

# Territorial Dispute Strategies as Diversionary Behavior

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## Structured Abstract

Article Type: Research Paper

*Purpose*—When leaders choose to divert the populace’s attention from domestic problems to foreign disputes, are there peaceful options to pursue diversion other than use of force? Building on diversionary force theory and foreign policy substitutability, this study tackles the continuing debate about how domestic unrest could lead to diversions and what constitutes diversionary behavior. The theory presented is that leaders of states claiming disputed territory can use demands for peaceful dispute resolution (negotiation, mediation, etc.) to divert attention from moderate domestic unrest, initiating a militarized interstate dispute (MID) in the territorial dispute more likely to occur under severe domestic unrest, and economic unrest has no effect.

*Design, Methodology, Approach*—This study examines the strategies of challenger states involved in territorial disputes across the world from 1945 to 2007—maintaining the status quo, demanding resolution of the dispute, or initiating a MID. To test the hypotheses about the effects of moderate political unrest, severe political unrest, and economic unrest, the analysis uses multinomial logistic regression models and graphed marginal effects.

*Findings*—The findings show overall support for the hypotheses. First, resolution demands are more likely to occur when challenger states are experiencing moderate political unrest. Second, MIDs are more likely to be initiated when challenger states are experiencing severe political unrest. Economic unrest has no statistical significant influence on resolution demands or MIDs.

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*Practical Implications*—The study contributes to the debate in the literature about diversionary force theory, as well as the territorial dispute literature, emphasizing the role of domestic politics on interstate conflict management.

*Originality Value*—The study discusses an alternative strategy for leaders of states involved in territorial disputes to deal with domestic unrest and diversion by pursuing resolution demands and not just threats or uses of force.

Key words: dispute resolution, diversionary theory, domestic unrest, MIDs, territorial disputes

## Introduction

Domestic vulnerability of leaders or governments is a frequent occurrence in many states, sometimes leading to diversionary behavior—leaders using external military force to divert attention away from domestic problems. The general assumption is that to divert from domestic problems, leaders must use threats or some degree of military force. The Argentine junta's decision to invade the Falkland/Malvinas Islands in 1982 was partially a means to divert attention from growing domestic unrest in Argentina. Yet the junta was not the only Argentine leaders to divert attention from domestic vulnerability. Since the conclusion of the war, many Argentine leaders have used the Malvinas territorial claim against the United Kingdom to divert from domestic problems, not through threats of force or actual uses of force, but instead through demands for resolution, a peaceful strategy.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this study is to tackle the continuing debate about the domestic conditions that lead to diversions and what constitutes diversionary behavior—whether leaders are more likely to pursue threats or uses of force, known as militarized interstate disputes (MIDs), or whether leaders pursue non-violent strategies to divert from domestic unrest. I argue that leaders of states claiming disputed territory specifically do, in fact, pursue non-violent foreign policy strategies as domestic diversions, depending on the conditions of domestic problems facing the leader. Along with the typical threats or uses of force that diversionary theory explains, this study presents the possibility that leaders can pursue demands for resolution of disputes under certain conditions.

Because of the salience of territorial disputes and the concern that citizens often have about territorial claims, leaders of challenger states should be able to effectively mobilize citizens by engaging in either attempt—forceful or peaceful—to resolve a territorial dispute by gaining territorial concessions, depending on whether the domestic despair that leaders experience are moderate, severe, political, or economic.<sup>2</sup> This study builds off of research on foreign policy substitutability and diversionary use of force, and examines the conditions under which diversionary behavior occurs, fleshing out the type of domestic despair—political, economic, or both—and the degree to which political unrest in particular makes diversionary behavior most likely to occur. I argue that under moderate domestic unrest, pursuing demands for resolution as diversionary behavior is more likely, while leaders experiencing

severe domestic unrest are more likely to pursue MIDs, and with economic vulnerability, neither strategy is attractive to leaders.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, I review previous research on diversionary force and foreign policy substitutability theory and discuss the previous findings about political and economic domestic unrest. I then present a theory of how MIDs and demands for resolution can both be used as forms of diversionary behavior, but each strategy should depend on the level of negative domestic conditions that leaders are experiencing. After outlining the research design, I present the findings, which show generally that moderate domestic unrest increases demands for resolution, severe domestic unrest increases the likelihood of MIDs, and economic unrest has no effect.

## **Diversionary Force Theory**

Studies of diversionary use of force, defined as military and diplomatic actions “undertaken for the purposes of enhancing one’s internal political support,”<sup>3</sup> have focused on interstate use of force regardless of the specific issue disputed, ranging from low intensity threat of force to full scale war. Applying observations of small group cohesion when faced with external threats<sup>4</sup> to state behavior, the theory of diversionary force argues that leaders can use an external threat to unify the populace domestically as a form of a principal-agent model.<sup>5</sup>

The empirical and case study record about diversionary force theory is mixed. Some studies show that leaders are more likely to use force in interstate disputes if their domestic positions are vulnerable, while other research does not find support for this theory.<sup>6</sup> There is some evidence that leaders use diversionary force to rally support of the domestic populace under domestically unstable conditions.<sup>7</sup> Several studies have revealed no systematic or case specific evidence that leaders took diversionary actions to mobilize domestic support.<sup>8</sup> Using different research designs and theoretical questions, other studies have demonstrated evidence that leaders do in fact use diversionary use of force to rally support of the domestic populace under domestically unstable conditions, difficult economic conditions, or challenging political circumstances for leaders.<sup>9</sup> Much research on diversionary force focuses on observations of use of force by leaders of one state, particularly the U.S.,<sup>10</sup> the United Kingdom,<sup>11</sup> and Argentina.<sup>12</sup>

Diversionary theory focuses almost exclusively on the strategy of pursuing force to divert attention away from domestic problems. Scholars have not yet been able to definitively agree on what causes diversion, if it occurs at all—poor economic performance, unpopular policies, scandals, low levels of popular support, or other domestic political factors. Types of domestic unrest can include both political and economic factors. Economic factors correlated with diversionary force in previous research include high inflation rates within states involved in enduring rivalries,<sup>13</sup> high inflation rates in states experiencing ongoing contentious issues, including territorial disputes, maritime claims, and river disputes,<sup>14</sup> declining economic perform-

ance,<sup>15</sup> measured by change in gross domestic product (GDP),<sup>16</sup> and GDP per capita levels.<sup>17</sup> Some research argues that leaders are more likely to divert when the economy is weak or economic performance is low because leaders will make tradeoffs between foreign policy and economic performance.<sup>18</sup> Several other studies have found contrary results, indicating that either economic problems have no effect or a reverse effect on diversionary force.<sup>19</sup> Jung (2014) argues that economic vulnerability is not an effective measure of domestic unrest since political vulnerability can still occur for leaders even when economies are strong.<sup>20</sup>

Political factors associated with diversionary force include unpopularity of the leader and/or government and regime type,<sup>21</sup> weak party cohesion or opposition to the leadership within the legislature,<sup>22</sup> upcoming executive elections,<sup>23</sup> the political leaning of a government,<sup>24</sup> and popular unrest in the form of anti-government demonstrations, general strikes, riots, and/or purges and government crises,<sup>25</sup> as well as domestic unrest interacted with regime type.<sup>26</sup> The research pursued in this study attempts to address some of the disagreements in the diversionary literature, broaden the foreign policy options in diversionary behavior, and better specify the conditions under which diversion may occur by examining levels of domestic unrest.

## **Territorial Disputes as Ideal Diversions**

Building on the theory of diversionary force, it makes sense that leaders of states claiming territory could use MIDs or demands for resolution to rally a populace specifically about a territorial dispute, as with other types of interstate disputes.<sup>27</sup> Territorial disputes are ideal as a diversionary issue because most of them are ongoing disputes that their populations know about, so vulnerable leaders do not need to invent foreign disputes to justify diversions. In order to divert attention from domestic problems, there must be a perceived or real condition of dyadic tension or hostility with an opposing state. As with enduring rivalries,<sup>28</sup> there is a significant foreign policy opportunity with territorial disputes,<sup>29</sup> a condition ranging from minimal dyadic tension to major hostility, of which leaders can take advantage to mobilize domestic support.

Diversions for leaders of challenging states are also quite feasible because it is difficult for leaders of target states to avoid potential force or other strategies when involved in a territorial dispute. The target's involvement in a contentious territorial dispute makes the strategic conflict avoidance argument less applicable,<sup>30</sup> which argues that target states are likely to avoid conflict with states experiencing domestic vulnerabilities. In territorial disputes, a target state cannot avoid the challenger state's territorial claims and potential subsequent threats to ownership of the disputed territory since the target states maintain status quo control of the disputed territory. Mitchell & Thyne (2010) argue and find support for the notion that it is not just the opportunity of an interstate dispute, but that territorial disputes are more salient issues, providing greater incentive for diversion.<sup>31</sup> More specifically, they find that when ongoing contentious issues—including territorial disputes—

exist between a dyad, there is more opportunity for diversionary behavior. Territorial disputes therefore act as a longstanding issue, providing an ideal opportunity for diversionary behavior.

Like rivalries, territorial disputes provide the ideal conditions for diversion due to the salience of the contentious issue and the opportunity that longstanding territorial disputes provide to leaders in need of foreign policy issues with which to divert the populace from domestic problems. An important factor in the ability to divert is for leaders to rally their populaces to support the government against a perceived national threat by an adversary, for example, stirring strong nationalist sentiments about acquisition of the (perceived) homeland. Disputed territory is an issue that is likely to unite domestic audiences behind leaders.<sup>32</sup> Hensel Mitchell, Sowers & Thyne (2008) show that, compared to river and maritime disputes, territorial disputes are five times more likely to see MIDs compared to other contentious issues, and these same disputes are also significantly more likely to be subjected to peaceful resolution demands as compared to maritime claims.<sup>33</sup>

Because disputed territory holds such salience as a disputed issue, feelings about the security of the national territory and borders are often emotionally charged.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the domestic populace tends to immediately support policies to acquire territory that is perceived to be rightfully theirs. Leaders can take advantage of this sentiment by making promises to right an injustice that resulted from a change in territorial ownership or a perception of unjust control by the target state.<sup>35</sup> This “rally around the flag” effect is likely to occur for leaders in both democracies and authoritarian regimes involved in territorial disputes due to the high level of issue salience. An illustration of such mobilization is the January 1995 border conflict fought between Ecuador and Peru when:

there were immediate political and military interests involved in the eruption of the dispute at this particular time, due to the declining support for both national presidents ... these political actors were able to mobilize the population around issues of territory, nationhood and the Amazon in ways which can throw light on the nature of national identities and their relationship with place.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to threatening or using force, domestically vulnerable leaders can also pursue other diversionary strategies.<sup>37</sup> Here I propose that leaders can use demands for dispute resolution as diversionary behavior in order to mobilize populations under the right conditions. This argument relies on the assumption of foreign policy substitutability, in which leaders have multiple foreign policy options to pursue in response to the same stimulus<sup>38</sup> or that leaders can pursue multiple strategies, not just diversionary force.<sup>39</sup> Since leaders can respond to crises with multiple foreign policy (or domestic) options, then leaders could pursue demands for resolution just as they would pursue threats or uses of force in territorial disputes to act as diversions. This possibility of foreign policy substitutability, also referred to as the policy alternatives approach,<sup>40</sup> suggests not only that one should consider a different independent variable when studying domestic vulnerabilities, but also that there has been misspecification of diversionary behavior<sup>41</sup> or that leaders can pursue multiple strategies, not just diversionary force.<sup>42</sup>

Substitutable strategies in response to domestic unrest can include several strategies: repression,<sup>43</sup> domestic diversion,<sup>44</sup> military spending and conflict initiation,<sup>45</sup> or a variety of non-conflict foreign policy actions, such as benevolent military missions for humanitarian reasons.<sup>46</sup> Other strategies include application of economic sanctions or personal diplomacy (trips and/or summits),<sup>47</sup> aggressive trade policies,<sup>48</sup> or cooperative behavior including international negotiations,<sup>49</sup> concessions to opposition groups,<sup>50</sup> de-escalation of strategic rivalries,<sup>51</sup> attempted termination of enduring rivalries,<sup>52</sup> and resolution attempts in territorial disputes, the foreign policy strategy addressed here.

In order to divert attention, leaders do not necessarily need to use force, but must be perceived as active and engaged in the territorial dispute.<sup>53</sup> As with diversionary force, the demand for resolution of a dispute over territory can serve as a means to rally the populace, mobilizing support for the leader in his or her attempt to acquire the disputed territory. Though it may seem that such resolution attempts are cooperative, on the contrary, most demands for resolution are considered to be hostile, causing significant tensions between the disputing states. An example of mobilization around a demand for resolution is the attempt in July 1984 by President Raul Ricardo Alfonsin of Argentina to press for sovereignty of the disputed islands and the carefully planned out execution of domestic mobilization efforts in Argentina. Prior to the start of the talks, Alfonsin gave a national speech, “evidently meant to prepare highly sensitive public opinion” about the negotiations.<sup>54</sup> Such statements about demanding sovereignty talks or some other form of resolution method can act as focal points around which citizens can rally around the disputed territory. By engaging in rhetoric about territorial claims while demanding sovereignty negotiations or third party involvement, leaders of challenger states can rally domestic support for the cause of acquiring the claimed territory, in a similar manner that they do by pursuing a MID, a form of foreign policy substitutability.

Since the settlement of a territorial dispute is generally considered to be a “major innovation in the international security system,” leaders who have the political interest to peacefully attempt the settlement of territorial disputes are more likely to do so.<sup>55</sup> Even if a leader is unsuccessful in getting the adversary to the bargaining table or settling the dispute altogether, the very demand for negotiations or third party involvement itself acts as an indicator of the leader putting forth a good faith effort and showing resolve to treat the territorial dispute with utmost priority, for which he or she is likely to be rewarded.

What matters is the effort of the leader to demand resolution of the dispute, regardless of whether the opposing state responds or even if negotiations take place. If leaders are demanding resolution of a dispute primarily for diversionary purposes, if dispute resolution does occur, such leaders should not agree to any actual concessions, but give the appearance of trying to acquire the disputed territory. If negotiations or another form of dispute resolution do occur, leaders of challenger states can easily blame failed attempts on the stubbornness of the target state’s government or the unfairness of a tribunal or court ruling on a dispute.<sup>56</sup> Since territorial disputes are generally long and enduring like rivalries, and demands for resolution can be

made repeatedly, populations are less likely to forget leaders' demands to settle disputes as they would likely do with a past armed conflict that involved a one-time issue. Unlike engagement in MIDs, demands for resolution can have much higher rewards than costs especially since they tend to be repeated. This way, the leader still gets the benefit of rallying the populace through a diversionary tactic of demanding resolution, but does not necessarily risk domestic punishment.

Since a wide range of conditions could be considered as domestic political unrest, it is useful to break down such conditions based on severity,<sup>57</sup> and make different predictions about the likelihood of MIDs and resolution attempts. With more moderate political despair, if leaders can pursue peaceful resolution rather than potentially costly and risky initiation of MIDs and effectively divert the domestic populace, it is logical for leaders to pursue such a strategy rather than through MIDs. Demands for resolution can act as a less costly and less risky means by which leaders can mobilize around territorial claims. Under these conditions, leaders can make the case that they are working hard to (re)acquire disputed territory thought to be highly salient by the populace and therefore effectively mobilize them behind the leaders and/or government in order to divert from these more moderate conditions of domestic vulnerability. Yet, under conditions of severe political despair such as mass riots and other violent unrest, demands for resolution would probably be ineffective as for diversionary purposes and only MIDs would suffice to effectively divert.

### *Domestic Unrest*

Moderate levels of domestic unrest, such as unpopularity of the leader and/or government displayed through political demonstrations would seem to be more likely to inspire leaders to divert attention differently compared to more severe types of political vulnerability, such as revolutions, riots, purges, and government crises. With moderate unrest, there is no real violence, so leaders are mainly receiving signals of discontent from the populace, but not direct threats to the government. Because the threat to leaders' survival in office is not as severe under these conditions, using an equally severe and costly policy of diversionary force would not be rational. Because of potentially higher costs and risks associated with MIDs and the fact that diversionary force can backfire, force is arguably not the most cost effective means to divert attention under conditions of moderate political despair. Diversions involving MIDs tend to be popular, but they can be costly and risky since leaders are not certain whether they will be successful, and war may result, such as the Falklands War of 1982. Additionally, use of diversionary force generally provides only short term or relatively low positive gains for domestically vulnerable leaders.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, since "the costs of armed diversion are indeed prohibitive, it is perhaps more reasonable to assume that less costly foreign policy actions which can rally patriotic feelings are preferable to the use of force."<sup>59</sup> A more cost effective and less risky means to divert for leaders experiencing moderate domestic unrest would be to still make some kind of effort to gain disputed territory by demanding sovereignty talks or third party involvement in the dispute. Therefore, leaders experiencing

moderate political despair do not need to pursue MID in international disputes to divert attention from moderate domestic unrest. Leaders can instead substitute their foreign policy of potentially diverting with force with demands of peaceful resolution, a much less costly and risky policy option, and one that is a more appropriate response to moderate domestic unrest. Since demands for resolution are cheaper and less risky, we should expect to see demands for resolution as more likely than pursuing MID when the domestic political unrest is moderate.

Yet, when leaders are experiencing severe forms of political despair, such as riots, purges, and government crises, they are actually so vulnerable to forcible removal from office that initiating a MID in the form of threat of force or low use of force, which could escalate to armed conflict, is not much riskier if defeated. Severe forms of domestic unrest, as defined here, involve violence and more intense threats to leaders or governments. Under severe domestic unrest, a more appealing strategy would be to achieve the payoff of effectively mobilizing the domestic populace through diversionary force. Leaders that are already experiencing strong negative sentiment from severe domestic unrest are already at a higher risk level than leaders with moderate domestic unrest. Therefore, desperate leaders whose survival in office (or even their own lives) is at a higher level of risk already should be more willing to seek a “hail Mary” and pursue a MID—not a war—since this could (1) benefit the leader through diversion, and (2) not extend the risk to leadership that much as it already stands.

Leaders “gain a private benefit from conflict—the increased likelihood of staying in power,”<sup>60</sup> suggesting that leaders experiencing severe domestic problems should be more willing to take riskier chances with MID in an attempt to divert from domestic problems. Likewise, with severe political despair, demanding resolution would not serve sufficiently to divert compared to MID since such demands would probably be drowned out by the severe domestic conditions or have limited ability to divert due to the chaotic conditions. Based on this logic, two hypotheses can be tested:

**Hypothesis 1:** *Moderate domestic political unrest will make it more likely that leaders will demand resolution of territorial disputes and less likely to initiate MID.*

**Hypothesis 2:** *Severe domestic political unrest will make it less likely that leaders will demand resolution of territorial disputes and more likely to initiate MID.*

## Research Design

This study evaluates the likelihood of MID initiation compared to demands for resolution in territorial disputes. The analysis used to test the hypotheses is a cross-sectional time series, with a spatial domain of all territorial disputes from 1945–2007. The unit of analysis is non-directed dyad dispute year, focusing on the challenger state behavior in a territorial claim year.<sup>61</sup> The dependent variable is a

categorical variable measuring conflict management strategies of the challenger state, coded 0 if the challenger state maintained the status quo, (1) if it made any demand to the target state for a peaceful resolution of a territorial dispute, and (2) if it initiated a militarized interstate dispute (MID) against the target state in any given year.<sup>62</sup> A multinomial logistic regression is used to test the hypotheses and marginal effects are graphed and presented as figures.

Demands for resolution includes any demand to meet through bilateral negotiations to discuss sovereignty, or demands by the challenger issued to the target to invite mediation by third parties, arbitration by third parties, or to agree to adjudication by an international court.<sup>63</sup> The data on demands for resolution are borrowed from Huth and Allee (2002), which were updated by Wiegand & Powell (2011)<sup>64</sup> to 2007 and added third party resolution attempts to the data. The data on MIDs are borrowed from the Dyadic MID data set available from the Correlates of War (COW) Project.<sup>65</sup> All data coded in the MID dataset having an objective of territorial revision are included in this data set and include both threats and uses of force, regardless of hostility level.<sup>66</sup>

Consistent with the literature, to flesh out the effects of different domestic despair conditions, and as robustness checks on the models, I use a variety of indicators of domestic unrest. The main domestic unrest variables are all from the *Cross-National Time-Series Data*,<sup>67</sup> and are lagged one year to test the effect on diversion in the near future. For moderate political vulnerability, I use general strikes and anti-government demonstrations. These measures are used in previous studies by Ghosh & Ramey (2011), Oakes (2012), and Tir (2010).<sup>68</sup> General strikes are those that include strikes of 1,000 or more workers, aimed at national government policies or the government authority, and anti-government demonstrations refer to peaceful public gatherings of at least 100 people “for the primary purpose of displaying or voicing their opposition to government policies or authority, excluding demonstrations of a distinctly anti-foreign nature.”<sup>69</sup> In the data, the mean of general strikes per year is .13 and the maximum per year is 13, while there is a mean of almost 1 anti-government demonstration per year and a maximum of 60 per year. Both of these activities are considered here to be indicators of moderate political vulnerability because they do not include any levels of violence, nor do they provide an immediate risk of being removed from office for the leader.

For severe vulnerability, I use government crises and purges as indicators, consistent with Jung (2014),<sup>70</sup> and for a robustness check, I also test riots. Major government crises are coded as “any rapidly developing situation that threatens to bring the downfall of the present regime—excluding situations of revolt aimed at such overthrow,” and purges are defined as “any systematic elimination by jailing or execution of political opposition within the ranks of the regime or the opposition.”<sup>71</sup> There is a mean of .26 government crises and a mean of .3 purges, with a maximum of seven and 13 respectively. Both of these measures are considered indicators of severe domestic unrest because they both involve violence and such conditions make it more likely that leaders could actually be removed from office.<sup>72</sup> Riots are considered to be demonstrations or clashes of more than 100 citizens that involve violence,

hence they are also considered more severe domestic unrest than general strikes or anti-government demonstrations, and therefore more threatening to the leader and government.<sup>73</sup> In the data, there is a mean of almost 1 riot per year, a maximum of 55 per year, and a standard deviation of 3.2 riots per year.

With regard to control variables included in the models, I first include a variable to control for economic domestic unrest, which is another typical factor used to study diversionary force. For this variable, I use percentage of GDP growth rates, borrowed from *Penn World Tables* version 6.3.<sup>74</sup> Factor loadings show that GDP growth rates are unique to the domestic unrest indicators tested, indicating that each of these factors can be tested on its own.<sup>75</sup>

Another important control variable is the influence of value or salience of territory, which is generally a strong indicator of conflict management.<sup>76</sup> To measure if the territory under dispute has value or salience, I use a dummy variable that determines whether there is ethnic value, strategic value, or economic value.<sup>77</sup> Ethnic value exists if members of a same ethnic group in the challenger state live across the border in the target state.<sup>78</sup> Strategic value exists if disputed territory is located at or near military bases, major shipping lanes, or choke points for ships, and economic value exists if the territory is located at or near a significant amount of natural resources, such as fishing grounds, oil, iron, copper, or diamonds.<sup>79</sup>

Another key variable from the literature on conflict management to consider is regime type. A common argument is that democracies are less likely to use force and more likely to attempt resolution of territorial disputes through peaceful means.<sup>80</sup> To control for these findings, I include the Net Democracy Score for the challenger state from the Polity IV data. Based on previous findings in the literature, the expectation is that leaders of democratic states will be less likely to pursue MIDs and more likely to demand peaceful resolution and vice versa.

I also control for relative power between challenger and target states, based on the Correlates of War's National Capabilities Index,<sup>81</sup> determined by the ratio of the challenger's CINC scores to the target state's CINC scores. States are expected to be more likely to pursue MIDs when there is power parity. I also include a dummy variable noting whether the challenger and target had past conflict, which is known to strongly influence future dispute strategies.<sup>82</sup> Lastly, I include peace years to control for the number of years since the challenger state last engaged in a militarized dispute against the target state, as well as peace years squared and cubed to control for temporal dependence.<sup>83</sup> The expectation is that the initiation of MIDs is less likely as time passes from the last conflict. Examining the influence of these control variables together with domestic political and economic vulnerabilities should provide for a broader understanding for diversionary behavior.

## Empirical Analysis

Overall, the models provide fairly strong support for the idea that domestic unrest influence decisions to initiate both MIDs *and* resolution demands as forms

of diversion, but it depends on whether domestic unrest is moderate or severe, and specifically the operationalization of the variable. Table 1 presents the results of a multinomial logistic regression model, with the conflict management strategy of maintaining the status quo as the base outcome. Figures 1, 2, and 3 present graphed first differences for different measures of moderate and severe political unrest respectively, holding all other variables at their mean or mode.

VARIABLES	<i>Model 1</i> Resolution Demand	<i>Model 1</i> MID
General Strikes	0.220*** (0.0733)	-0.0670 (0.0767)
Demonstrations	-0.0187 (0.0314)	-0.0316 (0.0274)
Govt Crises	-0.154* (0.0791)	-0.0957 (0.0763)
Purges	0.0224 (0.0733)	0.326*** (0.0568)
Riots	-0.0466 (0.0334)	0.0829*** (0.0259)
# of Past MIDs	0.415*** (0.0464)	0.360*** (0.0465)
Democracy	0.0266*** (0.00664)	-0.0167** (0.00676)
GDP Growth	0.00509 (0.00612)	0.000298 (0.00605)
Value/Salience	0.232 (0.162)	-1.082*** (0.132)
Power Ratio	-0.276 (0.361)	-0.621* (0.348)
Peace Years	-0.0145 (0.0186)	-0.126*** (0.0197)
Constant	-0.646* (0.350)	1.196*** (0.327)
Observations	2,782	2,782

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Table 1. Dispute Strategies and Domestic Unrest—1945–2007**

The most significant finding is that moderate factors of domestic unrest—as measured by general strikes—is more likely to lead to peaceful resolution attempts, as predicted by Hypothesis 1. Moderate domestic unrest using general strikes is statistically insignificant for MIDs, providing no rejection for this part of Hypothesis 1. The alternate measure of moderate domestic unrest—anti-government demonstrations—is not statistically significant for either dispute strategy. As shown in Table 1, the coefficient for higher levels of general strikes is significant and positively associated with the likelihood of resolution demands. As the number of general strikes increase from none to seven, the likelihood of resolution attempts

increase by 60 percent, as shown in Figure 1. When moving from none to just one general strike per year, resolution demands increase by 20 percent. These substantive findings about moderate domestic unrest as measured by general strikes provide support for the argument that frustrations with leaders and/or governments at a more moderate level are likely to influence leaders' decisions about foreign policy options not involving force. This finding helps to explain the particular timing of resolution attempts, suggesting that when leaders or governments experience moderate levels of domestic unrest, leaders are more likely to demand resolution, while there is no influence of general strikes on the likelihood of force.

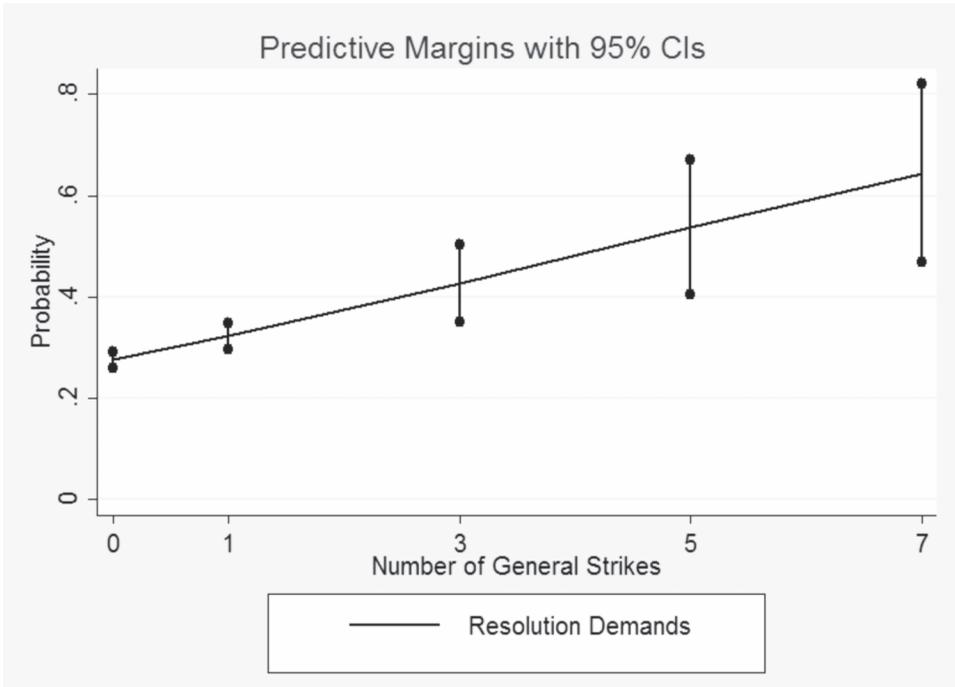


Figure 1.

In support of Hypothesis 2, the initiation of MID is found to be strongly influenced by two of the three measures of severe domestic unrest –purges and riots, both of which are statistically significant and positively correlated with force, while government crises is insignificant. As predicted, five purges in any given year increase the initiation of MID to 54 percent more likely compared to when no purges take place, shown in Figure 2. When using Jung's (2014) measure of domestic unrest as a robustness check,<sup>84</sup> the natural log of the sum of government crises and purges together, the results are similar. Using this measure, severe domestic unrest is positively related to the likelihood of MID, and substantively influential. Moving from the logged minimum of .7 to the logged maximum of 2.7 government crises and purges increases the likelihood of MID by 78 percent. As a further robustness check,

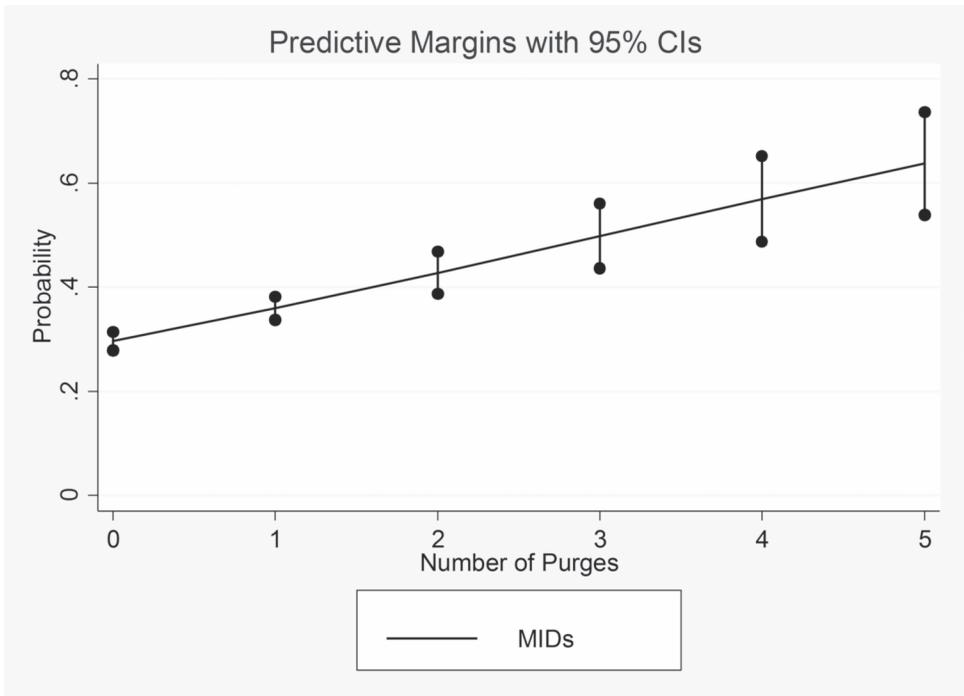


Figure 2.

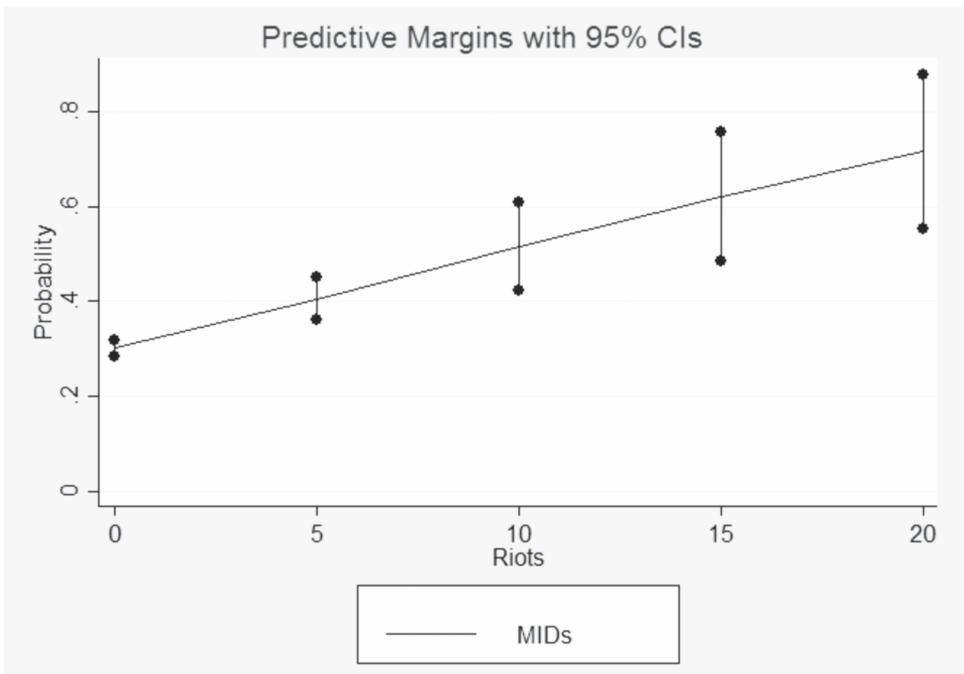


Figure 3.

I use Pickering and Kisangani's (2005) elite unrest variable (government crises and purges summed and squared)<sup>85</sup> and find a positive correlation with this index and MIDs. With these results, there is strong support for Hypothesis 2 using government crises and purges.

Using riots as a measure of severe domestic unrest also has a positive influence on the likelihood of MIDs. Compared to when there are no riots, the difference between 0 and 20 riots per year leads to a 58 percent increased probability of MIDs.<sup>86</sup> Even when there are only 5 riots per year, MIDs are more probable by 26 percent. The results from this model are consistent with evidence by Ghosn & Rhamey (2011), who show that riots increase the likelihood of escalation of strategic rivalries.<sup>87</sup> These findings are not surprising since riots involve violence and are therefore escalated to a higher scale of anti-government sentiment. Riots along with purges lack any statistical effect on the likelihood of resolution demands.<sup>88</sup> These combined findings indicate that we should expect to see initiation of MIDs as diversionary behavior when leaders are experiencing severe domestic unrest, but such unrest will not have any effect on the probability of resolution demands when it is measured by purges and riots. On the other hand, there is a statistically significant and negative relationship between government crises and resolution demands, indicating that this measure of severe domestic unrest is less likely to lead to resolution demands, consistent with Hypothesis 1.

Turning to the effects of control variables, GDP growth rates as a measure of economic vulnerability is statistically insignificant with both demands for resolution and initiation of MIDs. In other words, economic problems using low GDP growth rates have no apparent influence on these strategies. Consistent with previous research on diversionary force, political vulnerability factors are positively correlated with MIDs, but there is no consensus about the link of economic despair and diversionary behavior.

The coefficient for value of territory is statistically significant and negative for MIDs, indicating that valuable territory influences dispute strategies, in the expected direction of previous research.<sup>89</sup> As expected, the net democracy score of the challenger state is statistically significant and negatively correlated with MIDs. On the other hand, the challenger's net democracy score is statistically significant and positively related to resolution demands, also as expected. These results are very consistent with previous literature that suggests that leaders of democratic states involved in territorial disputes would be less likely to pursue MIDs as a conflict management strategy, and generally more likely to pursue peaceful means of dispute resolution. The results are also compatible with Pickering and Kisangani's (2005, 2010) results about mass unrest being affiliated with democracies and elite unrest being affiliated with authoritarian regimes.<sup>90</sup>

As expected, based on many previous findings about military capabilities, power ratio is statistically significant and negatively correlated with MIDs. Therefore, the higher the power asymmetry, the less likely MIDs will occur. Clearly and not surprisingly, relative power capabilities have a strong influence on the likelihood of force, which is consistent with most of the research on military power balance. Also

consistent with past research on the effect of challenger and target states being involved in past conflict, the number of MIDs the dyad experienced in past years is strongly and positively related to the probability of both demands for resolution and MIDs. Similarly, as expected, the number of peace years since the last armed conflict is also statistically significant and negatively correlated with MIDs. These findings support previous research about how repeated conflict is more likely the closer the time is to the most recent conflict. The number of peace years is statistically insignificant for demands for resolution.

## Conclusions

When leaders experience domestic vulnerability, foreign policy strategies that divert attention from domestic problems are attractive, so the study of diversion has interested scholars and policy makers for some time. Several questions about diversionary theory still exist, particularly the domestic conditions that lead to diversions and what constitutes diversionary behavior. This study has attempted to tackle both of these aspects of diversionary theory by answering two questions. First, does the level of domestic unrest influence diversionary behavior, and second, when diverting, are leaders more likely to pursue MIDs or another foreign policy strategy like demands for dispute resolution, or both?

Though diversionary theory has traditionally attempted to explain uses of force, including those in territorial disputes, the theory can also explain demands for peaceful resolution in territorial disputes. By removing a common assumption that diversionary behavior must involve use of force, the theory and findings suggest that foreign policy substitutability occurs when leaders pursue resolution demands in lieu of pursuing MIDs, depending on the particular conditions of domestic unrest. By accepting the logic of diversionary theory, but removing the assumption of only using force to attempt diversion, this study has concluded that domestically vulnerable leaders also can be likely to pursue resolution demands with experiencing moderate domestic unrest, and MIDs under conditions of severe domestic unrest. The findings also show that there is a negative relationship or no relationship between demands for resolution and severe domestic unrest, depending on the variable tested, nor is there any statistically significant relationship between moderate domestic unrest and MIDs.

There are three implications of this study. First, the findings provide further support for the notion of foreign policy substitutability, such that leaders have different options in foreign policy strategies in response to similar stimuli, in this case, domestic unrest. This means that force is not the only means used to divert domestic attention and though diversionary force theory is supported here, it is not the only strategy of diversion available to leaders. If leaders are more likely to pursue resolution demands under certain conditions, the implication is that the assumption of force as the only strategy in diversionary theory has been incorrect. The findings may also partly explain the difficulty that previous research has had in their attempts to find support for diversionary force.

Another implication is that the measure used for domestic unrest matters. Since the results of the models differ depending on which levels of domestic unrest are used in the models, and how they are operationalized, it is clear that specification is important. The varied outcomes in the primary model and robustness check models confirm that domestic unrest is multifaceted, particularly in regard to the selection of MID initiation as a conflict management strategy. The varied results in this study confirm that the discussion about which indicators of domestic vulnerability best influence diversionary behavior is still up for debate.

Last, domestic unrest should be considered as a key factor in understanding the variation in conflict management strategies. In addition to the well accepted findings about value or salience of territory and past history of MIDs, the results about domestic problems influencing territorial dispute strategies confirms previous research that domestic factors do indeed play an influential role in conflict management of these types of disputes. Recent research on territorial disputes has been more open to the idea that domestic factors like regime type, legal systems, and domestic accountability are influential on strategies of conflict management. This study has attempted to contribute to this genre of literature by providing a more carefully specified theory and models about domestic unrest and demonstrating that domestic vulnerability of leaders impacts conflict management strategies.

## Notes

1. I use the term “demand” for peaceful resolution attempts because when leaders of challenger states request that target states agree to a peaceful resolution method, they generally do so using rhetoric that comes across as a demand, not a friendly request. Leaders or government spokespersons typically issue such demands through public statements, news interviews, and speeches reported in the national press.

2. A territorial claim occurs when a government issues an official claim for sovereign rights to territory either claimed by another government, occupied already, or controlled by another state. The challenger state is the state that makes the territorial claim and remains as the challenger state throughout the years or decades of the dispute. The theory focuses on the domestic status of the challenger state specifically because it is the state that seeks a change in the status quo and is therefore generally more proactive in the territorial dispute, unlike the target state, which tends to prefer maintaining the status quo and control of the territory.

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60. Chiozza and Goemans, 2011.

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69. Banks, 2011.

70. Jung, 2014.

71. Banks, 2011.

72. Jung, 2014. I test government crises and purges as separate indicators of severe domestic unrest and as a robustness check, I replicate Jung's (2014) variable of domestic unrest, which is the natural log of the sum of these two factors.

73. Haynes (2017) uses a sum of riots, general strikes, and anti-government demonstrations as a measure of domestic unrest. Pickering and Kisangani (2005) use an index of general strikes, riots, and anti-government demonstrations for mass unrest and index of government crises and purges as a measure of elite unrest. Because I categorize riots as severe unrest, I do not use either of these indexes in the main model since they include riots as mass unrest or the equivalent of moderate unrest. Robustness checks using Pickering and Kisangani (2005)'s measures of mass unrest and elite unrest show that government crises and purges are positively correlated with MIDs in territorial disputes, while using Haynes (2017) measure of anti-government demonstrations, riots, and general strikes in a robustness check shows that purges are positively correlated with MIDs.

On the other hand, both of the summed measures that include riots are positively correlated with MIDAs as well, which is likely due to including riots in the measures. See Pickering and Kisangani, 2005. pp. 23–43 and Haynes, 2017.

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80. Todd L. Allee and Paul K Huth, “The Pursuit of Legal Settlements to Territorial Disputes,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 23(4) (2006), pp. 285–307, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07388940600972644>; Huth and Allee, 2002; Paul K. Huth, Sarah E. Croco, and Benjamin J. Appel, “Does International Law Promote the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes? Evidence from the Study of Territorial Conflicts since 1945,” *American Political Science Review* 105(2) (2011), pp. 415–436, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055411000062>; Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, “A Kantian System? Democracy and Third Party Conflict Resolution,” *American Journal of Political Science* 46(4) (2002), pp. 749–759, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3088431>; Sarah McLaughlin Mitchell and Paul Hensel, “International Institutions and Compliance with Agreements,” *American Journal of Political Science* 51(4) (2007), pp. 721–737, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00277.x>.

81. Daniel Jones, Stuart Bremer, and J. David Singer, “Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816–1992: Rationale, Coding Rules, and Empirical Patterns,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 15(2) (1996), pp. 163–213, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073889429601500203>.

82. Hensel, Mitchell, Sowers II, and Thyne, 2008, pp. 117–43.

83. David B. Carter and Curt S. Signorino, “Back to the Future: Modeling Time Dependence in Binary Data,” *Political Analysis* 18(3) (2010), pp. 271–292, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpq013>.

84. Jung, 2014, pp. 566–578.

85. Pickering and Kisangani, 2005.

86. The maximum number of riots per year is 55, but there are only four observations of these, making the frequency of this many riots very low.

87. Ghosn and Rhamey, 2011.

88. When riots are removed from the mass unrest summed variable used by Pickering and Kisangani (2005) and Haynes (2017), the results show that general strikes and demonstrations are not statistically significant with MIDAs. See Pickering and Kisangani 2005 and Kyle Haynes, “Diversionary Conflict: Demonizing Enemies or Demonstrating Competence?” *Conflict Management & Peace Science* 34(4) (2017), pp. 337–358, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894215593723>. This robustness check confirms that the inclusion of riots in the summed index of mass unrest changes the results from positively correlated with MIDAs to statistically insignificant.

89. Hensel and Mitchell, 2005, pp. 275–285.

90. Pickering and Kisangani, 2005.

## Biographical Note

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