

Project Summary

What Do Leaders Want?: Collecting and Coding Issue Positions and Demands in the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) Data, 1816-2010

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Both policymakers and scholars care greatly about military bargaining between states and between leaders, but no large-scale data resource exists to adequately test our theories about how bargaining affects leader interests during and after conflicts. The current Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) dataset is the most widely used international relations dataset, but even this dataset provides only broad summary measures of issue type and revisionism. There is no data on the evolution of conflict within the dispute, when fatalities occurred, or what actions were taken by each combatant. We seek funding to change that by collecting, coding, and analyzing issue position and issue position change data for all MIDs from 1816 to 2010. Our dataset will include dispute-level variables for initial and final status quo positions for every issue in a dispute, and our participant-level data will code the initial issue position and every change in that position for each participant and for every dispute issue. We will also identify all intra-dispute threats and demands for each participant.

Intellectual Merit

Theoretical insights in the international relations literature continue to advance, but the ability to test specific propositions from these theories remains limited, due primarily to a lack of data. Our good summary data most often provide only indirect measures of what conflicts were about, hence, an inappropriate sample for tests of many theories. By changing the level of precision in quantitative tests of conflict, our issue data will change the nature of empirical testing in international conflict for a long time. We intend to use this data to examine insights from territorial theories of conflict, but we will also design the project so that issue variables can be integrated with the MID dataset. As we describe in the proposal, that integration will allow empirical testing of many bargaining theories of conflict.

Broader Impacts

What causes international conflict is of course a central concern of policymakers and scholars, and this dataset would provide the opportunity to study the causes and consequences of conflict at a level of precision that has never before been realized over such a large temporal domain. Thus, this data will potentially have a very broad impact on society, policy, and scholarship. In terms of education, this proposal also integrates numerous undergraduates and graduate students into the process of discovery and understanding. Over the past two years, we have involved over 40 undergraduate students in projects derivative of a previously NSF-funded project, which will continue if this proposal is funded. These students have started considering graduate education and research careers at a much higher rate than their peers, and many of these students have benefited from attending academic conferences. The *majority* of our undergraduate researchers have been from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in political science (female and African American). These types of programs often provide underrepresented groups and first-generation college students their primary exposure to science and discovery at universities like ours. This will continue if the project is funded.

One of the strongest findings in the international conflict literature is that issues involving territory are incredibly difficult to resolve and often war-prone. This conclusion has continued unabated even though the data on what constitutes a territorial issue remain sparse. Indeed, most still rely on the three-part categorization provided by the Correlates of War (CoW) Project's Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data: disputes are fought over regime status, policy issues, or territory. The problems with this simple trichotomy are myriad, but principle among them is the vast heterogeneity within each category. Are we really going to assume that a border violation, which is often labeled a territorial conflict, is more dangerous to the states involved and more difficult to resolve than a confrontation over, for example, control of weapons of mass destruction—a policy or regime issue?

Even if we were to ignore the poorly informative categorizations of conflict, we would still lack information in these disputes on what exactly states are fighting over. We have information about whether each participant is trying to revise the status quo—a dummy variable—but that carries little information about the level of disagreement the state's leaders have with that position. This is important because that level of disagreement will likely be correlated at least somewhat with the conflict behavior of an opposing state. This is important when judging the effectiveness of different actions. For example, a show of force may stop dispute escalation when the other state's position is only mildly inconsistent with the status quo; the leader may not risk fatalities for small gains.

A third problem arises when we realize that data availability also trails the needs of some of our best explanations of conflict. These are the broad class of theories that understand disputes as extensions of international bargaining. Indeed, bargaining theories can provide ample predictions about both when and the types of issue positions dispute participants are likely to take. Most bargaining theories also assume position evolution over time as disputes progress and the resolve and capabilities of participants are revealed through conflict. However, no data exist to test these predictions consistently over spatial and temporal domains of any size. Summary indicators of issue type and revisionist nature are simply inadequate for examining the richness of these theories.

This proposal seeks funding to develop a dataset of the issues, issue types, and issue positions for each dispute participant in the MID dataset from 1816 to 2010. As we describe below, we intend to code the state of the world for each particular issue under contention at the initiation of a dispute as well as all stated and implied issue positions and issue position changes for each participant as they evolve throughout the dispute. These data also include coding whether the position changes involved demands and threats—militarized or otherwise. We intend to use this dataset for our own research on territorial issues and the causes and consequences of international conflict. However, we will integrate the data with our militarized incident and the MID data so that the issue data will be easily useable for empirical testing of most international conflict. Indeed, we coded each incident for connectedness—whether an incident is a response to previous incidents—and, together with issue data, most bargaining theories can be easily tested using the militarized incident data.

The proposal proceeds as follows. First, we highlight the unique opportunity we have to collect this data. Gibler's previous grant—and Miller's related work with it—have created the necessary infrastructure for collecting this issue data. The second section outlines the importance of issue type and how territorial issues have been consistently linked to conflict between states. We combine this review with a brief outline of bargaining theories of conflict and the importance they attach to issue positions. The next section provides a theoretical discussion of issues and issue positions and our expectations for the data we will collect. We then provide numerous case examples from the MID data that describe how issues and the demands made by conflict actors change as disputes

progress; we rely on case examples here because no consistent data exist across all disputes. We use the data we do have available to provide a straightforward demonstration of the heterogeneity within dispute types, focusing on those considered to be over territorial issues by the MID data. Finally, we close by discussing our coding plans and the broader impacts these data will have on political science and related fields.

1 Prior NSF Support

Gibler just completed an NSF-supported project that collected and coded militarized incidents within disputes, 1816 to 1992 (Award #1260492, 2013-2016). The grant ended last December, but we have nevertheless already produced several publications, working papers, and datasets. We have published an article that discusses our proposed changes for the existing MID data and how those changes affect previous studies (Gibler, Miller and Little N.d.) and an article that examines some of heterogeneity within disputes by discussing the protest-dependent cases (Gibler and Little 2016). Gibler (2017) has also used data from the grant in his argument that the relationship between dyadic capabilities and conflict is spurious to state system entry and development. Because of space concerns we refer readers to these independent publications for each particular argument.

Important for our current proposal is that we have now collected every militarized incident within disputes, providing over 20,000 subwar militarized international incidents between 1816 and 1992. Also included are location data for each incident, whether and how many civilians were killed in each incident, and the connectedness of the events in disputes—in other words, whether a given incident was a response to actions by another state, including previous incidents. A paper that uses the data to test several bargaining models of conflict will precede release of the data and a data-related article, most likely in the summer of 2017.

We have collected extensive source information on each dispute—our bibliography is available as an Appendix to Gibler, Miller and Little (N.d.)—in order to collect and code the militarized incident dataset. These sources are comprehensive enough to provide the bulk of materials we will need to code the issues we describe in the proposal, which is why we expect additional source searches for only the most complicated disputes. Finally, we have developed a research infrastructure on international conflict with undergraduate and graduate students at both universities who are intimately familiar with the coding rules associated with the MID data. Coding issue positions and changes across disputes will not require much additional training.

2 The Importance of Issues

We use this section to make two main points about the conflict literature. First, while we know that territorial issues are more difficult-to-resolve and more war-prone, that conclusion does little to unmask the vast differences across dispute types within that category. Only certain territorial disputes are likely to be dangerous. Second, the bargaining literature also suggest positions issues matter and, as importantly, changes in issue positions matter as well. However, no clear data exist to consistently test these theories. Together, we believe these arguments underscore the need for better development of the issue data that describe what states fight over.

2.1 Is Territory Important?

The short answer to this question is *yes*, of course, since this issue is most clearly associated with escalation, recurrent conflicts, fatal conflicts, and wars (for a review of these findings, see Gibler 2012). However, these conclusions rest on the argument that all territorial issues carry the

same salience for dispute participants and all territorial issues are qualitatively different from other contentious issues like regime and policy differences. This is not so, of course. While many familiar war cases began as territorial disputes—the First Gulf War (MID#3957), the Falklands/Malvinas War (MID#3630), Nagorno-Karabakh (MID#3564), and World War II (MID#0258)—but this category also includes some rather bizarre historical events that were coded as militarized incidents. Just a few examples include the 1893 incident in which French troops fired on British troops in West Africa, thinking they were fleeing members of the Sofa tribe (MID#2300); the French very quickly apologized for their mistake. Or, in 1842, US Commander Jones misread newspaper reports and thought Mexico was aiding the British, sailed to Monterrey, and took the city in the name of the United States. Jones then gave the city back two days later after he realized his mistake (MID#2116). More recently, MID#1367 codes cattle rustling by Ugandan troops against Kenya in 1973, and MID#4237 describes a similar incident by South African forces directed at Lesotho in 1994. Each of these are territorial disputes in the dataset resting alongside the major territorial wars of the last two centuries.

Even a focus on the territorial wars reveals substantial heterogeneity across the cases. The First Gulf War was a broad coalition fighting against Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. Only Iraq and Kuwait were fighting a territorial issue as the coalition was trying to compel Iraq to respect the ante bellum status quo. Compare, too, the Falklands/Malvinas War with Nagorno-Karabakh. The Falklands/Malvinas are islands in the South Atlantic, former British colonies that were claimed by Argentina and became an issue following growing nationalistic pride among Argentine citizens. Nagorno-Karabakh, meanwhile, constitutes a struggle between two states—Armenia and Azerbaijan—defending claims to additional homeland territory and co-ethnic populations. The motivations for fighting these conflicts and the effects of the wars on the populations and institutions of the states involved were vastly different. Finally, none of these is quite similar to the World War that began with a predatory Germany searching for what it called *lebensraum*. The world war is an outlier in many ways but also shares commonalities with the other war and dispute cases. These commonalities are not necessarily apparent, though, when grouped only according to the first revisionist issue in the conflict.

Few have actually tried to discern differences across types of territorial issues. Two notable exceptions include Huth (1998) and Hensel (2001). Huth divided territories based on the possible value that each piece of land could provide. Strategic territories and land with ethnic brethren were found to be more likely than other territorial disputes to escalate to conflict. Hensel took this value differentiation a step further and created an index that identified the possible salience of the contested land based on its characteristics—resources, strategic nature, etc.—and whether the territory was near the states or part of their homelands.

The index is a useful way of thinking about territorial claims, but there is one problem when discussing actual militarized conflict. It combines indicators of *what* states fight over with indicators of *why* they are fighting. This is important because the characteristics of the territory will likely be endogenous with the types of actions a state takes. Fights for control of territory may be more likely when resources are present, and leaders will more often try to occupy the land. Meanwhile, contested borders over land with little actual value may be more likely to provoke harassment strategies of repeated violations, seizures, and the like, and other pieces of territory may lead to strategies that try to deny the rival control of the land. Too, land often becomes strategic when rivalry makes it strategic; without rivalry though, the nature of the territory changes dramatically.

2.2 International Conflict as Bargaining Situations

While the last section focused on issue content, a separate issue arises when we consider participant positions on those issues at the start of a conflict and how those positions evolve with new information. For example, bargaining models of international conflict tend to assume that formal preferences over a disputed issue exist. These, in turn, motivate the initial demand that a state actor makes in a given international conflict. This demand, once rejected, starts the onset of war in the simpler bargaining models or the first use of force in repeated bargaining games.¹ Nevertheless, many theories and almost all empirical tests of these theories generally remain silent about the initial issue positions that combatants take.

Initial Issue Positions

Some works in the formal literature have only indirectly addressed the importance of initial issue positions prior to the onset of bargaining, and all focus more on crisis bargaining after assumptions of initial issue positions. [Slantchev \(2005\)](#), for example, develops a model that tries to disentangle “sunk-cost” signaling from “hands-tying” (and audience cost-generating) signals in crisis. His conclusions, contrary to the conventional wisdom largely drawn from [Fearon \(1994; 1997\)](#), are that neither mechanism is completely discrete from the other and military mobilization can serve as a credible signal. However, his discussion of why states engage in sunk-cost signaling is limited to statements that states do this as a signal of the value of the motivating issue. Sufficiently important issues or issue positions that entail a strong desire to revise the status quo can lead states to figuratively burn money it cannot recover in a crisis even if a crisis resolves short of war.

Elsewhere, [Slantchev \(2004\)](#) extends his argument of the principle of convergence in war to note that initiators fare worse in wars they initiate over more salient issues ([Slantchev 2003](#)). Potential war initiators prefer cheap and winnable conflicts when the issue at stake is not as important and self-select accordingly. They lose that advantage over more salient conflicts. However, this model gives only casual attention to the topic of salient issue positions, resorting to [Holsti’s \(1991\)](#) old typology of war to code for wars over territory or state integrity. The topic of salient issues was not even the main hypothesis [Slantchev \(2004\)](#) tested, but his work stands out in a field that otherwise ignores this important assumption.

[Reed et al. \(2008\)](#) are conspicuous for tackling the problem of ex ante issue positions and confessing there are important methodological challenges to coding issue positions within the bargaining framework. Almost all who have tried have resorted to coding issue positions with references to alliance patterns or the distribution of power. Power transition theory (e.g. [Kugler and Lemke 2000](#)) is the clear source of the intuition behind this measurement approach, but this type of measure conflates the contested benefit that motivates the demand to start the dispute with the sources of uncertainty that motivate bargaining breakdown. [Reed et al. \(2008\)](#) propose an alternative measure of state preferences with United Nations roll call votes. This is useful, but there is a real disconnect with the global focus of this measurement approach and the realities from the Correlates of War (CoW) Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data ([Palmer et al. 2015](#)) they try to explain. Most conflicts are bilateral (e.g. [Jones, Bremer and Singer 1996](#)), between contiguous states (e.g. [Senese](#)

¹We refer to the broad class of bargaining theories that derive from Thomas Schelling’s (1960, 5) decades-old observation that international conflicts “are essentially bargaining situations” generated scores of work, most formal theoretic, about how the bargaining framework unifies dispute onset, escalation to war, the conduct of war, and the conclusion of war. This framework has evolved over time, especially from simple ultimatum bargaining games (e.g. [Fearon 1995](#); c.f. [Guth, Schmittberger and Schwarze 1982](#)) to repeated [Rubinstein \(1982\)](#) bargaining games (e.g. [Wagner 2000](#)), but ultimately describes the same conflict process.

2005), and the most salient disputes are typically bilateral contests for territory (Gibler 2012). The global focus of UN roll call votes poorly matches the exigencies of most conflicts in the international system. Further, this approach is a rough proxy for state preferences that may explain the onset of a MID. They do not capture specific demands in rivalry relationships or the potential evolution of these demands within the dispute itself.

The Neglected Importance of the Initial Demand

Demands following fully formed issue positions always start disputes in the bargaining framework, but international conflict scholarship has effectively ignored this. Work derived from Schelling's (1960) seminal treatise or newer models like Fearon (1995) or Wagner (2000) instead focus far more attention on why a hypothetical demand is rejected or how military clashes in a dispute induce states to accept a negotiated settlement over the motivating demand. This has led to well-traveled arguments about misrepresentation of private information (e.g. Schultz 1998, 1999), the inability to credibly commit to a pre-war negotiated settlement (e.g. Powell 2006), and issue indivisibility (e.g. Goddard 2006) as causes of war. It has also generated novel insights to how battlefield outcomes reveal private information and lead to a convergence of expectations about what a total war would resemble (e.g. Wagner 2000; Filson and Werner 2002; Slantchev 2003; Powell 2004). However, again, these approaches ignore the importance and the properties of the initial demand in the process.

The security studies literature tends to be more interested in the initial demand and focuses interest on the problem of "indivisibility." Works in this vein explore how issues become construed as "indivisible" (Goddard 2006), whether discrete "divisibility" counts as de facto "indivisibility" (c.f. Reiter 2003), if multidimensional issue-linkage makes any issue truly indivisible (Fearon 1995, 381-82), if "indivisibility" is actually proxy for reputation concerns (Toft 2002/3), and whether issue-area subdimensions qualify the overall problem of the invisibility of demands (Hassner 2003). These works have tried to unpack theoretical concepts with case illustrations independent of broader implications for the bargaining literature—largely because no extensive data on issue content and issue positions exist.

Works in the bargaining literature provide even less information about the nature of the demand. These studies either assume a take-it-or-leave-it ultimatum that should induce Side B to accept a settlement short of war (i.e. Fearon 1995) or focus on how battlefield outcomes solve the private information problem. Some, like Fearon (1995) and Filson and Werner (2002), treat the demand as little more than a first move in a strategic situation. No discussion or elaboration follows.

The Potential for Issue Position Evolution in Disputes

Bargaining literature's neglect of initial issue positions and demands to start crises extends to the possibility of the evolution of these issue positions and demands in disputes. This is a curious omission of analytic effort since bargaining scholars invest considerable energy into the private information problem and how threats and battlefield outcomes help solve it. The real implication of scholarship on the private information problem is battlefield clashes and public statements that reveal resolve over a disputed issue should lead state actors to revise their prior beliefs about the nature of the adversary and adjust their issue positions and demands. These initial issue positions and demands can evolve. However, scholars who work on the problem of private information have not yet exploited this implication of their work in large part because the data do not exist.

The Correlates of War (CoW) Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data (Palmer et al. 2015) are not equipped to answer questions about demands that motivate the onset of a militarized

interstate dispute. The data set codes which side in a dispute is trying to revise the status quo. As we describe above, the data also provide a rough issue coding for whether the dispute concerns general policy matters, the composition of one side’s regime, or the distribution of territory (see also, [Gibler 2016](#)). However, these dispute-level codings do not capture the exact demand that motivates the onset of a MID, and they will not capture the multiple demands that sides may issue during a dispute. Until recently, CoW lacked extensive incident-level data for MID (Ghosn, Palmer and Bremer 2004), and CoW still lacks data on dispute demands that would help us evaluate our bargaining models of international conflict.

Sechser (2011) provides an instructive departure from what we describe. He identifies that most scholarship derived from Schelling’s (1960) canonical statement of conflict as bargaining have focused more attention on deterrence rather than compellence. This follows intense scholarship in the West about deterrence given Cold War concerns but it has left scholars with a dearth of data to test hypotheses about compellent threats in international relations. Even Schelling (1966) himself noted both compellence and deterrence have different strategic logics and should not be considered equivalent scenarios. Sechser’s (2011) Militarized Compellent Threats data set includes 210 threat episodes between 1918 and 2001 that provide important leverage for estimating the success of compellent threats. For our purposes, however, the dataset captures only part of the problem of demands in disputes. His data self-selects on demands that also coincide with militarized incidents. Demands and militarized incidents may come as a package in a dispute, but states can and often do issue demands without bundling them with a show of force or a threat to attack. Sechser’s (2011) temporal domain also limits our knowledge to data before the most recent CoW update (e.g. Palmer et al. 2015; Gibler, Miller and Little N.d.). As we describe below, our proposal would effectively subsume compellent threats within a larger framework of issue positions, issue position changes, threats, and demands.

3 Why We Need Data on Issues and Issue Positions

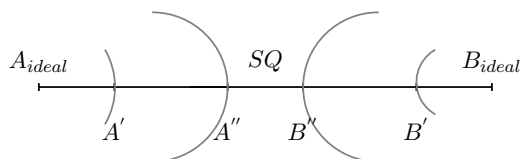
The last section highlighted the need for better issue and issue position data within two different literatures. Here, we take a step back and emphasize how current data may mask important heterogeneity across and within conflicts using a simple example of bargaining between two states. Figure 1 shows two dispute participants—State A and State B—with ideal points at opposite ends of a single-issue continuum. The indifference curves cross the issue continuum at two different points for each state. The smaller indifference curve and the position nearer the ideal point can be thought of as an issue that is more salient to that particular state. The larger indifference curve implies lower salience and, hence, more possible positions that are agreeable to that state. We arbitrarily placed the status quo for that particular issue at the center of the continuum, equidistant between both participants’ ideal positions.

Almost all of our existing issue data on militarized conflict denote salience dichotomously as either territorial or not and does so for both participants in the dyad. There are at least three problems with this approach. First, as we allude to above, not all territorial issues are likely to be salient to the conflict participants. A border violation is much different from a conflict that starts with a state massing troops on the border for an invasion. Second, many non-territorial issues pose serious risks for the states involved and will be highly salient. State-sponsored terrorism, for example, has caused political upheaval in most states affected by it, but the current data lump conflicts associated with terrorism as either regime or policy and, therefore, not salient. Third, the same conflict can raise different issues and different levels of salience for each state in the conflict.

This is not just true for joining states but also original participants. A major state may not want to lose a colony, for example, but that type of territorial issue for the major state will be much different than the territorial issue associated with a new state protecting its independence. Thus, tools that focus on the type of stakes involved with each territory will miss the larger point that, for example, non-strategic land or lack of economic resources for one state does not necessarily eliminate the salience of the land for the other state involved. Together, these criticisms imply any issue measure must delineate well among the many different types of territorial, regime, and policy issues, and also be based on the perceptions of each disputant. Using our figure, the indifference curves are unlikely to be uniformly distant from the status quo for both states on any issue.

Figure 1 also implies an infinite number of possible bargaining positions within each level of salience for each dispute participant. However, current datasets provide only a dichotomous measure of revisionism in the dispute—essentially, which state is trying to change the status quo. Those measures are also summary in nature and do not change as the dispute progresses. As we highlight in the last section, though, issue positions are supposed to change as disputes progress and reveal

Figure 1: Sample Issue Positions



information, so whether a disputant was revisionist (and won or lost) provides little information about what took place in the dispute and how issue positions changed. It may also be the case that both disputants want to change the status quo in the same way, but one is simply not going far enough and is being compelled by the other state with shows of force—seizures and the like, for example—until their ideal position becomes the new status quo. These criticisms imply that, to properly capture issue positions and changes in those positions, issue indicators should identify the initial position of each participant on the continuum, any changes in those positions, and the final issue position. When testing the effectiveness of bargaining, that type of data are required.

Finally, our figure provides a one-issue continuum, but many disputes involve multiple issues. Though the MID data has established variables for two issues, the second-issue variable is seldom used. We believe an issue focus should capture all relevant issues and positions during a conflict.

We focus our theoretical discussion in this proposal on the role of issues in conflict more generally, but both Co-PIs have long-standing interests in examining the effects of salient conflicts on state development (Gibler 2010, 2012; Gibler and Tir 2010, 2014; Gibler and Miller 2014) and public opinion (Miller 2013, 2016, 2017; Gibler, Hutchison and Miller 2012). We have also both examined how the distribution of salient issues may better explain empirical regularities like the democratic peace (Gibler 2012; Gibler and Miller 2013; Gibler and Hutchison 2013). The definition of salient issues in each of these works has been whether conflicts were over territorial issues, but, as we argue above, that dichotomy masks both the importance of other issue types and the relative importance of certain territorial issues over others. Thus, we are seeking these data to advance our own research programs in multiple directions.

The long-term benefits of this data for other research programs cannot be ignored. As we describe, many bargaining theories suggest explicit implications on the evolution of issues during a dispute, and we believe the lack of good data has hampered theory development in many cases. Specific conflict literatures that will benefit from this data include debates over the role of peace settlements (Fortna 2003; Werner and Yuen 2005), examinations of the signaling advantage of democracies Schultz (1998), and discussions of the role of threats during crisis bargaining (Downes

and Sechser 2012). However, any argument that affords at least some role for issues in the causes and consequences of conflict will benefit.

4 Analyses of Issues within and across MIDs

The next step in our argument examines the cases of conflict we wish to code. As our proposal makes clear, comprehensive data on issues and issue positions of dispute participants is not available. However, our familiarity with the MID data allowed us to develop several cases that should demonstrate well that issues, issue positions, and threats and demands, vary substantially across and within disputes. We present those cases here and close by comprehensively examining the one issue type we have coded already, examining heterogeneity across the types of territorial issues states contend.

Clear Positions and Demands: An Idiosyncratic World War I

Few disputes resemble the somewhat neat, if stylized, process of how the July Crisis became World War I (MID#0257). This dispute started with an Austrian threat of war against Serbia after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Gavrilo Princip. The threat came with 10 demands (Tucker 2005, 1370), many quite exorbitant (e.g. acceptance of Austrian representatives to suppress “subversive movements” in Serbia, among others), that amounted to a total concession of Serbian sovereignty to Austria. Serbia momentarily accepted almost all terms of the demand but began mobilization against Austria amid prospects of Russian intervention. Austria, not satisfied with Serbia’s reply, began concentrating forces in Bosnia against Serbia. Assured of Germany’s total support, Austria declared war against Serbia five days after its first ultimatum (Albertini 1953). The conflict expanded to a multilateral war a week thereafter.

The story of World War I is stylized into a bargaining situation with clear issue positions by the first player (Austria), a formal pre-conflict demand, a counter-demand (i.e. the Serbian reply), and, in bargaining language, the exercise of the “outside option” (c.f. Sutton 1986) reflected in Austria’s rejection of Serbia’s reply and declaration of war. It is almost a canonical case of bargaining and conflict that illustrates how a simple bargaining model can capture decisions that lead states to war (e.g. Fearon 2002). However, World War I, as even Wagner’s (2000) emphasis on “real war” would indicate, is not a representative case of international conflict no matter how many theories it inspired. We provide numerous examples in the remainder of this section that demonstrate this.

Incidents with No Clear Issue Positions

Not all MIDs necessarily have clear issue positions or stated demands, let alone counter-demands and protracted bargaining. The slew of one-day conflicts in the MID data set illustrate this well. This happens to be the modal case of international conflict; more disputes in the MID data last a day than any other duration recorded in the data. This accounts for almost a quarter of the entire data set. Seventy-nine percent of these one-day MIDs are unreciprocated, meaning the threat, display, or use of force by one side against the other did not merit a militarized response by the targeted side, let alone crisis bargaining. Fifty-five percent of the remaining one-day MIDs that were reciprocated were one-day, single-incident clashes. These are a class of MIDs with combat between sides in which attribution of initiation could not be discerned with the available information. Put differently, these MIDs featured a flare-up on the border between both sides’ militaries over some salient issue and no incident, or crisis bargaining, followed thereafter.

Our review generated conflict narratives that suggest no bargaining model of issue positions and demands in crisis bargaining could apply. For example, MID#1017 was a one-day raid in 1965

by Israeli forces against two Lebanese border towns. Israel stated this was punishment for recent terrorist attacks and offered no stated demand. It was a simple reprisal for an offense already committed and attributed to Lebanon (Facts on File 1965; New York Times 1965). Lebanon, otherwise the least troublesome of Israel's four contiguous neighbors at the time, offered no protest or militarized response. There was only a vague issue position from Israel (a dubious attribution of blame for recent terrorist attacks) with no formal demand and no response from Lebanon.

Issue Positions with No Demands

Some disputes carry assumed issue positions, but no demands or crisis bargaining. One-day, single-incident clashes seem to indicate this class of dispute quite well. Consider that CoW understands clashes as militarized incidents between both sides for which the available information can not pinpoint a clear initiator (Jones, Bremer and Singer 1996, 173). In other words, there is a motivating issue whose importance is sufficient to impel disputing sides to amass troops on a contentious border or in a disputed territory. The dispute follows after tensions ignite and, almost by definition, scholars cannot attribute initiation (and with it, a stated demand) to one side.

There are several cases that illustrate this well. MID#0358 was a one-day single-incident clash on October 20, 1975, between China and India near Arunachal Pradesh on the 13th anniversary of the Sino-Indian War (MID#0199). Four Indian soldiers even died in the clash. However, this fatal dispute came with no stated demand from one side to the other though we can readily infer issue positions about the disputed territory to both sides (Los Angeles Times 1975; Borders 1975; Belkind 1975). MID#2989 was a one-day MID in which a clash followed the attempted Chinese interception of the *Takshing*, a British commercial vessel. The incident, which occurred entirely in British territorial waters, involved Chinese officials' concerns that anti-Communist Chinese citizens were on board the ship (Sydney Morning Herald 1952). Yet, this clear issue position the British immediately inferred after its investigation came with no demand from China. Similarly, MID#3988 was a one-day clash on February 1, 1991, between Honduras and Nicaragua in the disputed Gulf of Fonseca in which naval vessels from both sides engaged fire and exchanged official statements blaming the other for the incident. Issue positions were again clear about ownership of the Gulf of Fonseca, though no demand followed (New York Times 1991; Los Angeles Times 1991).

Taking Positions and Making Demands Later in Disputes

Bargaining models conceptualize that issue positions and demands precede the onset of militarized incidents but this need not be the case. States may only take positions much later into even serious crises. Consider the Trent Affair (MID#0225) as illustrative of a serious crisis between two actors that almost came to war. The dispute starts with a militarized incident by the United States, a November 7, 1861, seizure of a British mail ship (the *HMS Trent*) that contained two Confederate diplomats the United States wanted to detain. British authorities found out the news five days after the seizure but offered no demand or formal position on the matter. The incident became a major crisis when news of the seizure reached London on November 27 (Donald, Baker and Holt 2000). Thereafter, Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and Lord Palmerston worked carefully on the demand the British ambassador ultimately relayed to the United States on December 21 (Mahin 2000). This demand—the release of the Confederate diplomats and an apology—was the first official position of Britain on the matter (New York Times 1861). Historians know ex post the demand the British gave approximated what both sides felt was an appropriate resolution to the issue. Abraham Lincoln did not want to risk British intervention in the American Civil War,

and the British, which had just begun investing in its Indian colony, did not want to divert forces from Europe for the cause of a slave-holding state. The United States released the two Confederate diplomats and apologized. The British accepted, resolving the crisis with a negotiated settlement short of war with a demand it issued more than a month after the crisis started.

The Evolution of Issue Positions

The case of the 1939 Tientsin incident (MID#0337) best illustrates the issue position evolution that can occur within MIDs. The MID occurs in the context of the Second Sino-Japanese War (MID#0157) and increasing Japanese imperialism into colonies held by the British and the French. The start to this dispute is rather simple, notwithstanding the severity of the April 9, 1939, assassination of Cheng Hsi-keng that preceded the June 14, 1939, start date. The Japanese Army blockaded the British and French concessions at Tientsin after four Chinese suspects implicated in Cheng Hsi-keng's assassination had taken refuge in the British settlement. Japan's issue position and first demand were straightforward. Japan demanded that Britain hand over these suspects or their concessions at Tientsin would face a protracted economic blockade.² Both the British and the French refused, and Britain warned of a potential clash if Japan's blockade persisted.

The demand was a simple one connected to an ongoing criminal investigation in Japanese-occupied North China, but the issues at stake in the dispute evolved rather quickly. The blockade soon became connected to the overall ambition of some members of the Japanese North China Army to abolish all Western concessions in the Tientsin territory it occupied during the Second Sino-Japanese War. A Japanese military spokesman in Tientsin remarked the next day that "the arrow is already off the bow" and the resolution of the blockade would not be settled by the transfer of the four suspects in the British concession (Watson, Bourne and Watt 1990, 11). Japan followed with successive demands to turn over all Chinese silver reserves held in British banks, end all anti-Japanese radio broadcasts emanating anywhere within the British empire, ban school textbooks the Japanese government deemed offensive, and end the issuances of the Chinese yuan within the concession (Byas 1939b). It issued several more as the blockade continued as the government in Tokyo noted that its army in Tientsin had complicated negotiations between both sides. Japan effectively demanded a total surrender to all its demands with an explicit threat to pursue a military alliance with Germany and Italy (Byas 1939a).

Negotiations were only successful when Britain realized its limitations several months later. Mindful of an impending war in Europe over Poland and privately aware it would not be able to commit its naval fleet in the Mediterranean to a show of force in Asia over the issue, the British Ambassador in Tokyo made veiled threats it would fight Japan over this issue before it ultimately yielded. Britain agreed to hand over the four Chinese suspects that first prompted the blockade, recognized the right of Japan to pursue the blockade as necessary for the context of the Second Sino-Japanese War, and also agreed to not hinder future Japanese actions. Japan dropped the demand for the Chinese silver reserves held in British banks (Watt 1989).

Testing and Informing Bargaining Models of Conflict

Bargaining theories often draw heavily on stylized cases of international conflict, prominently the July Crisis (e.g. Fearon 2002), to illustrate how bargaining models encapsulate decisions that lead to war or pre-war negotiated settlements. Our review (Gibler, Miller and Little N.d.), however,

²Japan blockaded both the British and the French concessions at Tientsin but Japan primarily targeted Britain over this matter. The British concession held the four Chinese suspects the Japanese Army demanded.

suggests these stylized cases may capture only a small fraction of actual disputes over time. We found numerous disputes with no clear issue positions that motivated a militarized incident. We found several cases in which clear issue positions and a militarized incident came with no stated demand for crisis bargaining. We also found that demands need not precede the first militarized incident, even in serious crises. Importantly, we also found cases—prominently, the Tientsin blockade—in which the issues that motivated the dispute’s onset underwent considerable evolution. All cast doubt on the simple model, and even its derivations, that bargaining assumes. We see important ramifications of this disjuncture between approach and cases for both conflict theory and empirical testing.

First, those theories that appeal to empirical testing for validation most often use MID data, but, as we demonstrate, few cases within that data will pose adequate tests of bargaining models that expect an evolution of positions, demands, or settlement attempts. The data is ill-suited to this type of testing as it is currently formulated. Second, there is a reason that most theories rely on the twists and turns of bargaining during general wars such as World War I. These cases present relatively straightforward attempts by each side to induce its will upon the other. However, it is also the case that these are some of the most historiographically rich events we have—we have good information about what took place, what demands were made, and what issue positions each actor took throughout the conflicts. We do not have such data for low-level cases of conflict such as dispute, especially in any type of consistent form. Thus, we expect better empirical data will lead to better-informed theoretical treatments of conflict.

Heterogeneity within a Single Issue Type

Thus far we have presented numerous case examples to underscore the heterogeneity in the likelihood and timing of issue positions and demands within disputes as well as substantial change in those issue positions over time. We used case studies because the data for issue positions do not yet exist in any consistent fashion across the dispute data. Here, however, we focus on another aspect of issue heterogeneity using data we have already developed for territorial disputes since 1816. These analyses underscore the often vastly different types of issues commonly characterized as similar by the MID dataset.

In separate work, [Gibler \(2016\)](#) has developed a working typology of territorial issues within disputes. This typology provides categories for disputes over the ownership of territories (either border areas, islands, colonies, or broad maritime areas), general border issues such as delimitation of where the border is placed, border violation issues, state system changes (new states, new regimes, and disintegrating empires), and opportunity-based issues of revanchism, failed states, predatory conflict, or involvement in general conflicts. The territorial disputes within the MID data are widely dispersed across these categories, but the actual war-proneness of each issue is concentrated in just a couple of types of territorial issues.

To demonstrate the heterogeneity of issues, even within the singular category of territorial dispute, we provide analyses of the typology in [Table 1](#) using a Heckman-type model. We use a heckman probit because many of the predictors of territorial disputes are likely to be common across types, but escalation will turn on the nature of the territorial dispute. Thus, the selection equation is whether a directed-dyad had a territorial dispute, 1816-2001, with a censored model that includes variables for contiguity, joint democracy, a defense pact in the dyad, the capability share of State A, and temporal corrects of peace years and its splines.³

³We omit this part of the table to save space. However, as would be expected contiguity and capabilities strongly

The uncensored observations in the outcome equation we present correspond to two different types of serious dispute: fatal disputes that included at least one military fatality and wars that included 1,000 or more related battle-deaths. The base predictors of serious disputes include the same dummy variables for contiguity, joint democracy, and defense pacts, and also the dyadic share of capabilities held by State A. These same variables are in the outcome equation, except for the peace year measures. Because the sample includes directed dyads, we distinguish between the level of democracy in each state of the dyad with two dummy variables, which makes the joint democracy measure an interaction. Our key variables for issue comparisons differentiate across type of conflict with dummies for territorial disputes, policy disputes, and regime/government disputes. Other and not applicable become the omitted categories.

Table 1: Heterogeneity among Territorial Disputes

Outcome:	Fatal MID	Fatal MID	War	War
Contiguity	0.130 (0.143)	0.153 (0.145)	-0.091 (0.210)	-0.015 (0.212)
State A is democracy	0.006 (0.088)	0.008 (0.088)	-0.130 (0.126)	-0.123 (0.128)
State B is democracy	-0.031 (0.086)	-0.023 (0.087)	-0.302* (0.138)	-0.319* (0.144)
Joint democracy	-0.292 (0.176)	-0.276 (0.176)	-0.214 (0.328)	-0.184 (0.337)
Defense pact	-0.168 (0.095)	-0.171 (0.095)	-0.337* (0.159)	-0.335* (0.160)
Capability share (State A)	-0.204 (0.106)	-0.217* (0.107)	0.212 (0.163)	0.170 (0.166)
Policy dispute	-0.259** (0.087)	-0.253** (0.084)	0.073 (0.141)	0.091 (0.134)
Regime dispute	0.420** (0.140)	0.429** (0.138)	0.809*** (0.187)	0.823*** (0.181)
Territorial dispute	0.256** (0.083)		0.526*** (0.133)	
<i>Type of territorial dispute</i>				
Disputed ownership		0.369*** (0.103)		0.728*** (0.145)
Delimitation dispute		0.215 (0.129)		0.274 (0.212)
Opportunity dispute		0.123 (0.228)		0.374 (0.319)
System changes		0.775*** (0.200)		1.166*** (0.236)
Border violations		-0.051 (0.168)		
Rebels/hot pursuit		0.843 (0.482)		
Constant	-0.113 (0.364)	-0.129 (0.364)	-1.640** (0.553)	-1.746** (0.552)
<i>N (uncensored)</i>	1,975	1,975	1,975	1,975

Heckman-type estimates of directed-dyads, 1816-2001; censoring model and temporal corrections not reported. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Finally, we use dummy variables to identify the various broad categories of territorial dispute types. We expect more serious disputes to occur when territory's ownership is disputed, not necessarily when borders are transgressed. Disputed ownership, delimitation, and system changes denote cases in which ownership was unclear, and opportunity disputes, border violations, or cases involving the hot pursuit of rebels can occur even when borders are roughly settled. We omit fishing disputes from these analyses because of collinearity—there were no wars or fatal disputes involving territory that primarily concerned fishing rights. Table 1 presents our estimates.

Again, two different dispute outcomes—the presence of a fatal dispute (columns 1 and 2) and the presence of a war (columns 3 and 4)—are presented in the table. Technically, only the latter dependent variable identifies escalation consistently since there are many one-incident disputes with fatalities in the data, but the separate outcomes provide an excellent way of identifying trends among the more serious conflicts in the dataset. For example, the presence of a regime dispute or a territorial dispute is correlated with both fatal disputes and wars, while policy disputes are not. Policy disputes actually

are associated with fewer fatal disputes than we would normally observe on average but provide no predict territorial disputes; joint democracy is correlated with peace. Defense pacts have no effect.

leverage on predictions of war. The non-dispute-type variables do a relatively poor job of discerning dispute severity. Only the presence of a democracy in the targeted state and a defense pact between both states are statistically significant in any models, and both of these variables are inconsistent across the two types of outcomes.

The importance of differentiation across issue type is evident when comparing the base models of fatal disputes and wars to the models that include specific territorial issues. Territorial issues generally predict both fatalities and war, but focusing on disputed ownership produces a substantive effect in the predicted probabilities that is almost 50% greater; system changes have an effect that is more than double the average for territorial disputes. Delimitation and opportunity disputes have a positive but not statistically significant effect on more serious disputes, and the latter becomes statistically significant when the analyses are limited to 1816 to 1945. Also important to note is that border violations are not at all associated with more serious disputes. The standard error for these cases is three times the size of the coefficient and has to be omitted from the war model. There are no wars that follow border violations or rebel pursuits.

These results confirm a great deal of variation across territorial dispute cases. Conflicts that begin over disputed ownership issues, especially disputed border issues, are likely to have higher fatalities than other disputes and other territorial disputes. This is also true for cases of state system change. Including border violations, rebel pursuits, fishing rights cases, and other types of low-level territorial conflicts as part of analyses of territorial conflict has dampened the very strong correlation between distributive issues and conflict. Here, we focus on territorial issues, but the variation we identify is likely present in other issue types as well.

5 Procedures for Data Collection

We have demonstrated how current datasets only weakly identify the content of contentious issues during disputes and fail to mark issue positions as they change during conflict. We have highlighted this with numerous case descriptions and also a brief example that focuses on the types of territorial issues. Our arguments developed from our reviews of the coding of the existing conflict data, including summaries for the over 2,000 MIDs we have confirmed as instances of CoW-defined disputes. We have also coded all militarized incidents within those disputes, including variables for whether the incident was connected to other incidents, the incident location, and the number of civilian deaths. We are currently finishing the final 30 war disputes⁴ and are in the process of cleaning that data for public release. This proposal asks for funding to code the issue positions of each participant at the start of each dispute and all subsequent changes in issue position over time. We outline the data we will collect and code below.

Issue Type and Status Quo Position

For every dispute we will identify the issue under contention, code the issue type, and then note with brief text the pre-dispute status quo issue position for that particular issue in the dispute. The vast majority of disputes have only one issue under contention but that need not be the case. Our coding scheme can incorporate multiple issues raised by the dispute and include each one accordingly with linked issue identification codes. As we mention above, the current MID data divides dispute issues among four types—territory, policy, regime, and other. As we also demonstrate above, those

⁴We identify, collect, and code all militarized incidents within each war dispute until the battle-deaths in the dispute reach 1,000, which is the definition of a war used by the Correlates of War Project.

categories often mask substantial variation in issue type, even within each category. Therefore, we will continue to develop the typology of issues over which states fought in militarized disputes.

Participant Issue Positions

The rest of the coding for each dispute follows an event-data framework, with the status quo position for each issue providing a within-dispute anchor for identifying participant positions. When a participant reveals its preferred issue position (or we infer that issue position from contemporaneous or historical accounts), we code the date and content of that issue position. We also code the participant’s position placement in relation to the status quo on a 7-point scale from -3 to 3, with 0 identifying the status quo. Thus, a participant challenging the status quo may be in (-3) strong disagreement, (-2) disagreement, or (-1) some/mixed disagreement with the pre-dispute state of the world on that particular dispute issue; a defender in the dispute may have a range that includes agreement with the challenger (-3 to -1) but is more likely to have values ranging from defending the (0) status quo to (3) strong disagreement in favor of the defender’s ideal point. Since these codes rely on our interpretation of issue position distance, extensive notes on particular issue positions will be provided as part of the released data. This transparency will allow future coders to check content validity but also to develop different coding schemes for different research interests with relative ease.⁵ Finally, a separate variable links each event to the dispute issue; this permits the coding of an infinite number of events within each dispute, though most have only one.

Table 2: Variables to be Collected

ID	Category	Variables	Values
A	Issue:	Dispute issue number	<i>1 to n</i>
B		Issue type	<i>typology code</i>
C		Issue description	<i>text</i>
D		Status quo position	<i>text</i>
a	Date:	Month	<i>mm</i>
b		Day	<i>dd</i>
c		Year	<i>yy</i>
d	Actor:	Country	<i>cocode</i>
e		Target	<i>cocode</i>
f	Issue:	Relevant issue number	<i>1 to n</i>
g		Issue statement	<i>text</i>
h		Issue position	<i>-3 to 3</i>
i		Method of change	<i>stated/implicit</i>
j	Demands:	Responsible party	<i>text/blank</i>
k		Responsible party code	<i>coded text/blank</i>
l		Demand made	<i>yes or no</i>
m	Sources:	Threat made	<i>yes or no</i>
n		Type of threat	<i>text</i>
o		Type of threat coded	<i>coded text</i>
p	Sources:	Source 1	<i>bibkey</i>
q		Source 2	<i>bibkey</i>
E	Issue:	Final issue position	<i>text</i>
F		Coding of final position	<i>-3 to 3</i>

Identifying an Issue Position Change and Event Type

Initial issue positions and position changes are actually most often provided as statements by policymakers. These are the easiest to code, and we will identify which policymaker made the statement and provide a code for their position within the regime. Continuing the framework above for each issue position change, we will add variables for method of position change, who made the change, and a coded variable for the type of official making the change. We include implied changes here because both contemporaneous accounts by journalists and secondary reviews by historians may be needed to occasionally identify position changes made by dispute participants.

Statements often take the form of demands or even threats. We capture these changes with additional variables that identify whether a demand or threat was made. Militarized threats are already captured by our militarized incident data, but threats may also include cutting diplomatic ties, economic sanctions, and similar penalties. Thus, two final variables capture the type of threat made and a categorical value that codes the threat type.

⁵We also routinely employ pre- and post-coding inter-reliability tests for all coding entries and will continue to do so in this project.

We should also note that dispute beginnings are relatively easy to identify, and we capture the status quo issue positions at the initiation of conflict. However, dispute endings are more difficult to ascertain, so CoW developed several coding rules that search for militarized incidents for anywhere between 3 days and 6 months following the last recorded incident. We will follow those rules here and examine the contemporaneous record for position changes following the last incident.

Summary of Data Collected

Table 2 provides a preliminary list of the variables we intend to collect. Upper-case identification letters denote variables recorded once for every issue in a dispute. These are the status quo positions for each issue at the start and end of conflict. Note, too, that since we will have initial issue position, we can code the distance of last issue position from the initial status quo using our scale. These are all summary indicators and can be used by researchers who use dispute-level data. The lower-case letters identify variables that will be coded for every single issue position change within a dispute for those who intend to use the data in conjunction with militarized incident data. We believe this data will allow proper testing of bargaining and issue evolution within disputes.

Timeline of Data Collection

We are asking for a three-year grant to cover the data collection effort. We are assuming, based on our previous assessments of the MID data, that there are four time periods that are roughly equal in the amount of time that will need to be spent by coders (1816 to 1912, 1913-1945, 1946-1992, and 1993-2010), and we will initially devote one semester to each of these eras. That timeframe allows for an additional semester to cover any remaining, difficult-to-code cases as well as cleaning the collected data. The final semester will be used to aggregate the data and build the datasets for release to the general public. In other words, we are asking for funding only for the data project and not for our own analyses that will be based on this data.

6 Broader Impacts

The current MID data is the most widely used international relations dataset, but even this data provides little information regarding the nature of issues states fight over. The data includes a broad issue type and whether participants were revisionist. There is no data on the issue affecting each participant, the issue categories are broad, and there is no information on how issue positions change as the disputes progress. Funding this proposal will change that and allow us to develop a linked dataset of detailed issue positions and changes, demands, and threats, that can be used in conjunction with the MID dataset. This type of innovation is likely to change the nature and precision of empirical testing in international conflict for a very long time and would likely influence most studies of international conflict, including the literatures on conflict bargaining, conflict escalation, studies of within conflict, conflict reciprocity, and conflict management. Indeed, any international conflict work that affords at least some role for disputant issues will benefit from this data. We believe, too, that the lack of good issue data is hampering the development of many theories on the causes and consequences of conflict.

We would also like to emphasize the educational nature of our proposal. NSF funding has been instrumental in initiating and developing several undergraduate and graduate careers at both our universities. Students who have started their research with MID data have gone on to graduate careers and careers in academia—including one of the PIs. These opportunities are too rare at universities such as ours, but our students do take great advantage of them.

7 Data Management Plan

Collection

We will collect additional primary source material and secondary historical reviews covering alldisputes, based on our existing bibliographic database and also as needed. In most cases, we already have the original sources in digital or print form.

Processing

We have all of our source material in electronic form and are currently scanning the remainder to .pdf. The data is added to our College's network, which gives all coders share-based access to add files. Our working materials (codebooks and coding decisions, essentially) are shared using Dropbox. The data on the College network is backed up each evening; Dropbox provides a continuous archive.

Coding

We typically collect the information necessary for several disputes and drop that source material into the appropriate, MID-numbered folder in the network. We then copy the materials for coding into Dropbox. This allows easy access for all coders who may have questions during the coding of a case. The completed codebooks and any additional source materials are then added to the network drive. The coding information for each dispute is saved electronically in a database program (Filemaker).

Documentation

All materials have source information included in the electronic version of the data. All codebooks are numbered according to the dispute, and the source material for each dispute, including all incidents, is included as a line item toward the end of the codebook associated with that particular dispute.

Products

Our complete bibliography of the entire MID dataset (in printed alphabetical form, printed and sorted by dispute, and also in a `BIBTEX` version) is already available online with our MID-data web page. Coded data for all disputes has been released as part of [Gibler, Miller and Little \(N.d.\)](#). Coded data for all militarized incidents will be released this summer. This grant proposal, if funded, will produce issue and issue position data for each dispute that can be easily integrated with either the dispute or incident datasets.

Distribution Policy, Archival Measures, and Publication

None of the data is likely to be sensitive since all materials are in the public domain. Therefore, we will openly share the bibliography, the original codebooks, and the quantitative database via an individual website for the project provided by the University of Alabama. Copyright laws prevent us from sharing the electronic files of original source material, so we will make those available to interested researchers upon request. All of this data will be available immediately after publication of the article that describes the data collection. We will also provide a Dataverse website for the project that will provide an easy way of archiving the datasets for future use. This is all consistent with our previous collection and coding efforts.

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