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Perilous Polities? Regime Transition and Conflict 1950-2000

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PERILOUS POLITIES?
REGIME TRANSITION AND CONFLICT 1950-2000

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
the Department of Political Science

by

Ursula Daxecker

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ABSTRACT

While evidence continues to mount that democracies resort to military force reluctantly, the transition to democracy may in fact be a dangerous and conflictual one. With the eyes of the world now focused squarely on democratization, a reassessment of the relationship between regime change and inter-state conflict seems fitting. To date, the evidence remains mixed. No clear consensus has emerged on whether regime transition either increases or decreases conflict propensities. The research here builds on models of democratization and conflict by including a more fully specified vector of conflict variables and by using an updated set of cases. Further, interaction effects are explored to assess whether factors such as power or contiguity differentially impact the conflict propensity of transitioning states. Employing a generalized estimating equation with logit and poisson specifications, the results show that change towards democracy decreases the probability of involvement in militarized inter-state disputes and wars. However, uneven or “rocky” transitions are found to increase conflict likelihood.

Introduction

In recent years, many Western democracies have adopted strategies in their foreign policies that emphasize the promotion of democracy. The fostering of democracy is an explicit goal of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy since the early 1990s. Democracy is a requirement for countries to be considered for European Union membership. Thus, the Union plays a major role in the shaping of the domestic policies of the Eastern European candidate countries. In addition, the EU presses democracy in its external assistance programs which considers progress in implementing institutional reforms for human rights, democracy, the rule of law and good governance as an element in defining allocations for individual countries. Similarly, the Bush administration lists the promotion of democracy as a strategic goal of U.S. foreign policy. The main reason to push the advancement of democracy is the belief of policy makers that a more democratic world would also be a more peaceful one. As the High Representative of the European Union, Javier Solana, puts it: "Our common mission is to defend and expand the boundaries of stable, durable and peaceful democracy; to share with others the rights and opportunities we enjoy."¹

This optimistic expectation shared by Western policymakers has its origin at least in part in the findings of academic research. There is empirical evidence that democracies do not fight each other (Bremer 1992). Increasingly, research shows that democracies generally are less involved in wars than autocracies, although the findings are somewhat mixed. Gleditsch and

¹ Speech held at a meeting of the Foreign Policy Association in New York, May 7th 2003.
<http://ue.eu.int/pressdata/EN/discours/75674.pdf>

Hegre (1997) show that after 1945, democracies are less likely to initiate wars. They argue that the variation in level of democracy over time may cause the lack of an overall consistent pattern at the nation-state level. If democracies do engage in wars, they tend to be the winners because they select the conflicts they get involved in more carefully. Democratic leaders want to remain in office and be reelected; therefore, they are reluctant to engage in war unless they are sure of winning (Bueno de Mesquita 1995, 1999). Reiter and Stam (1998) show that democratic states fight with higher military effectiveness in terms of logistics, initiative and leadership.

Additionally, the last decades have been evidenced by an increasing number of democracies in the world. Among the first to make the transition to democracy were the southern European countries Spain, Portugal and Greece in the 1970s. These were then followed by a number of democratic transitions in Latin America starting in the late 1970s. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequent democratization in Eastern European countries mark the peak in these developments. Combined with the empirical findings of democracies' foreign policy behavior, this third wave of democratization should be a reason for expectations of an increasingly peaceful world (Huntington 1991).²

The problem with this inference is, however, that the road that leads to democracy, the process of democratization, may not be a peaceful one. Transitions are periods of great instability. Old elites are threatened in their positions and may resort to violence to secure their leadership. Opposition movements may not yet have established effective control and thus be

² However, Huntington considers potential setbacks to the recent wave of democratization. He argues that lack of past democratic experience, non-Western orientation, and insufficient economic progress could lead to reversals (Huntington, pp. 290-316).

subject to challenges. Transitions are processes involving high levels of uncertainty (O'Donnell 1986). Snyder (2000) argues that democratization may unleash ethnic conflicts because elites use nationalism as a catalyst in the face of weakened institutions. Several studies show that transitional processes indeed increase the likelihood of violent conflict (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002). This would mean that the foreign policy goals of today's Western leaders could imply high risks in the short term. Others, however, challenge these findings and do not find a relationship between regime change and conflict (Thompson and Tucker 1997). The nature of the transition process was neglected in early research. Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000) show that "rocky", uneven transitions increase the likelihood of war (irregardless of whether it is autocratization or democratization), whereas smooth transitions to democracy decrease the likelihood of war involvement. It seems, then, that the relationship remains indeterminate and more evidence is still required to fully understand the complex nature of these processes.

This study re-examines the process of regime transition. Is democratization (and autocratization) related to interstate conflict?³ And, what effect might democratization have on conflict or war likelihood? Furthermore, why do some transitions result in violent interstate conflict, while others pass peaceful and smooth? These are the basic questions this paper addresses. As policy makers actively support democratization, the answers to these questions are obviously pertinent. A more complete understanding of regime transition will hopefully enable political elites to craft policies that encourage a smooth path towards democracy.

This paper is an empirical study of the relationship between regime transition and violent interstate conflict from 1950-2000. Expanding on earlier research by Mansfield and Snyder (1995, 2002) and Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000), the impact of regime transition on conflict

³ I focus on interstate conflict in this paper. However, it would also be interesting to investigate the impact of regime change on civil conflict and how these civil conflicts externalize.

involvement is reexamined, but with a more updated set of cases and a more fully specified model of interstate conflict. Further, rather than simply assess whether a relationship exists between regime transitions and conflict, this research investigates the specific factors pushing transitioning states toward or away from violent conflict. This analysis will provide a more nuanced understanding of regime change and foreign policy decision-making.

Democracy, Transition, and Conflict

While evidence for a democratic peace remains robust to recent theoretical and empirical challenges, transitions to and away from democracy potentially tell a different story. After the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, violent conflict occurred in several of the 15 newly independent states. Georgia, for example, made some progress toward democracy but is nevertheless involved in violent conflict in its regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The lack of developed institutions and democratic values among the population, coupled with a rapid expansion of the electorate led to the election of a strong nationalist president. Gamsakhurdia seized dictatorial powers and propagated exclusionary nationalism favoring Georgians as the former titular nation.⁴ He was overthrown in a coup by his successor Shevardnadze in 1992. Although the country under Shevardnadze made progress toward democracy on paper, the record is at best mixed in its dealings with ethnic minorities.⁵ He continued to effectively suppress Georgia's regionally concentrated minorities. Violent clashes in Abkhazia were followed by Russian intervention which ended in a defeat of the Georgians. Thus, newly democratizing states might not dispose of the same features as stable, mature democracies do. The democratic norms and procedures existing in consolidated democracies are not yet established. Regime transitions involve great levels of uncertainty which may provide incentives for political elites to appeal to nationalism to ensure popular support. This evidence, while admittedly anecdotal, suggests that polities in transition face a set of challenges rarely encountered by more stable democratic states.

⁴ This is linked to the fact that the movement for Georgian independence was based on Georgian exclusionary nationalist ideas and excluded other minorities from participation (Jones 1997).

⁵ Georgia scores a five on the combined polity score since 1992 which would suggest a rather democratic regime. However, many researchers would fundamentally disagree with this coding (Jones 1997: 515).

As such, a more complete understanding of the transition process will undoubtedly help explain the relationship between domestic political institutions and interstate conflict.

To be sure, the evidence for conflictual regime transitions remains mixed. Controversy swirls around theoretical specification, concept operationalization, and statistical estimation. More pointedly, though, models of regime change largely fail to account for even the most obvious conflict variables. Not only should models of transition look to the democratic peace for influences on foreign policy decision-making, but models of transition also must incorporate factors that clearly contribute to conflict occurrence.

Three areas of research are particularly important for this research question. When looking at democratization, one has to consider the work on the democratic peace. There is strong and consistent evidence that democracies do not fight each other. However, immense scholarly work shows increasingly more ways in which regime type impacts a state's conflict behavior at the monadic and systemic level of analysis. Second, how do these results relate to the foreign policy behavior of transitioning states? Does the democratic peace extend to democratizing states as well? Some work suggests that democratization increases the risk of war, whereas other research shows that the specific nature of the transition process impacts its conflict propensity. Third, as conflict is the dependent variable in the model used here, it is important to take into account the findings of the conflict literature. The first two strands of research often neglect these by not or insufficiently controlling for variables such as power, contiguity, satisfaction with the status quo or other conflict variables.

The Liberal Peace

Liberal ideology grounds the democratic peace. What defines democracy, basic freedoms of speech, press, and religion, coupled with elected and accountable leaders and a general tolerance for different viewpoints, explains expectations of non-violence and mutual compromise between democratic nations. Political leaders in democracies rely on the consent of civil society, a fact emphasized in the political philosophy of Kant: “If the consent of the citizens is required to decide that war should be declared, nothing is more natural than that they would be very cautious in commencing such a poor game, decreeing for themselves all the calamities of war” (Kant 1957[1795]: 13).

Scientific research has corroborated these expectations. Democracies do not fight war against each other (Levy 1988, Bremer 1980, Bremer 1992, Maoz and Abdolali 1989, Oneal and Russett 1999). Being an empirical finding, many scholars drew on classic liberal arguments to theoretically account for this relationship. Despite diverse realist and statistical challenges, this finding proved robust and consistent.⁶ Recent extensions also confirmed the validity of this finding for militarized interstate disputes, showing that democratic pairs do not fight each other (Russett and Oneal 2001). Besides, democratic leaders select the conflicts they get involved in more carefully since they are accountable for the decision to use force and thus, they win a disproportionate share of the wars they fight (Bueno de Mesquita 1995). Democratic elites know that their position depends on successful policy, such, they are also inclined to shift extra resources into the war effort. This also increases the probability to win wars (Bueno de Mesquita

⁶ One example is the finding by Maoz and Abdolali (1989) that democratic states get involved in war with non-democratic states as often as other regimes (Maoz and Abdolali 1989). This result, however, may be due to the operationalization of the regime type variable and the applied statistical testing. Maoz and Abdolali (1989) use simple correlations and chi-square tests which may not be sufficient.

et al. 1999).⁷ Finally, jointly democratic dyads involved in disputes choose more peaceful methods of settlement than other pairs of states. (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1997, Dixon 1994, Mousseau 1998, Raymond 1994)

Studies at the systemic level translate the findings at the dyadic level to the international system as a whole. Gleditsch and Hegre (1997) find some support (though not conclusive) for a curvilinear relationship between the level of democracy and the occurrence of war. Mitchell et al. (1999) find evidence for a negative relationship between democracy and war as the percentage of democracies increases after 1945; however, the opposite effect is present for the period immediately after World War I. The authors argue that it may just take time for democratic norms to develop. Recent research suggests that indeed democratic norms seem to become more prevalent as the international system gets more democratic. Mitchell (2002) finds that as the proportion of democracies increases, the likelihood of third-party intervention into peaceful settlements among non-democracies increases as well. Thus, the growing number of democracies in the international system influences the dispute settlement behavior of both democracies and non-democracies.⁸

Less evidence for the democratic peace proposition has been found at the monadic, the nation-state level. Initially, studies focused on the frequency of conflicts for the different regime types and did not find a significant difference between democratic and autocratic states.⁹ As

⁷ Reiter and Stam (1998) further confirm these findings by showing that democracies fight more effectively because of better initiative, as well as superior leadership.

⁸ Although this result does not necessarily show that non-democracies behave more democratically because of spreading norms. Mitchell finds that third-party intervention in peaceful settlements becomes more likely for both democracies and autocracies. First, this may be due to a general increase in third-party interventions over the studied time span; second, we do not know whether this increase can be attributed to the changed behavior of the autocratic states (as the author suggests) or to the different foreign policy behavior of the increasing number of democracies (as other democratic peace research might argue).

⁹ Morgan and Campbell (1991) found that that high degrees of political constraint on the executive (as in democratic countries) reduce the likelihood of war involvement for major powers. No support, however, was found for the same relationship among minor powers.

Macmillan points out, this weakens theories on the dyadic findings because they fail “to explain why liberal states should be peace prone only in relations with other liberal states” (MacMillan 2003: 233). A shift in scholarly attention from a mere occupation with frequency to more specific analyses of the willingness and circumstances in which democratic states fight wars puts this “separate peace” position further into question. Rousseau et al. (1996) find support for the contention that “democracies are less likely to initiate crises with all other types of states.” Gleditsch and Hegre (1997) find that democracies are generally very unlikely to engage in war except as in the situation of protracted high-tension disputes.

Explanations for the peace proneness of democratic states focus on norms, institutions or signaling arguments. Normative or cultural arguments emphasize the emergence of liberal norms within democracies that translate into a different foreign policy behavior. Decisionmakers “will try to follow the same norms of conflict resolution as they have developed within the domestic political process” (Russett 1996: 96). In addition, democratic leaders expect the same tendency toward peaceful methods of conflict resolution by other liberal democracies, thus uncertainty between democratic states is greatly reduced. The second part of the argument suggests a dyadic democratic peace, whereas the first part implies that democratic states in general are more peace prone. The normative theory, however, fails to explain the extent of a change in the foreign policy behavior of democratic states. It remains unclear if changed behavior pertains to other democracies only or to non-democracies as well.

Institutional explanations, as put forward by Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999) criticize the norms argument as being ad-hoc, inductive and unable to explain wars fought by democracies against substantially weaker states. Bueno de Mesquita et al. stress the importance of selection effects that make democratic leaders unlikely to engage in war unless they are not sure of

winning. Democratic elites depend upon successful policy, which in consequence makes them unattractive targets. Yet, if democratic leaders use force and perform poorly, they might resort to violence to divert from unsuccessful policies. Institutional theory centers on electoral accountability as a constraint for conflict prone behavior.

A third strand of literature focuses on signaling and audience costs as factors limiting conflictual behavior, suggesting that “democracies should be able to signal their intentions to other states more credibly and clearly than authoritarian states can” (Fearon 1994: 577). All three theoretical accounts limit their analysis to stable, mature democracies. Yet, the ability of nascent democratic institutions to serve as constraints on decision-makers and to effectively confirm the credibility of tacit signaling may be significantly undermined in transitioning polities.

Transitioning States

The findings on the democratic peace stand in partial contrast to the findings on democratization and war. Mansfield and Snyder (1995, 2002a, 2002b), for example, conclude that whatever is true for consolidated democratic regimes does not hold for states in transition to democracy. Using Polity II data (Gurr 1989), Mansfield and Snyder (1995) find transitioning states to be more war prone than stable states. Surprisingly, they observe transitions towards democracy to be particularly conflictual, although states undergoing high change from democracy to autocracy have the highest probability of war involvement. Mansfield and Snyder (1995) distinguish between democracies, anocracies, and autocracies by establishing thresholds for these regime types. This operationalization is problematic, especially since anocracy is an insufficiently defined and rather obscure construct. Also, the use of ordinary logistic regression does not take into account the nature of the data under analysis which may lead to biased and

inefficient estimation. Omitted variable bias, however, arguably presents the most significant limitation of their model. The authors fail to introduce variables that control for rival explanations, such as major power status, capabilities, contiguity or foreign policy preferences.

Thompson and Tucker (1997a) replicate the study by Mansfield and Snyder (1995), but cannot confirm Mansfield and Snyder's (1995) positive relationship between democratization and war. They criticize Mansfield and Snyder's application of chi-square tests since it is "equivalent to the regression of analog of testing whether a set of parameters is equal to zero" (Thompson and Tucker 1997a: 442). Thus, a significant result merely indicates if their parameters (autocratization, democratization and stable states) together are related to war, it does not allow one to conclude which one of the three is related to war. Applying more appropriate statistical tests, Thompson and Tucker (1997a) find strong evidence that democratization is independent from war occurrence, whereas "autocratization, compared to no regime change, is significantly related to war involvement" (Thompson and Tucker 1997a: 445).

In response to critiques, Mansfield and Snyder (2002a, 2002b) reanalyze their data, now differentiating between complete and incomplete transitions to autocracy or democracy. They find that states in the incomplete stage of a transition to democracy have heightened conflict propensities. However, a similar relationship between incomplete autocratic transitions and war is not observed. Theorizing that the degree of concentrated domestic authority might in part explain the relationship between polity transition and war, Mansfield and Snyder (2002a) test for interaction effects. Testing for interactive effects between the four regime change dummy variables and the degree of concentration of domestic authority (2002a), the results indicate that incomplete democracies possessing weakly concentrated domestic authorities are especially war

prone.¹⁰ These relationships hold up even after controlling for major power status, material capabilities, and the presence of a civil war. The major power and the capabilities variable are positive and highly significant. Further, Mansfield and Snyder (2002a) correct for methodological weaknesses, such as panel heteroskedasticity by using robust standard errors and introduce a natural spline function with three knots to account for temporal dependence.¹¹

Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000) develop more refined measures of polity change.¹² Rather than establish categorical distinctions for polity change, which will always be arbitrary, Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000) instead use the change scores themselves. Using continuous measures for polity change and variance, plus a dummy distinction for direction of change, Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000) find a significant and negative relationship between overall change towards democracy and conflict. This suggests that democratization decreases conflict propensities, although this result does not hold if democratization occurs during an ongoing war, which provides some support for the dangerous democratization hypothesis (Gleditsch and Ward 2000). Interestingly, though, direction of change is positively related to war, indicating that changes towards democracy are dangerous. This result arguably contradicts their other finding that larger changes toward democracy are associated with smaller probabilities of war involvement. These contradictory results may be due to the fact that direction of change and change in democracy scores both measure direction (since change is coded from -20 to 20,

¹⁰ It is interesting that the authors use Polity III data for the regime change variables, but include a variable from the Polity II data to interact the degree of authority concentration with the change variables. Thompson and Tucker (1997b) note that “empirically, the concentration variable is more characteristic of autocracies than democracies” (466). Thus, states with the same polity scores receive higher values in Mansfield and Snyder’s interactions if they are more autocratic. In addition, results are not presented without the interaction terms, which makes the interpretation of the main effects difficult.

¹¹ However, their modeling choices are not sufficiently explained. In their results, the authors present a base model, a model for country-specific fixed effects, a model controlling for regime type and a model excluding major wars. It is not clear what a fixed effects model should do for an analysis that already corrects for temporal and spatial dependency.

¹² The 1998 article does not employ any control variables. They include factors to account for contiguous effects of democratization on conflict as well as major power status and peace years in their 2000 article. Interestingly, the authors use one tailed tests in their model.

direction from -1 to 1). Gleditsch and Ward (1998) further observe uneven or “rocky” transitions to be especially war prone. Countries that have high variance in change scores show increased conflict probabilities.¹³ This seems to be consistent with Mansfield and Snyder’s (1995) earlier finding that large change from democracy to autocracy significantly increases the likelihood of conflict likelihood.

All of the above mentioned studies are conducted at the monadic level. Dyadic studies of regime transition remain rare. Oneal and Russett (1999) investigate the relationship between regime change and militarized interstate disputes for politically relevant dyads from 1950-1985. They authors test for the impact of change toward a coherent democracy (and autocracy respectively) on conflict and do not find a significant relationship.¹⁴ To measure change more gradually, Oneal and Russett determine if a country changed toward democracy (or autocracy) over a one year lag, which does not give significant results, although this might be due to the short time lag used. In a replication of this study, Mansfield and Snyder (2002b) use a different operationalization of regime change but keep Oneal and Russett’s (1999) control variables.¹⁵ They assess the impact of incomplete and complete transition processes on MIDs at the dyadic level. In contrast to the findings of Oneal and Russett, the authors show that incomplete democratization in one or both of the countries comprising the dyad increases the likelihood of a MID. This is consistent with their earlier, monadic findings on democratization and war (see Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002a), but contrasts with other findings of the (dyadic) democratic

¹³ Gleditsch and Ward (2000) differentiate between conflict onset and ongoing conflicts, and show that high variance increases probabilities of remaining in ongoing wars, but not conflict onset itself.

¹⁴ Democratization is defined as a change in polity scores from clearly autocratic (<-6) to clearly democratic (>6) persisting over five years, autocratization as change from democratic (>6) to autocratic (<-6), lasting five years as well. The authors admit that this operationalization is problematic since very few countries experience such large changes that then remain stable, and it furthermore excludes all changes in the in-between categories.

¹⁵ Mansfield and Snyder (2002b) construct four dummy variables for complete and incomplete transitions to democracy or autocracy and use one-tailed tests for these variables, expecting a positive relationship. This is questionable since one might expect that complete transition to democracy might decrease MID likelihood.

peace, since they do not find a significant relationship for complete democratization or autocratization and MIDs.¹⁶ Diehl and Goertz (2000) do show that rivalries in transition, regardless of the direction of polity change, are especially war prone. Yet, the fact that they look at countries that already are in some form of conflictual relationship combined with the low number of cases limits the generalizability of this result.¹⁷

Evidence on the relationship between regime transition and conflict thus remains mixed. Some findings show no relationship between regime change and conflict (Thompson and Tucker 1997, Oneal and Russett 1997), while others observe positive or negative relationships between democratization and conflict (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002a, 2002b, Gleditsch and Ward 1998, 2000). Some evidence points to the specific nature of the transition process as a determinant of conflict such as high variance in regime scores (Gleditsch and Ward 1998, 2000).

A Conflict Model

Most of the research on the relation between democratization and conflict suffers from omitted variable bias. The dependent variable in the above mentioned research is conflict, but scholars have often failed to control for variables other than ones directly linked to the transition. It is argued here that factors that are known to cause conflict must be included to build a more fully specified model of democratization and conflict. The systematic, scientific study of the causes of war and interstate conflict goes back to the works of Richardson (1960a) and Wright (1964). Since then, evidence identifying empirical patterns that are strongly related to the onset

¹⁶ As the democratic peace suggests, one should expect recently consolidated democracies to be significantly less war-prone, and consolidating autocracies to be more war prone. Since Mansfield and Snyder (2002) conduct only one-tailed tests and expect the relationship for all regime changes to be positive, the threshold for a negative and significant relationship between consolidated democracies and conflict likelihood is substantially lowered.

¹⁷ 46 out of 202 rivalries were in transition.

of war has mounted considerably, suggesting that power, contiguity, alliance, preferences and regime type are important variables related to conflict likelihood.

Realist scholars claim that power is the main explanatory variable determining conflict. Realism holds that the anarchical character of the international system leads state to pursue power to ensure their survival. Since the international system lacks a “government over governments”, states can never be certain about another state’s intentions (Mearsheimer 2001: 30). The maintenance of territorial integrity and sovereignty are the primary goals of states, which, coupled with uncertainty, drives states to maximize power. The causes of war, then, lie in the distribution of power in the international system (Mearsheimer 2001). Analyzing the frequency of wars and battles, Wright (1964) shows that major powers are more conflict prone than small states. Using the Correlates of War database, Small and Singer (1970, 1982) find that major powers are much more likely to engage in violent conflict than minor powers. Employing a composite index consisting of military expenditures, military personnel, the amount of energy production, iron and steel production, urban population and total population, Bremer (1980) shows that a country’s national capabilities have a strong and positive effect on the occurrence of interstate war. In a study reviewing more than 500 quantitative studies on interstate conflict, Geller and Singer (1998) confirm the importance of power status for war likelihood.

In addition, scholars have pointed to the salience of contiguity as a factor for conflict proneness. There is strong evidence of a positive correlation between the number of borders and conflict involvement (Most and Starr 1976, Holsti 1991, Gochman 1990a, Vasquez 1993, 1995, 2000). Violent conflict is “much more frequent between contiguous states than non-contiguous states” (Vasquez 1993:128). According to Vazquez (1993), more than 80% of all interstate wars since 1648 and two-thirds of all militarized interstate disputes have been fought between

contiguous states. Yet, the theoretical arguments explaining this relationship differ considerably. Richardson (1960b) argues that proximity simply provides the opportunity for conflict. States that share borders thus have more physical opportunities for war because of short distances. Vasquez (1995) criticizes that proximity (the number of neighbors) is a relative constant, which in consequence “cannot be the cause of something fairly infrequent, like war” (Vasquez 1995: 280). Proximity provides the opportunity for war, but does not explain when and why war occurs.

A second, but related argument centers on increased interaction opportunities for neighboring countries because of regional proximity. Conflicts of interests are expected to occur more often between neighbors than states that are far apart from each other. Gochman (1990) therefore predicts that technological innovations will diminish the impact of the number of borders on war involvement, but finds that the number of borders is associated with even more interstate conflict after 1870. In addition, increased interaction opportunities have facilitated economic cooperation which has been shown to reduce conflict likelihood (Oneal and Russett 1999, 2001). This is another flaw in the interactions argument.

The third approach, as represented by Vasquez (1993, 1995, 2000) argues that underlying territorial issues cause contiguous states go to war with each other. Territorial disputes are likely to arise among bordering states and unless these issues are resolved, contiguous states will be far more conflict prone than others. Vasquez and Henehan (2001) categorize militarized interstate disputes for different types of disputes involved (territory, policy, regime, and other) and show that although territorial disputes comprise only 35% of the sample, they produce 55% of the wars. This indicates that unresolved territorial claims result in much higher war proneness than

other types of disputes. This argument is compelling since it explains cooperation as well as conflict among neighboring states.¹⁸

Power transition theory stresses the importance of status quo evaluations on the likelihood of interstate conflict. Dissatisfaction with the status quo, especially for great powers, is expected to increase the likelihood of violent interstate conflict (Organski 1958, Bueno de Mesquita 1975, Organski and Kugler 1980, Kugler and Lemke 1996, 2000). Bueno de Mesquita (1975) developed a measure of foreign policy preference similarity that captures states' satisfaction with the international status quo, Kendall's τ_b .¹⁹ Focusing on the dyadic level, subsequent research demonstrated that status quo evaluations are powerful predictors for wars (Kim 1991, 1992, 1996). Evidence shows that states that are dissatisfied with the international status quo are more likely use force than states that are satisfied (Rousseau et al. 1996). Gartzke (1998, 2000) argues that the findings of the democratic peace are a result of preference similarity among democracies. One important weakness of measures of preference similarity is the emphasis on the dyadic level of analysis. The monadic variant measures preference similarity with the current system leader, which means that all countries are compared to the most powerful state in the system. This is not a very sophisticated measure since one might expect that there are regional powers that have also an impact on preference similarity. For example, relations with Russia are still very important for the former Soviet Union republics. Russia's military intervention in Abkhazia could be taken as one example in which preference dissimilarity in a regional context has contributed to a militarized interstate dispute.

¹⁸ Recently, concern with the data used to measure contiguity has grown. Gleditsch and Ward (2000, 2001) note that the COW contiguity data, which is the most commonly used in the literature, lacks a substantial documentation and develop a new dataset (Gleditsch and Ward 2001).

¹⁹ Signorino and Ritter (1999) point to weaknesses in Bueno de Mesquita's τ_b measure and develop an alternative measure of the similarity of foreign policy positions, S.

The conflict literature has so far failed to control for the effects of regime change on conflict and for possible moderating effects of regime change on conflict variables such as power or contiguity. Although much research on conflict controls for regime type, the impact of regime change is usually neglected. Most research assumes that states are stable over time, a proposition that might be questionable. Internal instability such as a regime transition might increase conflict likelihood. In addition, transitioning states might show different conflict behavior than stable states, which can be tested through the use of interaction effects.

The model developed here includes a nation's capabilities, satisfaction with the status quo and contiguity as explanatory variables, and combines them with others that are genuinely related to the transition process. Through the use of interaction variables, this research also aims to refine models on conflict that do not consider a state's instability as a factor. The following section discusses two cases of regime transitions in the Ukraine and Georgia. The focus will be placed on the impact of the transition on foreign policy behavior, but also take other factors into account.

Illustrative Cases in the Former Soviet Union: Ukraine and Georgia

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 obliged all union republics to contemplate independence, regime change, economic reform and nation-building all at the same time. Each former republic began the process of regime transition at the same time as it initiated the development of a foreign policy. Two of these former republics will be examined: the Ukraine and Georgia. Both demonstrate that the process of regime transition influenced foreign policy decision-making. Yet, I will also show that other factors shaping foreign policy, such as power considerations, neighbors, and preference similarity have to be taken into account as well.

Ukraine

The Ukraine was one of the economically most productive and strategically important Soviet republics. In addition, a large part of the Soviet military was stationed in the Ukraine. The Russian Black Sea fleet was located in the Crimea, a region that had been transferred to the Ukraine only in 1954. According to the 1989 Soviet census, 73% of the 52 million people in the Ukraine identified themselves as Ukrainian, 22% as ethnically Russian, and 1% as Belorussians and Jews (Laitin 2001: 843). However, the politics of Russification and the long-term union with Russia (especially in Central and Eastern Ukraine) led to the emergence of multiple identities among the population (Kuzio 2000b: 149).²⁰ Many Ukrainians do not perceive themselves as

fundamentally distinct from Russians with whom they share a similar language, culture and religious tradition (Diuk 2001:58). A split runs more along regional lines with a stronger emphasis on national identity and a distinct heritage in Western Ukraine, caused by the Habsburg heritage of these regions and their later incorporation into the USSR.

Regime Transition

The Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986 on Ukrainian soil, combined with signs of perestroika and glasnost from Moscow, created a climate in which Ukrainian independence and regime change became an issue among intellectuals and other significant parts of the population. The People's Movement for Restructuring, Rukh, was founded in 1989 and emphasized ideas of Ukrainian identity. Rukh supported democratization, linguistic renewal and economic autonomy from Russia, although initially within a renewed Soviet Union (Abdelal 2002:468). The 1990 parliamentary elections were the first elections in which parties other than the Communists could compete, although other parties had only one month to campaign and were not represented in all districts. The Communist Party won the clear majority, and only 25% of the seats went to the new democratic bloc that was sympathetic to the ideas of Rukh (Motyl and Krawchenko 1997: 248).

The inability of parliament speaker Vladimir Ivashko to hold back the unfolding national movement led to the elevation of Leonid Kravchuk to this position.²¹ Former Ideological Secretary Kravchuk, however, realized that an independent state would offer more opportunities for Ukrainians to gain power than a Russophile, centralized Soviet Union. Against expectations, "he became one of the most forthright defenders of Ukrainian sovereignty – the only position, as he no doubt realized, that permitted him to retain power, keep the conservatives and Gorbachev

at bay, and continue to court the nationalists” (Motyl and Krawchenko 1997: 250). Rukh’s ideas appealed to Kravchuk and soft liners in the CP as it had “at its core the attainment of statehood for the Ukrainian people, whom Rukh carefully defined in non-ethnic terms that permitted Russians, Jews and others to take part in and support its cause” (ibid). Kravchuk was thus able to satisfy demands for sovereignty by nationalist groups as well as to provide an incentive for soft liners among Communists to follow his lead.

The decisive moment for Ukrainian independence came with the August 1991 hardliner coup in Moscow. Kravchuk issued a declaration of independence contingent on a referendum to be held in December 1991. In a simultaneous referendum on independence and a presidential election in December, Ukrainians supported independence at a rate of 90.3 % and elected Kravchuk as president. Kravchuk appealed to both communists and nationalist democrats as he opposed an economic shock reform similar to Russia and employed a civic, inclusive form of nationalism (Braumoeller 1997). Citizenship was offered to all people living in the Ukraine’s territory when the Nationality Act was passed in 1991. However, independence caused an executive and administrative void in the country. The parliament was the only Ukraine-based institution inherited by the Soviet Union. The office of the President was institutionalized through an annex to the 1978 Soviet Constitution. This resulted in a Parliament and a Presidency that were quite independent, none of which had the powers to dismiss the other. The 1994 parliamentary elections led to a victory for a socialist-communist majority that gradually shifted in favor of both economic and political reform. Kravchuk was defeated by former Communist Leonid Kuchma in the 1994 presidential elections. This can be taken as a sign for the functioning of the democratic process, since the increasingly unpopular Kravchuk was replaced through

democratic means (Kravchuk 1999: 165). It was only in 1996 the Ukraine adopted a new constitution, being the last former Soviet republic to adopt a new constitution.

The most important aspect about the Ukraine's regime transitions is the fact that it was negotiated among moderates in the opposition and soft liners in the former elite. This certainly slowed down the process of democratization but avoided clashes among old and new political leaders. Kuzio calls this a "negotiated transition", in which "counterelites and former ruling elites block out extremists on both sides" (Kuzio 1999: 11). Such, the Ukraine made very slow, but consistent and relatively smooth progress toward democracy. In addition, the pact among elites allowed for relative stability. Institutions remained largely unchanged over the first couple of years in independence. Stability and slow but steady progress might have been interpreted as positive signals by other foreign actors.

Ukrainian Foreign Policy after 1991

The Ukraine's definition of its future relationship with Russia was the most crucial task in the first years after independence. In addition, the Ukraine had to define its position in the international system. Kravchuk pursued a policy that avoided alienating Russia but insisted on the Ukraine's sovereignty and independence. The declaration of neutrality passed by the parliament in 1991 must be seen in this light, as it was mainly aimed to divert Moscow's fear of a strong pro-Western and pro-NATO orientation of the Ukraine (Kuzio 2000). Cooperation with Russia, however, was based on very selective principles. For example, the Ukraine became a founding participant of the new established CIS, but only on the basis of its sovereignty. The Ukraine cooperated with Russia in energy matters (mainly because of its dependence on Russia

in this sector), but refused to join the CIS military bloc and the Belorussian-Russian union, referring to its neutral status (Chudowsky 2002: 27).

The greatest conflict potential with Russia involved the status of the Crimea, a region mainly populated by Russians and transferred to the Ukraine only in 1954.²² After independence, the Ukrainian government secured the Crimea its status as an autonomous republic.²³ Nevertheless, Crimea declared its independence in 1992, enacted its own constitution and stated reunification with Russia as its goal. In 1994, Yuri Meshkov, the leader of the popular Crimean movement, was elected President and established his movement as the ruling political party (Kuzio and Meyer 1999: 300).²⁴ This finally prompted the Ukrainian government to take action. Kuchma annulled the constitution and brought the region under direct control from Kiev.²⁵ Russia, however, did not intervene in this conflict given its engagement in Chechnya. Recognizing Crimean demands for independence would have stated a precedent for other regions such as Chechnya that were also struggling for independence.²⁶

Ukraine's nuclear weapons involved a sensitive issue in which the country had to deal with the United States and Russia, as the United States favored the deployment of nuclear weapons in Russia only. Kravchuk used the country's nuclear weapons as a means to put pressure on Russia and the West and demanded certain conditions for their removal. More than once, however, the Ukrainian parliament refused to sign agreements made between Kravchuk, Russia and the United States and forced him to continue negotiations. These long, protracted negotiations reflect confusion over foreign policy responsibilities in the years immediately independence, but also underline the willingness of both the legislature and the executive to resolve such conflicts on the bargaining table (D'Anieri 1999: 98). After economic guarantees from the West and security guarantees from other nuclear powers were made, the parliament and

the president finally agreed to remove all its nuclear weapons in a tripartite statement with Russia and the United States in 1994 (Motyl and Krawchenko 1997: 261). This agreement improved the international status of the Ukraine and opened the door for Ukrainian membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1995.²⁷ Power considerations drove this development for both the Ukraine and NATO: For the Ukraine, membership involved important security guarantees against Russian interference; for NATO, it increased security through the extension of its sphere of influence to a strategically important region (Kuzio 2000a). The mere Ukrainian threat of full NATO membership, then, was enough to convince Russia's President Boris Yeltsin to sign a treaty stating the inviolability of Ukraine's borders in 1997.

The Ukraine's successful balancing in its relations with Russia and the West depended on several factors: First, the Ukraine's slow progress toward democracy, coupled with a centrist government enjoying wide political support, increased its credibility in foreign policy issues. Kuzio argues that "pragmatic centrism is bad for the speed of its transition, but good in terms of maintaining stability and ethnic peace" (Kuzio 2000b: 161). Second, the Ukraine's power status in relation to Russia and its strategic importance to the West allowed it to pursue policies such as PfP membership in NATO; options that were not available to other, weaker union republics. Third, the careful balancing of foreign policy preferences against Russia on one side and the West on the other side avoided alienation of these important international actors. Fourth, potential conflict in the Crimea was avoided by Russia's entanglement in Chechnya, but also by the fact that the region shared a border only with the Ukraine.

Relating regime change in the Ukraine to the findings on democratization and conflict, it seemingly contradicts the "dangerous democratization" hypothesis (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002a, 2002b, Snyder 2000). Applying this argument to the Ukraine, one would expect that

movement toward democracy might have pushed the country into conflict with Russia. Yet, Ukraine's transition towards democracy, combined with the stability of the transition through a pact between old and new elites, helped to prevent signaling misperceptions with Russia. The ability of parliament to challenge the president, as shown in its refusal to ratify agreements on the Black Sea fleet or nuclear disarmament, also reflects the functioning of the domestic institutional process. The slowness and smoothness of the Ukraine's democratization allowed for the use of peaceful means to solve potential conflicts arising over the Crimea, its nuclear weapons and the Black Sea Fleet. In addition, this analysis also suggests a reconsideration of realist arguments. Ukraine's nuclear weapons and naval force, plus its infantry and overall latent resources might have led to open conflict with Russia. Surprisingly, though, the Ukraine mitigated the impact of its power by transferring its nuclear weapons to Russia, the country that posed a great security threat for the Ukraine (D'Anieri 2002: 47). Accepting a decrease in power helped to defuse a possible conflict with Russia.

Georgia

Georgia was one of the most ethnically diverse republics of the former Soviet Union. According to the 1989 Soviet census, 70% of the 5.5 million population identified themselves as ethnically Georgian, 8% as Armenian, 6.3% as Russian, 5.7% Azeri and less than 3% as Ossetian or Abkhaz (Jones 1997: 506). In addition, these ethnic groups were largely geographically concentrated. During the Soviet period, Georgia experienced less intense russification than other republics. Under Stalin and Beria, both ethnically Georgian, Georgia enjoyed privileges not

awarded to other republics. A strong emphasis on national identity based on the Georgian language, alphabet and history of independence persisted through the whole Soviet period. For Russia, Georgia's location in the Caucasus provided it with an important strategic forward defense against Turkey and Iran.

Regime Transition

Strong and organized independence movements existed in Georgia as early as the 1980s. The nationalist movements were heavily anti-Russian. The strength of these groups derived largely from Gorbachev's politics of liberalization, allowing for the existence of national and regional non-Communist organizations that were soon openly used for a revival of Georgian language, culture and national identity (Cornell 1997: 158). In addition, paramilitary groups supporting nationalist movements emerged.

Much of the popular discontent that existed was aimed against the privileged status of the Abkhaz and Ossetian people in the two autonomous republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In Abkhazia, Georgians "were increasingly upset by their lack of influence in policy-making and regional institutions as they actually formed a plurality, just short of a majority in the autonomous republic" (Cornell 1997: 160). In 1989, the Abkhaz leadership (supported by the South Ossetian republic) petitioned to Moscow for independence from Georgia. This, in turn, produced mass demonstrations by Georgians in the capital of Tbilisi that called for Georgia's right to secede from the USSR. The Georgian Communist leadership dispersed the uprising with the use of military force, which discredited the party and destroyed its legitimacy among the population.

In the meantime, nationalist groups under the leadership of Zviad Gamsakhurdia prepared for the parliamentary elections in October 1990. Despite some democratic rhetoric, he focused his campaign almost entirely on the rights of Georgians in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Parties appearing only in one region of the country were prohibited from participating, thus virtually eliminating any minority representation.²⁸ Gamsakhurdia's movement, Round Table-Free Georgia, gained 54% of the vote, whereas the Communist Party received less than a third (Jones 1997: 512). In May 1991, Gamsakhurdia was elected president with 87% of the vote (Snyder 2000: 232). The new government proclaimed the Georgianization and Christianization of Georgia, which led to increasing tensions and violent clashes with Abkhaz and Ossetian minorities. Soon after the election, Abkhazia and South Ossetia declared their independence, a decision in turn annulled by Gamsakhurdia, who abolished the autonomous status of the two republics. Gamsakhurdia completely underestimated the importance of a viable relationship with Russia. The Ukraine, for example, made costly signals (e.g. liberal citizenship laws, blocking extremists from the policy making process) to assure its minorities, but also the prior homeland, of a continued commitment to protection of minorities. Georgia's new government not just failed to do so, but even centered its policies on exclusionary nationalist principles that increasingly threatened its minorities.

Gamsakhurdia in consequence seized dictatorial powers and suppressed any opposition, "labeling anyone who disagreed with him as a traitor of the country" (Cornell 1997: 168). Increasingly, his own supporters turned against him and by early 1992, the leaders of the two paramilitary groups overthrew Gamsakhurdia in a coup and invited former Soviet Union foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze to overtake the government. A newly established shady institution, the State Council (led by the paramilitary groups), dissolved the parliament and

installed Shevardnadze as head of a new Consultative Council (Cornell 1997: 170). He was later confirmed as president in a popular election.

Georgia's first years after independence resulted in great internal instability and lack of any serious progress toward democracy. Georgia's first elections were based on exclusionary principles against minority groups (in a country with 30% minority population) that were then institutionalized in the new government.²⁹ These developments increased concerns in Moscow.

Violent Conflict in Abkhazia

The authoritarian, nationalist policies of Gamsakhurdia's government led to considerable fear among minority groups. Linz and Stepan note that this "eroded a core component of future democratization – full citizenship rights for all inhabitants regardless of ethnicity" (Linz and Stepan 1996: 383). In addition, the government's hostile attitude towards Russia and the former Communist Party alarmed Moscow. Gamsakhurdia also misjudged Moscow's strong strategic interest in the Caucasus. His opposition to joining the CIS increased Moscow's interest in his defeat. Gamsakhurdia's successor Shevardnadze was only slightly more successful in stabilizing the country and avoiding violent conflict. Especially, his power was very limited as he faced paramilitary groups assuming more and more power (Jones 1997: 527).

In June 1992, the Abkhazian government sent a draft treaty to Tbilisi that would have guaranteed Georgia's integrity. Georgia rejected this draft and Tengiz Kitovani, leader of one of the major paramilitary formations, initiated military action against Abkhazia in August 1992. This happened without Shevardnadze's approval, but finally prompted Moscow to intervene in the conflict. An agreement signed by Yeltsin, Shevardnadze and the Abkhaz president, however, turned out to be abortive premature and exemplified Shevardnadze's fragile position, since

Kitovani simply refused to acknowledge it (Cornell 1997:171). In the meantime, Russia greatly increased military support for the Abkhaz forces. An additional factor influencing Russia's actions was Shevardnadze's unpopularity in the Russian military. They saw him as the main architect of Russia's dismantlement (Hunter 1994: 131). Ongoing fighting in Abkhazia led to the dislodgement of about 200,000 Georgians from the region (Cornell 1997: 175). After the defeat of the Georgian troops in late 1993, Russia established a cease-fire under CIS peacekeeping observation. However, this peacekeeping mission was in fact Russian-only and included battalions that had previously fought in the conflict on the Abkhaz side. Since then, large-scale military fighting has ended with Abkhazia enjoying de-facto independence under Russian protection.

Georgia's inability to define a position regarding its minorities that was acceptable to Russia, and that finally led to Russian military intervention was caused by several factors. First, strong nationalist tendencies and the complete popular discredit for the old Communist elite led to the election of an openly nationalist, authoritarian president. Newspapers and television were soon under government control, and although a "Rechtsstaat" existed on paper by 1991, laws "were flawed by omission or vagueness, and betrayed a continuing concern for tight regulation by government" (Jones 1997: 515). Gamsakhurdia's exclusionary nationalism and attacks toward ethnic minorities alienated Russia and finally prompted Moscow to intervene in Abkhazia. Second, the geographical proximity of northern Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) to other very conflictual regions in the North Caucasus on Russian territory significantly enhanced Moscow's interest to contain the further destabilization of the region and avoid spillover effects (Cornell 1997: 344). Third, dissimilar preferences between Georgia and Russia (as well as the old elite) exacerbated tensions and made a viable foreign policy that was acceptable for both

sides impossible. The violent dissolution of protests in 1989 fundamentally discredited the old elite and made pact agreements such as in the Ukraine unfeasible. Fourth, Georgia underestimated the strategic interest of Russia in the Caucasus. Its weak power status in comparison to Russia led to the humiliating military defeat in 1993.

I argue that the great amount of instability involving Georgia's transition lowered its ability to credibly signal its foreign policy preferences. Leadership struggles, domestic unrest and nationalist tendencies led to great concern among Russia and the West. The threat posed to minorities by the government made a viable relationship with Russia impossible. Since stability in Russia was considered the main concern by the West (especially the United States) in the first years after independence, it decreased Georgia's chances of recognition and support (Cornell 1997: 367). This interpretation is consistent with evidence suggested by Gleditsch and Ward (1998), showing that democratic reversals and instability increase conflict propensities. This also conforms with a signaling argument, suggesting that polities with unstable and fragile domestic institutions lack the signaling ability of stable democracies (Fearon 1994). In addition, the proximity of unrest in Georgia's regions to unstable zones in the Northern Caucasus increased Russian incentives for intervention.

Although the evidence presented above is admittedly anecdotal, I argue that a focus on the nature of a regime transition offers some important insights. Comparing regime change in the Ukraine and Georgia, I suggest that the slow, retarded transition in the Ukraine explains the peacefulness of its foreign policy behavior at least in part. Although negotiated transitions will necessarily slow the process of renewal and democratization, they have the advantage that old, but still powerful elites are not threatened in their position (Kuzio 2000b). The contempt of the

ancient regime by the new Georgian elite, however, estranged Russia as the former imperial center. This, together with the authoritarian Georgian government's failure to guarantee participation for all of its population led to Russian military intervention (Cornell 1997). An explanation focusing on the speed and volatility as well as the direction of a regime transition explains the seemingly puzzling fact that both the Ukraine and Georgia had geographically concentrated ethnic minorities but nevertheless experienced different foreign policy outcomes. Slow, smooth democratization decreases the probability of violent conflict, whereas rapid change, coupled with threats against old elites increases the perils of conflict. In the following section, I further develop the causal connections between regime transition and inter-state conflict.

Theoretical Expectations

Evidence indicates that democratic polities initiate conflict at lower rates than non-democratic states, and almost never initiate against other democracies. However, the process of democratic transition remains obscure. That is, the evidence tying democracy to non-violent conflict resolution largely assumes that polity type remains fixed over time. Transitioning states are not excluded from models of democratic peace, but the regime changes occurring over time do not get modeled separately. This is not true of democratization and war models (see for example Gleditsch and Ward 1998, 2000, Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002a, 2002b), but to date models of transition and conflict remain underspecified and theoretically underdeveloped. I first examine how normative or institutional explanations of the democratic peace could be applied to transitioning states. Hypothesizing a linear relationship between democracy levels and conflict, it might be argued that increasing constraints and deepening norms affect states moving toward democracy. I then identify weaknesses in this argument based on existing empirical evidence indicating that incomplete democratization (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002a, 2002b) or “rocky” transitions (Gleditsch and War 1998, 2000) increase conflict likelihood. In the second section, I argue that a signaling approach gives account for both decreased conflict propensities of smoothly democratizing states as well as increased conflict propensities for states undergoing highly volatile transitions. A concluding section will translate these arguments into hypotheses.

Research on the democratic peace indicates that democracies engage in less conflict than autocracies, at least with similarly democratic states. It is not clear how these findings relate to the democratization process. Applying existing theoretical accounts of the democratic peace to transitioning states, one would expect that democratizing states are less conflict prone than autocratizing ones. Normative or institutional approaches can easily be translated to democratizing states: Due to increasing constraints and deepening norms, countries moving toward democracy are expected to less often use violent coercion. Such an extension of existing theories sees democratization as a linear process, where increases in democracy levels linearly translate into reduced conflict likelihood.

The extension of normative and institutional theories to democratizing states suffers from several weaknesses. First, empirical evidence does not support the view of democratization as linear, gradual processes. If attempts toward democracy are reversed or if change comes arrives too quickly, the likelihood of conflictual behavior increases (Gleditsch and Ward 1998, 2000, Mansfield and Snyder 1995). As shown by Lichbach (1984), the majority of transitions do not proceed in a gradual, linear manner. In addition, evidence suggests that transitions to democracy that are not yet completed have increased conflict propensities (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002a, 2002b). Hence, democratization would be more of a threshold process. Democracies tend to be more peaceful only when a certain set of institutions and/or norms are present. Yet, if the democratic peace is valid only for democracies that reached a certain threshold of stability, how can this threshold be defined or measured? Setting thresholds is somehow arbitrary, and furthermore does not explain theoretically how much democracy is enough to avoid the perils of

conflict.³⁰ In addition, evidence brought forward by proponents of the dangerous democratization argument does not look at the specific nature of the transition process; it neglects speed or volatility as a factor (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002a, 2002b).

Second, regime change itself, given the uncertainty and instability that denotes these processes, may indeed increase conflict propensities. Institutional weaknesses and the lack of deepened, liberal norms (combined with rising levels of mass participation) in unconsolidated democracies may lead threatened elites to appeal to nationalism and in turn resort to violence (Snyder 2000). High degrees of uncertainty and instability might invite diversionary moves by leaders in transitioning states. Also, transitioning states might function as likely targets for neighboring states. Therefore, countries undergoing incomplete transitions to democracy or autocracy may have increased conflict probabilities.

Signaling models (Fearon 1994, Eyerman and Hart 1996, Partell and Palmer 1999, Schultz 2001, Prins 2003) emphasize the importance of regime type in situations of crisis bargaining. States that incur audience costs when entering international disputes are expected to have superior abilities to demonstrate resolve and send credible signals. Since elites in democratic countries are accountable to the public, and foreign policy failure might lead to removal from office, it is a costly signal when they initiate or escalate international disputes. These signals provide important information to the opponent and reduce uncertainty in crisis situations. Empirical applications of Fearon's model (Fearon 1994) have indeed shown support for the ability of democratic states to credibly signal their foreign policy preferences in crisis situations (Eyerman and Hart 1996, Partell and Palmer 1999, Schultz 2001, Prins 2003). Thus, peace between democracies may not so much depend on norms or constraints, but their ability to make credible commitments.

Applying this logic to transitioning states, it suggests that the conflict probability of states undergoing regime changes depends on the effect of the transition on their signaling abilities. Countries moving slowly and smoothly toward democracy might have similar signaling abilities as consolidated democracies. Institutional reform and expansion of the electorate that comes over in a measured manner is expected to enhance the credibility of signals sent by political elites in democratizing states. States that experience highly volatile transition processes, however, will not be able to credibly signal their foreign policy preferences. Democratic reversals greatly increase the uncertainty about a state's preferences. Thus, countries sliding back and forth between democracy and autocracy are less efficient in sending credible signals and security concerns among contiguous states may increase. This is consistent with evidence showing that states with unstable or transitional political competition are more likely to reciprocate in interstate militarized disputes and, in addition, are more likely to engage in escalatory behavior (Prins 2003).

Normative, institutional and signaling approaches provide different explanations for the peaceful behavior of democratic states. Empirical research, however, often lacks measurement that allows for precise differentiation between these theoretical accounts, since most of the research uses the same data. Simply measuring the level of democracy or polity type does not tell us whether norms, constraints or signaling are responsible for a change in foreign policy behavior.³¹ Applying arguments drawing on norms and constraints versus signaling explanations to transitioning states, however, suggest different expectations for the foreign policy behavior of democratizing states.

First, a signaling model anticipates that high variance in democracy levels increases a state's conflict propensities. Democratic reversals increase uncertainty about a country's

preferences and makes signals less reliable since a stable democratic opposition is absent at the domestic level. A normative or institutional argument, however, does not address the conflict behavior of unevenly democratizing states. Consequently, I expect that **highly volatile, uneven transitions increase the likelihood of violent conflict**. Second, both signaling and normative/institutional approaches suggest decreased conflict propensities for states moving smoothly and steadily toward democracy. Deepening democracy results in increased decisional constraints on elites and strengthens the development of democratic norms. In consequence, this will foster progress toward real opposition parties and contested, competitive elections, and enhance signaling abilities. Therefore, I expect that **smooth, moderate change toward democracy reduces a country's conflict propensities**.³² Finally, the current level of democracy is included in the model to look at the impact of present regime type on conflict likelihood. Consistent with the democratic peace findings, **stable democracies are expected to have decreased conflict probabilities**.

In addition, I emphasize the importance of controlling for other factors that increase conflict likelihood but that are not directly related to the transition process. Power is a strong and potent predictor of conflict (see Geller and Singer 1998 for a review). Hence, I hypothesize that **the higher a state's national capabilities, the greater the likelihood of conflict involvement**. Besides, evidence shows that the number of border shared is positively related to a state's conflict propensities (Vasquez 1993, 1995, 2000). This suggests that **as the number of borders increases, conflict becomes more likely**. Additionally, research has shown that states having a high degree of preference similarity with each other are less conflict prone than states that have antagonistic preferences (Kim 1991, 1992, 1996, Rousseau et al. 1996). At the monadic level, this is measured as the preference similarity with the leader of the international system. It is

hypothesized that **satisfaction with the international status quo decreases conflict propensities**.

Lastly, regime change might alter the impact of power, contiguity or preference similarity on conflict likelihood. The impact of conflict variables is hypothesized to be significantly altered for transitioning states. This scrutinizes the stability assumption made by the conflict literature. Especially, I hypothesize that **the impact of power and contiguity on conflict likelihood is decreased for democratizing states**.

Hypothesis 1: Uneven or “rocky” transitions increase conflict likelihood.

Hypothesis 2: Smooth change toward democracy decreases conflict propensities.

Hypothesis 3: Stable democracies are less conflict prone than anocracies or autocracies.

Hypothesis 4: More powerful states are more likely to experience violent conflict.

Hypothesis 5: A high number of borders increases conflict probability.

Hypothesis 6: States satisfied with the international status quo are less likely to engage in violent interstate conflict.

Hypothesis 7: The effect of power on conflict likelihood is lower for democratizing states than for other states.

Hypothesis 8: The impact of contiguity on conflict probability is decreased for democratizing states.

Research Design

Data and Methodology

The analysis covers the period from 1950 to 2000 and includes all countries that are members of the state system as defined in the Correlates of War data.³³ Pooled cross-sectional time-series (TSCS) data are well suited to study the dynamics of change over time in different units. However, the assumption of homogeneity of data across units and time are easily violated in this kind of data (Sayrs 1989). A fixed effects model is one method to account for these temporal and spatial differences (Green, Kim and Yoon 2001). Applying a fixed effects model, the intercept varies from unit to unit, but remains time invariant across individual units. This technique recognizes the non-constant variation through the introduction of different intercept dummy variables for each cross-sectional unit. It models fixed unobserved differences in the data by including unmeasured predictors of the dependent variable that cause each unit to have its own base rate, or intercept.

However, as Beck and Katz (2001) point out, the fixed effects model has pernicious consequences when applied to time-series cross-section data with a binary dependent variable. Especially when dealing with rare events data (such as international conflict, where the majority of cases takes a value of 0), the application of fixed effects hides the explanatory power of the independent variables except for the fixed effect dummy variables (Beck and Katz 2001: 489).³⁴ A general estimating equation (GEE) can address the problems of pooled TSCS data and the model gives substantial flexibility in specifying the correlation structure within pools (Zorn 2001). GEE differs significantly from the fixed effects model as it does not model individual,

unit-specific effects, but corrects for intra-cluster correlation “by adjusting the covariance matrix of the estimated parameters to account for non-independence across observations or time points” (Zorn 2001, 474).³⁵ The population-averaged coefficient represents the average effect of a one unit shift in the independent variables on the whole population. Thus, GEE models are appropriate for cases in which one wants to assess general propensities across units. As this study intends to explain the overall impact of regime changes on states’ conflict propensities and not the propensity of one or several states, a GEE model is appropriate to deal with spatial and temporal dependence. The within-group temporal correlation is specified with a first-order autoregressive correlation structure (AR 1).

Data for this analysis come from various sources. The initial dataset was generated using the software EUgene that covers the period from 1950 to 1992 (Bennett and Stam 2000).³⁶ Data for militarized interstate disputes (MID) have been updated until 2000 using the Correlates of War 2 MID 3.1 dataset.³⁷ The data for democracy and autocracy scores are derived from the Polity IV dataset.³⁸ Data on national capabilities come from the COW 2 data (Singer et al. 1972, Singer 1987) using the 3.0 update. A measure for similarity of foreign policy positions is provided in EUgene. Contiguity data come from COW and measure the total number of states bordering by land and 400 miles of open water (Stinnett et al 2002). The analysis is conducted at the monadic level. Such, the unit of analysis is the nation-state in a given year. I use a generalized estimation equation model that allows for correction of spatial and temporal dependence, as well as logistic and poisson specifications, depending on the form of the dependent variable. Logit and poisson techniques are designed for probability models and are extensions of the linear regression model for ordinal and binary dependent variables.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable in this analysis is militarized interstate disputes (Gosh and Palmer 2003).³⁹ I use two different operationalizations of conflict.⁴⁰ First, I use onset of militarized interstates disputes (MID) as defined by the Correlates of War project. This variable takes a value of either 0 or 1, a value of 1 indicating that a MID occurred in a country-year. Second, the number of MIDs per country-year is taken as the dependent variable. This grasps the total number of events occurring and does not simplify it in a binary way. Theoretically, a count model better is a better way to operationalize the dependent variable MID. Through dichotomizing, we necessarily lose information, although empirically the amount of information loss may not be large and thus may not affect the results. Empirically, this variable takes values between 0 and 26.⁴¹

Independent Variables

Regime Change Variables

For regime change, I rely heavily on earlier work by Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000).⁴² I test for the impact of regime change on MIDs and the number of MIDs occurring per country-year. Four separate regime change variables are constructed using Polity IV data (Marshall and Jaggers 2002). The first variable measures magnitude and direction of change in democracy level over the past ten years.⁴³ The combined democracy-autocracy score is used to calculate this change variable.⁴⁴ Democracy-autocracy scores for the current year are calculated by subtracting autocracy scale values from democracy scale values, as such returning values between -10 and 10. I take each current democracy-autocracy score and subtract the score of ten years before from

the current value. This returns empirical values from -17 to 19 .⁴⁵ This corresponds to the overall change variable used by Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000).

Second, I use the above mentioned variable to calculate whether a country's change in democracy level was directed toward autocracy or democracy. This variable measures direction of change only. The total change values (ranging from -19 to 19) are transformed into a trichotomous measure. The variable equals -1 for all negative values meaning autocratization, 0 for no change and 1 for all positive values indicating change toward democracy.

Third, I transform the first variable (magnitude and direction of change) into absolute values. I transform all negative values into positive ones to grasp the *absolute* amount of change in a given period, regardless of whether the change was toward democracy or autocracy. The variable ranges from 0 to 19 in this sample. Not transforming negative values of change would mean that the variable would measure magnitude *and* direction of change. As I include another variable measuring the direction of change, not transforming this variable results in including two variables in one model that both measure direction.⁴⁶ This is an improvement of Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000) as they do not transform negative values, but nevertheless include a variable measuring change and direction, and direction separately in one model. The operationalization used by Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000) might also explain why the authors receive a negative value for the variable measuring magnitude and direction together (suggesting that democratization decreases the risk of war), but a positive value for the direction of change variable (contradicting the former result). Breaking apart magnitude and direction of change avoids multicollinearity and allows for better assessing the separate impact of the two component parts.

The fourth variable measures the variation in democracy-autocracy scores. This variable accounts for the variance of change. I calculate the variance in democracy-autocracy scores for each country over the past ten years. In this sample, the variable ranges from 0 to 78. Countries that are sliding back and forth between democratization and autocratization are hypothesized to have higher conflict propensities.

Finally, the current democracy-autocracy score (ranging from -10 to 10) for each country-year is included in the model. Since this research aims to extend the findings of the democratic peace to democratizing states, it is important to control for current polity scores. This variable is used with a one year lag.

Conflict Variables

The inclusion of several variables that are related to conflict aims to build a better specified model. First, power is a strong predictor of conflict behavior. A state's power is measured using the Correlates of War CINC score, which is the combined index of national capabilities.⁴⁷ Second, the more neighbors a state has, the greater the level of inter-state conflict.

This variable counts the number of neighbor-states for each system member. Data come from the Correlates of War contiguity data (Stinnett et al. 2002). Third, satisfaction with the international status quo may have an impact on its peacefulness. Signorino and Ritter (1999) develop a variable measuring the similarity of foreign policy positions S for each state with the system leader. The values for S range from -1 to 1. A value of 1 indicates identical policy positions, whereas -1 indicates that the two states are as far apart as possible in the policy space. For the

time period under analysis, the system leader is the United States, thus having a value of 1. This variable is available in EUGene, but only up to 1992.

Interaction Variables

Standard interaction effects are a way to deal with the interactive relationship among explanatory variables and their combined effect on conflict.⁴⁸ I focus my tests on effects between regime change variables and conflict variables and the combined impact on conflict. I test for the combined effect of capabilities and democratization by multiplying the two variables. Does democratization reduce the impact of capabilities for conflict? Then, mutually reinforcing effects of contiguity and democratic change are examined through multiplying the variables. Is the number of borders related to more or less conflict for states that are undergoing changes toward democracy?

Data Analysis

The Logit Model

I employ a general estimating equation with a logit link function to model MID onset (a dichotomous variable). The logit coefficient represents the effect of an increase in the independent variable on the log odds of an increase or decrease in the dependent variable. I specify the correlation matrix as a first-order autoregressive process.

Direct Effects

The first set of models looks at direct effects of regime change and conflict variables on MID onset. In the first model, I include the combined magnitude and direction variable and the trichotomous direction variable. This specification is presented to facilitate comparison to the models used by Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000) since it employs the same regime change variables.⁴⁹ However, I expect that this model specification will render one of the change toward democracy variables insignificant since they both measure direction and are highly collinear. Using militarized interstate disputes as the dependent variable, the functional form can be written as follows:

$$\Pr(Y_{it} = 1) = \beta_1 \text{change} + \beta_2 \text{direction} + \beta_3 \text{variance} + \beta_4 \text{polity} + \beta_5 \text{preference_similarity} + \beta_6 \text{capabilities} + \beta_7 \text{contiguity} + e_{it}$$

The second model excludes the direction variable to test whether my expectation that the overall change and the direction model should not be included in one model is right.

$$\Pr(Y_{it} = 1) = \beta_1 \text{change} + \beta_2 \text{variance} + \beta_3 \text{polity} + \beta_4 \text{preference_similarity} \\ + \beta_5 \text{capabilities} + \beta_6 \text{contiguity} + e_{it}$$

The third model breaks magnitude and direction of change apart and includes the variables measuring absolute change and direction of change.

$$\Pr(Y_{it} = 1) = \beta_1 \text{absolute_change} + \beta_2 \text{direction} + \beta_3 \text{variance} + \beta_4 \text{polity} + \beta_5 \text{preference_similarity} \\ + \beta_6 \text{capabilities} + \beta_7 \text{contiguity} + e_{it}$$

TABLE 1: Logistic Regression Estimates for Probability of Militarized Interstate Disputes 1950-2000

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Logit Model 1</i>	<i>Logit Model 2</i>	<i>Logit Model 3</i>	<i>Marginal Effects Model 2</i>	<i>Marginal Effects Model 3</i>
Magnitude and Direction of Change combined	-0.002 (0.024)	-0.0352** (0.017)	—	-0.25	—
Direction of Change	-0.292*** (0.144)	—	-0.315*** (0.106)	—	-0.13
Absolute Change	—	—	-0.082*** (0.031)	—	-0.30
Variance	0.0075 (0.006)	0.0079 (0.0065)	0.028*** (0.009)	—	+0.49
Polity Score, lagged	-0.0119 (0.0096)	-0.012 (0.0096)	-0.013 (0.009)	—	—
Preference similarity	-0.572 (0.435)	-0.665 (0.436)	-0.549 (0.426)	—	—
Capabilities	26.112*** 4.244	26.474*** (4.345)	25.951*** (4.120)	+0.76	+0.77
Contiguity	0.100*** (0.023)	0.099*** (0.0233)	0.097*** (0.023)	+0.58	+0.52
Constant	-1.484*** (0.270)	-1.435*** (0.271)	-1.436*** (0.265)	—	—

N=2410

Note: Coefficients are estimated using a generalized estimating equation with a logit link function and an AR 1 specification of the correlation matrix. Standard errors are in parentheses. Column four and five represent the change in the probability that Y=1, fluctuating the significant variables from their minimum to their maximum one at a time, while holding all other variables at mean values.

*** $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

The first model includes two variables that measure change toward democracy and comes closest to the variable operationalization used in Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000). As expected,

one of the democratization variables is significant and negative, whereas the other one is insignificant. The trichotomous measure indicates that change toward democracy decreases conflict likelihood, whereas the overall change variable (ranging from -17 to 19) does not have a significant impact on conflict likelihood. This is due to a multicollinearity problem between the variables, since both measure direction of change. Expressed in probabilities, change toward democracy decreases the likelihood of conflict by 11.7%, holding all other variables at their mean. This supports the hypothesis that states changing smoothly towards democracy are better able to signal their foreign policy preferences than autocratizing ones. Variance of change is insignificant in the first model. Thus, the hypothesis expecting that rocky transitions are more conflict prone is not supported. This result is consistent with earlier findings on the relationship between variance and conflict probability that failed to find a relationship between variance and conflict onset (Gleditsch and Ward 2000).⁵⁰

In addition, the impact of current polity scores and preference similarity on conflict propensities is not statistically different from zero. This contradicts my expectation that the democratic peace is found at the monadic level as well. The finding for current level of democracy also reduces the validity of my theoretical argument. I argued that signaling models offer a fitting explanation for democratizing countries as an extension of the findings for stable democracies. Yet, the results do not indicate decreased conflict propensities for stable, consolidated democracies. In contrast, it indicates support for earlier studies that failed to show a linear relationship between democracy level and conflict at the monadic level (see for example Rousseau et al. 1996, Gleditsch and Hegre 1997, Gleditsch and Ward 1998). However, it might be that the relationship is non-linear which is not tested for in this model.

The result for preference similarity might be a function of the monadic level of analysis. It will matter more how close a state is to an opponent than to the system leader. One might expect that the greater the distance between two states in their preferences with the system leader, the more likely conflict is. I also suggest that this measure does not consider preference similarity with a regional power. In addition, the United States as the system leader scored a one for preference similarity, but was involved in a high number of conflicts. It might be naïve to assume that the system leader is satisfied with the international status quo.⁵¹ Contiguity and power strongly increase the probability of conflict likelihood as expected by the hypotheses.

The second model excludes the trichotomous measure for direction of change. As predicted, the magnitude and direction variable now becomes significant. Varying change to democracy from its minimum to its maximum results in a 25% decrease in the likelihood of MID occurrence, holding everything else constant. States moving towards greater democracy are significantly less likely to engage in violent interstate conflict. Thus, explanations put forward by democratic peace theorists regarding the peacefulness of stable democracies seem to be present in democratizing states.

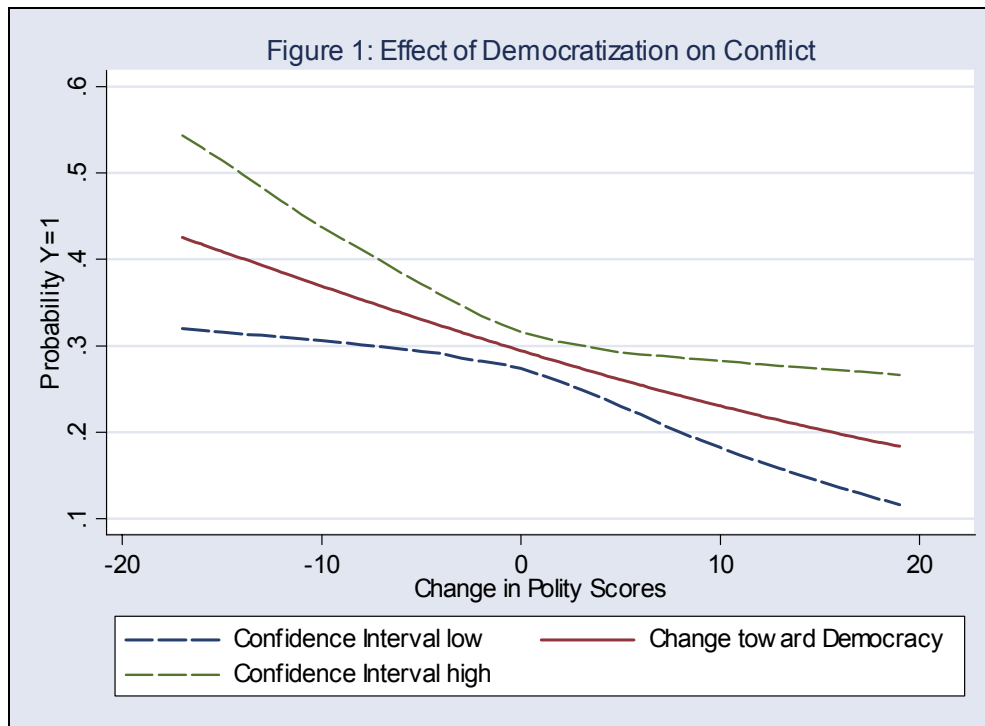


Figure one depicts the relationship between change toward democracy and conflict.⁵² Countries experiencing high change toward autocracy have a conflict probability greater than 40%. In contrast, conflict likelihood decreases to less than 20% for highly democratizing states. Since the confidence intervals at the tails are relatively wide, I vary the variable from one standard deviation below its mean to one above, which still results in a 7% decrease of conflict likelihood for democratizing states. This finding contrasts in part with evidence presented by Mansfield and Snyder (1995, 2002a, 2002b), which indicates higher conflict probabilities for incomplete transitions to democracy. Although this research does not directly test the impact of regime change toward an unstable democracy, it is still puzzling that general change toward democracy decreases conflict likelihood, whereas Mansfield and Snyder (2002a, 2002b) find that incomplete democratization increases conflict proneness. It seems that smooth transitions to democracy gradually alter a state's foreign policy. As democracy deepens and strengthens, conflict proneness also decreases. In contrast, Mansfield and Snyder's (1995, 2002a, 2002b)

findings suggest that up to a certain threshold, countries moving toward democracy are more conflict prone than others. Thus, until enough time has passed to establish stable institutions “guaranteeing the rule of law, civil rights, a free and effective press, and representative government” change toward democracy increases conflict likelihood (Mansfield and Snyder 2002b: 530). It is not clear yet how these divergent findings might be reconciled.

Variance of change, current polity score and preference are insignificant as in the first model specification. Power strongly predicts the likelihood of MID occurrence. Varying capabilities from its minimum to its maximum and setting all other variables at their means, the likelihood of conflict goes up by 76%. This supports earlier research finding a strong and positive relationship between power and conflict likelihood (Bremer 1980, Geller and Singer 1998). Equally, a higher number of borders results in increased conflict probabilities. Conflict likelihood goes up by 58% if contiguity is varied for its full range (and all other variables are held at their means). As an example, the model predicts a 96% probability that China will be involved in MID in 1991, being contiguous with 18 states (and given the values of other variables) and indeed, China was involved in a MID during 1991. The positive relationship between number of borders and conflict confirms other research pointing to the impact of territory on conflict (Vasquez 1992, 1995, 2000).

The third model presented in table one breaks magnitude and direction of change apart. Direction of change (ranging from -1 to 1) is negatively related to conflict likelihood, which is consistent with the other model specifications. The coefficient for the variable measuring direction of change is negative and significant, supporting the expectation that democratization decreases the likelihood of MID occurrence. Interestingly, variance becomes significant in this model. High variance in polity scores increases the probabilities of MID onset. Holding

everything else constant, conflict probabilities increase by 49% when variance goes from its minimum to its maximum.

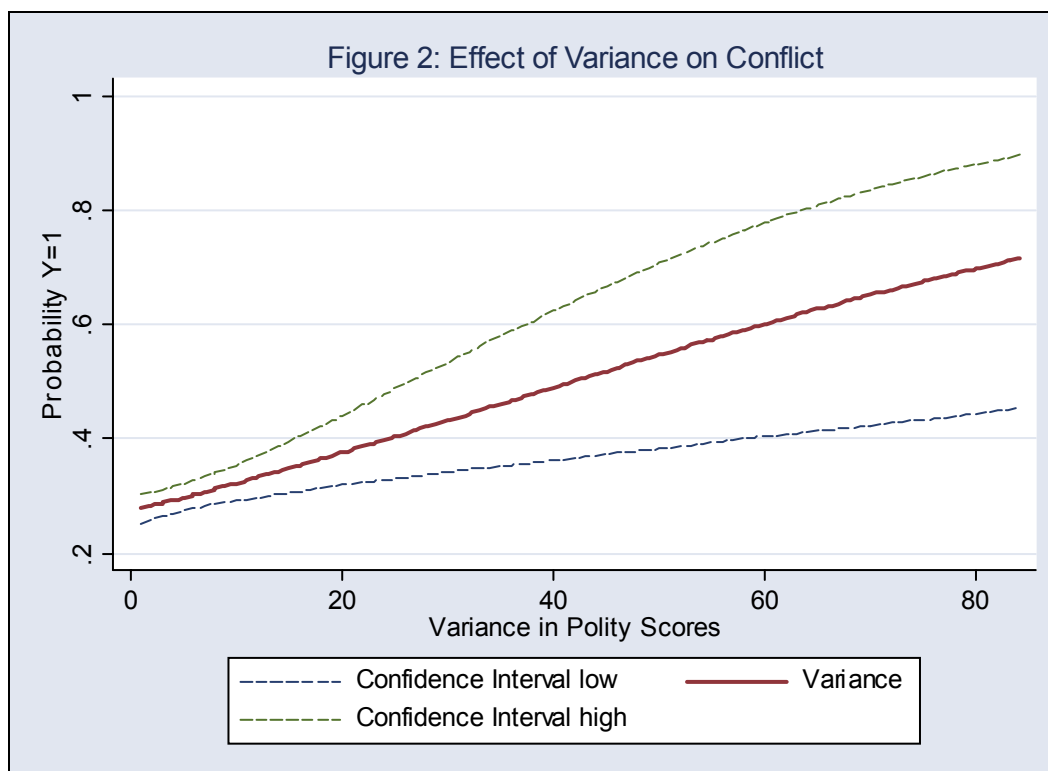


Figure two shows that the degree of volatility of a transition positively impacts conflict propensities. Not controlling for variance would suggest that change toward democracy simply translates into more peacefulness. This finding corresponds to Gleditsch and Ward (1998), yet caution is necessary since it is not consistent over different model specifications. Interestingly, absolute change in polity scores is negatively related to conflict in model three. This suggests that regime change itself, irregardless of its direction, reduces conflict propensities. Stable states might thus be more conflict prone than transitioning ones. Some caution is needed in interpreting this result. Tests of multicollinearity showed that the variance and absolute change variable are closely related. The negative relationship between absolute change and conflict might thus be a product of the high correlation with variance. The results for other variables are similar to the other model specifications. Current level of democracy and preference similarity

are not significant. Power is by far the most potent predictor in this analysis. Varying national capabilities for its full range, conflict likelihood increases by 77%. Ranging contiguity from its minimum to its maximum, conflict propensities go up by 52%. The results for power and contiguity are very robust over all model specifications.

Interactive Effects

The next set of models includes the interaction terms between change toward democracy variables and power and contiguity, respectively. I run all of them in separate models since I interact the same independent variables in various combinations to avoid problems of multicollinearity.

TABLE 2: Logistic Regression Estimates for Probability of Militarized Interstate Disputes 1950-2000, Interaction Effects

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Interaction Model 1</i>	<i>Interaction Model 2</i>	<i>Interaction Model 3</i>	<i>Interaction Model 4</i>
Magnitude and Direction of Change	-0.0477*** (0.017)	- 0.040** (0.0171)	—	—
Direction of Change	—	—	-0.348*** (0.104)	-0.326*** (0.104)
Absolute Change	—	—	-0.081*** (0.0308)	-0.0828*** (0.0308)
Variance	0.0096 (0.006)	0.0085 (0.0063)	0.027*** (0.009)	0.028*** (0.0096)
Polity Score, lagged	-0.0129 (0.009)	-0.012 (0.009)	-0.015 (0.009)	-0.013 (0.0089)
Preference similarity	-0.658 (0.412)	-0.643 (0.4203)	-0.555 (0.412)	-0.535 (0.415)
Capabilities ^a	28.783*** (4.392)	26.816*** (4.197)	28.920*** (4.514)	26.204*** (3.939)
Contiguity ^a	0.1024*** (0.0221)	0.1021*** (0.0226)	0.097*** (0.0219)	0.098*** (0.022)
Magnitude and Direction *Capabilities	-3.3517*** (1.129)	—	—	—
Magnitude and Direction *Contiguity	—	-0.0106** (0.0054)	—	—
Direction *Capabilities	—	—	-17.136*** (6.170)	—
Direction *Contiguity	—	—	—	-0.073** (0.0366)
Constant	-1.247*** (0.261)	-0.8912*** (0.224)	-1.226*** (0.261)	-1.448*** (0.258)

N=2410

Note: Coefficients are estimated using generalized estimating equation with a logit link function and an AR 1 specification of the correlation matrix. Standard errors are in parentheses.

^a Mean centered values of capabilities and contiguity are used for the interaction terms.

*** $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

The interaction terms provide some new insight in the conflict behavior of transitioning states.⁵³ All of the interaction terms are negative and significant, indicating a strong moderating effect of the transition variables on factors known as strong predictors of conflict likelihood. The first model includes an interaction term between magnitude and direction of change and

capabilities. The coefficient for the interaction variable is negative and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The second model includes an interaction between change toward democracy and contiguity. The interaction is negative and significant, indicating that democratization decreases the impact of contiguity on conflict onset. The third and fourth model include interactions between the trichotomous change variable and power and contiguity, respectively. Both interaction terms are negative and significant and thus confirm the robustness of results over different models. Since continuous interaction terms are difficult to interpret by looking at the coefficients, I include graphical displays of the interaction variables in the first and second model presented in table two.

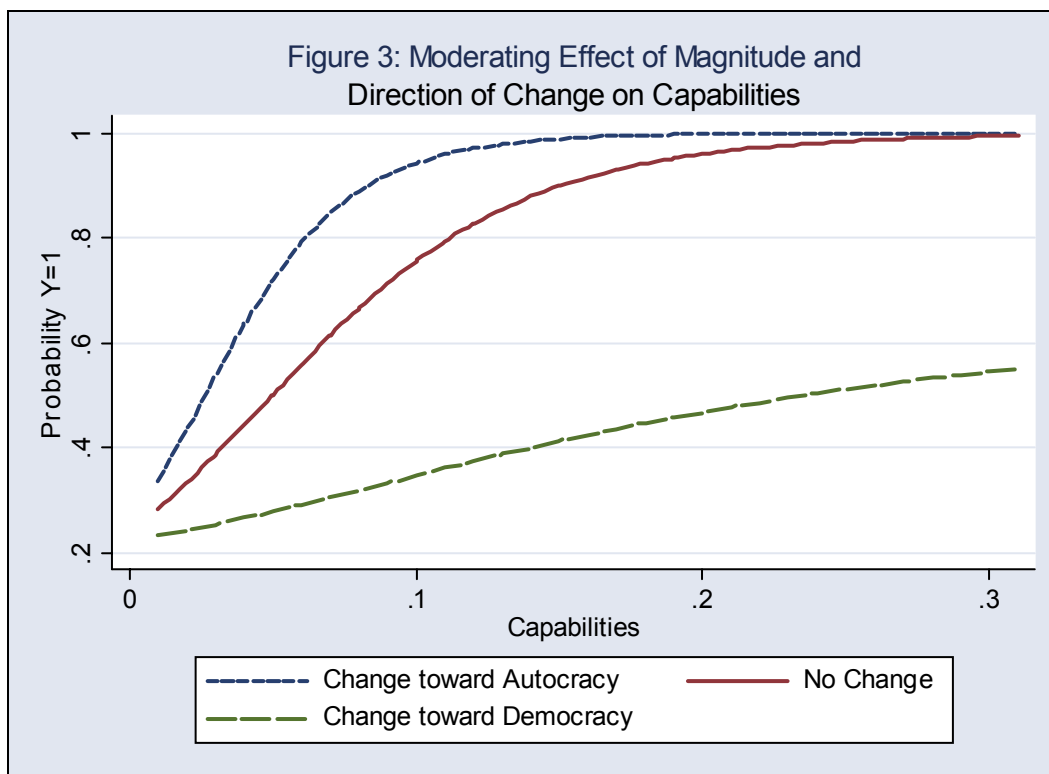
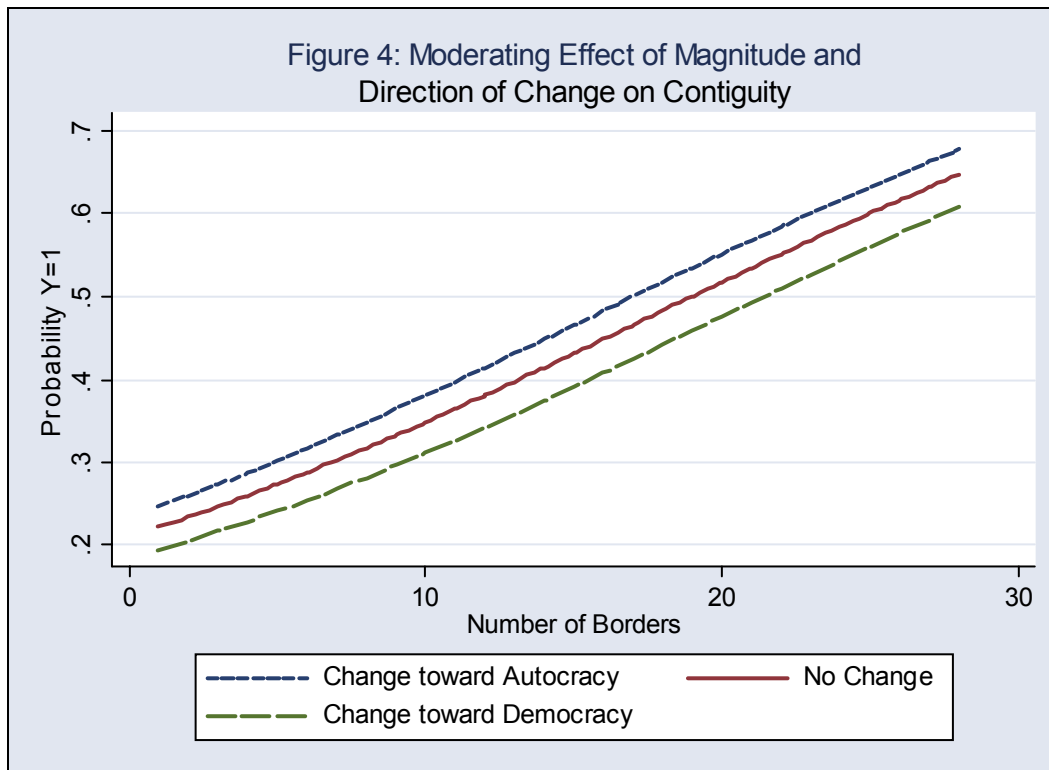


Figure three shows that the impact of capabilities on conflict changes greatly if states are in regime transition. The magnitude and direction of change variable is set at one standard deviation below its mean (change toward autocracy), zero for no change (which is close to its mean) and one standard deviation above its mean (change toward democracy). Autocratizing

states with high capabilities have the greatest likelihood to experience conflict. The effect of capabilities on conflict is much lower for countries changing toward democracy. The curve for democratizing countries is rather flat compared to stable countries and autocratizing countries. Thus, democratization greatly decreases the otherwise strong impact of power on conflict. The altered effect of power on conflict propensities for states undergoing regime transitions suggests future consideration in conflict models.



This figure represents the moderating impact of change toward democracy on contiguity as in the second interaction model. Again, the change toward democracy variables is set at one standard deviation below and above its mean for autocratization and democratization respectively, and set at zero for stable states. Figure four shows that the impact of contiguity changes for transitioning states, although the effect is much weaker than for the interaction with capabilities. States that are democratizing have significantly lower conflict probabilities even if bordered by a high number of states. Democratic states are 7% less likely than autocratizing ones

to be involved in a MID for the states having the highest numbers of borders. This suggests that the moderating effect of democratization on the number of borders is relatively small. The probability of conflict increases from below 20% to more than 30% for a change from 0 to 10 borders for democratizing states. For autocratizing states, this probability increases from 25% to almost 40% of conflict likelihood given a change in borders from 0 to 10. The probability of conflict, however, increases in similar ways for transitioning states and stable states for the range of contiguity. A better measure might look at the number of democratic versus non-democratic neighbors. The impact of contiguity on conflict might be sufficiently lower for democratizing states in largely democratic environments.

To summarize, the findings of the logit models support earlier research that showed a negative relationship between change toward democracy and conflict (Gleditsch and Ward 1998, 2000). In addition, it explains the contradictory findings of Gleditsch and Ward (1998) for change toward democracy. If multicollinearity is avoided, change toward democracy significantly decreases conflict likelihood which is consistent over all model specifications. Findings for variance are mixed. However, earlier evidence failed to find a consistent relationship between variance of change and conflict onset (Gleditsch and Ward 2000). The moderating effects of democratization on power and contiguity are consistent in all models and indicate a negative effect of change toward democracy on power and contiguity. I will now test the hypotheses employing a poisson model, which models the distribution of the dependent variable in a more precise way.

The Poisson Model

A poisson regression model is employed to estimate the number of conflicts occurring per country year.⁵⁴ MIDs are rare events and the distribution of the data does appear to follow a poisson distribution.⁵⁵ The poisson coefficient allows calculating the probability of an increase or decrease in the number of events occurring. Once again, a GEE estimator is used to effectively model the possible correlational structure of the data. A first-order autoregressive component is specified. Similar to Tables 1 and 2, I first examine the relationship between regime transition and conflict onset, including the conflict controls. Then, I collapse absolute change and direction as Gleditsch and Ward (1998) did. Lastly, I regress the interactions of the combined change variable with power and contiguity against MID onset.

TABLE 3: Poisson Regression Estimates for Probability of Militarized Interstate Disputes 1950-2000

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Poisson Model 1</i>	<i>Poisson Model 2</i>	<i>Poisson Model 3</i>	<i>Poisson Model 4</i>
Absolute Change	-0.059*** (0.0205)	—	—	—
Magnitude and Direction of Change combined	—	-0.038*** (0.012)	-0.024* (0.013)	-0.0338*** (0.0125)
Direction of Change	-0.363*** (0.0704)	—	—	—
Variance	0.0170*** (0.0067)	0.001 (0.005)	0.0036 (0.0047)	0.0027 (0.0047)
Polity Score, lagged	0.005 (0.0065)	0.005 (0.007)	0.0057 (0.0067)	0.0055 (0.0066)
Preference similarity	-0.481* (0.2715)	-0.474* (0.270)	-0.505* (0.274)	-0.470* (0.270)
Capabilities ^a	12.924*** (0.797)	12.848*** (0.806)	12.939*** (0.811)	12.835*** (0.804)
Contiguity ^a	0.029*** (0.011)	0.025** (0.011)	0.032*** (0.011)	0.0305*** (0.0113)
Change *Capabilities	—	—	-0.010** (0.0048)	—
Change *Contiguity	—	—	—	-0.0053* (0.00299)
Constant	-0.9177*** (0.182)	-0.908*** (0.182)	-0.836*** (0.188)	-0.772*** (0.146)

N=2410

Note: Coefficients are estimated using generalized estimating equation for a poisson family and a log link function. The correlation matrix is specified as an AR1 process. Standard errors are in parentheses.

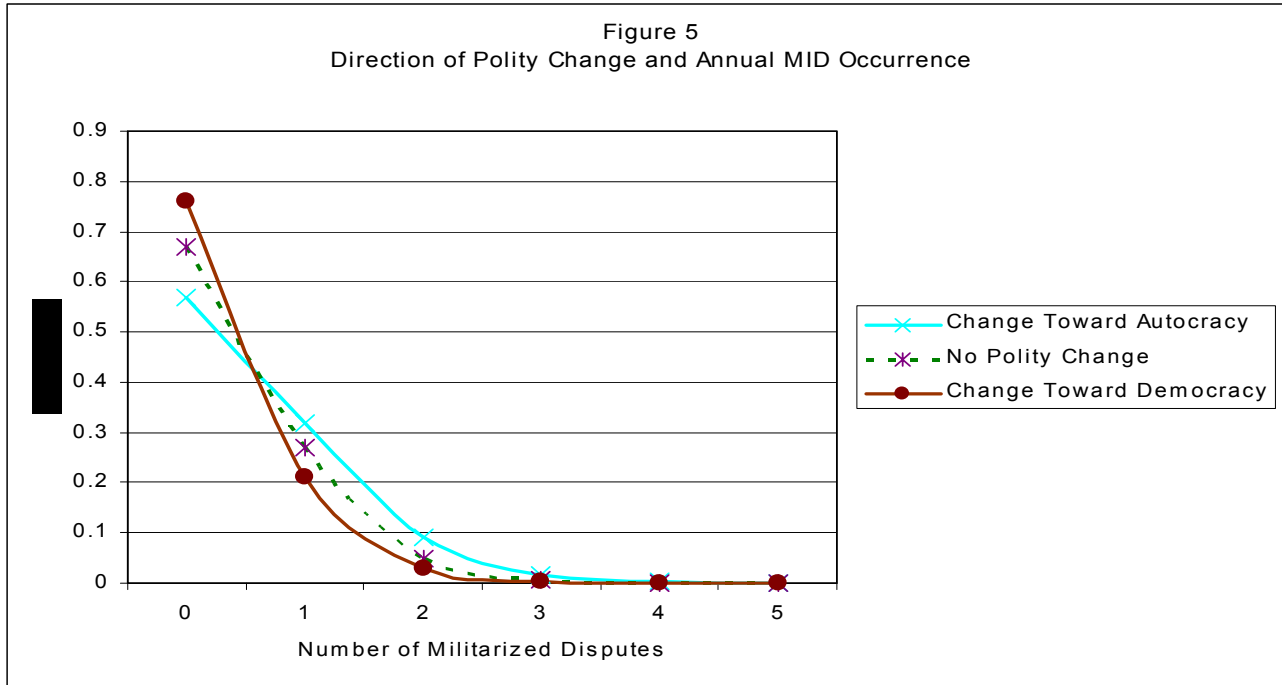
^a Mean centered values of capabilities and contiguity are used for the interaction terms.

*** $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

The results of the first model specification are very similar to the equivalent logit model.

Democratization reduces conflict propensities and this result is significant at the 0.01 level.



Autocratizing states have higher probabilities of a one or more MID occurrence per country-year in comparison with stable and democratizing states. Democratizing countries have a 78% probability not to experience a MID in any given country year. For autocratizing states, this probability is about 20% lower. For the probability of one MID onset per year, the probability for democratizing states decreases to 20%, whereas autocratizing states have a 35% probability to engage in military use of force once per country year.

Variance is positively related to conflict in the first model, suggesting that highly volatile transitions increase the likelihood of militarized interstate disputes.

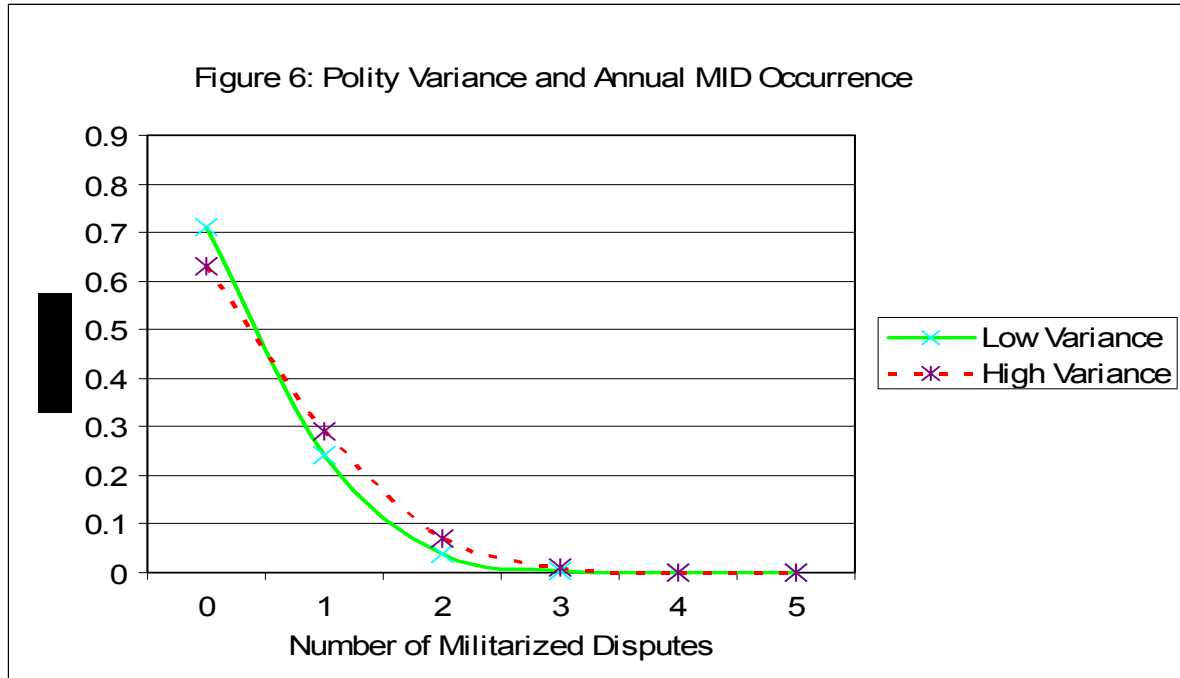
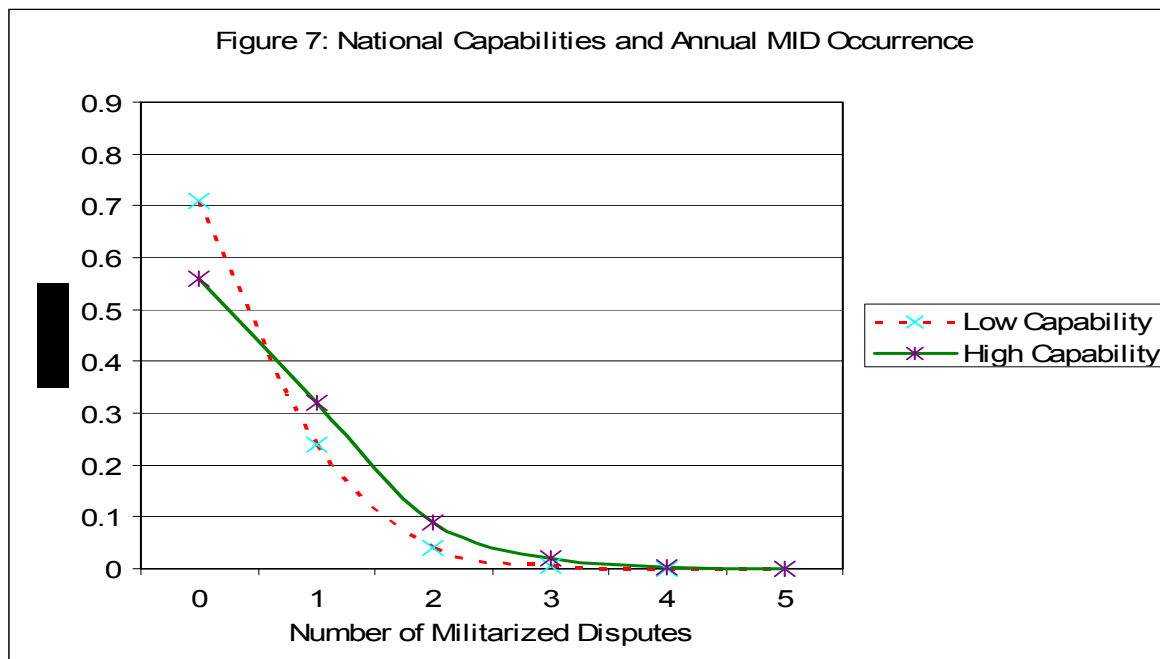


Figure 6 shows that countries experiencing high changes in polity scores are more likely to experience conflict for a zero MID occurrence. Yet, the probability of one or more MID occurrences is only slightly higher for countries experiencing high changes than for countries having low variance in polity scores. Absolute change is negatively related to conflict in model one, although I emphasize that one has to regard this finding with caution due to high multicollinearity with variance. Power and contiguity have a strong and positive impact on MID occurrence which is robust for all models and consistent with the logistic regression results.



The graph shows that powerful states have significantly higher probabilities to be involved in one or more MID per country-year than weak ones. The current level of democracy has no impact on conflict likelihood in the first model. Preference similarity gets slightly significant in the poisson model at the 0.1 level, indicating that satisfaction with the status quo decreases conflict probabilities.

The second model collapses direction of change and magnitude of change and supports the expectation gained for overall change toward democracy by the first model. As in the logit model, however, the relationship between variance and MID onset does not remain robust to model specification change. This might be because, one, high collinearity among the regime change variables increase the standard errors of the coefficients making statistical significance more difficult to uncover. Two, variance is only tenuously related to conflict onset and consequently the relationship is not robust to model changes (Gleditsch and Ward 2000). Three, noise in the data and in the measurement instrument clouds the relationship. Variance in the transition may be strongly related to conflict onset, but the precise measurement technique used

here to capture unevenness in transition may be problematic.⁵⁶ Regarding the interaction terms, the findings are consistent with the logit models, indicating moderating effects of democratization on power and contiguity.

The results of the poisson model are very similar to the results for the dichotomous dependent variable. Signs and significance levels of the variables correspond to the logit models. However, a poisson model is a theoretical improvement since it models the empirical distribution of the dependent variable under analysis. Yet, the poisson models suffer from the fact that the probability of observing more than two or three MID's per country year is close to zero. I argue that the distinction between conflict and no conflict might be more important than the total number of conflicts occurring per country-year. In addition, the assumption of independence for the number of events occurring per country year in poisson models might be easily violated.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Policy makers in the European Union and the United States emphasize the promotion of democracy as an important foreign policy goal. This is based on the belief that democracies engage in a more peaceful foreign policy behavior. Empirical evidence indeed supports this notion, suggesting that democracies do not fight each other and that they are generally less conflict prone than non-democracies, although findings for the latter are somewhat more mixed. Theoretical arguments explaining the peace proneness of democracies center on norms, constraints or signaling explanations. Consolidated democracies are expected to be less conflict prone because of deepened norms, constraints on political elites and superior abilities to credibly signal their foreign policy preferences. Thus, increasing numbers of democracies may result in a more peaceful world. Yet, findings of the democratization literature at least indirectly challenge these conclusions. Incomplete transitions to democracy have been shown to be substantially more war prone than others (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2002a, 2002b). Thus, the promotion of democracy as a means to achieve a more peaceful world might be dangerous at least in the short term. Still, other research does not support the above conclusion and indicates decreased conflict propensities for democratizing states (Gleditsch and Ward 1998, 2000).

The lack of theoretical explanations for the conflict behavior of transitioning states and the mixed empirical evidence justify a reassessment. This research re-evaluates the relationship between regime transition and conflict employing variables measuring regime change that are similar to Gleditsch and Ward (1998, 2000). It is argued here that signaling models provide a useful explanation of the relationship between regime change and conflict likelihood. First, a

signaling argument suggests that states experiencing democratic reversals are more conflict prone since rocky transitions increase the uncertainty about a state's foreign policy preferences. Unfortunately, this hypothesis is only partially supported depending on the different model specifications used. The research design used here suffers from multicollinearity problems since all variables are constructed using polity scores. Second, I expected that smooth change toward democracy decreases conflict. The growing importance of democratic institutions and norms will force political elites to consider audience costs when using military force. In addition, gradual change toward democracy will enhance the credibility of signals sent by democratic states and reduce uncertainty arising in crisis situations. This hypothesis is strongly supported in all models and also supports the impression given in the initial discussions of regime change and conflict in the Ukraine and Georgia. It seems that negotiated transitions, although necessarily slowing progress, increase the chances for its peacefulness. Yet, the failure to find a significant relationship between stable democracy and conflict in the statistical analysis questions my theoretical argument. Evidence for a monadic democratic peace thus remains inconclusive. Additionally, this weakens most theoretical accounts given for the democratic peace, given their emphasis on the general pacific nature of democracies.

This research contributes importantly to earlier work on democratization and conflict. First, I develop a more fully specified model by controlling for power, contiguity and preference similarity. Second, interactions effects show that democratization has a strong moderating effect on power and contiguity. This calls for a re-consideration of the assumption of state stability in the conflict literature. Third, I use two different operationalizations of my dependent variable, a dichotomous measure and a variable counting the number of events. In addition, I improve a variable operationalization in Gleditsch and Ward's (1998, 2000) research design. By breaking

apart direction and change, we can better assess the impact of regime change and conflict. As the results show, I find that democratization reduces the likelihood of conflict, which is consistent over the different models. The results indicate that for the post-WW II period, change toward democracy substantially reduces conflict likelihood. As the time frame and dependent variable used in this research are very similar to Mansfield and Snyder (2002b), further research is necessary to explain the contending evidence. Although I certainly recognize that their regime change variable operationalization and the level of analysis is different from the one employed here, the inconsistency in results is still puzzling. Besides, earlier evidence that uneven transitions increase conflict propensities is partly supported by my models. Methodologically, this model is an improvement over earlier research as it corrects for cluster-specific and temporal dependence, which are likely to arise in pooled cross-sectional times-series data.

However, this paper also has its limitations. Although the model does correct for temporal and within-panel dependence, it does not model spatial dependence between cross-sections. Yet, it is likely that events such as violent conflict or transitions have an effect on neighboring states. Gleditsch and Ward (2000) heavily emphasize the importance of regional factors for democratization as well as war. They account for spatial correlation among countries by creating new local measures for spatial correlation that are in consequence interacted with variance in democracy and war. In addition, I neglect the impact of economic factors such as trade on conflict likelihood. However, since the main concern of this paper is the impact of regime change on conflict likelihood, the inclusion of economic factors could prove difficult since it is not clear yet how democratization and economic development are related (Przeworski (1991). More importantly, this research does not look at civil conflict. Since transitions almost always involve some form of internal conflict (strikes, mass protest, civil strife), it might be

problematic to test the impact of democratization on interstate conflict only. With increasingly better data on civil wars and political violence, it might be fitting to employ civil conflict as an independent or dependent variable. Related to this, then, is the need to better explain the link between civil and interstate conflict in future research. Why do some civil conflicts externalize whereas others do not?

The perilous polities, then, are countries that are strongly autocratizing, powerful and share a high number of borders with other states. The results do not support the dangerous democratization hypothesis.

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Appendix

Codebook

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Variable Name Dataset</i>	<i>Variable Description</i>	<i>Measurement Level</i>	<i>Calculation</i>	<i>Source</i>
Country Code	ccode	Panel ID variable, identifies each country that is member of state system with a code number			EUGene
Year	year	Time variable, Takes 1950 to 2001 for each country if member of state system			EUGene
Militarized Interstate Dispute All MIDs	mid	Violent interstate conflict	Dichotomous 0=no MID, 1=MID		MID 3.1 update
	allmids	Number of MIDs in every country year	Ordinal scale, range from 0 to 25		MID 3.1 dataset
Total change in Democracy Score	Demchg10	Magnitude and Direction of change in Democracy Score	Ordinal Scale, Ranging from -20 to 20	$xit = xit - xit10$	Polity IV
Absolute Change in Democracy Score	abschg10	Absolute change in democracy level over 10 years	Ordinal Scale, ranging from 0 to 20		Polity IV

<i>Direction of Change</i>	dirchg10	Direction of change in democracy level, going from autocratizing (-1), no change (0) to democratizing (1)	Ordinal scale, taking values -1,0,1	$x_{i,t} < x_{i,t-n} > -1$ $x_{i,t} = x_{i,t-n} > 0$ $x_{i,t} > x_{i,t-n} > 1$ $n = 5,10,15$ $i = nationi$ $t = time$	Polity IV
<i>Variance of Change</i>	variance	Variation in democracy score for the past 10 years	continuous	$\frac{1}{n} \sum_{t=1}^n \left(x_{i,t} - \frac{1}{10} \sum_{t=1}^n x_{i,t} \right)^2$ $n = 5,10$	Polity IV
<i>Current Level of Democracy</i>	demlg	Combined Democracy score for each country year, lagged one year	Ordinal, Ranging from -10 to 10		Polity IV
<i>Power</i>	cap	CINC score measuring national capabilities	continuous		EUGene, CINC score update
<i>Contiguity</i>	totalcon	Number of neighbors of every state system member	Ordinal, ranging from 1 to 28		Stinett et al. 2002
<i>Satisfaction with Status Quo</i>	s_lead	Similarity of foreign policy positions with system leader	Continuous, from -1 to 1		EUGene

Vita

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