

IO Survival Literature

The existing literature on IO survival develops its theoretical frameworks around two primary approaches to explain the factors contributing to an IO's collapse. One approach emphasizes external factors, such as withdrawals by member states (Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019; 2022; 2024; Walter 2021) and exogenous shocks that accelerate the demise of IOs (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2018; 2020; Schuette 2023). The other approach focuses on the internal characteristics of IOs, including the size and quality of their bureaucracies (Gray 2018; Debre and Dijkstra 2021; Schuette 2023; Reinsberg 2024) and an IO's institutional design (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020; Dijkstra and Debre 2022), which help them endure despite challenges to their survival.

Although these studies provide empirically supported insights into IO survival, they rely on a binary framework that categorizes IOs as either fully functional or entirely defunct. This

binary distinction fails to account for an important intermediate category—zombie IOs that remain in a state of inertia, functioning minimally without being formally dissolved. As a result, the literature struggles to assess the frequency of IO dissolution, with scholars debating whether IOs frequently fail (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020) or rarely undergo outright termination (Dijkstra and Debre 2022; Dijkstra et al. 2024). This gap is particularly significant for understanding IOs trapped in inertia, where survival does not necessarily equate to functionality.

Recent scholarship has moved beyond a binary understanding of IOs as simply alive or dead, recognizing that their vitality can fluctuate over time (Gray 2024). This perspective acknowledges that IOs can persist in a state of inertia as zombie organizations (Gray 2020; Dijkstra et al. 2024). While scholars recognize the existence of zombie IOs, they have yet to fully examine the conditions under which these organizations might regain effectiveness or transition back to functional entities. Additionally, the literature tends to focus on an IO's ability to attract talented staff and grant them autonomy, with higher levels of both associated with a greater likelihood of vitality. This approach overlooks how a bureaucracy's autonomy and expertise can lead to an IO's stagnation by reducing accountability, allowing it to continue functioning despite external demands for reform.

Institutional Reform Literature

To address the gap in the literature on IO survival, this study draws on insights from the institutional reform literature. The existing research on institutional reform is valuable to this study of zombie IOs, particularly in its exploration of who initiates reform—whether states are the primary actors or IOs themselves play a more significant role.

The principal-agent theory posits that a principal delegates authority to an agent to act on their behalf. In this framework, states are seen as the primary drivers of institutional reform. The principal-agent theory argues that any changes to an IO's mandate or structure are driven by state demands, as IOs are designed and empowered to serve the interests of the most powerful states, who maintain control over decision-making (Mearsheimer 1994; Graham & Serdaru 2020). From this perspective, IO survival depends on maintaining the support of dominant states. Without this support, IOs are unable to take significant action (Waltz 1979). While the principal-agent perspective offers valuable insights into IO design and change (Lipscy 2017), its state-centered focus creates a gap in the literature by emphasizing external factors shaping IO reform while overlooking IOs' potential agency. This limitation hinders a full understanding of how IOs themselves influence their survival and evolution.

Institutional Agency Literature

The institutional agency literature, in contrast, emphasizes the role of IOs as strategic actors with the capacity to drive institutional change. Existing scholarship often differentiates between IO leaders (Schuette 2021; Kille and Scully 2003; Hall and Woods 2018) and their bureaucracies (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Gray 2018) when discussing IOs as strategic actors. For the purposes of this study, IOs as strategic actors will refer to both IO leaders and their bureaucracies. While this perspective recognizes that IOs are somewhat constrained by states, it argues that once an IO is established, it develops its own identity and pursues independent

objectives that go beyond its original state-given mandate (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Barnett and Coleman 2005). Unlike principal-agent models that emphasize state-led reform, the institutional agency perspective argues that IOs may resist or shape reforms to prioritize their own survival and autonomy rather than reforming in order to advance the interests of powerful states (Hawkins et al. 2006).

Recent scholarship increasingly highlights the nuanced interplay between the principal-agent framework and an IO's ability to assert its autonomy (Kapur 2002). Rather than viewing this as a binary choice, emerging research on IO reform suggests that IOs often engage in strategic adaptation—modifying certain structures to align with the interests of powerful states while still preserving their core objectives and principles (Schuette 2021). One important limitation of this literature lies in its limited exploration of the conditions under which IOs successfully navigate this trade-off between adaptation and inaction. Specifically, the literature lacks a deeper understanding of how IOs prioritize certain principles over others during external contestation and the impact of these decisions on their overall legitimacy and survival.

While existing literature often overlooks the specific mechanisms through which IOs navigate the trade-off between adaptation and inaction, the perspective that IOs possess agency and actively shape their own evolution offers a more persuasive explanation for the persistence of zombie IOs than the principal-agent model. Instead of dissolving in response to challenges, IOs actively implement strategies to sustain themselves (Hanrieder 2015). Although these efforts extend an IO's lifespan, their primary focus on self-preservation can render them unresponsive to external demands, leading to inefficiency and self-defeating behavior (McCalla 1996). While much of the existing literature on IO bureaucracies primarily highlights their role in maintaining organizations (Debre and Dijkstra 2021; Schuette 2023) or shaping institutional design (Johnson and Urpelainen 2014), it often overlooks how bureaucratic dynamics can foster inefficiencies, entrench rigid institutional structures, or create resistance to meaningful reform. This study expands on existing literature by examining the influence of bureaucratic structure on IO outcomes after zombification.

Theory and Hypotheses

This study applies organizational theory to argue that an IO's bureaucratic structure is a key determinant of whether a zombie IO remains stagnant or regains functionality. Organizational theory is essential for this analysis because it provides a framework for analyzing how an IO's internal dynamics shape its ability to adapt or reform. It is important to note that this argument focuses solely on IOs that have become zombies, examining their potential for revival or continued stagnation, rather than the role of bureaucratic structure in their initial creation.

The argument that bureaucratic structure affects a zombie IO's potential for revitalization or continued stagnation centers on one key actor: IO bureaucracies. This study focuses on IO bureaucracies because it is their specific structural features that are of primary interest. While

member states establish the IO and define its initial mandates, it is the IO bureaucracies that interpret these mandates and influence the organization's development.

This argument is based on two key assumptions. First, this study assumes that IOs are autonomous entities, not just tools of state interests (Helfer 2006). If IOs were merely tools of state interests, then their persistence or revival would be entirely dependent on external political factors, such as state preferences or power dynamics. Assuming IO autonomy allows for the application of organizational theory to examine how internal factors—such as bureaucratic structure—contribute to their stagnation or revitalization.

Second, this study assumes that the autonomy of IOs enables bureaucrats to develop interests that may diverge from those of its member states (Hirschmann 2021). One such interest, crucial to explaining the variation seen in zombie institutions, is self-preservation. Bureaucrats are deeply invested in the survival of the IO, as its collapse would mean losing their positions as well as the subsequent loss of prestige. While member states may also have an interest in maintaining IOs, their jobs do not depend on the IO's existence, and so they are generally less concerned about its survival compared to IO bureaucrats.

This study argues that two specific aspects of an IO's bureaucratic structure influence whether it remains a zombie or undergoes revival: organizational fragmentation and bureaucratic expertise. It defines organizational fragmentation as the degree to which decision-making authority is dispersed or divided among multiple subunits within an organization, while bureaucratic expertise refers to an IO's ability to effectively manage its internal operations and implement reforms by leveraging the specialized knowledge of its bureaucrats to make informed decisions, respond to evolving conditions, and deliver high-quality outcomes.

Organizational Fragmentation

Organizational fragmentation plays a crucial role in determining whether a zombie IO persists or successfully revives, as it directly affects the severity of coordination challenges the organization encounters during reform efforts. This study characterizes highly fragmented IOs as those with authority dispersed across multiple, often semi-autonomous subunits—such as regional offices or specialized agencies—each possessing substantial decision-making independence. By contrast, less fragmented IOs feature centralized authority, typically located within a strong secretariat or a small core leadership body.

Greater organizational fragmentation exacerbates coordination challenges by hindering the alignment of interests within an IO. When numerous subunits possess independent decision-making authority, each develops and advances its own priorities, often competing for influence. As authority becomes increasingly dispersed across autonomous entities, reconciling these divergent interests grows more difficult—particularly during efforts to implement reform. Hanrieder (2015) highlights this dynamic in the case of the WHO, where regional offices have acquired substantial autonomy, enabling them to resist central oversight and impede reform initiatives. Without a cohesive decision-making structure, such fragmentation frequently leads to gridlock, as competing agendas stall or weaken reform efforts. This, in turn, undermines the IO's capacity to respond to global challenges and contributes to organizational inertia.

When a zombie IO operates with a highly fragmented bureaucratic structure, the lack of strong central coordination heightens the chances of its continued dysfunction. Fragmentation intensifies coordination difficulties, making it even more challenging for the IO to align the interests of its subunits, even in efforts to revive itself. Consequently, the IO is more likely to remain trapped in a state of dysfunction, unable to regain its effectiveness. In contrast, a zombie IO with a more centralized bureaucratic structure—where decision-making authority is concentrated in a powerful secretariat—faces fewer coordination problems due to the reduced number of competing interests between the IO and member states. This centralized structure helps mitigate coordination issues by facilitating streamlined decision-making, with a single authority exerting significant control over policy direction. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: Higher levels of fragmentation within a zombie IO increase the likelihood that it will remain in a zombie state.

It is also important to address whether the same factors that lead to IO fragmentation also contribute to an IO becoming a zombie. While fragmentation and zombification may appear to be linked, they stem from different sets of causal factors. Fragmentation often results from organizational design choices that emphasize representation, inclusivity, or regional autonomy, with the intent of ensuring that the interests of diverse members are adequately reflected in decision-making. On the other hand, the factors that contribute to an IO becoming a zombie are more closely tied to institutional dysfunction, agency slack, or failure to adapt to changing external conditions. These are distinct but interconnected processes—while fragmentation can increase the likelihood of dysfunction, it is the inability to reform or adapt that ultimately leads an IO into a zombie state.

Bureaucratic Expertise

The second bureaucratic factor influencing a zombie IO's trajectory is its level of expertise. An IO's ability to persist or revive often depends on how effectively its bureaucracy leverages technical knowledge to address emerging challenges. Bureaucratic expertise shapes outcomes through two key mechanisms

First, bureaucratic expertise enables bureaucrats within zombie IOs to better anticipate global shifts. Bureaucracies with deep expertise can identify emerging challenges early and diagnose internal weaknesses, allowing for timely adjustments. This proactive approach helps prevent the IO from sinking further into stagnation or remaining trapped in a zombie-like state. In contrast, IOs with weaker bureaucratic capacity struggle to detect problems early and adapt to external changes, increasing the risk of prolonged irrelevance and institutional paralysis.

Second, bureaucratic expertise influences an IO's strategic adaptation and institutional reform. Skilled bureaucrats can translate early warnings into concrete action by pushing for internal reforms and introducing new policies. Additionally, bureaucrats with deep informational expertise can leverage their knowledge to expand an IO's mandate, helping it stay relevant even if member states are reluctant to broaden its scope. By continuously refining its functions to

address emerging global challenges and mobilizing external support, a zombie IO with strong bureaucratic capacity can reclaim its functionality. Conversely, IOs with limited expertise are more likely to remain bound by outdated structures, lacking the knowledge to enact meaningful reforms and expand their mandates. This leads to a final hypothesis:

H2: Higher administrative expertise within a zombie IO increases the likelihood of its revival.

A key challenge in linking bureaucratic expertise to the revival or persistence of zombie IOs stems from the widespread characterization of such organizations as inherently lacking bureaucratic capacity. In other words, if an IO's decline into zombie status is attributed to low bureaucratic expertise, then what explains the emergence of sufficient expertise to enable revival?

The flaw in this argument is that it assumes that all zombie IOs fell into their zombie status because they had a weak bureaucracy. This critique mischaracterizes the argument by assuming that bureaucratic expertise must remain static over time. In reality, bureaucratic capacity is not a fixed attribute—it can develop, adapt, and reassert itself even after an IO has entered a period of dormancy. An IO may decline into zombie status for reasons unrelated to bureaucratic weakness, such as geopolitical shifts, membership fragmentation, or resource constraints. During this period, bureaucratic expertise may remain latent or underutilized rather than absent. Revival becomes possible when bureaucrats are able to reorient the IO's mission in response to shifting global dynamics.

Moreover, bureaucratic learning, leadership turnover, or strategic recruitment can all contribute to a renewal of expertise over time. In this view, it is not that bureaucratic expertise suddenly appears *after* decline, but rather that its influence becomes visible once conditions allow it to be mobilized effectively. The key point is that revival does not require a constant high level of bureaucratic capacity—it requires the presence of sufficient expertise at the right time, combined with internal willingness and external opportunity to act on it.

Research Design

This study tests its argument using an original dataset on IO vitality. Rather than relying on Gray's (2018) dataset, which is limited to economic IOs, it constructs a new dataset to capture a broader range of IOs across diverse sectors. Building on Gray's definition of zombie IOs—institutions that continue to exist but deliver underwhelming outputs and fail to fulfill their core mandates—the study employs a two-step method to identify potential cases of zombification. First, it draws an initial sample from all IOs listed in the Correlates of War (COW) IGO Dataset (Pevehouse et al. 2019) between 1950 and 2014. This time frame is selected for the ease of operationalizing this study's independent variables. Within this sample, IOs that show no evidence of formal meetings or significant activity for at least three consecutive years are flagged as potential zombie IOs. Second, more specific coding—based on the IO's meeting

frequency, number of formal resolutions, and the degree to which these outputs align with the IO's stated mandate—is applied to classify IOs from this sample as zombies. As an additional robustness check, the study will apply the specific coding criteria independently, omitting the three-year inactivity threshold.

The unit of analysis for this study is the IO-year, beginning with the first year an IO meets the zombification criteria. The resulting dataset includes multiple yearly observations for each zombie IO. This study recognizes that the vitality of IOs can fluctuate, with some zombie IOs undergoing periods of revival before ultimately returning to stagnation. To address this, each transition from zombie to revival is treated as a distinct phase in the IO's lifecycle. The theoretical framework is then applied separately to each phase in order to ensure that the theory can be comprehensively tested and that the unique dynamics of each phase are captured.

Operationalization of Vitality

To accurately determine the stage of vitality an IO should be categorized into, this study introduces several innovations in variable construction. Building on prior literature, which identifies three distinct levels of institutional functionality—alive, zombie, and dead (Gray 2018)—these categories serve as the foundation for assessing IO vitality. Dead IOs are those that no longer convene and display no observable activity, existing in name only. Alive IOs meet at least once annually and show measurable progress toward fulfilling their mandates. Zombie IOs occupy a middle ground: they continue to operate in a limited fashion, such as holding occasional meetings, but generate little to no output aligned with their stated goals.

Distinguishing between alive and zombie IOs is crucial—although both may convene meetings, only alive IOs complement these gatherings with substantive, goal-driven activity. To systematically differentiate between the two, this study introduces the IO Vitality Score (IOVS), a composite measure built on three key indicators: (1) the frequency of meetings, (2) the annual number of formal resolutions or decisions, and (3) the extent to which these outputs align with the IO's mandate.

The first indicator assesses whether an IO is maintaining the essential function of convening its members. This is coded as a binary variable, where the IO is marked as 1 if it holds at least one meeting per year, and 0 if it does not. IOs that are coded as 0 are classified as dead. The second indicator quantifies the number of resolutions, declarations, or decisions produced annually. This is coded as a count variable, reflecting the IO's procedural productivity and indicating whether meetings result in tangible, actionable outcomes.

This study acknowledges that while some outputs may appear procedurally similar, they differ in how meaningfully they advance the IO's core purpose. Additionally, because this study examines IOs across different issue areas and functional mandates, it may be difficult to determine how effective or appropriate their outputs are using a universal benchmark. To address these issues, this study utilizes a third indicator that evaluates the extent to which the outputs identified in the second indicator align with the IO's stated mandate.

Before assessing alignment, IOs are grouped by mandate type (e.g., economic, security, environmental) to provide the contextual grounding necessary for evaluating outputs

appropriately. This grouping ensures that effectiveness is judged relative to each IO's functional purpose, avoiding misleading comparisons across fundamentally different organizations. Within each mandate group, tailored alignment criteria are developed based on the specific types of outputs that signify meaningful progress toward the IO's stated goals. For example, security organizations are assessed based on activities like peacekeeping deployments or conflict monitoring, whereas economic IOs are evaluated on trade agreements or regulatory harmonization. This issue-specific framework ensures that alignment is not assessed against a uniform benchmark but is instead grounded in the outputs most relevant to each IO's mandate, as derived from founding documents and strategic plans.

This method enables meaningful cross-organizational comparison while preserving the contextual sensitivity needed to evaluate output relevance. The degree of alignment is determined through expert coding, with researchers qualitatively analyzing the content and intent of IO outputs. Based on this assessment, outputs are classified as "aligned," "partially aligned," or "not aligned," and then numerically coded (aligned = 2, partially aligned = 1, not aligned = 0) to reflect their ordinal nature for inclusion in the composite IO Vitality Score.

It is important to recognize the concern that there may be little variation in how closely an IO's outputs align with its mandates, given the expectation that such outputs should naturally reflect the organization's founding goals. However, this study operates under the assumption that IO bureaucracies possess some autonomy, which can cause their outputs to deviate from their original mandates. Consequently, the study anticipates meaningful variation in how closely outputs align with mandates, thus positioning this variation as a useful and insightful measure of IO vitality.

Information for these indicators will be sourced primarily from the Yearbook of International Organizations (UIA), which provides detailed institutional profiles for over 70,000 organizations, including data on meeting frequency, documented outputs, and organizational mandates (Union of International Associations). Supplementary information may be drawn from IO websites, annual reports, and policy archives as needed for content coding and validation.

The vitality score for each IO-year is constructed by combining the three core indicators—meeting frequency, formal outputs, and relevance of outputs—into a single composite measure. Each component is weighted according to its significance for institutional vitality, with the alignment between an IO's outputs and its mandate receiving the highest weight, as it is the strongest indicator of an IO being alive rather than a zombie.

Following this, a threshold value will be established to differentiate between alive and zombie IOs. Organizations scoring below this threshold, even if they continue to convene regularly, will be classified as zombies due to their limited or non-mandate-related output. The threshold will be identified by examining the distribution of vitality scores across the IO sample and selecting a point where a meaningful separation becomes evident between IOs actively fulfilling their mandates and those exhibiting only minimal operational activity. Once determined, this cut-off will be used to categorize IOs, with scores above indicating active, mandate-aligned engagement, and scores below signaling stagnation. To enhance classification

accuracy, borderline cases will undergo manual review. As an additional robustness check, the study will explore alternative threshold levels to assess the sensitivity of the classification.

Operationalization of Independent Variables

This study's theoretical framework focuses on two key dimensions of bureaucratic structure: organizational fragmentation and bureaucratic expertise. To operationalize fragmentation, the analysis will rely on a textual examination of each zombie IO's founding charter. These documents typically outline the formal institutional structure, detailing the number and types of permanent bodies, their designated functions, and how decision-making authority is allocated. This study also acknowledges the distinction between fragmentation and organizational complexity due to size or functional delegation. Large IOs, such as the UN, may contain multiple organs or agencies, but this does not necessarily indicate fragmentation if the bodies are well-integrated and clearly coordinated toward a unified mandate. As such, the coding will take into account not just the number of bodies or subunits, but whether these entities are purposefully integrated with formal mechanisms for coordination.

Fragmentation will be assessed using four criteria. First, whether the IO has multiple distinct organizational bodies (scored as 1 if present). Second, whether these bodies operate under independent rather than shared mandates (scored as 1 if mandates are independent). Third, whether responsibilities are functionally divided among the bodies (scored as 1 if responsibilities are divided). Fourth, the absence of formal coordination mechanisms (scored as 1 if no such mechanisms exist). Each IO will receive one point for each condition associated with greater fragmentation, resulting in a total score ranging from 0 to 4. Higher scores indicate greater institutional fragmentation.

To operationalize bureaucratic expertise within IOs, this study codes individual-level data on the professional backgrounds of unit leaders across a range of institutions. Bureaucratic expertise is measured using two primary indicators: (1) educational credentials and (2) professional experience within IOs. For the education indicator, unit leaders are coded as 1 if they possess an advanced degree (Master's, PhD, or equivalent) in a field substantively aligned with the IO's mandate (e.g., public health for WHO, international law for the ICC), and 0 otherwise. For the professional experience indicator, an ordinal scale is employed to capture increasing levels of embedded expertise: 0 indicates no prior IO experience, 1 indicates at least one year of experience in any IO, and 2 indicates prior professional experience specifically within the zombie IO. These two indicators are combined to reflect both the depth of technical expertise and the level of organizational familiarity, with higher combined scores indicating greater bureaucratic capacity. Data for both indicators will be sourced from publicly available leadership biographies, CVs, and archival records, which serve as observable proxies for the underlying construct of bureaucratic expertise.

Control Variables

In order to ensure that the relationship between organizational fragmentation, bureaucratic expertise, and IO vitality is not confounded by other factors, this study controls for a number of variables that may obscure this relationship. First, this study controls for an IO's age

as older IOs might have established systems and a more robust institutional member that could affect their ability to revive or persist. Second, this study controls for the level of democracy among the IO's member states, as more democratic states may be more inclined to support the persistence or revitalization of an IO due to shared normative values, such as a commitment to international cooperation and institutional efficacy. Third, this study controls for whether an IO is political or technical in nature. Technical IOs are those that focus on specialized, non-political functions such as scientific collaboration, standard-setting, or humanitarian aid. These IOs may be more resilient to geopolitical shifts, whereas political IOs—whose agendas often reflect the priorities of dominant member states—may become obsolete if the international political context changes. Lastly, this study controls for the broader geopolitical context by including time-period fixed effects and dummy variables for major systemic shifts (i.e., the Cold War) that may influence an IO's likelihood of revival.

Model Specification

Due to the binary nature of the dependent variable—whether a zombie IO persists in its zombie state or successfully revives—the most appropriate statistical model to assess this relationship is a logistic regression. Logistic regression is well-suited for binary outcome variables, as it estimates the probability that a given IO revives as a function of key independent variables, such as organizational fragmentation and bureaucratic expertise. This method allows for the identification of factors that significantly increase or decrease the likelihood of revival while accounting for nonlinear relationships.

Challenges

A significant challenge in this study is ensuring the validity and consistency of the IOVS across various IOs. The subjectivity involved in coding "mandate relevance" could introduce bias and inconsistency, especially when dealing with ambiguous cases. Moreover, the subjective nature of the threshold used to differentiate between zombie and alive IOs could lead to misclassification of borderline cases. However, this study has taken the necessary steps to address these concerns by implementing a standardized and transparent coding process to minimize subjectivity. Clear guidelines for coding "mandate relevance" will be established, and multiple coders will be employed to assess inter-rater reliability to ensure consistency and reduce bias.

Conclusion

This study has sought to explain why some zombie IOs remain stagnant, while others manage to revive and regain functionality. It argues that internal institutional features—specifically the bureaucratic structure of IOs—play a crucial role in determining whether an organization can recover from a zombie state. This study identifies two key dimensions of bureaucratic structure that are central to this process: the degree of organizational fragmentation and the level of bureaucratic expertise. These factors are empirically tested using an original dataset on IO vitality and logistic regression analysis.

Understanding why some IOs stagnate while others remain resilient is key to developing more effective international institutions. A deeper understanding of these dynamics can help prevent IOs from becoming mired in inactivity, thereby supporting broader international cooperation. Moreover, even when an IO enters a zombified state, this research may uncover strategies for revitalization. By drawing on insights from IO survival, reform, and agency, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how IOs operate, why some persist in stagnation, and what actions can be taken to enhance global governance.

As one of the first studies to directly examine zombie IOs, this paper makes several important contributions to the existing literature on IO survival and reform. While existing research has predominantly categorized IOs as either alive or dead, this study introduces a more nuanced approach by recognizing the dynamic nature of zombie IOs, offering a deeper understanding of IO vitality. It also makes a significant empirical contribution by developing a novel dataset on zombie IOs and introducing the IOVS metric to assess IO vitality.

From a policy perspective, this study recommends that IOs reinforce their internal bureaucratic structures to reduce the risk of prolonged stagnation. Improving both organizational cohesion and bureaucratic expertise increases the chances of revival by reducing coordination challenges and enhancing the IO's ability to adapt and reform. To strengthen cohesion, policymakers should clarify lines of authority, eliminate overlapping mandates, and streamline decision-making processes to improve efficiency. To build bureaucratic expertise, IO leaders should focus on recruiting technically skilled personnel with relevant experience and invest in continuous training and professional development to maintain institutional knowledge. Recognizing the critical role of internal dynamics in IO performance can guide more effective institutional reforms, helping IOs become more resilient and responsive in the long term.

This paper also paves the way for several promising avenues of future research on IOs, their bureaucratic dynamics, and long-term sustainability. A key direction for further study is the comparative analysis of bureaucratic fragmentation and expertise across various types of IOs. Disaggregating these types of IOs could provide insights into how bureaucratic characteristics influence each organization and impact their ability to adapt to changing political contexts and address emerging global challenges. Additionally, while this study examines IOs that have already fallen into a zombie state, another critical area for future research would be to investigate the causal mechanisms that contribute to an IO's initial descent into stagnation. Identifying these mechanisms would allow scholars to trace the early warning signs and risks that lead to the decline of IOs.

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Contagion by Connection: Trade Networks and Autocratic Diffusion

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Abstract

Democratic diffusion, the spread of democracy among states, is well-documented while autocratic diffusion remains less explored. Existing research on democratic diffusion through trade assumes a trend of continued democratization of states in the global trade system. However, contrary to expectations of democratic diffusion theory, autocratization is happening at record levels. I argue that the structures of trade networks that states participate in can create conditions conducive to the diffusion of autocracy, offering a network-based explanation to the rise in the number of autocracies. I examine trade relations between 1962 and 2017 to propose a novel dataset of global trade networks constructed through the Leiden algorithm that captures the interactions between states and their regimes. This proposed dataset would not only advance our understanding of autocratic diffusion, but also contribute to the growing trend in research of a shift away from dyadic frameworks towards multilateral analyses. By analyzing these networks, I demonstrate that trade relationships among states with autocracies can foster the spread of autocracy, undermining the predictions of democratic diffusion theories. My capstone highlights the need to reconsider the mechanisms by which political regimes influence one another and offers a new approach to understanding the global dynamics of regime diffusion.

Introduction

Diffusion is the process through which political norms, models, and institutions can spread through certain networks. Democratic diffusion theory argues that an increase in democracy in a country can spread and diffuse to other neighboring countries. Therefore, aside from domestic and foreign causes, countries could become democracies, or at least democratize, simply through "capturing" democratization in their neighbors. This diffusion has been observed empirically: between the years of 1991 and 2001, a country whose neighbor's Polity IV score increased by one would itself experience a larger increase in polity score than a country whose neighbor did not undergo a one point increase in polity score (Leeson and Dean 2009). This effect of democratic diffusion is also argued to occur through non-geographical linkages as well, including trade.

Beyond liberal theories that discuss the coevolution of trade and democracy and their effects in maintaining peace, empirical research has shown that in the era of globalization, increased exposure to trade and financial markets can lead to democratization in less developed countries where welfare spending is present (Rudra 2005). Also, economic liberalization and openness to trade is known to advance democracy (Fish and Choudhry 2007; López-Córdova and Meissner 2008). Furthermore, bilateral trade agreements can lead to democratization, especially if the trade partner is a democracy (Manger and Pickup 2016). Trade globalization has begun to reach its upper bounds, and an effect of that is trade between nearly all states present in the international system (Palan et al. 2021, 1876). This would imply that many, if not all, countries trade with democracies.

With this in mind, it would be expected to see countries continue to democratize in line with the theories and research discussed. However, what is actually observed is a large amount of autocratization, even among states that participate heavily in the global trade network. The European Union, itself a promoter of democratic norms to the rest of Europe (Börzel and Lebanidze 2017), had nearly 20% of its member states experience autocratization over the past decade. This is not isolated to the EU, but is indicative of a larger observed wave of autocratization in the modern world; 33 countries, a record number, that are home to 36% of the world population autocratized in 2021 (Boese et al. 2022).

This puzzle, the contradiction between what research and theory tells us and what is being observed in terms of trade and democratization, could possibly be addressed by autocratic diffusion theory. In a similar vein to democratic diffusion theory, autocratic diffusion theory argues that autocracy can spread from country to country as well. If true, the theory would argue that we observe this large amount of autocratization because autocracy diffuses in networks like international trade, and "outweighs" the effect of democratic diffusion. Tangential research could be seen as support for this idea: trade with autocratic regimes is known to promote illiberal norms in certain cases. For example, members of the Belt-and-Road Initiative have increased political alignment and relations with China (Lu et al. 2021), and trade with China and Russia is known to lead to the adoption of autocratic norms through the transfer of information (Flonk

2021) and endorsement/patronage of autocratic government actors (Bae 2022), even in democratic states.

Applying the effects observed in trade with China and Russia to trade with all autocratic regimes is unwise, given the great power status of those two states even in the Liberal International Order compared to other autocratic regimes which might not hold the same influence. This raises the question of if autocracy can really diffuse through trade and explain the rise of autocracy and shift away from democracy in some states, and if the theory can be applied to autocratic states that aren't the two discussed above. There is also the issue of applicability of autocratic diffusion through trade to the modern understanding of trade. Recent literature has changed focus from bilateral trade dyads to trade networks made up of multiple states trading with each other more than others to reflect the international system in which all states trade with each other. These issues lead me to the research question my capstone seeks to explore in detail: When does autocracy diffuse through trade networks?

Literature Review

Though understanding diffusion theory is key in starting to formulate an answer to my capstone's area of focus, the literature on autocratic diffusion is not only sparse but also focused more on theoretical aspects than empirical research. As noted by Ambrosio and Tolstrup (2019), this theoretical focus has left some of the possible networks that autocracy can diffuse through, such as trade, underexplored compared to the literature on democratic diffusion. The concepts of autocratic diffusion and democratic diffusion imply that the two phenomena inherently counteract each other: democratic diffusion sees states shift away from autocracy and towards democracy and vice versa for autocratic diffusion. As such the networks identified by the literature through which democracy diffuses could also be applied to autocratic diffusion, but due to the difference in causal mechanisms behind the two phenomena this is unlikely.

For democratic diffusion, Elkink (2011) puts it succinctly: "Democracy is Contagious". There is a historical focus on geographical linkages, although there has been a shift towards a more abstract conceptualization of democratic diffusion to see how it occurs in other networks. To begin, it is well-documented that democratization can happen in spatial clusters (Gleditsch and Ward 2006; O'Loughlin et al. 1998), and empirical research supports the idea that democratization in one country can spread to its neighbors (Leeson and Dean 2009). Historical examples such as the Spring of Nations in the early 19th century as well as the Third Wave of democracy in the late 20th century show the geographical pathways of democratic diffusion (Gunitsky 2018).

Aside from geographical proximity, democratic diffusion can be facilitated through international organizations. IOs can promote democratic development among member states through pressure (Pevehouse 2002) and democratic development can originate from democracies within IOs as seen in the example of Indonesia promoting democracy in Southeast Asia through ASEAN (Nanda and Permata 2023). By increasing economic openness and the level of

international trade of their members, regional organizations can also help democracy spread among member states (Kim and Heo 2018). As mentioned in the puzzle, there is a large body of research that discusses the role of trade ties in inducing democracy as well.

The key causal mechanisms of democratic diffusion are based on a down-to-top perspective. Change tends to be induced from domestic audience costs and pressure on incumbent governments (Koesel and Bunce 2013). In a similar vein, related factors such as shared history, culture, or languages cause any shift towards democracy in a country to be more visually pronounced to citizens in its neighbors and affects public opinions on democratic institutions (Kyritsis et al. 2022). Networks such as geographical proximity act as vectors that aid attitudes promoting democracy to spread through informal communication between citizens of different countries (Elkink 2011).

While not yet demonstrated empirically, scholars do theorize that autocracy can diffuse regionally: Kurt Weyland, for example, identifies the Blue Waves in Latin America during the 70s as an example of autocratic diffusion (2016) and the current Conservative Wave in the same region supports the idea that autocratic diffusion can happen through spatial networks as well. However, though geographical proximity facilitates this diffusion, it is not the only pathway through which autocracy is known to spread.

Autocratic diffusion can occur through IO membership. Being a member of an IO predominantly made up of autocrats helps stabilize autocratic rule, and increases in the level of autocracy in an IO is associated with decreases in political liberalization among member states (Cottiero and Haggard 2023). However, it is unknown if autocracy can spread through trade to the extent that democracy does. Past research has shown that trade with China can stabilize autocratic rule due to insulation from democratic pressures (Bader 2015), but this doesn't exactly tell us if trade can induce autocratization, and there is the same issue from the puzzle in that trade with China cannot be generalized to trade with autocracies as a whole.

Like democratic diffusion, the literature on autocratic diffusion highlights the potential for autocratization to spread through various networks, but the mechanisms differ significantly. Autocracy is primarily implemented by elites, in contrast to the bottom-to-top model in democratic diffusion where citizens pressure their leaders. Autocracy spreads from elites in powerful autocratic states to other countries with the goal of expanding their sphere of influence and challenging the promotion of democracy (Weyland 2019, Gunitsky 2019; Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016). Similar to the image of a nucleus, these states act as hubs through which illiberal governance models, strategies, and support are transmitted.

Although there is a gap in what is known about autocratic diffusion and trade, it is not enough to see if autocracy can spread through trade dyads. The increased number of papers that look at trade from a multilateral network perspective challenges the generalizability of a prospective paper that looks only at bilateral trade and autocratic diffusion. This shift in thinking supports the idea that states are not only influenced and influence their direct trade partners, but their overall influence is determined by their roles in larger networks. Network theory has been applied to trade to examine the effects of network structures on outcomes such as susceptibility

to COVID (Antonietti et al. 2022), vulnerability to water shortages (Lee et al. 2016) and diffusion of technological information and norms (Ferrier et al. 2016; Zhang and Duan 2020). While the latter studies show how network theory can be used to model diffusion processes, little attention has been paid to how political models might similarly diffuse. This creates an opportunity to extend network theory into the subject of autocratization.

Overall, the literature shows that democracy and autocracy can diffuse through international networks like geographical proximity, membership in international organizations, and for democracy, trade. Despite the similarity in networks, the two phenomena have different causal mechanisms. Democratic diffusion mostly occurs through norms being spread among citizens in different states and those attitudes creating audience costs that put pressure on government actors, though some cases see pressure coming from foreign actors. In comparison, autocratic diffusion is driven primarily by elites with norms being spread by other autocratic states in order to increase their spheres of influence. Unfortunately, the literature is uneven; autocratic diffusion is largely understudied in comparison to democratic diffusion, especially in contexts such as trade. The work that does look at autocratization through trade focuses on actors like China and Russia and at a bilateral, not multilateral, level which challenges their generalizability. In order to address this, my capstone attempts to look at autocratic diffusion through the lens of network theory and offers a new perspective on the role of trade network structure in the spread of autocracy.

Theory and Hypotheses

Traditional frameworks of international trade use bilateral dyadic relationships between states to examine the effects of trade on other variables. While this framework has benefits such as offering a smaller level of analysis, looking only at bilateral trade fails to address the complexity of global trade systems where bilateral trade is present among all states. By focusing on relationships in isolation, this framework ignores how connections between states can interact with each other and confounds the various effects of dyadic trade. Network theory in comparison allows for an analysis of how states are positioned within global trade systems. The arrangement of states in a network and structures of the network itself can shape outcomes (Antonietti et al. 2022).

As such, I choose to use a network-level perspective to model autocratic diffusion not only due to a lack of such research on the topic but because analyzing networks allows for an understanding of the cumulative effects of trade with many states. In response to the research question of when autocracy diffuses through trade networks, I argue that the structure of trade networks affects the propensity for autocracy to diffuse within those networks.

Following the present literature on autocratic diffusion, implementation of autocracy is driven by elite decisions. For this paper, I use the definition of elites from Osei (2018): “Persons who are able, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations and movements, to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially.” All states have some form of a political

elite group, and the decisions of that elite group are shaped not only by domestic factors (Miller and Curry 2024), but also by their country's participation in the international system. Economic factors, for example, can drive elite decision making (Amodio et al. 2022). Trade networks are a key part of the international system that can influence how elites affect political outcomes as they offer repeated interaction with other international actors, exposing states and their elites to a variety of political norms and institutional practices. Elites may respond not just to a single trade partner but to broader trends within networks themselves.

I begin with the premise that elites seek to maintain power and stability in their domestic environments and adapt their strategies in response to external pressures and factors. I don't argue that elites might prefer one form of governance over another inherently; there are many reasons as to why elites might prefer democracy to autocracy (Baliamoune-Lutz 2020) and vice versa (Kailitz and Stockemer 2017). When their states participate in trade networks, elites may encounter various political models that influence and shape their decisions. Networks dominated by democratic states may constrain autocratization and induce democracy by raising political and material costs of deviating from entrenched liberal norms. In contrast, networks with autocracies may expose elites to political models of centralized governance, patronage, and political illiberalism which can appear attractive or viable. This can lead to an elite emulation mechanism in which continued exposure to autocratic models and isolation from non-autocratic ones results in norm internalization and observational learning of governance styles. As such, the structure of a trade network can condition the behaviors of elites in member states. In terms of network structure, I argue that the main determinants of diffusion are the centrality of autocratic states as well as the overall exposure to autocratic states within the network. The presence of these factors can induce elite emulation of autocratic models (especially of states seen as central and prestigious), increase the spread of norms from autocracies, and isolate member states from democratic pressures.

When the most central and influential state in a trade network is autocratic, other member states are more frequently exposed to their political models. In a similar vein to Weyland's (2019) writings on autocratic spheres of influence, centrality affords autocratic states to normalize their styles of governance to other states through example and exchange. Not only are such central states more economically connected, but they may also have more prestige and hold asymmetric power and influence within trade relationships. This could lead to autocratic diffusion in two ways: central autocratic states can gain leverage over other member states that presumably wish to maintain trade ties in a network either through direct coercion or intentional entrepreneurship of norms, and political models can become more familiar and potentially legitimate to other member states simply through consistent engagement with central autocratic regimes. This leads me to my first hypothesis:

H1: A trade network with a central and influential autocratic state will experience autocratic diffusion more than a network without one.

Beyond centrality, I also argue that the proportion of trade a state conducts with autocratic regimes may also shape susceptibility to autocratic influence. With a larger number of authoritarian trade partners, elites may have more opportunities to emulate political models. Furthermore, a higher proportion of such trade partners can also reduce the leverage and pressures from democratic actors or institutions. In contrast, when democracies represent a smaller share of a country's trade network, those pressures become easier to ignore, and elite alignment with illiberal models may become more attractive or viable. As such, my second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: A trade network with a higher proportion of overall trade ties to autocratic states will experience autocratic diffusion more than a network with a lower proportion.

While exposure through autocracies through increased trade ties is expected to increase the potential for autocratic diffusion, I also want to take into account the possibility of networks that see significant trade with both democracies and autocracies. In such situations, it could be that there is less insulation from democratic pressure and an increase in exposure to democratic norms. Following the mechanisms of democratic diffusion, consistent exposure to trade with democracies can act as a pathway for norms to spread to citizens who might impose domestic audience costs on elites and leaders. Research on the effects of EU trade in post-soviet states have theorized that trade with the EU aided democratization by counteracting the autocratizing effects of Russian trade (Lankina et al. 2016). To test this, my final hypothesis is thus:

H3: Trade networks that have trade ties to both democracies and autocracies will experience less autocratic diffusion than a network that has more trade ties to autocracies than democracies.

My theory proposes that autocratic diffusion can occur through the structural features of trade networks, as they can shape elite decisions through exposure to political models and norms. Through a focus on centrality and embeddedness of autocratic states within networks, my framework goes beyond bilateral trade models to properly observe systematic pressures and effects that influence elite behavior as well as political outcomes. This reflects an effort to answer when autocracy diffuses overall, rather than just when autocratization occurs within states.

Research Design

To comprehensively test my hypotheses of how network structure affects the propensity for autocratic diffusion among member states, I lay out the following research design. To begin, I use a unit-of-analysis of the network-year, that is a unique trade network in a given year, and a sample of all trade networks in the international system between the years of 1962 and 2017.

Those dates are drawn from the starting year of the UN Comtrade Database (2024) and the second to last-year of the Polity V dataset (Marshall and Gurr 2020), both of which will be used to operationalize my variables. To conduct a quantitative analysis of trade network structures, I first construct a novel dataset of all trade networks in the dates discussed above. This is done by using Comtrade data, which shows bilateral trade flows between all UN member states, to construct an adjacency matrix representing the global trade system, and then performing the Leiden algorithm on the adjacency matrix as proposed by Traag et al. (2019) to identify trade networks with members more densely connected to each other than other states in the global trade system. Using the Leiden algorithm allows for the identification of trade networks based on actual observed trade intensity rather than arbitrary geographical or institutional boundaries. This helps capture environments where sustained exposure and influence are most likely to occur as they reflect the dynamic and evolving patterns of trade interactions. The algorithm will be performed using the leiden package in R (Kelly 2023) and each network will be assigned a given identification letter and the year it was found. Although identification numbers will be retained through each year of observations for the sake of simplicity, a Network A in 2004 won't be the exact same as a Network A in 2005 as it is rare that the membership of trade networks remains stable and identical over time.

The Leiden algorithm itself works by iteratively refining distinct networks through a three-phase process which includes the local moving of nodes, refinement of communities, and continued aggregation based on refined networks. This guarantees trade networks that are not only locally-optimal but also structurally cohesive. This is common practice within network theory-focused research: Antonietti et al. (2022) used this method in the past with the precursor to the Leiden algorithm on a sample of fifty-five states to identify 22 unique trade networks in 2019 and 21 unique networks in 2021. Assuming an average of fifteen to twenty networks in a given year, the sample of time from 1962 to 2017 allows for more than enough observations to achieve statistical power of 80% to detect effect sizes similar to those found in Leeson and Dean (2009). Figure 1 below shows a simplified version of the process by which I will construct this novel dataset: the adjacency matrix made from Comtrade data is visualized in graph-form and two trade networks are found through the Leiden algorithm. Figure 2, in comparison, shows five of the communities in 2019 identified in Antonietti et al. (2022) as an example of possible outputted trade networks.

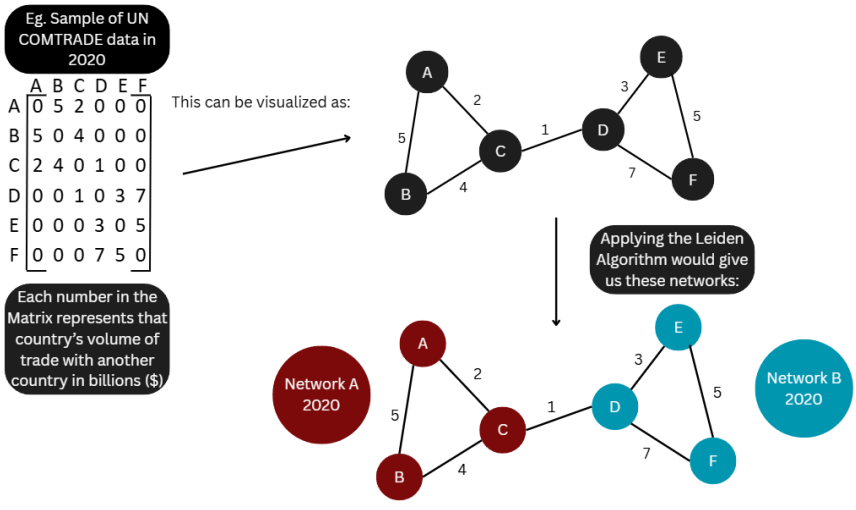

Figure 1. Example of the creation of the dataset's observations in 2020

	Size	Members
Community 1	6	AUS CAN JPN NZL PHL USA
Community 2	14	BEL CHE CZE DEU ESP GBR HUN
		IRL ITA MDA NLD PRT ROU SVK
Community 3	5	BIH HRV MNE SRB SVN
Community 4	7	DNK EST FIN LTU LVA NOR SWE
Community 5	3	ARM AZE GEO

Figure 2. Sample of five trade networks in 2019 from Antonietti et al. (2022)

My dependent variable, autocratic diffusion, is operationalized as a count variable measuring the number of countries within a network that experienced a decrease in Polity score in the following year. For example, a network in 2014 might be given a DV measure of five if five of its countries saw a decrease in polity score (compared to 2014) in 2015. Data for this will be gathered from the Polity5 dataset, which assigns such Polity scores to all major, independent states (those that had a population greater than 500,000 in the most recent year) in the global system over the period 1800-2018. Since I am leading my DV measurement by one year, the timeframe of my dataset stops at 2017.

By using a count variable rather than a binary variable that measures if a country autocratized in a network, this analysis better captures the concept of diffusion among states. It should be noted though, that this current operationalization treats a one point drop in Polity score the same as an eight point drop, even though the latter might represent a more significant autocratization. To address this, I perform robustness checks by running multiple models that use alternative measures of the DV. For example, the average change in polity scores in a network and the sum of the magnitude of all changes in a network, both of which would be continuous variables. I also test robustness by trying models where I lead the DV by two years to account for temporal sensitivity of autocratic diffusion, as well as different measures of autocratization such as V-Dem's Polyarchy Index which is an alternative measure of the level of electoral democracy in a country (Coppedge et al. 2025).

To test my first hypothesis which looks at the effect of centrality of autocratic states in a trade network has on autocratic diffusion, I do as follows. I operationalize the centrality of an autocratic state in a trade network as a binary variable. I apply the Eigenvector centrality formula to all states in a network-year. The formula outputs a score representing the degree to which a node/state in a network is well-connected to the overall network, but also well-connected to other such well-connected states (Ruhnau 2000). As a country's influence within a network increases, so too does its eigenvector centrality score. This process has been done in papers such as Lee et

al. (2016) and Antonietti et al. (2022), and works especially well in networks that change through time (Taylor et al. 2017) like trade. Using the constructed matrix of states in a trade network, I apply the eigen_centrality function from the igraph package in R (Csárdi et al. 2025) to find the eigenvector centrality scores of all states in a network. If the state with the highest centrality score has a polity score between -10 and -6, defined as autocratic by the Polity5 dataset, then I code this variable as 1, and 0 if otherwise.

To test my second hypothesis, which is about the proportion of trade connections to autocracies, I operationalize my IV: autocratic trade ties, as a continuous variable bounded between 0 and 1. I calculate the proportion of trade connections to autocracies by dividing the number of nodes/countries in the trade network that have a direct trade tie to an autocracy by the total number of nodes in the network in a given year. Again, the data to measure this will be gathered from COMTRADE and the Polity5 project. I define trade ties as any non-zero volume of trade between two states in a network, following the approach used in Sajedianfard et al. (2021). To confirm robustness, I run models with an alternative measure of this IV using thresholds of trade based on the quantiles of trade flows between states, for example only counting trade above the 25th quartile.

To test my third hypothesis, that democratic trade ties in a network can act as a buffer to autocratic diffusion, I use an IV of Autocratic-Democratic Balance. I operationalize this metric as a continuous variable measuring the ratio of number of nodes connected to democracies (Polity5 scores of 6 to 10) to the number of nodes connected to autocracies. Reflecting the reality that states trade with both autocracies and democracies in the modern international system, nodes can be counted for connections to either polity type; I expect that most nodes will have some autocratic and democratic partners in a network. Hypothetically, a trade network that is balanced will have a ratio greater than or equal to one, while trade networks skewed towards autocracies will have a ratio lower than one. A higher measure implies greater exposure to democratic pressures and norms.

I control for two confounding variables. Given the unique nature of network-year as a unit of analysis, any control has to take into account how aspects of the structure of trade networks not discussed in my theory and hypotheses can affect autocratic diffusion. The first is the size of the trade network. Simply by virtue of having more states present, a large network mechanically has more opportunities for autocratization and thus could bias the model if not accounted for. I also control for the lagged number of autocratization events from the previous year among member states in order to address the possibility that observed instances of the DV are actually representative of ongoing political changes rather than impact of network structure. The latter will also be reexamined for alternative operationalizations of the DV used in robustness checks.

Given that the DV is a count variable, I use a poisson distribution regression model. In the event that the data is overdispersed and the variance of the DV is greater than the mean, I use a negative binomial distribution model for robustness. With the operationalization of my variables, Figure 3 shows an example of a row in the constructed novel dataset:

Year (T)	Network	Autocratic Centrality (H1)	Autocratic Trade Ties Ratio (H2)	Democracy to Autocracy trade Ratio (H3)	# of countries that autocratized in Year + 1 (DV)	# of Countries	# of previous autocratization events
2010	2010-A	1	0.76	0.31	5	7	2

Figure 3. Sample row in dataset used for quantitative analysis

Policy Implications and Conclusion

The research performed in my capstone contributes to the growing field of study on autocratic diffusion by introducing a network-based analysis and framework for understanding how trade can induce and influence political regime transition. Conventional literature and theories has treated international trade as a force that spreads democracy through economic liberalization, but my capstone challenges this assumption by introducing the idea that trade networks, especially those dominated by autocracies, can spread autocratic norms amongst member states. The usage of network theory in my capstone reflects a trend in the overall literature toward a shift away from a focus dyadic bilateral trade frameworks to interconnected trade relationships, and in doing so addresses how the changing focus affects theories on elite decision making.

The findings of this research would have policy implications for any party interested in fostering democracy or autocracy. If the hypotheses are true, they would primarily suggest that trade can lead to autocratic diffusion and thus policymakers would have to reconsider past ideas that assume trade supports liberalization. One could also identify countries that are more susceptible to autocratization based on the trade network they participate in in a given year and the structure of that network. This could aid democratic institutions and actors in focusing on key targets based on strategic goals such as maintaining global democracy. The third hypothesis especially could show the importance of democratic trade blocs and incentivize a concerted effort to include at-risk states in trade amongst democracies to prevent autocratic diffusion.

In addition to the theoretical and policy contributions of my capstone, I propose a novel dataset for examining autocratic diffusion within trade networks. Aside from autocratic diffusion research, this dataset could provide a comprehensive list of all trade networks in the global trade system which could be used by scholars outside the field of diffusion as well. This dataset could open paths for future research beyond dyadic analysis that tests other features of networks such as the length of time states are in the same network. Despite these contributions, it is important that further research on the diffusion of political models, especially autocracy, is done, especially as global power dynamics continue to shift through time.

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More Compliance in the Middle: Women's Rights and Civil Society in Anocratic Regimes

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Introduction

At the tail end of a political transition, Tunisia passed one of the most comprehensive laws on violence against women in the Arab world, criminalizing not only physical abuse but also psychological, economic, moral, and political violence. Championed by domestic civil society groups like the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD) and backed by international actors like UN Women, the 2017 law marked a major step forward for gender rights in a transitional regime (UN Women, 2017). It reflected years of sustained local advocacy and built on Tunisia's post-revolution legal reforms, signaling a serious commitment to women's rights. By contrast, Nigeria, a similarly classified open anocracy, passed the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act in 2015, but implementation has been limited. Despite civil society efforts and international praise, the law remains unenforced in much of the country, hindered by a lack of institutional framework for its enforcement, low levels of violence awareness in Nigeria, and a general cultural resistance (Shajobi-Ibikunle & Kassim, 2023).

Both regimes fall into the category of semi-open, transitional systems. Yet their commitments to women's rights norms have diverged sharply, illustrating a broader puzzle: what drives this variation in women's rights norm adherence among anocracies?

Formally articulated in instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and reinforced by UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, women's rights norms refer to state obligations to eliminate discrimination, ensure legal equality, guarantee women's equal participation in public and private life, and protect them from violence and structural exclusion (United Nations, 1988; UN Security Council, 2000; 2008). However, in states all across the political spectrum, women's rights are often the first to go. Their intersection with cultural hierarchies, domestic power structures, and limited international enforcement complicates their uptake. This makes women's rights norm internalization especially susceptible to strategic manipulation, and thus more heavily dependent on local actors. Unlike some other human rights that may carry stronger international enforcement mechanisms (e.g., conventions against torture or arbitrary detention), women's rights, such as gender quotas, anti-discrimination laws, or protections against gender-based violence, tend to be subject to more discretion in domestic implementation. Whether this leads to curtailing through the rollback of gender equality laws or the hollow implementation of anti-violence protections, women's rights are particularly vulnerable to symbolic adoption; promoted on paper to appease international audiences but neglected in practice. As such, women's rights norms offer a uniquely revealing lens into how states comply under uncertainty, especially in regimes marked by institutional instability and contested legitimacy.

To this point, the theoretical focus of this study is anocracies: hybrid regimes that combine democratic and authoritarian traits and are characterized by fluctuating power dynamics, weak institutions, and semi-open civil society spaces. Often overlooked or grouped with authoritarian systems in norm compliance literature, anocracies are promising contexts for examining partial, albeit substantive, norm adherence. Their hybrid, and often unstable, nature

allows international pressure and domestic mobilization to interact in different ways than in other regime types. In anocratic environments, local women's rights civil society organizations (CSOs) may play a larger role in shaping government behavior, pressuring leaders to adopt international norms through tools such as coalition-building, public protest, and media campaigns.

Despite their global rise after the Cold War, anocracies remain understudied in both the norm diffusion and compliance literatures, particularly concerning how local actors influence women's rights adherence in these semi-open regimes. Most existing research prioritizes either consolidated autocracies or democracies, overlooking the fluid dynamics that make anocracies distinct. This leaves open important questions about whether meaningful rights-based reforms can emerge in these grey-area regimes and, if so, what drives them.

While much of the existing literature emphasizes top-down explanations for norm compliance, whether driven by international organizations or binary regime type, this study turns attention to the domestic actors operating in local contexts. Building on audience cost theory and contrary to strategic ratification literature, this study argues that women's rights CSOs in anocracies are uniquely positioned to generate significant pressure for women's rights norm adherence, even in the absence of full ratification or immediate institutional reform. When well-organized and embedded in national discourse, these groups can exploit the regime instability and reputational sensitivities common in anocracies to elicit forms of incremental adherence, including treaty signing, legislative debates, and official statements from government officials.

To test this theory, this research employs a large-N quantitative design covering 1985-2025 to test how CSO presence and coordination capacity shape norm adherence across a global sample, with the country-year as the unit of analysis. In doing so, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly debates by re-centering norm diffusion on domestic agency within hybrid regimes. It also provides actionable policy insights for international actors seeking to support rights-based reform in these increasingly common hybrid contexts; not through top-down conditionality alone, but by empowering the local actors already mobilizing change.

Literature Review

Scholars contributing to broader norm compliance literature have long explored the variance in adherence to international norms. Early rationalist approaches emphasize incentives, coercion, and strategic calculations, while constructivists focus on persuasion, norm internalization, legitimacy, and norm entrepreneurs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Checkel, 2001; Börzel & Risse, 2001). As this literature largely frames international organizations (IOs) as the primary drivers of norm diffusion (Thomson, 2017; O'Rourke, 2020), it often overlooks the role of local actors—particularly in shaping women's rights norms—and frequently lacks theoretical grounding or empirical testing of their influence (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Conversely, emerging literature highlights the influence of rational calculations, policy diffusion, and domestic politics on the compliance behavior of IO member states (Underdal, 1998; Risse et al.,

2013). Sikkink and Kim (2013) propose an "international justice cascade" of norm diffusion, linking compliance to leaders' political survival strategies (Conrad & Ritter, 2013). Parallel to this literature is Fearon's (1995) definition of commitment problems, where states renege on human rights agreements, as a key factor in non-compliance, particularly in contexts with low enforcement (Mearsheimer, 1994; Simmons, 2009; Matanock, 2020; Tallberg et al., 2020).

Because women's rights often lack strong enforcement mechanisms and are shaped by deeply rooted cultural and institutional resistance, they are especially vulnerable to symbolic adoption and are frequently among the first to be curtailed during periods of instability. Within the broader compliance landscape, recent scholarship has turned attention to this strategic adoption of women's rights norms (Htun & Weldon, 2010). Many scholars operate under the assumption that democracies naturally comply with women's rights treaties, shifting scholarly focus to non-democratic regimes (Wyndow et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2017; Hill & Watson, 2019). Scholars argue that international political contexts shape norm adherence, with authoritarian regimes adopting symbolic gender reforms, such as CEDAW, to enhance international reputations or respond to external pressures (Goldsmith & Posner, 2006; Htun & Weldon, 2010; Comstock & Vilán, 2023). Goldsmith and Posner (2006) term this "strategic ratification," when non-democratic regimes exploit low compliance costs to project progressiveness, a tactic often used to appease opposition groups (Donno & Kreft, 2018). Bush et al. (2024), building on Levitsky and Way (2010) and Donno and Kreft (2018), argue that post-Cold War democratic incentives prompt authoritarian regimes to adopt reforms that secure international rewards without risking political survival.

A key concept of strategic ratification is the use of gender quotas or tokenism to signal international legitimacy without enacting meaningful reform (Bush, 2011). Bush and Zetterberg (2020) find that quotas boost autocratic regimes' reputations and access to aid, as Western donors often favor higher female representation. Other scholars similarly note that autocratic Rwanda and Tanzania use quotas to appear progressive under Western pressure (Bauer & Burnet 2013; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2016; 2022; Donno et al., 2022). While this literature links binary regime type to strategic versus substantive compliance and highlights women's rights norms, it remains centered on reputational incentives and formal ratification. As full compliance is often symbolic, limited attention to local actors and informal adherence overlooks the incremental steps regimes may take when full implementation is not feasible. Studying this dynamic in authoritarian settings is further complicated by opacity and the low salience of women's rights due to minimal domestic audience costs. In contrast, anocracies offer a crucial middle ground: local actors occupy a more ambiguous but potentially influential space due to these regimes' hybrid institutional features.

Much of the previous literature focuses on fully fledged autocracies or democracies, often grouping anocracies as a "non-democracy" and overlooking their uniqueness (Frantz, 2017). However, due to an increasing number of anocracies worldwide, an emerging collection of works is dedicated to defining these regimes and studying what makes them different (Fuller 2016). Burnell (2006) and Sternberg and Fischer (2022), among others, provide a useful framework for

distinguishing between democracies, autocracies, and a range of hybrid regimes that are often blurred by the proliferation of terms like "less hard types of authoritarianism" and "diminished forms of democracy". Anocracies are thus defined as hybrid regimes with both autocratic and democratic traits, fall mid-range on the Polity index, and are marked by high instability (Burnell, 2006; Vreeland, 2008; Regan & Bell, 2010; Jones & Lupu, 2018; Pate, 2020). This unpredictability creates opportunities for both progress and regression in rights adherence, making anocracies a crucial yet understudied category. Fein's (1995) seminal work exploring the idea of "more murder in the middle" posits that regimes in the middle of the regime-type spectrum are, due to their instability, more prone to human rights violations than others. Other scholars add that anocracies exhibit higher rates of human rights and civil liberties abuses than consolidated regime types, a pattern that aligns with "more violence in the middle" hypotheses and is most strongly supported in cases of civil conflict (Slinko et al., 2017; Jones & Lupu, 2018; Walter, 2022; Teodorescu, 2024).

Although these studies have examined hybrid regimes' volatility in terms of civil conflict and broader human rights violations, very few directly link anocratic institutional inconsistency and women's rights norm adherence. Women's rights are often among the earliest casualties in times of political instability, a frequent condition in anocracies (Hudson, 2012; Obradovic, 2015; Mueller-Hirth et al., 2023). Understanding how these regimes approach women's rights can provide insight into their broader patterns of norm adherence and institutional commitment. Despite the link between instability and the rollback of women's rights, anocracies' occupation of the "muddy middle ground" may allow local actors within these regimes to foster partial compliance that reflects a more genuine commitment to women's rights progress.

Theory and Hypotheses

To address these gaps, I propose a theory that centers on the presence of women's rights CSOs in shaping adherence to international norms on women's rights in the context of transitioning regimes. Contrary to prevailing assumptions that non-democratic regimes uniformly exhibit weak adherence to international women's rights norms, I argue that anocracies create unique opportunities for local women's rights groups to exert influence due to their hybrid political nature. While previous literature often categorizes anocracies alongside fully authoritarian regimes, I pull from transitional regime literature to contend that anocracies occupy a paradoxical middle ground, blending elements of both democracy and authoritarianism in ways that merit independent study and create a variation among anocracies within the broader regime spectrum (Jones & Lupu, 2018). This combination of institutional instability and partial democratic openness creates fertile ground for local-level women's rights CSOs to pressure the volatile government into adhering to women's rights policies, though this may not manifest in full ratification. My theory also draws from audience cost literature while diverging from existing norm compliance and hybrid regime literature, positing that women's rights norm

adherence in anocracies can surpass that of fully authoritarian regimes and even rival that of some stable democracies, particularly when local CSOs are active and strategically mobilized.

A defining characteristic of anocracies is their political instability, marked by weak institutions and unstable or fluctuating power dynamics. However, unlike fully authoritarian regimes, anocracies often retain elements of democratic governance such as political pluralism, semi-competitive elections, or decentralized decision-making. These traits create openings for domestic actors and civil society to organize and advocate for change. This blend of instability and openness amplifies the influence of present grassroots women's rights CSOs. While CSOs take diverse forms, I focus more on the non-state, locally anchored coalitions advocating for a broad spectrum of women's rights. These may range from well-established and coordinated coalitions to newly emerging or decentralized networks. While all grassroots CSOs operate at the local level, their capacity and internal organization vary, differences that significantly shape their ability to influence regime behavior. As much of the existing norm adherence literature explains, non-democratic regimes are often motivated by reputational factors, and I do think this rings true for anocracies to a certain extent in that it amplifies internal audience costs. I posit that the greater permeability of anocratic regimes allows CSOs to exploit windows of opportunity where these governments seek to bolster their domestic legitimacy or improve their international standing. In short, this theory positions grassroots CSOs not as peripheral actors but as central drivers of women's rights norm adherence in transitional contexts.

A key concept of my theory is the idea that these CSOs use audience costs as a mechanism to influence adherence in anocracies. Audience costs refer to the domestic and international penalties that governments incur when they publicly commit to certain policies but fail to follow through (Fearon, 1994; Tomz, 2007). While this concept has traditionally been applied to democracies and is increasingly applied in the context of autocracies, I argue that it holds particular salience in anocracies, where political accountability mechanisms are evolving and governments are often highly sensitive to both domestic discontent and international scrutiny (Weeks, 2008). In these regimes, women's rights CSOs leverage social mobilization, media campaigns, and coalition-building to elevate women's rights as public priorities. By publicly framing women's rights as central to national development or social justice, CSOs amplify public demands for accountability and signal to both domestic and international observers that the vulnerable regime is under pressure to meet its human rights commitments, thus increasing the reputational risks of non-compliance. This dynamic creates a feedback loop where governments, seeking to maintain legitimacy and avoid unrest, are compelled to substantially align with the women's rights norms advocated by these CSOs.

Moreover, the ability of politically active CSOs to generate audience costs in anocracies is heightened by these regimes' inherent vulnerabilities. Anocracies often lack the severely repressive instruments that characterize fully autocratic states, which I argue makes them more susceptible to the semi-organized domestic pressure of CSOs. The presence of semi-independent media outlets or opposition parties common in anocracies further facilitates the diffusion of women's rights discourse. Even under conditions of increased repression in anocracies, like

democratic backsliders or states transitioning to autocracies, local women's rights groups often operate via decentralized networks, making them more resilient and difficult to suppress. These bottom-up coalitions play a crucial role in shaping the political agendas of anocracies, especially when they align their demands with larger socio-political movements such as democratization or civil rights campaigns.

This leads me to another core tenet of my theory, the meaning of "norm adherence." Unlike previous research that emphasizes official ratification or de jure commitments to these norms, I adopt a process-oriented approach to defining adherence that moves beyond formal ratification. I identify three pre-ratification proxies for this de facto norm adherence: treaty signing, legislative debate, and official statements. Each proxy reflects a different mechanism of CSO influence in anocracies, capturing incremental yet significant shifts toward policy alignment with international women's rights standards and showing how adherence can manifest well before ratification. Though frequently dismissed as symbolic, I argue that treaty signing in anocracies is not as seemingly performative as it is in other non-democracies, as it often involves significant political capital and administrative investments that may be costly for the already-unstable anocratic government. This action involves CSOs leveraging domestic grievances or transnational partnerships to shape protest dynamics and international attention, putting the regime in a position where treaty signing is a politically expedient form of commitment that spurs preliminary policy change for leaders wanting to avoid domestic or international turmoil. Therefore, treaty signing represents a substantive commitment, requiring governments to navigate both domestic and international consequences while aligning with CSO expectations, signaling partial compliance and deflecting pressure. The second proxy, legislative debates, often emerge from grassroots mobilization and coalition-building. As CSOs frame women's rights as pressing domestic priorities and affiliate them with broader movements, they compel regimes to discuss adherence to avoid domestic audience costs. I argue that this is another substantive proxy, seeing as during legislative debates, lawmakers go through multiple rounds of discussion and deliberation of proposed policies in a process that requires a wider support base and can lead to more deliberate policy engagement or tangible solutions reflecting the specific needs of CSOs. The third proxy, official statements, often occur in response to heightened visibility due to CSOs' ability to shape narratives with media campaigns and international pressure. Although this proxy represents a lower-cost gesture signaling adherence, it can foreshadow future commitments or trigger provisional changes in governance practices.

By emphasizing pre-ratification mechanisms of adherence, this theory challenges the existing binary distinction between strategic and substantive norm adherence. While much of the literature treats symbolic commitments as evidence of strategic adoption, I argue that even low-cost actions like official statements can reflect meaningful shifts toward substantive women's rights reform when driven by domestic mobilization. This distinction is especially important in anocracies, where weak institutions and fluctuating leadership often make incremental changes the primary pathway to reform. Rather than dismissing partial adherence, this framework highlights how locally rooted women's rights CSOs can exploit the unique

vulnerabilities of transitional regimes, where a blend of authoritarian control and democratic openness creates opportunities to generate tangible, albeit incremental, policy shifts in favor of women's rights norms (Carothers & Press, 2022).

While I acknowledge that this effect may be moderated by the prior level of democracy or the extent of current democratic traits, I control for these factors and expect the effect to remain constant, though potentially less severe depending on existing cultural or religious norms, institutional capacity of the regime, and the broader makeup of the anocracy. I recognize that official statements and legislative debate may not always be with the intent to expand women's rights reform, instead with the intent to oppose or even reverse women's rights norms. Therefore, official statements and legislative debate won't always lead to positive reform, but could still be impactful by bringing the regime and the public's attention to the topic and encouraging further debate. Despite these possible counterarguments, I believe my general theory will hold that grassroots women's rights CSOs consistently exploit hybrid regimes' instability to push for incremental women's rights norm adherence.

However, CSO capacity is not constant across anocracies—some may have more ingrained organizational systems, while others may lack the infrastructure for sustained mobilization. The political volatility and weak institutions inherent in anocracies compounded with the differences in CSOs' internal capacity, including their ability to coordinate activities, maintain networks, and mobilize resources, can complicate their influence on women's rights norm adherence. More organized, resourceful CSOs that existed before the regime transition and ensuing instability can better sustain pressure and push for tangible treaty signing or policy discussions. These pre-existing groups are likely to be seen as more legitimate by the regime, as they are better equipped to overcome coordination problems and maintain consistent advocacy over time. By framing women's rights issues within broader agendas or having the ability to collaborate with other civil society actors, these well-established CSOs can compel the regime to engage in more substantive mechanisms as a means of addressing domestic demands. Contrastly, in more fragmented or newly emerging CSO networks, coordination problems may limit their ability to generate audience costs or sustain pressure on the regime. This effect means these groups are less likely to achieve deeper policy changes due to capacity constraints and lower perceived legitimacy. While high coordination problems may prevent sustained pressure, I argue that fragmented CSOs can still leverage short-term mobilization efforts to exert influence and extract lower-cost adherence behaviors from the regime. Even though these actions may appear largely symbolic, they can still generate de facto adherence practices within anocracies by creating temporary policy shifts or establishing new bureaucratic procedures, particularly when regimes seek to deflect international scrutiny or quell domestic unrest.

This intervening dynamic leads me to the following hypotheses:

H1: The presence of local women's rights CSOs increases the likelihood of treaty signing or legislative debate of women's rights norms in anocracies if the CSOs are pre-existing and experience low coordination problems.

H2: The presence of local women's rights CSOs increases the likelihood of official statements around women's rights norms in anocracies if the CSOs are newly emerging/highly fragmented and experience high coordination problems.

Research Design

To test my theory and hypotheses regarding the role of women's rights CSOs in driving adherence to international women's rights norms in anocracies, I adopt a large-N quantitative research design. Countries are included in the sample for each year from 1985 to 2025, a forty-year period marked by a rise in anocracies as many states transitioned toward democracy near the end of, and after, the Cold War. Providing forty years of data allows me to observe regime transitions and long-term CSO activity across varying political and geographic contexts, while isolating the specific capacity conditions under which CSOs are most influential. I classify regime type using Polity IV scores, with country-years categorized according to standard thresholds: autocracies (–10 to –6), anocracies (–5 to +5), and democracies (+6 to +10). While my theory centers on women's rights norm adherence in anocracies, this empirical analysis will include all regime types to allow for cross-regime comparison and broader generalizability. This full-sample approach enables both in-sample analysis of anocracies and out-of-sample comparisons with democracies and autocracies.

At the core of this study are the three observable proxies of norm adherence I mentioned earlier in this paper: (1) treaty signing, (2) legislative debates, and (3) official government statements. Treaty signing will be measured dichotomously (1 = occurred, 0 = not occurred), but I propose a more granular coding strategy for the other two proxies. Legislative debates and official statements will be measured on ordinal scales from 1 to 5, where 1 reflects negative or dismissive mentions of women's rights norms, and 5 reflects positive engagement, such as legislative debate with intent to ratify or statements indicating commitment to adopt international standards. Scores in the mid-range (2–4) represent degrees of neutral or mixed discourse, general references to gender equity, or discussion on the validity of the norms without clear commitment. These scales will be constructed using bibliometric text analysis to identify pre-defined sets of keywords. Examples include references to treaties like CEDAW, thematic terms such as "gender-based violence," "economic empowerment," "women's rights," "gender equality," "access to land," "reproductive rights," "political participation," and "women's rights legislation," as well as procedural language like "ratify," "adopt," "implement," or "in line with international standards." These keywords will be drawn from UN treaty language, UN Women policy briefs, civil society advocacy toolkits (AWID), and past studies that categorize rights-based discourse (Raja, 2023). In legislative debates, a level 5 would correspond to a debate explicitly linked to treaty ratification or reform bills.

I will draw data for these dependent variables from multiple sources: the United Nations Treaty Collection database for treaty signatures; national legislative records or IPU Parline database summaries, which will be scraped and coded for relevant legislative debates using

gender equality keyword matching and frequency analysis; and LexisNexis, media archives, and government websites for official statements, which will similarly be scanned for policy-relevant language, tone, and stated intent. Where possible, automated bibliometric methods (e.g., TF-IDF, dictionary matching) will be supplemented with my coding to verify sentiment and intent. I chose these sources for their credibility, global coverage, and their ability to capture both formal institutional behaviors and informal signals of policy alignment over time.

The independent variable I explore focuses on the presence of CSOs, including those engaged in a wide range of women's rights issues, from socio-economic concerns like education and access to land, to more politically or culturally contested areas such as reproductive rights and political participation. Capturing this full range of issue areas enables a more comprehensive assessment of how CSOs operate in varied normative environments, some of which may be more prone to cultural or religious resistance. These contextual factors are accounted for through relevant controls in the model. This approach also speaks to longstanding debates in the literature about the challenges of gender norm reforms that are deeply embedded in social and cultural systems (Englehart & Miller 2014). Because V-Dem does not disaggregate CSOs by issue area, I will generate an original issue-area classification through content analysis of CSO mandates and reported activities, using regional NGO databases (AWID, CIVICUS), official websites, and advocacy documents. To measure CSO presence, I use the V-Dem dataset, drawing from indicators in the Civil Society Index and Women's Civil Society Participation variables. These include "CSO entry and exit," "CSO repression," "CSO structure," and "CSO women's participation." These indicators are coded on ordinal scales (0 to 4 or 0 to 5), with higher values indicating more open environments, greater participation, or less repression, as defined by V-Dem's methodology. The dataset's cross-national structure makes it especially valuable for assessing civil society strength across diverse regime types.

The study also includes a moderating variable to account for variation in CSO historical presence and organizational capacity. To capture this variation, I further distinguish between pre-existing groups—those formed before a regime transitioned into an anocracy—and newer or more fragmented groups that emerged in the aftermath. I also assess the degree of coordination problems among CSOs (coded as low vs. high), using V-Dem indicators related to network structure (CSO participatory environment), collaborative activity (CSO consultation), access to resources (CSO financial support), and longevity (CSO entry and exit). CSOs that exhibit a strong presence of these indicators will be coded as having low coordination problems, whereas groups that lack these characteristics will be coded as having high coordination problems. Where necessary, I will supplement V-Dem with regional databases (e.g., CIVICUS, AWID), media archives, and NGO reports.

The statistical analysis will be conducted using three models, one for each proxy of norm adherence. Treaty signing will be modeled using logistic regression, with legislative debates and official statements modeled using ordered logistic regression. To test my core hypotheses, I will include an interaction term between CSO presence and coordination capacity to assess whether CSO impact on women's rights norm adherence increases when coordination problems are low.

Additionally, to examine how anocratic political context shapes CSO influence, I will include interaction terms between CSO presence and each regime type. On top of that, a three-way interaction term will assess how the effect of CSO presence on norm adherence is conditioned by both regime type and CSO coordination capacity. This adds another layer to my study, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of whether CSOs are more effective in anocratic regimes with institutional volatility, or whether their influence diminishes in more consolidated or repressive systems.

To better isolate these relationships and avoid potential confounders, I include a set of control variables. Prior and current levels of democracy (measured using Polity IV scores lagged by two years to account for democratic conditions before and during anocratic transition) may influence both CSO presence and government responsiveness to women's rights norms. Institutional capacity, captured through World Governance Indicators such as "government effectiveness" and "rule of law," affects a state's ability to implement reforms and may also determine how effectively CSOs generate audience costs. Cultural and religious attitudes toward gender equality, drawn from the World Values Survey, shape baseline societal receptiveness to women's rights. Reliance on international aid, based on OECD aid flow data in sectors linked to gender equality or civil society development, may create external incentives for states to signal compliance. Finally, conflict presence may disrupt civil society operations, and is accounted for using the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, which defines conflict as contested incompatibility over government or territory involving at least 25 battle-related deaths per year (Davies et al., 2024; Gleditsch et al., 2002). I rely on UCDP's type of incompatibility and actor identity codes to identify cases where violence may intersect with CSO activities or shape the political salience of women's rights.

However, I recognize that there are still potential issues of endogeneity that may link my study too closely to previous works on strategic adherence, such as regimes only allowing CSO activity because they already intend to comply with women's rights norms. To address these concerns, I will explore instrumental variable analysis. Possible instruments include external shocks to CSO capacity (e.g., funding changes, international CSO bans), historical CSO donor funding, or the presence of global advocacy campaigns, which may influence CSO development independently of state compliance intentions. I also anticipate several other empirical challenges. First, in operationalizing CSO influence by distinguishing between pre-existing and newly formed groups, there is a risk of overrepresenting new organizations in states transitioning from autocracy. This may conflate regime openness with CSO emergence, rather than isolating the independent effect of grassroots mobilization on norm adherence. On the other hand, informal or decentralized CSOs may be underrepresented in the data, especially in more repressive anocracies. To address this, I will draw on media sources and conduct bibliographic analysis to systematically code mentions of grassroots women's rights organizations, their activities, partnerships, advocacy strategies (protests, petitions, educational outreach), and any evidence of government engagement or response. This qualitative coding will help construct binary or scaled indicators of CSO activity in country-years that may otherwise appear missing or null. A

mixed-method approach will thus provide a more comprehensive and context-sensitive account of CSO dynamics. Additionally, the internal dynamics of anocracies are heterogeneous: some may lean more democratic, while others approach full authoritarianism. In this case, incorporating continuous measures of regime openness or disaggregating anocracies by subtype may be appropriate. Finally, validating audience cost mechanisms poses challenges, as direct indicators of reputational or political costs are limited. I will rely on indirect measures and pattern matching to assess these effects.

Policy Implications and Conclusion

This study makes important contributions to both scholarly debates and real-world policymaking on women's rights norm adherence. At the scholarly level, it challenges dominant compliance theories that center international organizations or binary regime types as the primary drivers of norm diffusion and compliance. Instead, I foreground the role of local women's rights CSOs, particularly in the transitional environments of anocracies—regimes too often treated as residual categories in the existing literature. By drawing from audience cost theory and process-oriented adherence through treaty signing, legislative debates, and official statements, my study introduces a more nuanced framework for analyzing norm compliance in contexts where full ratification may be politically unfeasible. Anocracies represent a "dangerous hour" for norm implementation—marked by volatility, institutional weakness, and contested authority—which I theorize creates unique obstacles to full de jure realization of women's rights. However, this is not to say that de facto change is impossible within these regimes. Instead, the process-oriented approach developed in this study not only contributes to the growing literature on hybrid regimes but can also help deepen our understanding of how incremental reforms can emerge from below, driven by domestic actors navigating volatile institutional landscapes. In doing so, it advances the norm diffusion literature by integrating the role of domestic civil society under conditions of institutional instability, filling a major gap in existing research on women's rights in semi-authoritarian contexts.

The policy implications of this study are equally significant. Strategies that assume top-down change, whether through diplomatic pressure, aid conditionality, or treaty monitoring, frequently overlook the informal mechanisms by which rights norms begin to take hold. For international organizations, donors, and transnational advocacy networks, this research highlights the need to move beyond state-centric strategies that overemphasize ratification and elite buy-in. If partial compliance in anocracies is often initiated by domestic CSOs, especially those that are pre-existing and well-organized, then policy frameworks must prioritize long-term investment in these actors' capacity and protection. This includes funding for institutional development, coalition-building support, legal aid, and access to transnational networks, particularly in politically fluid environments where new or fragmented CSOs may face high coordination costs but still drive lower-cost forms of adherence from the anocratic regime. My theory and expected findings suggest that, even in regimes where full policy transformation is unlikely, the

groundwork for future reform is laid through these smaller but cumulative acts of compliance, which gradually reshape state behavior and discourse.

This study also has implications for monitoring bodies and how they can revise progress assessments. Rather than relying exclusively on binary indicators like treaty ratification, compliance metrics should include softer, process-based signals of adherence such as sustained legislative discussions or high-level official statements. These acts, when produced under pressure from domestic actors, often serve as precursors to more substantive and longer-lasting policy change. Integrating these metrics would allow policymakers and aid donors to better identify regimes that are trending toward genuine reform and allocate resources accordingly.

Lastly, this study suggests that regional organizations and global advocacy campaigns can amplify CSO influence by generating dual pressure from below and above. By elevating local demands into international forums, these networks can help create feedback loops that increase non-compliance's reputational and political costs for anocratic regimes seeking increased international legitimacy. This builds on the strategic ratification literature by digging deeper into the domestic mechanisms that make symbolic commitments politically useful, showing how local CSOs can convert surface-level gestures into pathways for more meaningful adherence.

Ultimately, further research is needed to more exactly map the causal pathways and scope conditions under which CSOs exert influence, but the implications are compelling. This research reorients norm adherence debates by showing how domestic CSOs, not just states or IOs, drive women’s rights reform in anocracies. Its policy contribution highlights a path forward: empowering the very actors who mobilize pressure from within. In highly unstable political environments, sustainable reform is less likely to come from formal commitments alone. Instead, it begins with resilient, organized actors embedded in the communities they serve, leveraging every institutional opening to push for rights-based changes for women. These efforts are critical not only for legal or symbolic progress, but also for improving the lived realities, safety, and dignity of women who are often the first to bear the costs of weak institutions and fragmented protections.

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Playing For Keeps:
Power-Sharing in Civil Conflict Settlement and Durable Peace

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Abstract

In the complex process of civil conflict settlement, power sharing is often employed to mitigate tensions between opposing groups and balance the power. However, given the number of recurring civil conflicts in various regions, one must wonder just how effective power-sharing is in achieving durable peace. This paper explores the conditions under which power-sharing has the most success. Here, I theorize that local power-sharing, when implemented alongside or as part of national power-sharing, increases the durability of peace. Local power-sharing reinforces the same commitment mechanisms and incentives that are crucial to the success of power-sharing arrangements at the national level. This study proposes a cross-national analysis of local power-sharing, using a Cox proportional hazards model, including 34 observations from 1990 to 2015. Should the research be supported, a greater subnational emphasis in negotiated settlements may lower the likelihood of conflict recurrence. Moreover, societies with high ethnic diversity and historically clientelistic governance systems may benefit the most from local power-sharing.

Introduction

Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where ethnic tensions between Hutus and Tutsis have culminated in fighting between the Congolese and nonstate actors (Center for Preventive Action, 2025), has made finding a method of sustainable peace especially pertinent. In 2020, a peace agreement in the DRC between the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) and the Common Front for the Congo (FCC) collapsed just a year after its signing (Gavin, 2020), plunging the country back into civil war. The since-abandoned settlement stipulated that presidential control go to the UDPS and parliamentary power and governorships be allocated to the FCC (Gavin, 2020). However, this wasn't the DRC's first attempt at peace. In 2002, the end of the conflict in East Congo brought power-sharing through the Global and All-Inclusive Agreement, and in 2009, the GOMA agreement brought another power-sharing system to the state (Norman & Mikhael, 2019; Dumas, 2025). None of these attempts yielded peace.

What's puzzling is that other post-colonialist countries in the same region, which also faced civil conflict stemming from ethnic divisions, *have* been able to broker more durable peace. In Nigeria, following the Biafran civil war, the state entered a power-sharing arrangement focusing on decentralization, which, despite some civil tensions, has been maintained since the 1970s (Orji, 2008). Similarly, Burundi, a neighboring state to the DRC whose civil conflict also stemmed from Hutu-Tutsi divisions, has also maintained peace since 2008, following the full implementation of its 2004 power-sharing agreement (Falch & Becker, 2008; Joshi, Quinn & Regan, 2015). So what explains this variation? Why do power-sharing agreements facilitate more durable peace in some cases, but not others?

Scholars have discussed several reasons for the varied outcomes of power-sharing mechanisms. Some suggest that the kind of representation chosen in power-sharing, which affects the mechanisms of governance used, can determine if violence will return (Cammett & Malesky, 2012). Others have argued that regions with deep-seated ethnic cleavages are more challenged in shared governance due to the politicization of these divisions (Seaver, 2000), which leads to conflict renewal. Mehler (2008) argues that power-sharing agreements often neglect local civilian input, which can contribute to their breakdown—a theory that remains underexplored due to the literature's predominant focus on the national level. Successful power-sharing, where prolonged peace has endured, is rare, and the mechanisms for its success are not yet fully understood.

This paper aims to answer the question: When do power-sharing agreements following civil conflict create durable peace? This paper contributes to the conflict literature by narrowing the theoretical gap in understanding when power-sharing implementation works. The following sections cover the current power-sharing literature, my theory of power-sharing success, a research design proposal, and, finally, policy contributions and areas for future research.

Literature Review

With the rise of ethnic and religious civil conflict, mediators have frequently turned to power-sharing mechanisms within negotiated settlements. Power sharing can be understood as conditions defining how state decisions are divided amongst groups (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2019). However, scholars have not been unified in understanding power-sharing's ability to create lasting peace. Regarding power-sharing design, some scholars find that agreements that constrain and decentralize institutional power, through greater representation of constituencies and federalism, reduce civil conflict onset (Gates et al., 2016; Lijphart, 1969; Walter, 1999). However, Jarstad & Nilsson (2008) find that only agreements designed for military and territorial power-sharing increase settlement durability.

Others find that settlements designed to incorporate political, military, economic, *and* territorial power-sharing decrease the likelihood of conflict recurrence (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2015). Combining structural components such as long-term political and security reforms, as well as short-term monitoring and renegotiation provisions, has also been found to increase peace stability following settlement (Badran, 2014). Finally, in some studies, agreements with provisions for peacekeeping presence, which should increase defection costs, are found to produce the best outcomes (Mattes & Savun, 2009; Walter, 1999). However, others suggest that the utility of peacekeeping in power sharing is lowered when a majority group is at the negotiating table (Nomikos, 2021).

The power-sharing literature has also focused on the targets of power-sharing. Conflict is resolved based on credible agreements between parties, which are achieved by combating insecurities and employing costly signaling (Fearon, 2004; Walter, 1999). Power-sharing reduces these insecurities by eliminating a monopoly of power by one group (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007). Essentially, distributing power across groups allows for checks on potentially harmful actions of the opposition (Hartzell & Hoodie, 2015). For instance, power-sharing that targets political institutions reduces the elite influence of one party, reducing the odds of repression and conflict resumption (Gates et al., 2016; Hartzell & Hoodie, 2019). Additionally, power-sharing that targets militaries may require rebels to demobilize or require the integration of troops, which imposes a costly signal of commitment on both sides (Hoddie & Hartzell, 2003; Jarstad & Nilsson, 2008; Walter, 1999).

Power-sharing agreements typically target primary warring parties, the group in control of the government, and the opposition group(s) that pose the biggest threat. For instance, the Angola civil war (1975-2002) witnessed several peace agreements that were struck between the de facto governing group, the Ambundu people's MPLA, and the primary opposition group, the Ovimbundu people's UNITA, the largest ethnic group in the country (Shutvet, 2022). This occurred even though other groups representing smaller identity groups like the Cambindas and Bakongo, such as the FLEC and the FNLA (Toulemonde, 2022; Shuvet, 2022), also participated in the conflict and carried separate goals. Thus, the order of power-sharing presents additional problems like exclusion amid inclusion (EAI), where smaller groups posing a lesser threat relative to others are overlooked in conflict settlement (Juon, 2020). While some scholars find that inclusive power-sharing reduces conflict with previously excluded groups (Bormann et al.,

2019), others find that power-sharing can create more inequalities for minority groups outside of the primary warring parties (Juon, 2020).

Still, given both the merits and limitations of power-sharing, we observe a puzzling variation in outcomes. Lebanon has maintained its political power-sharing (confessionalism), re-established with the 1989 Taif agreement (Bennet, 2013), since the 1990s without a return to war, and Burundi has seen extended peace since the Arusha Accords and the integration of political and military power-sharing (Nantulya, 2015). Yet, Myanmar, which established power-sharing in its 2008 constitution between the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the military, continues to face agreement breakdown and conflict (Ratcliffe, 2022). Similarly, the Central African Republic has experienced the breakdown of several political and military power-sharing settlements over a decade (Petrini, 2021). So what explains this variation? Two things are apparent in the power-sharing literature: 1) subnational power-sharing is understudied, as most scholars focus on national-level agreements, and 2) informal, or socially enforced, characteristics of power-sharing are often ignored.

Some scholars suggest that subnational power-sharing is insignificant due to national elites' political influence (Simons et al., 2013), though these findings have not been tested systematically, reducing some generalizability. Bunte & Vinson (2016) find that local power-sharing provisions, through informal social contracts or formal division of power, reduce tensions between groups by pacifying antagonistic elite rhetoric and reducing threat perceptions between groups. This study, conducted on six districts across three African countries, provides the foundation for my research. Grievance-based insurgencies often emerge outside of the national center (Fearon & Laitin, 2003), and the power-sharing literature can benefit from a broader understanding of how local adoption of power-sharing agreements may complement national settlements. Additionally, some states operate through informal governance, like clientelism, which affects de facto power-sharing despite de jure establishment (Hale, 2011). Discrepancies in the rule of law can also shape grievances, and understanding whether local power-sharing can mitigate informal challenges is important for future policy.

My theoretical and systematic analysis of the local-level power-sharing aims to add understanding to the variability of durable peace following a power-sharing settlement. The subsequent sections will explore the theory of when and why local power-sharing complements national settlements, followed by a research design proposal for testing my hypotheses, and finally, policy recommendations and contributions.

Theory and Hypotheses

The settlement stage of civil conflict occurs once information asymmetries about a group's likelihood of success are revealed; even so, power-sharing agreements are constructed to reduce uncertainties and commitment issues (Fearon, 2004; Walter, 1999). Based on bargaining theory, power-sharing provisions that require high-cost concessions from warring sides establish peace by making commitment more likely (Walter, 1999). Several forms of power-sharing are

considered costly enough to be effective in negotiated settlements. Military and territorial power-sharing are costly because of the required forfeiture of strategic combat positions and sovereignty (Jarstad & Nilsson, 2008). While some theorists suggest military and territorial power sharing are the most promising for peace (Jarstad & Nilsson, 2008), the collapse of South Sudan's 2015 agreement, prioritizing military integration, suggests this is not always the case (Sarkar, 2024).

My theory centers on political power-sharing because of its ability to be implemented on multiple levels and the degree of inclusivity it provides compared to other methods. Political power-sharing (PPS) occurs when the executive, legislative, and civil service are constructed to ensure that opposing groups share control (Mattes & Savun, 2009). PPS is costly because both groups would prefer complete control, and must agree to a shared system of checks and balances instead. For example, in Burundi, the Hutus and Tutsis share power through two representative vice presidents, and a cabinet proportional to the number of Hutus and Tutsis in the country (Hoddie & Hartzell, 2015). Still, variation in power-sharing's precipitation of peace can be observed in the breakdown of the DRC's PPS across several agreements (Norman & Mikhael, 2019). So, what explains why, in some cases, power-sharing agreements are still ineffective?

Two common themes within the previous literature may explain this puzzle. First, the power-sharing literature has a strong emphasis on the national level. Scholars often present power-sharing agreements as settlements between the central warring parties and examine power-sharing mechanisms at the national level. Second, power-sharing theories frequently overlook the informal considerations of politics. In countries where institutions are weak, which is the case for many states facing repetitive civil conflict, corruption takes the place of the rule of law (Spears, 2013). As a result, politics may manifest as an exchange of punishments and rewards for specific groups and individuals (Hale, 2011). Agreements that insist on restructuring institutions to ensure the peaceful maintenance of power may become obsolete when clientelism is prevalent.

Focusing on the importance of the local level, there are three reasons why subnational power-sharing provisions are especially pertinent. First, local communities are where a majority of citizens feel the effects of civil war. Rebel groups often recruit locally (Sambanis, 2004), and civilians are more likely to be enticed to join rebel organizations when peace settlements fail to address their grievances. Additionally, civilians are frequent casualties of intrastate conflict (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024), making local communities ground zero for conflict. Second, local leaders are better able to oversee the integration of power-sharing mechanisms than national ones, due to their proximity to interest groups. Third, and most importantly, local communities are likely to have different ethnic or religious compositions compared to national-level estimates reflected in central agreements. For instance, the Nigerian population is majority Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo, though in the North Central territory of the Republic, citizens are majority Hausa-Fulani (PBS News Hour, 2007). Moreover, a majority of civil conflicts have taken place in regions where countries have multiple ethnic groups (Okafor, 2024), yet the warring parties may be representative of only a few.

Furthermore, highly heterogeneous societies increase the odds of misalignment between national-settlement power distribution and local population demographics. Often, because national agreements focus on primary warring parties, ethnic minorities may be ignored entirely. For instance, Myanmar consists of hundreds of ethnic groups, though most political power is maintained by ethnic Burmans (Maizland, 2022). Myanmar continues to face civil conflict, and when national PPS agreements take place between one group and the state, other identity groups are usually excluded (Maizland, 2022). While some minority parties may be included in national PPS through proportional representation in a legislature, this inclusion may be seen as tokenistic when accounting for the size of the majorities (Fraenkel, 2020), especially in political systems where representation is proportional to the overall population. However, when power-sharing is reflected locally and nationally, identity group members can more easily voice their concerns, and leaders at both levels can better advocate for their interest groups, thus maintaining support.

Local-level power-sharing enhances the mechanisms associated with incentives to commit and the costs of reneging. The first portion of my theory suggests that local power-sharing (LPS) can reduce conflict recurrence by increasing the costs of reneging and improving confidence in the national power-sharing agreements. Pulling from Bunte & Vinson's (2016) examination of LPS in Nigeria, I conceptualize LPS as a subnational division of authority where the primary warring parties, or the majority groups within the subnational jurisdiction, control the local executive[1]. National settlement divides power between the primary warring parties: the group in control of the government and the strongest rebel opposition. These groups may represent the dominant groups involved in conflict, though the state may have other minority groups that are reflected in the composition of localities. Power sharing at the local level still splits power between primary warring groups and majorities, but also includes a proportional representative council. This gives minority groups more power locally to address grievances than they would be guaranteed at the national level. The local system also reinforces the power division of primary warring groups.

For example, in Nigeria, the two majority religious groups share the local executive by electing a chairman from the majority group and a deputy chairman from the second majority, with both running on the same ballot. Additionally, local councils or legislatures are controlled with representation proportional to the community population. This parallels some national forms of power sharing, as demonstrated by Burundi's cabinet system (Hoddie & Hartzell, 2015). These local councils make minority groups' influence more prominent, due to the smaller scale. This increased inclusion through LPS can reduce attempts to spoil peace by the nationally excluded groups.

Groups outside of the national settlement process have incentives to spoil peace through overt violence or covert deals with apprehensive members of primary negotiating parties (Stedman, 1997). Outside spoilers may be motivated by a lack of recognition or grievances over the power-sharing deal, which may obstruct their goals (Stedman, 1997). LPS can offer greater

[1] This means that at the local level, if the primary warring parties are not the majorities at the district level, then the majority parties within that subnational district share the executive.

opportunities for recognition and influence for groups excluded from national settlement or who have limited roles in national settlement. LPS also reduces the odds of those smaller identity group members viewing their leaders as sellouts when signing peace agreements that grant little power nationally (Fraenkel, 2020).

Some scholars suggest that the increased inclusivity that power-sharing provides can hinder peace. For instance, Cunningham (2006) finds that when more veto players must be included in a negotiated settlement, conflict is more likely to persist because of incentives to spoil agreements in the hope of gaining a better deal. However, Cunningham (2006) describes a veto player as a group that can single-handedly continue the conflict. Primary groups, who could unilaterally continue conflict, still receive the best deal through control over the national executive, and depending on local ethnic/religious composition, the local executive as well. However, minority groups are assumed to lack the power to continue conflict because of their exclusion from national settlement, and the power they are given through the local council is likely greater than what is guaranteed federally. Moreover, should non-primary groups be a majority locally, they are still granted executive power sub-nationally. As a result, the incentive to renege or spoil peace is lowered.

Additionally, I rely on two assumptions to support this local-level theory. First, the majority groups and their leaders prefer to maintain power. Power-sharing agreements are usually decided after the conflict begins, meaning leaders have more information about the likelihood of success. Leaders then sign agreements when they are unwilling to continue fighting. LPS increases confidence in national power-sharing settlements because of the multi-level implementation, reinforcing the commitment to peace. This raises the cost of resuming conflict, as it becomes less certain that reneging will result in greater gains in power than both the national and local agreements have established. Moreover, uncertainty is minimized by the ability of opposing groups to check one another.

Second, I assume civilians prefer to avoid future conflict. Civilians feel the effects of civil conflict through recruitment and casualties. National power-sharing agreements may not address the majority of civilian grievances, especially in highly heterogeneous societies. LPS increases opportunities to address grievances, reducing the utility of conflict. Split executives also assure opposing groups of their power to check overzealous opponents. Moreover, political power-sharing at the local level makes reneging more costly for groups that are guaranteed power, and decreases the desirability of conflict.

H1: Local-level political power-sharing reduces conflict recurrence.

H1a: The conflict-reducing effect of local-level political power-sharing is stronger in highly heterogeneous states.

Regarding informal politics, many states that are prone to civil conflict also face clientelistic environments. Clientelistic societies may struggle under formal national

power-sharing agreements, which delegate most power to a single executive. With only legislative and judicial checks on this individual, a single executive allows a pyramid of clientelism to persist (Hale, 2011). However, as Hale (2011) suggests, when power-sharing settlements delegate power to two executives from different groups, in addition to incorporating proportional representation in the legislature and judiciary, clientelism can morph into something democracy-adjacent. When societal groups no longer feel pressure to defer to a single executive's group, but must balance between multiple groups, competition ensues. As a result, formally excluded groups may find opportunities to address grievances by manipulating the rivalry between the multiple heads of the clientelistic pyramid, which minimizes the risk of conflict recurrence.

This division of the executive can have an even stronger effect at the local level, where the provision of resources and political participation is felt more by civilians. When local power-sharing stipulates competition between executives and allows for proportional representation, there are more avenues for acquiring resources and privileges. This decreases the likelihood of spoiling peace for both primary and non-primary groups. This leads me to my last hypothesis:

H1b: The conflict-reducing effect of local-level political power-sharing is stronger in clientelistic states.

Research Design

To study how the inclusion of local power-sharing in national civil conflict settlements affects peace duration, I will use a sample of conflicts and subsequent peace settlements from 1990 to 2015. This time frame fits the availability of data for the datasets I employ. The unit of analysis for this study will be conflict-year because settlements may take place between more than two actors. A conflict-year analysis accounts for power sharing at the local level, which involves parties outside of primary warring groups.

Using the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset v.3 (Kreutz, 2010), which codes for all armed conflict dyads from 1946-2020 and their means of termination. The UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset is suited for evaluating peace duration because it codes for start and end dates of conflict, whether the outcome includes a peace agreement, and includes a binary variable for conflict recurrence, which will determine peace duration. The UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset also codes for intensity level, with minor intensity recorded as 25-900 battle-related deaths in a year, and high intensity coded as 1,000 battle-related deaths in a year. After subsetting the data to include only intrastate conflicts that end with a settlement, the resulting time frame consists of 34 conflict observations from 1990 to 2015.

Data on the political power-sharing settlements will be drawn from the PA-X Peace Agreements Database (Bell et al., 2024), which lists 2,055 peace agreements from 1990 to 2024. I will use the "PpsSt" variable, a binary variable coding for state-level political power-sharing,

and the "PpsSub" variable, a binary variable coding for the presence of subnational power-sharing in peace agreements. I will also take data from the PA-X Local dataset (Bell & Badanjak, 2019), which includes text data on agreements made in local communities following conflict and is matched to the PA-X general dataset. To overlap both the PA-X dataset and the UCDP Conflict Termination dataset, I will take the country and nonstate group(s) signing the agreement, and the year from the PA-X data, and match this with the UCDP conflict data. Once the UCDP data is subsetted to be aligned with the PA-X data, I will also match the PA-X local data with the UCDP and PA-X data according to year, country, and group.

The theory presented in this paper stipulates that local power sharing in peace settlements leads to more durable peace in highly heterogeneous and clientelistic societies. To measure heterogeneity in my sample, I will use Cederman et al.'s (2010) updated Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) core dataset, which codes all politically relevant ethnic groups in every country from 1946 to 2021. Because civil conflict can stem from religious cleavages, I will also use the Religious and State Round 3 dataset (RAS3) from Bar-Ilan University, which codes for religious political parties in 183 countries from 1990 to 2014 (Fox, 2017). I will use both datasets to categorize countries into high, medium, and low heterogeneity based on ethnicity and religion across my study's sample. To measure clientelism, I will employ the V-Dem dataset and use two variables: the clientelism index (v2xnp_client) and the regime corruption index (v2xnp_regcorr), which both scale from 0 to 1, with lower scores indicating low clientelism or corruption (Coppedge et al., 2025). These variables will be used to rank my sample of countries from low, medium, and high levels of clientelism.

Variables

My dependent variable will be peace durability. I borrow Jarstad & Nilsson's (2008) definition of the number of years that signatories of peace agreements are at peace following the agreement or the likelihood that conflict resumes between those warring parties. My main independent variable (IV1) is local power-sharing agreements that are in succession to or are included in national power-sharing settlements. Local power sharing is defined as subnational agreements where local executive power is shared between primary conflicting parties or local majorities, and a proportional council representative of the community is included. Proportional council representation is observed when at least two election seats are reserved for groups within the community (Bell & Badanjak, 2019).

I have two other interacting independent variables of high heterogeneity (IV2) and high clientelism (IV3), which I expect to strengthen the effect of local power-sharing on peace duration. I define highly heterogeneous societies as countries where there is a 70% chance that two randomly selected people are from different ethnic or religious groups (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). The EPR dataset details all ethnic groups and their group size, as a percentage, for each country (Vogt et al., 2023). I will calculate the measure for heterogeneity by squaring each group size for a given country, adding them together, and subtracting this from 1, which will reveal the percentage of likelihood that two randomly chosen people in a given country are from different ethnic groups. A similar approach will be used for the RAS3 dataset on religious diversity. I

define highly clientelistic societies as those that operate on a system of rewards and punishments for specific groups instead of the rule of law (Hale, 2011). The V-Dem dataset uses a scale for their clientelism variable "v2xnp_client" (0 to 1), which I will use to categorize countries with a score of 0.6 or higher as highly clientelistic.

Controls

I plan to control for conflict duration using the UCDP start and end dates, given that longer conflicts reveal more information, which can reduce the risk of recurring violence (Walter, 2004). Meanwhile, shorter conflicts may reveal less information on capabilities, resulting in conflict recurrence (Walter, 2004). I also plan to control for conflict intensity because high-intensity conflicts may increase the risk of renewed conflict due to both parties having exhausted their resources (Walter, 2004). Controls for the type of conflict will be included using the PA-X data, considering that conflicts over territory may have different effects on recurrence based on the level of issue indivisibility. Often, peace settlements include provisions for peacekeeping, and to ensure that peace duration is not driven primarily by third-party presence, I will also control for peacekeeping using UN data.

I will also control for regime type using the Polity scores from the V-Dem dataset. I assume that the regime type before settlement implementation or at the time of implementation can affect the duration of agreements because of variations in institutionalization. In addition, controls for poverty levels, through the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI), will be included to account for grievance-based incentives to contribute to violence. I will also control for the average state population, using the World Bank's WDI, because highly populated areas may experience greater competition, which can contribute to recurring violence (Bunte & Vinson, 2016). Finally, I will control for education because higher education rates may contribute to low conflict recurrence due to a more rational response to ethnoreligious tensions (Bunte & Vinson, 2016), or better access to legitimate channels for addressing grievances.

Statistical Method

To test my hypotheses, I will use a Cox-proportional hazard model, a common method for peace duration research (Jarstad & Nilsson, 2008). This model will be employed because my outcome, peace duration measured in years, is a time-to-event variable, measuring the time until conflict recurs (Abd ElHafeez et al., 2021). Because some of my observations may have no recurrence and are thus not fully observed, the data may be right-censored (Gelman et al., 2020, pp. 333, 459), which the Cox model accounts for. Additionally, rather than continuous variable coefficients, Cox reports the hazard of occurrence or the likelihood of conflict resuming (Gelman et al., 2020, pp. 333, 459). My statistical analysis will include 4 models. Model 1 will show the effect of national and local political power-sharing provisions on peace duration (H1). Model 2 will test hypothesis 1a, adding the interaction effect of local power-sharing in highly heterogeneous societies. Model 3 will test hypothesis 1b, adding the interaction of local power-sharing in highly clientelistic societies. Finally, model 4 will show all four variables and their effect on peace duration for robustness. Model 1 will exclude controls to demonstrate the main effect of my primary independent variable, and all subsequent models will include controls.

Limitations

Several limitations to my study need to be addressed. The first is that subnational authority varies across countries, which can impact the comparability of local power-sharing agreements. To address this, I will use both the PA-X standard definitions and conduct robustness checks using other operationalizations of local power sharing. For example, using a count of local power-sharing agreements in a given conflict-year to capture settlement intensity, and limiting agreements to just those that were signed and agreed on to account for the quality or legitimacy of agreements. These checks will help determine the consistency of the observed relationship between local power sharing and peace duration.

There is also the possibility of selection bias. My sample focuses on states that already have a formal national settlement, but the findings may not apply to conflicts resolved without formal settlements. To account for the possibility that some countries may be more likely to adopt local power-sharing following national settlements, I will use matching to compare cases with and without local power-sharing but with a shared likelihood of local power-sharing adoption. Additionally, there could be reverse causality where countries with local power-sharing were already more likely to maintain peace. I address this issue with the controls I have included. There could also be confounding variables like hidden bargaining, which the data does not capture, and may influence the duration of peace. Finally, because the outcome occurs over time, those conflicts that do not recur within the observation period may bias results, though the Cox model accounts for this.

Policy Contributions and Future Research

This study makes several contributions to the power-sharing literature. First, the subnational focus offers insight into how local-level arrangements in conflict settlement can affect post-conflict stability. Second, by employing a cross-national analysis to understand the role of local power-sharing, I add a broader understanding of its effectiveness. The study proposed includes a more generalizable statistical approach to understanding local power-sharing effectiveness. Thirdly, this study explores the conditional effects of local power-sharing in highly heterogeneous and clientelistic states, which may better explain variation in power-sharing outcomes. Moreover, should local power-sharing be found to increase peace duration, identifying which countries are at greater risk of conflict recurrence and which states need local power-sharing provisions will be easier.

Additionally, understanding what conditions make local power-sharing more effective can aid in future policy advising during settlement negotiations. Several policy implications can be taken from this study. For instance, during settlement negotiations, a greater emphasis should be placed on including local actors and governance. This may be especially important in states where conflict stems from grievances among several groups, and when states must prioritize the strongest opposition group(s) in negotiations. Policymakers may also want to increase peacekeeping at the local level and disperse resources across subnational jurisdictions to track

the local implementation of peace agreements. Moreover, increased coordination between the national and subnational levels of governance in conflict settlement should be prioritized. Regarding funding initiatives by donor governments, states should increase support for projects that evaluate the impact of local power sharing on peace maintenance, and tie some reconstruction aid to the implementation of more inclusive and locally focused institutions that reach a diverse range of communities, inside and outside of primary warring parties.

Finally, NGOs should focus on advocating for reforms that begin locally and allow communities to participate in peace implementation. These organizations should also focus on fostering inclusive dialogue between community leaders and marginalized groups to improve the peace process and the likelihood of addressing grievances without conflict. Future research should explore how the timing of local power-sharing implementation affects peace prospects. This study includes local power-sharing established following or during national settlement, but does not test whether reactive local power-sharing is more or less effective. Furthermore, scholars should explore the nuances in local power-sharing by conducting studies that compare the specific methods of power-sharing, like splitting executives or weighting representation based on territory, that may differ by region or country. Understanding how differences in local power-sharing methods affect the duration of peace will also aid in future policy recommendations and mediation.

Finally, the power-sharing literature has not fully explored how decentralization can affect gender disparities. Women are often excluded from negotiations at the national level, though some research finds that when women are included in settlement mediation, the likelihood of peace increases (O'Reilly, Suilleabhain, and Paffenholz, 2015). However, future research should explore the role of women in local power-sharing agreements and agreement implementation.

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