

Bullies and Victims: Targets of Third Party Interventions in Ongoing Conflicts¹

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Abstract

Theories of war tell us that states contemplating to start a conflict choose their targets carefully and take into account the likelihood of third party interventions in their decision to begin hostilities. Yet, miscalculations seem to happen, as third parties often join ongoing conflicts. Theories of joining behavior tell us under what circumstances third parties are likely to intervene. However, such theories tell us little about which states third parties are likely to target in their interventions. I combine models of conflict initiation and models of joining behavior to address the question of which conflict originators are targeted by third party interventions. I use Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) data to test the hypotheses developed from such models. I find that hypotheses concerning balance of power behavior are commonly violated. Third parties show a marked tendency toward the preservation of the democratic status quo by “ganging up” against authoritarian and revisionist states, regardless of whether they were the aggressors in a conflict.

Most theories of conflict initiation tend to focus on the two or more states responsible for opening military hostilities. Realism, for example, stresses the balance of power between two states. The democratic peace emphasizes the underlying probability of conflict within dyads as a function of regime type. Rationalist explanations look at the expected utilities of potential aggressors or at the distribution of information between initiator and target state. Yet, to various extent, all of these theories incorporate some assumption about the role of third party states in the initiation of conflict. Again, one of the main claims of realism is that power asymmetries between two states can be rectified through external balancing —i.e., with the aid of third parties through alliances (see, for instance Morgenthau 1985; Waltz 1979). Institutional explanations of the democratic peace suggest that democracies exclusively choose “easy” targets —that is, weak states with few friends or formal allies (see Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999). Rationalist approaches stress that expectations about third parties’ future interventions can affect a state’s utility for conflict initiation (see Bueno de Mesquita 1981). In summary, these approaches share the —stated or unstated— assumption that conflict initiators behave rationally and will either form alliances when threatened with aggression or avoid aggression when third parties are likely to intervene.

When third party states are brought into the picture, the most popular theories of conflict initiation seem to concur that aggression is facilitated by a target’s lack of friends or by the inability to create credible alliance commitments. However, theories of conflict have paid much less attention to instances in which aggression occurs even when the prospects of third party interventions are high. The case of Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait is the most recent and most visible example of poorly planned interstate aggression. Commentators of international politics have speculated at length on Saddam Hussein’s underestimation of the reaction from the international community. But Saddam Hussein’s apparently irrational choice is not an isolated case. While most wars and military disputes are bilateral in character, a non-trivial proportion of them experiences third party intervention. This indicates that aggressors fairly often either disregard the possibility that third states will join in the conflict, or simply miscalculate their chances of scoring an easy victory. Yet, despite the fairly large number of conflicts experiencing some form of “joining behavior,” theories of conflict remain silent about this phenomenon. Research on joining behavior has not shed much

light on the issue because it has focused heavily on the motivations of joining states rather than on the characteristics and motivations of the states drawing the intervention.

Thus, questions concerning when and why conflict initiators become the target of third party interventions remain largely unexplored. Which states are more likely to miscalculate or disregard the potential for third parties' involvement? Under what conditions are states more likely to ignore or misinterpret the signals coming from the external environment and pursue aggression nonetheless? This paper attempts to answer these questions by exploring which characteristics of conflict initiators make them more likely to become the target of third parties' military intervention in Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs).¹ Given the virtual absence of a pre-existing theoretical framework that fully accounts for the interrelatedness of conflict initiation and expectations about joiners' involvement, I draw from a variety of theoretical traditions and empirical studies, including realism, the democratic peace, and rational choice. The objective is to offer information that can be used to develop more refined theories of conflict initiation that include not just strategic interaction between conflict initiators but also between conflict initiators and third parties, as advocated and pursued by Signorino (1999, 2002).

1 Initiation and Intervention

Compared to conflict initiation, our knowledge of joining behavior is still fairly limited. Moreover, we know a lot about supply side of joining behavior—who provides interventions—but less about the demand side—i.e., who gets targeted. Most of the existing studies on third party intervention in ongoing conflicts have focused on joiner's motivations and opportunity for intervention. We know that third party states tend to conform to realist expectations about balance of power and side with the weaker party in an ongoing war (Altfeld and Bueno de Mesquita 1979). We know that joiners tend to side with the originator with whom they share similar regime type, and that this tendency works both for democracies and non-democracies (Werner and Lemke 1997). We know that major power states are remarkably more likely to join ongoing conflicts and to

¹For a definition of militarized interstate disputes see Jones, Bremer and Singer (1996); Ghosn, Palmer and Bremer (2004).

drag one another in ongoing wars (Huth 1998; Yamamoto and Bremer 1980; Corbetta and Dixon 2005). We know that joiners often join in order to punish enemies rather than help friends (Kim 1991). And, after much controversy, there now is sufficient evidence that alliances do play a role in shaping a third party's decision to join (Smith 1996; Leeds, Mitchell McLaughlin and Long 2000).

However, focusing only on the incentives and opportunities of actual and potential joiners tells us only a part of the story. The decision to join depends in equal measure on third parties and on the states involved in the ongoing war or dispute. Thus far, the most visible efforts to represent the complex interplay between conflict originators and potential joiners emerge from formal models of war initiation. In *The War Trap*, Bueno de Mesquita (1981) incorporates expectations about third parties' behavior in his expected utility model of war initiation. The potential for third party intervention on the side of a potential target significantly complicates the calculus of a state's expected utility for starting a war. Bueno de Mesquita (1981) postulates that under certain restricted circumstances it may be rational for unaligned states to start wars against aligned states. However, leaders contemplating military aggression are likely to refrain from starting a war when the potential for joiners intervention on the "wrong" side —i.e., the opposite side— is high, or the third party's threat is credible (Bueno de Mesquita 1981, 88-89). However, Werner (2000) argues that war initiators can act strategically in order to avoid third party interventions. They do this by moderating the magnitude of their demands so that the interests of third parties are not sufficiently affected to warrant intervention. In equilibrium, strategic originators manage to get away with aggression while avoiding being targeted by third parties.

Werner (2000)'s model offers an enormous contribution to our understanding of war because it help us explain why most interstate conflicts start and end as bilateral affairs. Yet, the fact remains that in many interstate bargaining situations such equilibrium is not achieved. Many states start wars in the face of a high likelihood of third party intervention or do not sufficiently adjust their demands in order to avoid such interventions. Many states fail to act strategically and end up taking disproportionate risks. Again, rationalist explanations of war initiation shed light on possible causes of such reckless behavior.

In one of the most popular rationalist explanations of war initiation, Fearon (1995) claims that conflict arises when rational actors' see fighting as being efficient *ex ante* and/or fail to see the possibility that conflict may be inefficient *ex post*. The reason for such a calculation is attributed either to the inability to make credible commitments or to the impact of private information about military matters. One of the sources of private information mentioned by Fearon (1995, 392) is the disputants' expectations or knowledge about potential intervention by third parties. States see conflict as efficient *ex ante* because they do not know the level of commitment of their target's allies. The aforementioned invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein offers a recent example of this. It has been often argued that Saddam Hussein misread the United States' and other countries' level of commitment to the preservation of Kuwaiti independence.

Powell (2004) supports Fearon (1995)'s approach. But he further contends that private information is not necessary. States may start inefficient conflicts even under perfect information, again, because they cannot make credible commitments. Yet, under complete information, the inability emerges from the expectation that power relations between the two states will change over repeated plays of the interaction. Changes in power are associated with conflict initiation, even when such conflicts produce Pareto-inefficient outcomes. Disputants' expectations about changes in power relations may come from expectations about third party interventions or from miscalculations about third party interventions. This confirms Bueno de Mesquita (1981)'s finding that it is rational sometimes for weaker states to start conflicts.

Nevertheless, neither Bueno de Mesquita (1981)'s, nor Werner (2000)'s, nor other models of war initiation are designed to tell us who these risk-prone or miscalculating war initiators are. The identity of those states who end up being targeted by third party intervention remains unspecified. What are those state-level characteristics that prevent states from reading correctly or simply disregarding the signals that come from the external environment? Drawing from the aforementioned theoretical perspectives —formal theory, realism, and liberalism— the following section derives a set of specific hypotheses about state-level factors likely to affect conflict initiators' targeting bt

third party states.

2 Who Draws Third Parties' Intervention?

Both the literature on joining behavior and the literature on conflict initiation offer only tentative insight on the factors leading aggressors to start conflicts even when the potential for third party intervention is high. As suggested earlier, the absence of theory that points to mechanisms that make some conflict initiators more likely to experience third party opposition is conspicuous. Nonetheless, looking at things from the perspective of originators being targeted by third party can be useful because: (1) it encourages researchers to combine two different strands of conflict research; and (2) it may bring together a wide spectrum of conflict theories, ranging from traditional realism to the democratic peace.

Given the absence of any pre-existing theory that develops *both* hypotheses about conflict initiation and hypotheses about joining, a useful starting point is provided by those explanations of conflict that have done the most to account for the role of information, misinformation, and decision-making process —i.e., rationalistic explanations. Following Bueno de Mesquita (1981), it is assumed that conflict is the result of a rational decision-making process. Following Fearon (1995), it is further assumed that private information plays a key role in determining whether a state finds it cost-effective to start a conflict. Decision-makers choose to fight when they lack information that can lead them to conclude that war can be *ex post* less cost-effective than negotiating *ex ante*. This information contains expectations about the role of third party states. When potential aggressors know that third party intervention in support of a target is unlikely, they may find it cost-effective to fight rather than negotiate. In most cases, the information they hold is correct, and in fact the majority of interstate conflicts remain one-on-one contentions. As Bueno de Mesquita (1981) found, when potential aggressors see third party intervention as very likely, their expected utility for fighting decreases, and they are likely to eschew war. More rarely, under certain conditions, potential aggressors may perceive fighting as cost-effective even when the chances of third party interventions are high. This may occur when the potential target of the aggression holds private

information about the possibility of support by friends and allies. Alternatively, aggression may still occur when an initiator tends to discard information about potential interventions against it.

What factors lead to such an outcome? Realism offers some insight into those characteristics that may make conflict initiators more prone to targeting by third parties. Realists claim that aggression is more likely when power between two states is not balanced. Morgenthau (1985), Waltz (1979) and others further insist that alliances represent an alternative to internal balancing. Third states are expected to form alliances with the weaker side in dyad and to intervene in support of that side if conflict occurs. If the balance of power expectation is correct, the implication for joining behavior is that, between two conflict originators, the stronger one is more likely to initiate conflicts and to become the target of third party interventions. In their study of potential and realized interventions in ongoing wars over the last two centuries, Altfeld and Bueno de Mesquita (1979) measure state strength with the Correlates of War's index of material capabilities and find strong support for the realist claim about balance of power. That is, when third parties enter an ongoing war they side with the weaker party and *against* the stronger originator.

Furthermore, the notion that joining states may be more likely to target stronger adversaries appears to be connected to Werner (2000)'s and Fearon (1994)'s ideas about the role of signals and information in the process of conflict initiation. Strong states can become overconfident in their ability to prevail quickly in conflicts and in the deterrent effect of their capabilities. They may count on their ability to use military power in order to get what they want and present third states with a *fait accompli*. Excessive reliance on their material capabilities shortens the attention they pay to the signals coming from the external environment. Large capabilities may simply lead to *hubris*. Powerful states rush into military confrontations, raising third parties' concerns and exposing themselves as targets. To summarize, realism and bargaining models of conflict suggest that, because of balance of power dynamics, the stronger initiator will have the greater incentives to start a conflict but will also be more likely to be the victim of third parties' targeting. This hypothesis is labeled **H1**.

Conversely, both realism and formal theory indicate that, despite their individual capabilities, states who successfully manage their alliance ties can (1) avoid aggression, and (2) receive the allies' support in case of conflict. Bueno de Mesquita (1981), for example, stresses the role of a potential target's embeddedness in a system of alliances as a factor in a potential aggressor's decision to start a war. It is plausible that the more allies one has, the more likely it is that they will intervene in its support in case of aggression and will deter intervention on the other side of the conflict. According to these perspectives, states with allies should not find themselves at the receiving end of third party interventions. However, Christensen and Snyder (1990) stress the "chain-ganging" dynamics generated by alliance ties. In their view, a state who initiates a war recklessly can drag its allies into the conflict against their will. Empirical studies on alliances and war expansion seem to confirm the expectation that the presence of allies increases the chances of intervention on both sides of a conflict and, as a result, the likelihood of being targeted by joiners (Sabrosky 1980; Sullivan and Siverson 1984). Overall, expectations about the role of allies are controversial. Following realism, the greater the number of allies that conflict initiators bring to the dispute, the smaller the likelihood that they will be the target of third party intervention. This hypothesis is labeled **H2**. However, it is important to remain agnostic about this hypothesis and be open to the possibility that the relationship may cut either way.

Although there is overlap between material capabilities and status in the international system, realism stresses the importance of major power status as a determinant of conflict behavior.² Major powers have a large range of foreign policy interests and their actions are more visible. Their foreign policy interests cause them to become involved in a larger number of conflicts overall. Almost by definition, they are entangled in rivalries with other major power states. Overall, they exercise a greater pull on other states. Major power status multiplies the opportunities both for conflict involvement and, therefore, for targeting by other states.

²While it is generally assumed that major power status and material capabilities are conceptual and operational synonyms, the original Correlates of War definition of major power state is more nuanced. According to Singer and Small (1972) and Singer (1988), major power status is a multidimensional notion which depends on a country's foreign policy aspirations, on its diplomatic "weight," and on other countries' perceptions. For instance, in the COW data sets, Italy is classified as a major power during the 1930s even though it was much weaker than other major powers according to material capabilities alone. Material capabilities are but one of the dimensions of major power status.

Several studies indirectly support this expectation. Yamamoto and Bremer (1980), for instance, find that major power states are likely to drag one another into conflicts. Major powers are more likely to become third parties in other major powers' conflicts. That is, major powers target each other. Corbetta and Dixon (2005) provide descriptive evidence in support of this notion, noting that major power states top the list of most active joiners and most frequent targets of intervention. Thus, realism also offers the hypotheses that major power states will be at the receiving end of third parties' intervention simply as a function of the larger number of conflict in which they engage. I label this hypothesis **H3**.

In his study on major powers' joining behavior, Huth (1998) finds that major powers, as joiners, tend to target aggressors even after controlling for the power distribution within a dyad of conflict initiators. This finding suggests another possible predictor of targeting. As many aggressors in wars and disputes are states seeking a revision of an existing status quo, it is possible that an initiator's support or aversion for the existing order may draw the attention of potential third parties. Most states in the international system are supportive of the status quo. If this is true, status quo third parties, who represent the majority of states in the system, will (more or less) tacitly support another status quo state who attacks a revisionist state, even though the aggression violates international law and basic norms of international coexistence. The much heralded "coalition of the willing" during the 2003 US invasion of Iraq was largely composed of status quo states who offered much verbal support and little material help to a status quo attacker. However, when a revisionist state initiates a conflict, the majority of status quo states may be willing to come to the aid of the state being attacked. Again, the response to the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait may serve as an example of this. The propensity of revisionist states to be targeted by third parties can also be explained by another fact. Representing a minority of the international system's members, revisionist states are forced to evaluate the propensity to intervene of a large number of potential third parties. Under these circumstances, miscalculations are more likely to happen. As a result, it is possible to expect that revisionist aggressors will be more likely to be targeted by third parties, either because they are more risk-prone than status quo states, or because most potential third

parties are likely to support the status quo. This is hypothesis **H4**.

The definition of status quo and revisionist states is often confusing in the conflict literature. The definition is often based on whether a state is a conflict initiator. Scholars in the traditional realist or power transition perspective think of revisionism as a state's broader outlook toward the international system or as a long-term foreign policy goal (Schweller 1994). Regardless of which view of revisionism one adopts, some types of revisions may draw more third party interventions than others. Revisions that alter the status quo in particular draw attention from third parties (Werner 2000). A vast body of literature on territorial conflicts —too vast to be summarized here— indicates that territorial disputes may actually fit this description. Petersen, Vasquez and Wang (2004), in particular, find that disputes stemming from territorial revisions are more likely to escalate into multiparty wars. As an issue of contention, territory gives states both the willingness and the opportunity to fight. Territorial disputes are more violent and more difficult to settle than other types of disputes (Diehl 1992, 1996; Hensel 1996; Ben-Yehuda 2004). Territorial transfers through conflict change the strategic environment for more states than just the conflict's initiators. Third parties, and especially the status quo ones, may be willing to intervene against the state seeking a territorial revision in order to prevent destabilizing changes. States seeking a territorial revision may be willing to assume the risk of being targeted by third parties because territory has a high tangible and intangible value to them. Hypothesis **H5**, then, states that who seek a territorial revision should be more likely to experience targeting by third party states.

Common wisdom suggests the very diffused and largely untested idea that revisionist states tend to be autocratic states. This notion is rooted in early thought —actually starting from Immanuel Kant— on the democratic peace, which portrayed democratic states as “content” with their lot and, therefore, less likely to want to unsettle the international order. If this view is correct, autocratic states may be more likely to seek revisions and to be targeted by third parties. The more contemporary take on the democratic peace suggests a more plausible reason for why autocratic states may become the target of third parties' intervention. As Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999) suggest, democratic leaders tend to be extremely careful in choosing their targets when they start

conflicts, and they tend to pick on states who can be easily defeated. On the contrary, autocratic leaders do not face the same domestic-level constraints, and their political survival does not hinge on winning every conflict. As a result, they tend to be more adventurous in the choice of conflicts and targets. Reiter and Stam (2003), for instance, find that “personalistic” leaders of autocratic states are more likely to challenge democratic states in disputes than vice versa.³ As the number of democracies has increased in the international system over time, and to the extent that democratic states are more likely to support other democratic states (see Werner and Lemke 1997; Corbetta 2004), autocracies may have become progressively more likely to become the target of third party intervention. In sum, autocratic leaders tend either to take greater risks or to miscalculate more. Miscalculations may imply the selection of targets with many friends and allies. This, in turn, exposes them to becoming targets of third party intervention, while democracies are more likely to receive help from democratic third parties. The hypothesis that the likelihood of being targeted by third party increases with a state’s autocratic traits and decreases with its democratic characteristics is labeled **(H6)**.

Both realism and formal theory suggest that, regardless of domestic-level traits, there is variation among decision-makers in their propensity to take risks (Bueno de Mesquita 1981; Waltz 1986). Bueno de Mesquita (1981) argues that the individual risk-proneness of certain decision-makers may lead them to take risks that other risk-averse leaders find unacceptable. Risk-prone decision-makers may be willing to engage in conflict even when the probability of third party intervention looms large. Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman (1992) find that more conservative decision-makers experience higher rates of success in conflict than risk-prone leaders. A possible explanation for this finding is that risk-prone leaders expose themselves as targets for third parties more frequently than risk-averse decision-makers. I label this hypothesis **H7**.

The expected relationship between a conflict initiator’s domestic-level trait and the likelihood of becoming the target of third party intervention is summarized in Table 1. In addition to domestic-

³It is important to note, though, that their finding is in response to previous findings by Peceny, Beer and Sanchez-Terry (2002), who find that democracies are more likely to challenge authoritarian states.

level characteristics, other contextual factors may influence an initiator’s propensity for being targeted by third parties. Bueno de Mesquita (1981) suggests that the fluidity of the international system around potential conflict initiators may have an impact on their calculations concerning third party interventions. The more unstable the international hierarchy among states, the more difficult it is for a potential aggressor to estimate correctly the probability that other states will enter the conflict in support of the target. A noisy environment in which a potential originator has to take into account signals coming from uncountable directions and actors, may lead to miscalculations and risky behavior. An environment already characterized by tension and conflict may have different effects on different states. Some states may become more cautious, while others may be willing to exploit small windows of opportunity and take greater risks. Rationalistic approaches to the issue of conflict indicate that the impact of contextual factors ultimately rests on the way in which a potential aggressor reads the signals and information coming from the external environment. The evaluation of information and signals largely depends on the characteristics of the potential aggressor. As a result, while controlling for potentially confounding system-level factors, this study primarily focuses on these domestic-level traits.

[Table 1 approximately here]

3 Research Design

Given the emphasis on individual states’ characteristics, the unit of analysis is a state’s conflict participation as an originator. The dependent variable is simply whether a conflict initiator was targeted by third parties at any point during the fight. The paper employs as a starting point the participant file of version 3.0 of the Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) data set (Jones, Bremer and Singer 1996; Ghosn, Palmer and Bremer 2004). The MIDs participant file distinguishes between dispute originators —those states taking part in the dispute from the very first day— and joiners —states entering after the militarization of hostilities on either side of the conflict. The empirical domain is the 1816-2001 period. The dependent variable is dichotomized as 1 if a dispute originator experiences intervention by third party states on the “other” side of the conflict, or 0, if

the conflict remains a bilateral contention.⁴

Although apparently straightforward, this research design hides a non-trivial problem. When we are dealing with instances of successful or failed deterrence—in this case, at the hand of third parties—the existing empirical data are inherently biased (Werner 2000, 730). The bias comes from sample selection dynamics. As indicated by formal theory (Bueno de Mesquita 1981), dispute initiators tend to “select themselves” into conflicts that are likely to remain bilateral. In order to avoid problems of selection, it was necessary to merge the MID data with a country–year data structure in which each member of the international system faces the opportunity to initiate a dispute in each year between 1816 and 2001. The resulting country–year design has 15,231 observations and 2,482 instances of dispute initiation.

The operationalization of the main independent variables is rather straightforward. Beginning from the realist variables, each originator’s material capabilities are used to estimate the stronger state on each side of the conflict. The Correlates of War’s Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC), which combines indicators of a country’s military, economic, and population strength, is used as an indicator of material capabilities (Singer, Bremer and Stuckey 1972; Singer 1988). CINC scores are then used to create a dummy variable indicating whether a MID originator is the stronger state on that side of the conflict. Major power status is coded dichotomously following the standard Correlates of War’s definition.⁵ The Correlates of War alliance data are employed to derive the number of allies that each originator brings to the dispute (see Gibler and Sarkees 2004).

The Militarized Interstate Disputes’ classification concerning the originator seeking a revision in dispute is employed to distinguish whether a state is a revisionist (1) or status quo (0) country.

⁴A problem of the MID data set is that in cases of multilateral conflicts with multiple joiners on both sides of the conflict, it is not possible to say whether multiple joiners join to support (antagonize) the conflict originators or to support (antagonize) other third parties already in the dispute at that point. For the purposes of this paper, it is assumed that multiple joiners all enter a conflict to support or fight against the conflict’s originators. In disputes with multiple originators, each third party intervention is counted as a separate instance of targeting. For example, if state X and Y attack state Z, and third party Q intervenes in support of Z, two separate targeting actions are recorded.

⁵See Small and Singer (1982); Singer (1988) for a detailed summary concerning this measure.

The MIDs' data offer information about the type of revision being sought. Dispute originators are classified according to whether they seek a territorial, policy, regime, or "other" revision. This coding is used to create a dummy variable coded 1 if an initiator seeks a territorial revision, 0 otherwise.

Polity IV data are used to classify MID originators' regime type (Marshall and Jaggers 2002). Specifically, the Polity Democracy-Autocracy (DEM-AUT) index —ranging from -10 for perfectly autocratic states to +10 for fully democratic states— is used. Again, the expectation is that the more democratic (or autocratic) a state, the more (or less) likely it is that it will experience targeting by third parties. The Democracy-Autocracy index is interacted with the "aggressor" variable to explore whether autocratic states are more likely to be targeted by third party only if they start a conflict or if they are magnets for all interventions regardless of their intentions.

It is more challenging to evaluate individual states' propensity to take risks. To measure this concept, an index of risk attitude calculated according to Bueno de Mesquita (1985) is employed. The index was produced with Bennett and Stam (2000)'s EUGene software. The index estimation is based on the comparison of a country's actual and hypothetical alliance patterns at a regional level. It ranges from -1 to +1, with -1 indicating high risk-aversion and +1 indicating high risk-proneness.

I tentatively try to capture the characteristics of a shifting, noisy international environment in two simple variables: the number of states in the international system and the number of great powers in the international system. These are all sources of uncertainty that a potential aggressor needs to take into account before starting a conflict. They multiply the amount of information a state has to collect and the external signals it has to interpret. It is possible that, as these two factors grow larger, states contemplating aggression may become more likely to take risks or miscalculate. Even more simply, the likelihood that an originator will be targeted can be an artifact of the number of potential third parties in the system and, in particular, by the number of major powers. However, the opposite may also occur. Uncertainty may actually deter third parties from intervening, leaving dispute originators to fight among themselves. Again, number of states and great powers are derived from EUGene (Bennett and Stam 2000).

Hypotheses are tested with two kinds of empirical model. First, in order to account for possible selection effects, I employ a Heckman probit model in which the decision to start a dispute is the dependent variable for the selection equation and third party targeting is the dependent variable for the second-stage equation. Second, as will be seen next, based on the results from the Heckman probit model, I then move to a standard logit regression approach to estimate the likelihood that a conflict initiator will be targeted by third parties. Results are reported in the following section.

4 Results and Discussion

Table 2 reports the result of the Heckman probit equations. The dependent variable in the selection equation is a state's decision to initiate a militarized interstate dispute. Following recent studies on the monadic democratic peace (Caprioli and Trumbore 2006), the decision is modeled as a function of three key state characteristics: its capabilities (CINC score), its Polity score (DEM-AUT), and its number of direct contiguities to other states.⁶ In order to account for temporal dependency across observation, following Beck, Katz and Tucker (1998) the number of "peace years" between successive aggressions and three cubic splines were also included.

[Table 2 approximately here]

Before discussing the meaning of the covariates' coefficients, the first thing to point out about the Heckman probit approach is the lack of statistical significance for the rho coefficients. The chi-square for the Wald test of independence between equations is rather small. This indicates that selection effects are not a concern in this study. In order to simplify the analysis and facilitate the interpretation of results, it is then possible to move to a more straightforward logit regression approach. Table 3 reports the results of a series of logit regressions using different model specifications. Huber/White (robust) standard errors with clustering on disputes are reported in parentheses. Model 1 reflects the original model as proposed in the preceding section. Model 2 and 3 attempt a different coding of the democracy variable. The literature on the democratic suggests that "mature" regimes are more likely to exhibit peculiar conflict behavior than transitional

⁶Data on states' borders and contiguities are from Stinnett et al. (2002).

regimes. Hypothesis **H6** further suggests that autocratic states may be more likely to become the targets of intervention and democratic states will be less likely to face intervention. Using a continuous measure of regime-type such as the DEM-AUT Polity score may mask the fact that autocratic states are more aggressive and more isolated than transitional states or mature democracies. Thus, two dummy variables one reflecting a mature democratic regime —with a DEM-AUT score of 6 or greater— and one reflecting “mature” autocratic states —with a DEM-AUT score greater than -6 in the negative direction— were created and used in Model 2 and Model 3.

[Table 3 approximately here]

The results are consistent across different model specifications. Starting with what may be called the realist variables, it appears that being the stronger state on a side in the dispute has no significant effect on the likelihood of being targeted by third parties. Looking at the stronger side —rather than the stronger state on a side— in the dispute did not change the nature of the results. Regressing the “stronger state” variable in isolation without controls did not change the results. This finding seems to go against findings by Altfeld and Bueno de Mesquita (1979) and general expectations about balance of power behavior. We cannot say that material capabilities deter interventions, but it is not possible to conclude that they attract them either. It is possible to speculate that powerful conflict initiators, expecting balance-of-power tendencies on the part of joiners, plan and time their conflict strategically in order to avoid being targeted. However, this is just a speculation. The fact that contradictory findings emerge depending on whether we look at things from the joiners’ perspective or from a dispute originator’s perspective presents us with a major area for further work.

Also surprising is the finding that major power status tends to have a negative impact of the probability of being targeted in most models. At first, this seems to go against previous findings by Yamamoto and Bremer (1980) and Corbetta and Dixon (2005). In the case of Yamamoto and Bremer (1980), their results may be explained by the fact that they look only at interventions by major powers against other major powers in full scale wars. The inclusion of disputes and non-major power states may simply “muddy up” their research design. Similarly, Corbetta and Dixon

(2005) look at non-military interventions in dyads —rather than MIDs. Less powerful joiners may be more willing to target major powers with non-military means. Major power status seems to work as a deterrent —rather than a magnet— for third party interventions. Major power disputes tend to be longer, more violent, and more prone to escalation (Jones, Bremer and Singer 1996). States may simply fear becoming entangled in conflicts of this kind.

Realist expectations about the role of alliances —hypothesis **H2**— also find no support from the logit analysis. Rather than deter intervention, alliances seem to drag other states into a dispute. Confirming the role of alliances as a one of the mechanisms leading to conflict expansion (Siverson and King 1979, 1980; Sullivan and Siverson 1984; Petersen, Vasquez and Wang 2004), states with more allies are more likely to be the target of third party intervention. Similarly, hypotheses **H4** and **H5**, concerning revisionist states and the kind of their revision, find no confirmation in the analysis. Although revision-seekers are not very liked by the community of states, they do not draw opposition from third parties. Like stronger states in a dispute, states who seek revisions are likely to operate strategically so as to avoid being targeted. As Werner (2000) correctly suggests, they adjust their demands in the course of the conflict in order to avoid third party interventions. Although territorial revisions are said to be the most destabilizing for the international status quo, their presence in a dispute does not significantly alter the chance of external intervention.

By far, the most interesting result emerging from the analysis concerns the role of regime type. There is a pro-democracy bias in the pattern of targeting by third parties. The more democratic a dispute originator, the smaller the probability that it will be targeted by joiners. The pattern is even more marked when dichotomous measures for mature regime are employed. The coefficient for mature democracies is negative and significant. The coefficient for mature autocracies becomes, instead, positive while retaining significance. As Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999) suggest, various institutional constraints seem to induce prudence in democratic decision-makers. Democracies are said to choose their conflicts carefully, picking only those they know they can easily win. The calculation of ease of victory appears to be affected, among other things, by expectations about the behavior of third parties. Democratic states stay out of conflicts where hostile interventions

are expected. Substituting the continuous democracy score with a dummy for mature autocracy reinforces the notions that (1) autocratic leaders are more careless in the choice of their conflict and (2) there may well be a pro-democracy “policing mechanism” at work in the international community. A dynamic of such type may well be part of the explanation for the evolutionary diffusion of democracy analyzed by Cederman (2001*a,b*) and the relationship between the strength of the democratic community and the occurrence of conflict found by (Kadera, Crescenzi and Shannon 2003).

Finally, the environmental variables introduced in model 4 help us draw a richer picture of the targeting dynamics in militarized disputes. First, it appears that being targeted by joiners is not simply a function of the number of states in the system. The coefficient for the “N States” variable is negative and significant. It is not just the number of chances of being targeted that make a conflict originator more likely to experience third party opposition. Rather, being targeted remains a function of the an originator’s characteristics and behavior. Moreover, controlling for the number of states and major powers in the system help us to gain some additional knowledge about the role of major power status in deterring third party interventions.

To further investigate the possible existence of a pro-democratic, status quo collective policing mechanism, the same models presented in Table 1 have been run separately on MID aggressors and victims. The previous analysis conflated all dispute initiators and failed to distinguish between initiators who start the fighting and those who are instead attacked. As suggested by (Caprioli and Trumbore 2006), this distinction may introduced important differences. It is plausible that third parties may be inherently more prone to target aggressors and defend victims. Alternatively, as Schweller (1994) suggests, some states may be more likely to bandwagon and intervene against the victims of aggression. The results of a separate logit analysis for victims and aggressors are presented in Table 4.

[Table 4 approximately here]

When MID aggressors and victims are separated in two distinct sub-sample, the tendency toward a democratic status quo emerges more clearly. The effects of regime type remain unchanged,

regardless of whether one is an aggressor or a victim. Democratic aggressors still remain less likely to be confronted by third party states. Separate analysis for mature democracies and mature autocracies —not reported here— confirms this tendency. Mature democracies remain less likely to become the targets of joiners’ intervention, especially if they are the victims of aggression. Mature autocracies, instead, face systematic third party opposition even when they are the victims of aggression. It can also be seen from Table 4 that being a revisionist does not increase the chances that an aggressor will be targeted by third parties. However, being a revisionist state matters greatly for victims of aggression. In addition to being attacked, revisionist victims are also more likely to draw opposition by third parties. Interestingly, if the victims seek a territorial revision, the likelihood of being targeted diminishes. Also interesting is the fact that balance of power considerations appear to affect —at least marginally— the chances that an aggressor will be targeted, while they play no significant role in the targeting of victims.

As a final step in the analysis, it is important to consider possible variations in the effects of the explanatory variables over time. This is important especially for the impact of regime on targeting. As Thompson and Tucker (1997), Cederman (2001*a*), Cederman (2001*b*), and others have highlighted, the number of democracies and their mean Polity score change dramatically over time. It is not until the early 20th century that we see a sizeable group of mature democracies in the system. As a result, the effects of regime type may vary across the empirical domain considered here. Table 5 shows the results of a separate logit estimation for the 19th century, the 20th century, and the post-WWII period.

[Table 5 approximately here]

As can be seen from Table 5, there is no remarkable variation in the effects of regime type on the likelihood of third party targeting over time. The impact of some of the covariates is susceptible to temporal change —e.g., major power status or the number of states in the system. Democracy, instead, is the only variable to be consistently *negatively* related to joiners’ intervention. The result is even more remarkable in light of the aforementioned paucity of democracies in the pre-1945 period and evidence of generally weaker effects of democracy on the occurrence of dyadic and systemic

conflict.

In order to provide more context for these results and give some more substantive sense about the actual magnitude of the effects of democracy, Figure 1 shows the changes in the predicted probability of third party targeting across levels of the Polity scores. The dashed lines in the figure represent confidence intervals around the probability estimates. Given the relative rarity of third party interventions, the absolute magnitude of the drop in probability is not dramatic. However, it remains quite apparent that the chances of being targeted by third parties diminish substantively for more democratic states. Furthermore, as shown can be easily seen from the narrowing confidence intervals, the precision of the prediction increases with a country's regime score.

[Figure 1 approximately here]

To substantiate inferences about the generalized effects of democracy on aggression and intervention in conflicts, Figure 2 shows the change in median predicted probabilities over time for mature democracy and mature autocracies over time. It can be easily seen that mature democracies are consistently more likely to be targeted by third parties regardless of time period. Probably as a function of the growing number of conflicts over time, the median probability of being targeted decreases for all states over time. As a reflection of this trend, and as a reflection of the larger number of democracies in the system, the gap between autocracies and democracies is greatest during the 19th century. It shrinks progressively throughout the 20th century but, at no point in time are mature democracies do the trends for autocracies and the trend for democracies ever cross path. Some of the implications of these findings are discussed in the following section.

[Figure 2 approximately here]

5 Conclusions

Although most conflicts are bilateral in nature, some of them evolve into multilateral conflicts. States' calculations concerning conflict initiation involve expectations about intervention by third parties. However, with few exceptions (see, for instance Bueno de Mesquita 1981; Werner 2000),

theories of conflict initiation and theories of joining behavior rarely speak to one another. There is little doubt that the interaction between conflict originators and joiners is strategic in the way indicated by Signorino (1999, 2002). However, scholars of conflict have been only marginally concerned with the strategic nature of this interaction. Lack of ready-made models, methodological difficulties and, arguably, the popularity of dyad-years research design have led us to consider initiation and joining as two separate dimensions of conflict.

One simple way to take a small step in the direction of bringing two strands of research together is by reversing the research question that is commonly asked. Rather than investigating the motivations and similarities/dissimilarities with the originator that motivate third party joining, it is possible to explore the factors that lead originators to become targets for third parties. The present analysis begins to bring together various approaches to conflict initiation and to joining. It confirms findings from several theoretical perspectives and, in the process, it brings to the surface intriguing results with indirect policy implications. The most interesting findings concern the impact of regime type on the likelihood of becoming targets of third party intervention.

It appears that, overall, conflict initiators —democratic aggressors in particular— choose their conflicts carefully and pay a great deal of attention to possible hostile interventions by third parties. As a result, they are less likely to become the targets of intervention and successfully keep their conflicts bilateral. Aggressors seeking to revise the status quo are particularly aware of pro-status quo bias inherent in the international community and plan their attacks carefully. As indicated by Werner (2000), they may alter their behavior during the course of a dispute by tailoring their demands so as to avoid the expansion of the conflict. As a result, attempt to revise the status quo has no significant impact of the likelihood of intervention. However, third parties display a remarkable tendency to stay out of conflicts initiated by democratic revisionist states while jumping onto the opportunity to bandwagon against autocratic, revisionist countries. Initiators who are victims of aggression are, in fact, more likely to see insult added to injury, especially if they are autocratic and revisionist. It appears that members of the international community are willing to take advantage of the opportunity to punish “pariah” states —i.e., revisionist, autocratic countries— by ganging

up against them. If these speculations are in any way correct, they bring together simultaneously existing and apparently contradictory findings about the democratic peace (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999), the conditions of democratic aggressiveness (see Peceny, Beer and Sanchez-Terry 2002; Reiter and Stam 2002, 2003), the tendency of democratic states to align with each other (Werner and Lemke 1997), the tendency of joiners to bandwagon rather than balance power (Werner and Lemke 1997), the tendency of third parties to punish enemies rather than help friends (Kim 1991), and the existence of system-level mechanisms facilitating the preservation of the status quo and the diffusion of democracy (Cederman 2001*a,b*; Kadera, Crescenzi and Shannon 2003) at the systemic level. Formal and non-formal theorists may find these findings useful in elaborating richer and more dynamic models of conflict.

The findings presented above offer an explanation as to why recent attempts by autocratic states to challenge the status quo —e.g., Argentina invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1983 or Iraq’s attempt to conquer Kuwait in 1990— have been met with a high degree of international opposition, while democracies’ challenges against authoritarian states —e.g., NATO troops’ raids against Serbia in the 1990s or the American-British invasion of Iraq in 2003— have seen international acquiescence and even a moderate “bandwagoning effect.” The international isolation and progressive disappearance of authoritarian regimes arguably is a desirable outcome. Yet, the prospect of an international system characterized by unchecked democratic aggression looms large in the results presented here.

Although intriguing, the present findings should nonetheless be treated with a great degree of caution. The model proposed above largely focuses on domestic-level determinants of third party targeting. A relative resurgence in popularity of monadic approaches to conflict initiation suggests that there is merit to this perspective (Benoit 1996; Souva and Prins 2006; Caprioli and Trumbore 2006). Nonetheless, as much of the literature on joining behavior stresses, a state’s decisions about initiating or joining a conflict are largely shaped by the traits of and relationship with its adversary. Furthermore, it is tempting to draw inferences about system-level dynamics. But such inferences must be tempered by the consideration that a monadic research design is not the most effective

approach for speculating about trends at the highest level of generalization. As a result, future iterations of this research project will be aimed at exploring whether there are dyadic and systemic determinants of third party targeting that cannot be detected by a monadic approach.

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Table 1: Hypotheses' Summary: Principal Variables and Expected Direction of the Relationship

Hypothesis	Initiator's Characteristics	Probability of Targeting
H1	Stronger side	+
H2	Number of allies	+
H3	Major power status	+
H4	Revisionist state	+
H5	Territorial revision	+
H6	Democratic traits	-
H7	Risk proneness	+

Table 2: Heckman Probit Estimates of the Effects of Domestic-level and System-level Variables on the Likelihood of Targeting by Third Parties in Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816-2001

	Coeff.	St. Error	z	P>—z—
Target				
Stronger	.180	.096	1.87	0.062
Major power	-.158	.135	-1.17	0.240
Revisionist	-.085	.107	-0.79	0.427
Democracy	-.012	.006	-1.90	0.058
Territory	.177	.113	1.56	0.119
Risk Attitude	-.174	.092	-1.90	0.057
N Allies	.013***	.004	3.25	0.001
N Major Powers	-.086	.052	-1.66	0.097
N States	-.003**	.001	-2.80	0.005
Constant	-1.067**	.394	-2.71	0.007
Aggression				
Democracy	-.003	.002	-1.67	0.095
Capabilities	2.27***	.226	10.07	0.000
Contiguities	.032***	.004	8.42	0.000
Peace Years	-.343***	.026	-12.88	0.000
Spline1	-.023***	.003	-6.80	0.000
Spline2	.004***	.001	5.51	0.000
Spline3	.000	.000	1.92	0.055
Constant	.606***	.034	-17.42	0.000
athrho	.136	.128	1.06	0.288
rho	.136	.126		
Wald test rho = 0				
chi-square	1.13			
Prob> chi-square	0.287			
Log likelihood				
	-4998.294			
N	11830			
Wald chi-square	22.97			
Prob > chi-square	.006			

*** = $p \leq .001$; ** = $p \leq .01$; * = $p \leq .05$; † = $p \leq .1$

Table 3: Logit Estimates of the Effects of Domestic-level and System-level Variables on the Likelihood of Targeting by Third Parties in Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816-2001

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Stronger	.159 (.136)	.124 (.136)	.078 (.147)
Major Power	-.409* (.184)	-.388 (.187)	-.469* (.193)
Revisionist	.228 (.161)	.254 (.161)	.305 (.168)
Democracy	-.031*** (.009)		
Mature Democracy		-.381* (.161)	
Mature Autocracy			.472*** (.141)
Territorial Revision	.084 (.213)	.075 (.214)	.053 (.224)
Risk Attitude	-.088 (.151)	-.087 (.152)	-.109 (.155)
N Allies	.023*** (.007)	.024*** (.007)	.023*** (.007)
N Major Powers	-.092 (.096)	-.112 (.096)	-.128 (.106)
N States	-.008*** (.002)	-.008*** (.002)	-.009*** (.002)
Constant	-1.834** (.666)	-1.602* (.663)	-1.735* (.732)
Log Likelihood	-891.930	-887.250	-799.766
Wald χ^2	31.81	29.47	28.91
Prob > χ^2	.0002	.0005	.0007
Number of obs.	4067	4007	3667

*** = $p \leq .001$; ** = $p \leq .01$; * = $p \leq .05$; † = $p \leq .1$

Table 4: Logit Estimates of the Effects of Domestic-level and System-level Variables on the Likelihood of Targeting by Third Parties in Militarized Interstate Disputes for Aggressors and Victims , 1816-2001

	Aggressors			Victims		
Stronger	.340† (.206)	.298 (.207)	.258 (.221)	.004 (.229)	.033 (.234)	-.205 (.248)
Major Power	-.446† (.239)	-.439† (.239)	-.465† (.249)	-.199 (.256)	-.163 (.263)	-.325 (.269)
Revisionist	-.231 (.228)	-.208 (.227)	-.217 (.242)	1.153*** (.261)	1.169*** (.264)	1.332*** (.267)
Democracy	-.028* (.013)			-.033* (.014)		
Mature Democracy		-.227 (.217)			-.526* (.258)	
Mature Autocracy			.506* (.209)		.449* (.209)	
Territorial Revision	.400† (.242)	.401† (.243)	.419 (.257)	-.841* (.358)	-.861* (.359)	-.959** (.373)
Risk Attitude	-.365* (.183)	-.381* (.183)	-.364† (.191)	-.246 (.228)	.257 (.231)	.181 (.231)
N Allies	.299*** (.008)	.029*** (.008)	.030*** (.009)	.015† (.009)	.015† (.009)	.014 (.009)
N Major Powers	-.166 (.109)	-.176 (.108)	-.176 (.117)	-.013 (.132)	-.044 (.132)	-.066 (.151)
N States	-.008*** (.003)	-.008** (.003)	-.008* (.003)	-.008** (.002)	-.007** (.002)	-.009** (.003)
Constant	-1.377† (.753)	-1.220† (.736)	-1.483† (.819)	-2.326* (.919)	-1.994* (.920)	-2.060* (1.045)
Log Likelihood	-466.986	-465.968	-416.578	-413.195	-408.906	-371.012
Wald χ^2	24.36	23.16	22.34	33.91	34.54	34.12
Prob > χ^2	.0038	.0058	.0078	.0000	.0001	.0001
Number of obs.	2081	2049	1873	1986	1958	1794

*** = $p \leq .001$; ** = $p \leq .01$; * = $p \leq .05$; † = $p \leq .1$

Table 5: Logit Estimates of the Effects of Domestic-level and System-level Variables on the Likelihood of Targeting by Third Parties in Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816-2001

	19th century	20th century	Post-WWII
Stronger	.198 (.339)	.185 (.148)	.156 (.181)
Major Power	-.237 (.508)	-.626** (.213)	-.135 (.242)
Revisionist	.530 (.426)	.235 (.179)	.465* (.219)
Democratic	-.113*** (.032)	-.019* (.009)	-.024* (.012)
Territorial Revision	-.035 (.506)	.023 (.240)	-.188 (.294)
Risk Attitude	.129 (.588)	-.041 (.156)	.099 (.174)
N Allies	.016 (.056)	.023*** (.006)	.017* (.007)
N Major Powers	-.418 (.305)	-.079 (.107)	.158 (.318)
N States	-.079† (.041)	-.010*** (.003)	-.010** (.003)
Constant	-3.686 (2.471)	-1.627* (.816)	-2.892†* (1.541)
Log Likelihood	-138.120	-742.320	-503.757
Wald χ^2	21.31	28.92	22.94
Prob > χ^2	.0113	.0007	.0063
Number of obs.	609	3437	2451

*** = $p \leq .001$; ** = $p \leq .01$; * = $p \leq .05$; † = $p \leq .1$

Figure 1: Predicted Probability of Targeting by Third Parties by Polity Scores, 1816-2001

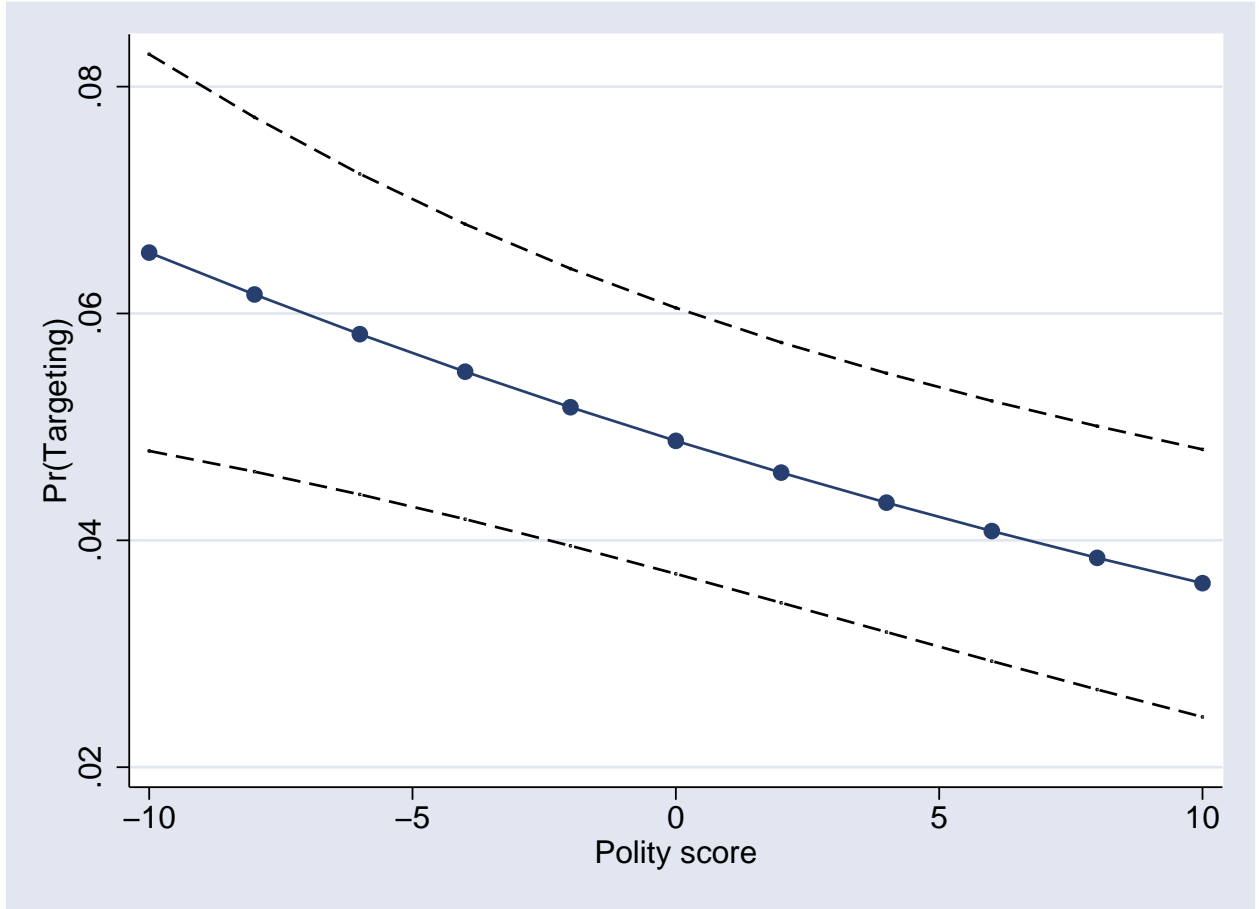


Figure 2: Median Predicted Probability of Targeting by Third Parties by Regime Type Over Time

