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Democracy and Diversion: Government Arrangements, the Economy, and Dispute Initiation*

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Do legislative constraints constrain or compel democratic executives' conflict behavior during periods of economic decline? Although institutional constraints are thought to reduce democratic executives' propensity to engage in interstate conflict, other research suggests that such constraints may provide incentives to engage in diversionary uses of force. Incorporating work from the comparative study of economic voting and cross-national research on the diversionary use of force, this article contends that government arrangements – coalition, minority, weak party cohesion – influence democratic conflict behavior by (1) shaping the extent to which the executive is held accountable for the economy and (2) determining the executive's capacity to address the economy with legislation. Specifically, the argument presented here suggests that governing parties in coalition governments share the blame for a poor economy, reducing the likelihood that the executive initiates disputes in response to the economy. Compared to single-party majority governments with high party discipline, executives presiding over minority governments, or whose parties are plagued by a lack of cohesion, are more likely to initiate disputes when faced with poor economic conditions, because these executives are likely to face resistance to remedial economic policy. Probit analyses of the interactive effects of government arrangements and economic performance on dispute initiation among industrialized democracies, 1950–97, support the argument. The article concludes with implications for research in comparative politics and international relations, including, for example, executive–legislative relations and strategic conflict avoidance.

Introduction

Democratic leaders are thought to be restricted in their conflict behavior when faced with legislative constraints (e.g. Clark & Nordstrom, 2005; Morgan & Campbell, 1991; Prins & Sprecher, 1999). The capacity of coalition partners or a majority opposition to check the executive's foreign policymaking autonomy is a key part of the institutional constraints, or structural, explanation of the democratic peace (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita & Lalman, 1992; Bueno de Mesquita & Siverson, 1995; Maoz & Russett, 1993). But according to some studies (e.g. Davies, 2002; Gelpi, 1997; Russett, 1990), democratic leaders may also be more likely than their autocratic counterparts to use force abroad in order to divert public

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attention from deteriorating economic conditions – the so-called diversionary use of force.[1] Do legislative constraints on the executive actually constrain conflict behavior, or do they compel democratic leaders to initiate international disputes in response to declining economic performance?

Drawing on the comparative literature on electoral accountability for the economy (e.g. Anderson, 1995; Powell & Whitten, 1993; Whitten & Palmer, 1999), we argue that government arrangements (i.e. majority, minority, coalition, and weak party governments) condition the extent to which executives initiate disputes for domestic purposes. We contend that executives who are accountable for poor economic performance, but are unable to implement remedial economic policy because of legislative opposition, may turn to foreign policy to demonstrate their leadership competence. Alternatively, executives in systems where accountability for economic conditions is clouded will have few incentives to use force abroad. Thus, government arrangements that blur the line of accountability (i.e. coalition governments) reduce the impulse to respond to economic decline with foreign policy, while constraining government arrangements (i.e. minority governments and governments with weak party cohesion) may increase the executive's conflict propensity under poor economic conditions. We analyze the impact of economic performance and government arrangements on dispute initiation among the 23 advanced democracies of the OECD, 1950–97, finding strong support for our argument.

This article contributes to our understanding of how democratic politics influence conflict behavior as well as the manner in which leaders contend with legislative constraints. We conclude that coalition partners and majority oppositions do not serve as foreign policy 'veto players' (Tsebelis, 1995). Rather, these government arrangements influence the executive's capacity to address domestic policy. Our argument also suggests that executives may be able to overcome the constraints of legislative opposition by focusing on issues that cut across ideological and partisan cleavages.

Institutional Constraints and Diversions

Our understanding of democratic conflict behavior illuminates a tension between democratic leaders' constraints and incentives. The institutional constraints perspective of the democratic peace literature (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita & Siverson, 1995; Maoz & Russett, 1993; Smith, 1996) suggests that such features as minority government or the separation of powers limit the executive's autonomy in decisions to use force. In contrast, studies exploring the divisionary use of force hypothesis (e.g. Davies, 2002; Gelpi, 1997) argue that constraints on democratic leaders' domestic policymaking autonomy provide incentives to initiate interstate disputes.

A prominent explanation for the democratic peace is the institutional constraints argument (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita & Lalman, 1992; Maoz & Russett, 1993). This perspective suggests that the institutional arrangements of democratic regimes limit the executive's autonomy in decisions to use force. Specifically, executives are constrained by such structural features as elections, parties, and legislatures (e.g. Dixon, 1994; Morgan & Schwebach, 1992). These features can be thought of as 'veto players' (Tsebelis, 1995). As the number of institutional actors who are able and willing to veto executive action increases, the autonomy of the executive decreases.

The institutional constraints argument is intuitively pleasing when illustrated with

[1] There is not a consensus concerning whether democracies are more likely than autocracies to use force abroad for domestic political purposes, which we discuss below.

an 'ideal' majoritarian system (Lijphart, 1999), where a clear line of accountability can be drawn from voters to parliament to the executive (Strøm, 2000). Parliamentary executives need the support of parliament to make policy. Consequently, the more seats the executive's party holds in parliament, the less he or she is constrained in policymaking (Reiter & Tillman, 2002). According to this formulation, single-party majority governments face fewer veto players than coalition or minority governments, making them less constrained in their conflict behavior.

But the evidence concerning institutional constraints among parliamentary democracies fails to comport with the straightforward account of veto players restricting executives' foreign policy choices. For example, Ireland & Gartner (2001; see also Clark & Nordstrom, 2005; Palmer, London & Regan, 2004) find that both single-party majority and majority coalition governments are more likely to initiate international disputes than minority governments, while Prins & Sprecher (1999) find that coalition governments are more likely to reciprocate disputes than single-party governments. However, Reiter & Tillman (2002) fail to discover a distinction between government types on the likelihood of conflict initiation.

The disparity between the expectations of the veto players account and the evidence may center on the implicit assumption that a legislative opposition has incentives to oppose the government on practically every issue. Parties tend to be organized around social and economic debates (e.g. Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Mair, 1997). Foreign policy issues involving the use of force are likely to lie on a dimension that is orthogonal to ideology.[2] For example, US presidents' partisan opponents in Congress are likely to support presidential national security policies (Fleisher & Bond, 1988; Stoll, 1987). Similarly, Schultz (2001) offers cross-national evidence of opposition parties supporting an executive's call to arms. This suggests that a legislative opposition may work to thwart the efforts of the government on social and economic policy, but not necessarily on foreign policy. Thus, government arrangements characterized by veto players may not provide ex ante constraints on executives' conflict decisions.[3]

While the institutional constraints literature identifies the conditions under which democratic leaders are thought to be more pacific in their foreign policy behavior, the diversionary use of force literature explores the domestic factors associated with belligerent foreign policy behavior (e.g. Levy, 1989; Morgan & Bickers, 1992; Richards et al., 1993). This research agenda explores whether national leaders use force abroad in response to domestic problems. For example, a leader may use force when the economy is deteriorating (e.g. DeRouen, 1995; Fordham, 1998), leader approval is falling (e.g. Morgan & Bickers, 1992; Ostrom & Job, 1986), or popular unrest is on the rise (e.g. Davies, 2002; Gelpi, 1997).

Because leaders are thought to divert when direct policy measures to address the source of discontent are unavailable (e.g. Gelpi, 1997; Morgan & Bickers, 1992; Russett, 1990), there is a tendency to conclude that the diversionary use of force is a pathology of democracies – specifically, powerful and mature ones (Pickering & Kisangani, 2005).

[2] An exception is Klingemann, Hofferbert & Budge (1994) who conclude that right parties are pro-military, while left parties tend to be anti-military, driving parties' preferences with respect to allocation of the budget – defense versus social welfare.

[3] Concerning the role of ex post constraints, the prospect of domestic political punishment for conflict behavior is unlikely to constrain a democratic leader's decision to use force. Because democratic leaders tend to select themselves into conflicts they expect to 'win' (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita & Siverson, 1995; Gelpi & Griesdorf, 2001), they are unlikely to be punished for conflict behavior that ends successfully (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Chiozza & Goemans, 2004).

These states are thought to have fewer available policy options with which to address domestic problems, forcing their leaders to substitute foreign policies in place of domestic policies (Dassel & Reinhardt, 1999). For example, democratic leaders are typically constrained from political repression or the wholesale redistribution of private property. As a consequence, these leaders are likely to use military force abroad in order to distract dissatisfied groups from the declining domestic situation.

Although several studies find evidence of a link between democratic government and incentives to divert (e.g. Davies, 2002; Gelpi, 1997; Pickering & Kisangani, 2005), other studies either find no such link or find that democratic leaders are less likely to use force in response to poor domestic conditions than their autocratic counterparts (Enterline & Gleditsch, 2000; Heldt, 1999; Miller, 1995). The mixed findings may be due to the failure of cross-national studies to consider two key features of democratic systems. First, this literature fails to consider that institutional constraints vary over time and within countries. Some scholars (e.g. Davies, 2002; Gelpi, 1997; Miller, 1995) argue that institutional constraints critically affect the availability of certain policy options. Yet these studies typically dichotomize regime type, distinguishing only between democracies and autocracies (but see Pickering & Kisangani, 2005). If democratic leaders have greater access to domestic policies for addressing deteriorating domestic conditions under certain government arrangements (e.g. single-party majority government), but not others (e.g. minority government), null findings may be attributed to the failure to control for variation in these institutional arrangements.

A second overlooked feature of democratic systems concerns the extent to which executives are likely to pay a price for deteriorating domestic conditions. A key assumption of the diversionary use of force is that leaders are blamed for miserable domestic conditions, providing incentives to shift the public's focus to the international arena. But a large literature on economic voting suggests that institutional arrangements influence the extent to which the electorate holds the executive accountable for the state of the economy (e.g. Lewis-Beck, 1988; Norpoth, 2001; Powell & Whitten, 1993). Some studies (e.g. Anderson, 1995, 2000; Norpoth, 2001; Whitten & Palmer, 1999) suggest that such legislative constraints as minority or coalition governments confuse the line of accountability between voters and executives (e.g. Strøm, 2000). According to this account, any divergence from a single-party majority government complicates the ability of the government to pass legislation, but also obscures voters' attributions of responsibility for policy outcomes.

The literature on electoral accountability offers important implications for research on the diversionary use of force: an executive who is not blamed for the economy lacks the incentives to divert. Although minority executives seem to comport with the straightforward account of electoral accountability (i.e. more constrained and less accountable than single-party majority executives), the literature suggests that executives presiding over coalition governments may be less accountable *and* less constrained than minority governments or governments with weak party cohesion (Anderson, 1995, 2000; Bawn & Rosenbluth, 2006; Narud, 1996). Coalition executives are less accountable because blame for the economy is likely to be distributed across governing parties, rather than focused on a single party (e.g. Anderson, 2000; Powell & Whitten, 1993; Whitten & Palmer, 1999). The executive's party can also use its position as the coalition leader to shift blame for problems to other parties, reducing accountability (Anderson, 1995, 2000;

Narud, 1996). Coalition executives who command – along with their coalition partners – a majority of seats are likely to be less constrained than minority or weak party governments by virtue of simply possessing adequate parliamentary support for the government's program. Executives may be able to overcome constraints in the negotiation phase of policy formation and oversee the passage of the government's program through logrolling.[4] Consequently, coalition executives may be able to offer domestic policies that satisfy their constituencies in the face of economic decline, reducing their need to turn to foreign policy issues.

The literatures on institutional constraints and electoral accountability point to critical weaknesses in diversionary theory. Government arrangements should be taken into account in order to identify the conditions under which executives are likely to resort to a use of force abroad in response to a faltering economy. When the executive is held accountable for the state of the economy, but lacks the legislative support necessary for passing remedial economic policy, he or she may turn to the realm of foreign policy. In the next section, we develop an account of the influence of government arrangements on executives' choices in response to deteriorating economic conditions.

Theory

Executives attempt to establish a record of policies, proposals, and positions that enhance their electoral fortunes or those of their party (e.g. Richards et al., 1993). When poor economic conditions arise, the executive's leadership competence may be called into question, raising the risk of electoral punishment (Lewis-Beck, 1988; Norpoth, 1991; Whitten & Palmer, 1999). If an executive's party is held accountable for the state of the economy, the executive may either propose remedial economic policy, or turn to the international arena to reverse negative evaluations of his or her leadership competence. An executive is likely to regard foreign policy as a more attractive vehicle for demonstrating leadership competence when legislative opposition places remedial economic policy out of reach. Because foreign policy issues frequently transcend partisan and ideological lines (e.g. Schultz, 2001; Stoll, 1987), a legislative opposition may be unwilling or unable to block foreign policy proposals in the same manner as they oppose the executive's economic policy initiatives.

To identify testable hypotheses, we develop the following simple model. Call the costs of economic decline to the executive's party ε and the extent to which the executive shoulders all of the blame for the economy N, reflecting the number of parties in government. The executive's propensity to substitute a foreign policy in place of an economic reform may be of the form ε/N, which suggests that the costs to the executive's party of economic decline are adjusted by the number of parties in government. When $N = 1$, the full costs are imposed. But, *ceteris paribus*, the costs are mitigated when $N > 1$ (Anderson, 1995; Narud, 1996; Powell & Whitten, 1993), reducing the likelihood that the executive seeks to pursue foreign policy to demonstrate his or her competence.

Now, let T be the total number of seats in the legislature; G is the number of members in the governing parties; O is the members of the opposition parties ($T - G = O$). The probability that any member of G supports an economic policy proposed by the government is p, while the probability that any member of O supports the

[4] Some scholars (e.g. Bawn & Rosenbluth, 2006; Persson & Tabellini, 1999; Rogowski & Kayser, 2002) suggest that coalition governments tend to arrive at elaborate compromises in order to satisfy all coalition partners and secure passage of the government's program.

government's economic policy is q (where $p > q$, since members of G are more likely than O to support the government's policies). In order for an executive to successfully pursue a policy, he or she must expect that$(pG + qO) \geq [(T/2) + 1]$.[5] Other things being equal, this condition is more easily satisfied as G increases. Put another way, as the number of seats held by the government increases, the ability of the opposition to derail the executive's economic policy decreases.

For the executive to substitute a foreign policy in place of an economic reform in the effort to demonstrate leadership capacity, we should expect that $\varepsilon/N > (pG + qO)$, or

$$\varepsilon > N(pG + qO). \qquad (1)$$

The conditions under which the inequality is satisfied offer expectations about the influence of government arrangements and the economy on international conflict initiation. Others things being equal, this condition is increasingly difficult to satisfy when $N > 1$. This is consistent with our discussion of the extent to which coalition governments are held accountable for the state of the economy. As the number of parties in government increases, the executive may be able to escape the ire of voters by emphasizing other issues of importance to party supporters and shifting blame to coalition partners (Anderson, 1995, 2000; Narud, 1996). Moreover, if a coalition executive expects to be held accountable for the economy, G may be sufficiently large to provide the opportunity to garner support for remedial economic policy via logrolling (e.g. Bawn & Rosenbluth, 2006; Laver & Shepsle, 1996; Weingast, 1979). Consequently, poor economic performance is unlikely to provide the impetus for coalition executives to demonstrate their leadership capacity via foreign policy.[6]

H1: As the number of government parties increases, executives are less likely to initiate international disputes in response to declining economic performance.

When $N = 1$, the conditions under which the inequality is satisfied depend on the relative size of government and expected support; that is, $(pG + qO)$. When G decreases, the condition illustrated by the inequality is more likely to be met (*ceteris paribus*). As opposition to the government's economic policies increases, legislative solutions to economic decline are likely to become unavailable, escalating the probability that the executive substitutes a foreign policy for a remedial economic policy to demonstrate his or her competence (e.g. Davies, 2002; Gelpi, 1997; Russett, 1990). Although a minority executive is likely to be less accountable than a single-party majority executive, the executive's party remains a large target for voters because a minority government typically holds a plurality of seats (Anderson, 1995, 2000; Narud, 1996; see also Cox, 1990). In other words, a minority executive's party should be a larger target for voters than a coalition executive's party. The case for minority governments: given that $p > q$, $O > G$, the implication is that

H2: Minority governments are more likely than majority governments to initiate international disputes in response to declining economic performance.

[5] This expression is from Palmer, London & Regan (2004).

[6] In the interests of isolating the effects of institutional arrangements of policy choices, the formal model necessarily simplifies the theoretical argument. One way in which it does so is by assuming that all parties have the ability and incentive to respond to poor economic growth with remedial economic policy, regardless of the specific policy area around which the party was formed. Our awareness of this concern partially drives our use of GDP growth as a broad measure of economic success that similarly threatens all ideological types of parties.

Another possibility remains. Consider what happens when $N = 1$ and the executive's party has weak cohesion (p approaches zero). Given that $p > q$, the value of the term reflecting the executive's capacity for economic policy change ($pG + qO$) decreases, making the condition easier to satisfy (other things being equal). In other words, executives whose parties lack cohesion face similar obstacles to economic policy change as minority executives, making foreign policy more feasible than economic policy. Again, the voters may be more likely to sympathize with the constraints on the executive presiding over a weak-party majority – which suggests that they are less likely to hold this executive accountable for the state of the economy than a majority executive with strong party cohesion (e.g. Powell & Whitten, 1993). However, there may continue to be some expectation of leadership on the part of the executive to work toward a legislative solution for the economy.

H3: Governments with weak party cohesion are more likely than cohesive governments to initiate international disputes in response to declining economic performance.

When considered in light of the literatures on institutional constraints and diversionary use of force, these hypotheses are novel and somewhat surprising. They provide expectations of how leaders might use foreign policy in response to ex ante constraints on remedial domestic policy. In the next section, we describe the empirical research design for testing the hypotheses.

Research Design

In order to assess the hypotheses, we examine the impact of government arrangements and economic performance on dispute initiation among 23 OECD member states from 1950 to 1997. These OECD member states (see appendix) are established, industrialized democracies, with a credible capacity to intervene in their domestic economies.[7] We use a cross-sectional time-series dataset composed of interstate directed dyads of which the OECD states were members.[8]

The dependent variable in these analyses is a dichotomous measure indicating whether the OECD state initiated a dispute against the other state in the dyad during that year.[9] We measure the dependent variable using the Correlates of War (COW) Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data (Jones, Bremer & Singer, 1996). Dispute initiation takes the value of 1 for each dyad-year that an OECD state initiates a MID (hostility level 2 or greater) and 0 otherwise.

We expect the likelihood of dispute initiation to be a function of three types of government arrangements and economic conditions. Our first measure of government arrangements, number of government parties, is a count of the number of parties serving in the government. The second government arrangement measure, minority executive, is a dummy variable that takes on the value of 1 for governments in which the executive's party does not hold a majority of seats in the legislature. Consistent with other research (e.g. Laver & Shepsle, 1991; Samuels, 2004), we regard periods of divided government or cohabitation as minority governments among presidential systems. The third measure is weak party. This dummy variable assumes the value of 1 for executives

[7] We include all OECD countries whose membership began prior to 1994. Among those, we exclude Turkey because its governments are frequently accountable to its military rather than voters (Sakallioğlu, 1997).

[8] This dataset was constructed using the EUGene data generation program (Bennett & Stam, 2000).

[9] Specifically, the OECD state is coded as an initiator if it is the actual initiator of the dispute, or it is on the side of the initiator on the first day of the dispute – 'Side A', not a revisionist state.

whose party lacks internal cohesion.[10] According to the institutional constraints perspective, these government arrangements should reduce the likelihood of MID initiations. But we suspect that these features have conditioning effects on dispute initiation in response to declining economic conditions.

As an indicator of economic performance, we include annual GDP growth per capita taken from the *Penn World Tables* (Heston, Summers & Aten, 2002). We expect the coefficient for GDP growth to indicate a negative relationship between economic performance and dispute initiation. We interact the three measures of government arrangements with GDP growth to assess the impact of a declining economy during periods of minority, coalition, and weak party government. We expect to observe a relationship between worsening economic conditions and an increased likelihood of dispute initiation for minority and weak party governments. But the effect of GDP growth among governments with more than one party should indicate that coalition governments diffuse the responsibility of poor economic conditions, reducing the propensity to initiate disputes during periods of economic decline.[11]

We also consider a number of other variables thought to influence international conflict. The first of these is the target state's level of democracy. As democracies, the OECD states are not expected to initiate disputes with other democracies (e.g. Bremer, 1992; Maoz & Russett, 1993). We include the level of democracy of the opposing state in the dyad using the Polity III dataset (Jaggers & Gurr, 1995).[12]

Another robust finding in the literature suggests that dyads composed of states with very unequal military capabilities are unlikely to experience conflict (e.g. Blainey, 1973; Organski & Kugler, 1980). Thus, we control for the balance of military capabilities within each dyad by including a variable – relative capabilities, from the COW data on national material capabilities (Singer, Bremer & Stuckey, 1972).[13]

Alliance similarity is also thought to reduce the likelihood of conflict within a dyad because of shared preferences over security issues (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita & Lalman, 1992). We control for alliance similarity by including the tau-b rank-order coefficient of the two states' alliance portfolios. Alliance portfolio is generated by the EUGene software (Bennett & Stam, 2000).

Geographic proximity also exerts a strong influence on the probability that a dyad experiences a dispute (e.g. Bremer, 1992). The nearer two states are to each other, the more likely they are to engage in a dispute. Thus, we include contiguity as a control for proximity, which is a dummy variable that equals 1 when the members of the dyad share a land border or are separated by 150 miles or less of water (Stinnett et al., 2002).

Empirical Results

We conducted probit analyses of the directed dyads in which the OECD nations were members, 1950–97, using the Generalized Estimating Equation procedure (GEE).[14]

[10] The source for number of government parties and minority government is Whitten & Palmer (1999). For weak party systems, the source is Hankla (2006), who received assistance updating the data from Daniel Kuthy.

[11] Multicollinearity levels among these interaction terms and their constitutive terms do become high in some cases (auxiliary R^2 range from .47 to .81). However, Kam & Franzese (2007) show that the detrimental effects of multicollinearity are rarely a problem in testing interactive hypotheses because the coefficients' standard errors computed for the regression are not those used to test conditional hypotheses.

[12] We use the net democracy score for each state, which is defined as its democracy score minus its autocracy score.

[13] Relative capabilities are measured as follows: State A's capabilities / (State A + Target's capabilities).

[14] The estimates were obtained using Stata 8's XTGEE procedure with a probit link and AR(1) autocorrelation structure specified (Zorn, 2001). In addition, we account for unit heterogeneity and temporal dependence using

Table I. Dyadic Analysis of Government Arrangements, the Economy, and Dispute Initiation, 1950–97

	1.1	*1.2*	*1.3*	*1.4*	*1.5*
Number of parties in government	-0.153***	-0.213***	-0.190***		
	(0.043)	(0.052)	(0.052)		
Minority government	0.093*	0.113*		0.277***	
	(0.066)	(0.075)		(0.080)	
Weak party government	0.468***	0.559***			0.476***
	(0.101)	(0.106)			(0.096)
Number of parties in government × GDP		0.022***	0.019***		
		(0.007)	(0.008)		
Minority government × GDP		-0.016		-0.035**	
		(0.018)		(0.019)	
Weak party government × GDP		-0.037***			-0.026**
		(0.014)			(0.014)
GDP growth	-0.027***	-0.037***	-0.052***	-0.010	-0.008
	(0.007)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.008)	(0.012)
Target's level of democracy	-0.020***	-0.020***	-0.023***	-0.023***	-0.022***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)
Relative capabilities	0.092	0.077	0.225*	0.270**	0.219**
	(0.129)	(0.128)	(0.146)	(0.150)	(0.132)
Alliance portfolio	-0.066	-0.073	-0.076	-0.052	-0.031
	(0.227)	(0.225)	(0.246)	(0.244)	(0.233)
Contiguity	0.902***	0.908***	0.944***	0.925***	0.912***
	(0.170)	(0.169)	(0.200)	(0.203)	(0.184)
Constant	-3.09***	-3.04***	-2.96***	-3.39***	-3.44***
	(0.131)	(0.145)	(0.140)	(0.140)	(0.116)
Chi-square	74.84***	125.66***	65.21***	61.41***	77.30***

The table displays Probit estimates obtained from a GEE regression with AR(1) correlation structure specified. The numbers in parentheses are semi-robust standard errors. $^{*}p < .10$, $^{**}p < .05$, $^{***}p < .01$; one-tailed tests. $N = 109{,}700$.

Table I shows the probit estimates for the relationships between government arrangements, economic performance, and dispute initiation. The column labeled 1.1 assesses the impact of government arrangements, economic performance, and the dyadic attributes independently. In Model 1.1, the coefficient for number of parties in government, which is negative and significant, is consistent with the logic of earlier formulations of the institutional constraints perspective – as constraints on an executive's freedom of action increase via interparty coalition bargaining, the discretion of the executive to initiate conflict declines. The coefficients for minority and weak party executives in Model 1.1 indicate a positive and significant impact on dispute initiation. This suggests that executives facing an opposition legislature or weak party cohesion are more likely to initiate disputes. In Model 1.1, the coefficient for GDP growth suggests that declining economic performance is associated with a greater propensity to initiate international disputes. Model 1.1 provides a sense of how government arrangements and economic performance are independently associated with dispute initiation, but does not assess the hypotheses drawn from the theoretical framework we set forth. For the

other estimation techniques. These analyses produce results that are consistent with those presented in the article and are available in an online appendix.

Table II. Dyadic Analysis: Marginal Effects of GDP Conditioned by Government Arrangements

Conditioning variable (Z)	$\beta_{GDP} + (\beta_{Z \times GDP} \times Z)$[a]	*Change in Pr(Y)*[b]
Model 1.2		
Number of parties in government = 1	-0.015	
	(0.013)	
Number of parties in government = 2	0.008	
	(0.014)	
Number of parties in government = 3	0.030**	-29%
	(0.018)	
Number of parties in government = 4	0.053**	-47%
	(0.023)	
Number of parties in government = 5	0.075***	-62%
	(0.029)	
Model 1.2		
Minority government = 1	-0.053***	+69%
	(0.018)	
Minority government = 0	-0.037***	+46%
	(0.016)	
Model 1.2		
Weak party government = 1	-0.074***	+89%
	(0.013)	
Weak party government = 0	-0.037***	+46%
	(0.016)	

[a] This column displays the marginal effect of GDP under the specified government arrangement. The numbers in parentheses are the appropriate standard errors for marginal effects (see e.g. Brambor, Clark & Golder, 2006). *$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$; one-tailed tests.
[b] Change in Pr(Y) reflects the percentage change in the predicted probability of dispute initiation when GDP is reduced by one standard deviation from its mean, while holding all other variables at baseline values (continuous variables are held at mean values and dichotomous variables are held at zero).

task of empirically evaluating our theoretical framework, we turn to the remainder of the models in Table I.

Models 1.2 through 1.5 show the probit estimates for specifications including the interactions between government arrangements and economic performance. Although the signs and significance levels of the interaction terms across the four models in Table I appear to be supportive of our hypotheses, the levels of certainty calculated with the interaction terms' coefficients and their associated standard errors are unsuitable for testing hypotheses about marginal effects (e.g. Brambor, Clark & Golder, 2006; Kam & Franzese, 2007). The appropriate hypothesis tests and marginal effects – as well as substantive effects for the sake of interpretation – are displayed in Tables II and III.

The coefficient for the number of parties in government × GDP interaction term assesses Hypothesis 1. We assert that the number of parties in government conditions the effect of economic performance on dispute initiation, erasing the executive's impulse to demonstrate his or her leadership competence in the face of economic decline. The results appear to bear out this claim. The marginal effects computed from Model 1.2 for number of government parties and GDP are positive and significant when governments consist of more than two coalition partners. In other

Table III. Dyadic Analysis: Marginal Effects of GDP Conditioned by Government Arrangements

Conditioning variable (Z)	$\beta_{GDP} + (\beta_{Z \times GDP} \times Z)$[a]	*Change in Pr(Y)*[b]
Model 1.3		
Number of parties in government = 1	−0.032***	+38%
	(0.008)	
Number of parties in government = 2	−0.013*	+14%
	(0.008)	
Number of parties in government = 3	0.007	
	(0.014)	
Number of parties in government = 4	0.026	
	(0.022)	
Number of parties in government = 5	0.046*	−42%
	(0.030)	
Model 1.4		
Minority government = 1	−0.045***	+56%
	(0.017)	
Minority government = 0	−0.010	
	(0.008)	
Model 1.5		
Weak party government = 1	−0.035***	+39%
	(0.008)	
Weak party government = 0	−0.008	
	(0.012)	

[a] This column displays the marginal effect of GDP under the specified government arrangement. The numbers in parentheses are the appropriate standard errors for marginal effects (see e.g. Brambor, Clark & Golder, 2006). $^{*}p < .10$, $^{**}p < .05$, $^{***}p < .01$; one-tailed tests.
[b] Change in Pr(Y) reflects the percentage change in the predicted probability of dispute initiation when GDP is reduced by one standard deviation from its mean, while holding all other variables at baseline values (continuous variables are held at mean values and dichotomous variables are held at zero).
[c] The Wald test assesses the joint significance of the interaction term and constitutive term, GDP.

words, declining GDP growth is associated with a decrease in the probability of dispute initiation among executives with 3 or more coalition partners. The marginal effects computed from Model 1.3, which are displayed in Table III, are consistent with Hypothesis 1 as well. The presence of coalition partners in government appears to mitigate the executive's impulse to demonstrate his or her leadership competence in foreign policy when facing poor economic performance.

To test Hypothesis 2, we interacted the minority government variable with GDP growth. Consistent with the hypothesis, the marginal effects computed from Models 1.2 and 1.4 are negative and significant, suggesting that declining GDP growth is associated with an increase in the probability of dispute initiation among minority executives. Because they are unable to garner sufficient legislative support to affect domestic economic policy change, minority executives appear to have a greater propensity than majority executives to turn to the international arena to demonstrate their leadership competence in response to deteriorating economic conditions.

According to the marginal effects of GDP growth among weak party governments, Hypothesis 3 is also borne out in Models 1.2 and 1.5. The marginal effects are negative and significant, which indicates that

Table IV. Monadic Analysis of Government Arrangements, the Economy, and Frequency of Dispute Initiation, 1950–97

	4.1	*4.2*	*4.3*	*4.4*	*4.5*
Number of parties in government	-0.441* (0.276)	-0.580** (0.268)	-0.472* (0.297)		
Minority government	0.206 (0.311)	0.144 (0.294)		0.426 (0.404)	
Weak party government	1.44** (0.750)	1.71*** (0.719)			1.56** (0.828)
Number of parties in government × GDP		0.050** (0.022)	0.040** (0.018)		
Minority government × GDP		-0.005 (0.064)		-0.063* (0.040)	
Weak party government × GDP		-0.106** (0.050)			-0.082** (0.047)
GDP growth	-0.048** (0.028)	-0.065 (0.058)	-0.090*** (0.032)	-0.005 (0.025)	0.007 (0.040)
Constant	-1.53*** (0.474)	-1.43*** (0.487)	-0.939*** (0.863)	-1.86*** (0.423)	-2.32*** (0.374)
Chi-square	5.27	131.79***	8.45**	6.53*	14.69***

Table displays negative binomial estimates obtained from a GEE regression with AR(1) correlation structure specified. The numbers in parentheses are semi-robust standard errors. $^*p < .10$, $^{**}p < .05$, $^{***}p < .01$; one-tailed tests. $N = 969$.

executives plagued by weak party cohesion and economic decline may seek to demonstrate their leadership competence via foreign policy rather than battle for a legislative consensus over economic policy.

In addition to the dyadic analyses, we examined the interactive effects of the economy and government arrangements on dispute initiation using a cross-sectional time-series dataset composed of state-years (i.e. monads). The dependent variable in these analyses is the annual count of MID initiations by the OECD member states. King (1988) shows that an event count, such as the number of dispute initiations, is suitable for drawing inferences about the underlying process that generated the events. In the monadic analyses, we include the measures of government arrangements and economic performance as well as the interaction terms for evaluating our theoretical hypotheses. These analyses are summarized in Tables IV through VI. Our hypotheses 'survive' this initial robustness check. The results of the monadic analyses buttress our findings discussed above.

We also subjected our hypotheses to a series of additional robustness checks.[15] First, we distinguished between presidential and non-presidential systems in our analyses. Given that presidents are popularly elected and frequently enjoy greater latitude in foreign policy decisions than other executives (Lijphart, 1999; Shugart & Carey, 1992), failure to account for presidential systems could bias the results. We controlled for this possibility by including a dummy variable that assumes the value of 1 for post-1958 France and the USA and re-estimated all of the dyadic and monadic specifications

[15] These results are available in an online appendix at http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets.

Table V. Monadic Analysis: Marginal Effects of GDP Conditioned by Government Arrangements

Conditioning variable (Z)	$\beta_{GDP} + (\beta_{Z \times GDP} \times Z)^{a}$	*Change in E(Y)*[b]
Model 4.2		
Number of parties in government = 1	-0.015	
	(0.048)	
Number of parties in government = 2	0.035	
	(0.047)	
Number of parties in government = 3	0.085*	-23%
	(0.056)	
Number of parties in government = 4	0.135**	-34%
	(0.072)	
Number of parties in government = 5	0.185**	-43%
	(0.090)	
Model 4.2		
Minority government = 1	-0.070*	+23%
	(0.052)	
Minority government = 0	-0.065	
	(0.058)	
Model 4.2		
Weak party government = 1	-0.172***	+69%
	(0.045)	
Weak party government = 0	-0.065	
	(0.058)	

[a] This column displays the marginal effect of GDP under the specified government arrangement. The numbers in parentheses are the appropriate standard errors for marginal effects (see e.g. Brambor, Clark & Golder, 2006). $^{*}p < .10$, $^{**}p < .05$, $^{***}p < .01$; one-tailed tests.

[b] Change in $E(Y)$ reflects the percentage change in the expected count of dispute initiations when GDP is reduced by one standard deviation from its mean, while holding all other variables at baseline values (continuous variables are held at mean values and dichotomous variables are held at zero).

described above. The results of these analyses were consistent with our previous findings with one exception – the marginal effects for the minority government × GDP interaction as well as marginal effects for the interaction of GDP with the number of government parties fail to attain significance in the monadic analysis in specifications which include the other interactions.

Second, we excluded the USA from the sample and re-estimated all of the dyadic and monadic specifications presented in Tables I and IV. An examination of the cases detailed in the appendix reveals that the USA is responsible for most of the disputes initiated by the OECD countries. Moreover, the USA does not experience coalition government, but frequently experiences minority government and is plagued by a weak party system. Consequently, the results could be due to the presence of the USA. However, the results of these analyses continued to support our hypotheses. We found that in all hypothesis tests save one – the marginal effect for minority government × GDP fails to attain significance in the monadic analysis – the expected relationships were borne out in spite of the exclusion of the USA.

Overall, our results are suggestive of the theoretical argument. Hypothesis 1 is supported; we find that coalitions tend to reduce the likelihood of international dispute initiation as

Table VI. Monadic Analysis: Marginal Effects of GDP Conditioned by Government Arrangements

Conditioning variable (Z)	$\beta_{GDP} + (\beta_{Z \times GDP} \times Z)$[a]	*Change in E(Y)*[b]
Model 4.3		
Number of parties in government = 1	–0.049**	+16%
	(0.021)	
Number of parties in government = 2	–0.009	
	(0.023)	
Number of parties in government = 3	0.031	
	(0.036)	
Number of parties in government = 4	0.071*	–19%
	(0.052)	
Number of parties in government = 5	0.111*	–29%
	(0.069)	
Model 4.4		
Minority government = 1	–0.068***	+23%
	(0.027)	
Minority government = 0	–0.005	
	(0.025)	
Model 4.5		
Weak party government = 1	–0.074***	+26%
	(0.024)	
Weak party government = 0	0.007	
	(0.040)	

[a] This column displays the marginal effect of GDP under the specified government arrangement. The numbers in parentheses are the appropriate standard errors for marginal effects (see e.g. Brambor, Clark & Golder 2006). *$p < .10$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$; one-tailed tests.
[b] Change in $E(Y)$ reflects the percentage change in the expected count of dispute initiations when GDP is reduced by one standard deviation from its mean, while holding all other variables at baseline values (continuous variables are held at mean values and dichotomous variables are held at zero).

economic performance deteriorates. Hypothesis 2 receives strong support as well; minority executives are more likely to resort to international conflict when faced with declining economic growth. The results also provide credible support for Hypothesis 3, suggesting that executives beleaguered by weak party cohesion are more likely to engage in an international dispute during hard economic times.

Conclusion

Examining conflict behavior among OECD member states from 1950 to 1997, we find that the extent to which democratic leaders use force abroad in response to economic decline is conditioned by government arrangements. Specifically, government arrangements (1) shape the extent to which the executive's party is held accountable for the state of the economy and (2) affect the capacity of the executive to address economic decline with policy. Coalition government appears to diffuse responsibility for the state of the economy and provides opportunities for logrolling, reducing the need for the executive to demonstrate his or her competence in the foreign policy arena. Minority government and weak party cohesion limit the ability of the executive to shift economic policy from the status quo, which increases the executive's need to demonstrate his or her competence in international affairs. Because foreign policy issues tend to fall on an issue dimension that is orthogonal to economic issues, partisan and factional oppositions are typically unable or unwilling to thwart the executive's pursuit of foreign policy.

This article elucidates our understanding of democratic conflict behavior as well as executive behavior in the face of legislative constraints. Our results call into question the conceptualization of coalition partners and majority oppositions as 'veto players' (Tsebelis, 1995) that limit the executive's foreign policy decisionmaking autonomy. We fruitfully incorporate the assumption that partisan preferences tend to be limited to social and economic policy, rather than foreign policy (e.g. Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Mair, 1997). Government arrangements that deviate from single-party majority governments may 'constrain' leaders, but not in the manner typically described. If we accept that a constraint effectively reduces the size of the set of alternatives from which a leader may select a policy option or course of action, a constraint may prevent a leader from initiating a dispute under some circumstances, but a constraint may also prevent a leader from *not* initiating a dispute. Therefore, when remedial economic policies are unavailable, democratic leaders may be compelled to use force; and the probability of dispute initiation does not necessarily vary directly with a leader's policymaking discretion.

Our argument also raises new questions about the capacity of executives to contend with legislative constraints on domestic policy. The literature on electoral accountability indicates that minority and weak party governments are less likely than majority governments to suffer electoral losses in the wake of economic decline (Powell & Whitten, 1993). This lack of electoral accountability is typically explained in terms of public recognition of legislative constraints on the executive's ability to affect economic policy. However, our argument suggests that these constrained executives may be able to overcome legislative opposition by changing the nature of the debate from socio-economic issues – which tend to define partisan and ideological disagreement (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Mair, 1997) – to less contentious issues that cut across partisan and ideological cleavages. For example, such issues as, say, immigration policy or infrastructure maintenance may stand a better chance of transcending partisan and ideological divisions than tax and welfare policy. Future research should explore whether minority and weak party governments are more likely than single-party majority governments with strong cohesion to take up less contentious issues.

Our findings also appear to challenge the strategic conflict avoidance (SCA) perspective (e.g. Fordham, 2005; Leeds & Davis, 1997; Smith, 1996). SCA argues that potential targets of diversions tend to refrain from behavior that may lead them to be targeted by democratic states experiencing difficult domestic times, reducing opportunities for democracies to divert. In spite of a supposed dearth of opportunities to divert, we find that – under specified conditions – democratic leaders manage to initiate disputes in response to the economy. Although our results pose a challenge for SCA, it could be the case that potential targets fail to receive a clear signal from executives under the conditions we specify. Executives may be unable to credibly signal their resolve to targets when the legislature is generally unsupportive of the executive's policies (see e.g. Schultz, 2001; Foster, 2006). This could result in targets refusing to back down in the run-up to disputes, leaving the executive little choice but to press the issue through the force of arms.

In addition to implications for other research agendas, this project raises additional questions about the linkage between government accountability and the diversionary use of force. First, we assume that costs of economic decline are distributed equally among coalition partners. But in multiparty systems, which tend to produce coalition governments (e.g. Lijphart, 1994), the parties are likely to be relatively small and beholden to narrowly focused, intensely organized interest groups (e.g. Weingast, Shepsle & Johnsen, 1981). These narrow interests stand in stark contrast to the relatively broad swath of important issues facing larger parties, such as those in countries with two-party systems (see e.g. Bawn & Rosenbluth, 2006; Cox, 1990). Consequently, some coalition partners may be more likely to be held accountable for the economy than others. For example, Anderson (1995) suggests that voters hold governing parties that emphasize economic issues accountable for the economy more so than those emphasizing non-economic issues. Similarly, voters may evaluate governing parties on the basis of issues emphasized by these parties. Such issue-specific accountability implies that the extent to which coalition executives have incentives to divert in response to the economy depends on the kinds of issues their party emphasizes. Future research should devise tests to evaluate this possibility.[16]

Another related question raised by this project concerns the possibility that ideological macroeconomic preferences condition the extent to which executives are held accountable for the economy and, consequently, their incentives to divert (see Fordham, 1998). The economic voting literature suggests that parties of the left tend to be accountable for unemployment, while parties of the right tend to be accountable for inflation (e.g. Powell & Whitten, 1993). This suggests that responses to different macroeconomic conditions are conditioned by executives' ideology. Although we use an indicator of economic misery that is thought to apply generally to parties of the left and right, future studies should distinguish between the effects of unemployment and inflation conditioned by government ideology on dispute behavior in a cross-national context.

[16] We are grateful to an anonymous referee for recommending this possibility.

Appendix

Table AI. Dispute Behavior, Government Arrangements, and Economic Performance among OECD Member States, 1950–97

Country	*Total dispute initiations*	*Periods of coalition government*	*Periods of minority government*	*Weak party system?*	*GDP growth descriptive statistics*	
Australia	3	1950–72	None	No	Mean	2.122
		1976–82			Std. Dev.	3.24
		1996–97			Min	-10.53
					Max	10.92
Austria	2	1950–65	1970–71	No	Mean	3.55
		1983–95			Std. Dev.	3.05
					Min	-2.23
					Max	13.28
Belgium	5	1954–57	1958	No	Mean	2.78
		1959–97			Std. Dev.	2.22
					Min	-2.97
					Max	7.15

(*Continued*)

Table AI. (*Continued*)

Country	*Total dispute initiations*	*Periods of coalition government*	*Periods of minority government*	*Weak party system?*	*GDP growth descriptive statistics*	
Canada	9	None	1957	No	Mean	2.23
			1962–68		Std. Dev.	2.84
			1973–74		Min	-6.08
			1980		Max	6.84
Denmark	2	1950–53	1950–56	No	Mean	2.60
		1955–71	1961–67		Std. Dev.	3.53
		1977–79	1972–90		Min	-5.56
		1982–90	1995–97		Max	14.16
		1995–97				
Finland	0	1950–60	1953	No	Mean	3.22
		1962–95	1957		Std. Dev.	3.80
			1959–61		Min	-7.78
			1972		Max	10.97
France	24	1950–66	1956–57	No	Mean	2.89
		1968	1986–92		Std. Dev.	2.08
		1986–97			Min	-2.23
					Max	7.07
Germany	6	1950–59	None	No	Mean	2.06
		1962–97			Std. Dev.	1.84
					Min	-1.86
					Max	6.35
Greece[a]	3	None	None	No	Mean	1.11
					Std. Dev.	2.56
					Min	-3.02
					Max	5.80
Iceland	5	1950–58	1990–91	Yes	Mean	2.87
		1960–97			Std. Dev.	4.82
					Min	-8.17
					Max	14.49
Ireland	2	1950	1950–53	No	Mean	3.75
		1954–56	1962–64		Std. Dev.	3.13
		1973–76	1981–82		Min	-1.74
		1981	1987–91		Max	10.2
		1983–86				
		1989–97				
Italy	4	1950–52	1954–61	Yes	Mean	3.45
		1954–56	1968–69		Std. Dev.	2.62
		1962	1976–79		Min	-3.74
		1964–71			Max	8.80
		1979–94				
Japan	2	1955	1953–54	Yes	Mean	4.99
		1983–85	1977–79		Std. Dev.	3.88
		1994–96			Min	-2.94
					Max	13.06
Luxembourg	0	1950–97	None	No	Mean	2.90
					Std. Dev.	3.99
					Min	-8.93
					Max	10.27

(*Continued*)

Table AI. Dispute Behavior, Government Arrangements, and Economic Performance among OECD Member States, 1950–97 (*Continued*)

Country	*Total dispute initiations*	*Periods of coalition government*	*Periods of minority government*	*Weak party system?*	*GDP growth descriptive statistics*	
Netherlands	4	1950–97	None	No	Mean	2.57
					Std. Dev.	2.86
					Min	-6.48
					Max	8.79
New Zealand	2	None	None	No	Mean	1.42
					Std. Dev.	4.16
					Min	-7.45
					Max	13.36
Norway	8	1966–69	1962–65	No	Mean	2.86
		1982–85	1970–81		Std. Dev.	1.80
			1986–97		Min	–.78
					Max	6.25
Portugal [b]	1	1978	1977	No	Mean	2.89
		1980–85	1980		Std. Dev.	2.80
			1986–87		Min	-2.41
			1996–97		Max	7.93
Spain [c]	2	None	1977–80	No	Mean	2.00
			1990–97		Std. Dev.	3.09
					Min	-4.75
					Max	10.34
Sweden	0	1951–57	1951	No	Mean	2.31
		1980–82	1958–68		Std. Dev.	2.22
		1992–94	1971–97		Min	-2.99
					Max	6.69
Switzerland	1	1950–97	None	Yes	Mean	1.93
					Std. Dev.	3.52
					Min	-8.79
					Max	8.61
United Kingdom	31	None	1974	No	Mean	2.20
					Std. Dev.	2.14
					Min	-2.83
					Max	7.35
United States [d]	81	None	1950–52	Yes	Mean	2.32
			1955–60		Std. Dev.	2.58
			1969–76		Min	-4.18
			1981–92		Max	7.42
			1995–97			

[a] Greece enters the sample in 1977.
[b] Portugal enters the sample in 1977.
[c] Spain enters the sample in 1977.
[d] Laver & Shepsle (1991) argue that minority governments in parliamentary systems closely parallel divided governments in the US case. In both situations, the leader has to receive legislative support from those outside the leaders' partisan base.

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